

Trade Union Politics in Nigeria – A Case Study of 2023 General Election in Nigeria

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Abstract. Ahead of the 2023 general election, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has asked all its state chapters to activate their political committees at local government levels to sensitise workers and the public on the need to vote for the Labour Party (LP) candidates in all elective positions in the 2023 general election. This showcases the relevance of trade unions as seen in the contemporary society in many ways. So far, we have stressed that it is imperative for trade unions to actively participate in the political process so as to further safeguard the interest of members as seen during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. To some extent, trade unions in Nigeria have over the years fulfilled this laudable objective. This is attested to by their involvement in several political issues especially when the wellbeing of the working class is affected. An overall assessment of the role of trade unions in the political process in Nigeria would show that there is still more to be done in this direction. Specifically, trade unions have some constraints which limit their effectiveness in the performance of their functions. These include among others, poor leadership, lack of internal democracy, government intervention, tribalism and nepotism, poor economic climate, internal factionalism and apathetic attitude, as most unions depend largely on check-offs from their members which is generally insufficient. In addition, is the problem of low participation of members in union activities. It is hereby

suggested that Nigerian government should allow free trade unionism as a way of strengthening the current democratic dispensation; and that, in view of the paramount role played by trade unions in the political process in Nigeria, it would be imperative to advocate that all the stakeholders in the nation's industrial relations should take practical measures aimed at strengthening trade union movement in the country.

Key words: Trade Union, Politics, Democracy, 2023 General Election, Nigeria Labour Congress

INTRODUCTION

Ahead of the 2023 general election, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has asked all its state chapters to activate their political committees at local government levels to sensitise workers and the public on the need to vote for the Labour Party (LP) candidates in all elective positions in the 2023 general election. This showcases the relevance of trade unions as seen in the contemporary society in many ways. For one, a substantial proportion of people in the society (specifically within the working population) belong to trade unions. Many of these individuals have witnessed transformation in their socio-economic and political conditions due largely to the influence of trade union intervention. In this respect, several workers have experienced wage increase, improved working condition, including better safety and enhanced participation in the decision making process in their workplaces. More importantly, trade unions have assumed the role of formidable pressure groups in the larger society where they struggle for the attainment of fundamental socio-economic and political changes (Akinyanju, 2017). The above consideration attests to the strategic position occupied by trade unions in modern society.

There is the notion that trade unions exist to cater for the interests of members, especially matters that concern their work conditions. However, as Hyman (2017) has argued, trade unions are not merely economic organizations concerned only with obtaining minimum hours of work and maximum pay for their members. Rather, they are social organisations concerned among other things, with the quality of the daily working lives of their members.

The early trade unions emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries in Britain and other industrialized countries as a defensive mechanism against the exploitation of employees and also to secure improved wages and working conditions for their members. This development made the modern

industrial relations scene to be dominated by the trade unions and employers' organizations. The two parties set the pace and tempo in which the framework for industrial relations practices is drawn by the state in its capacity as the largest employer of labour and as the most dominant actor in the system. Trade unions emerged from the efforts of workers to seek improvement on existing working conditions through collective actions. They function to provide social, economic, political and psychological benefits for their members as well as the platform for participation in managerial functions in the industry. Trade unions are generally organized grouping of workers that relate with employers on various issues related to the conditions of employment of their members. They arose as a consequence of the industrial revolution which led to the development of industrial capitalism (Adefolaju, 2013). In the contemporary times however, especially in the developing countries, trade unionism has become an indispensable tool in ensuring and guaranteeing industrial harmony between the employers and the workers.

In Nigeria, trade unions fought against colonial rule and exploitation of the Nigerian State during the colonial era. The activities of trade unions, under the umbrella of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) have been responsible for the reversal of government actions and policies. NLC now plays social, economic and political roles not only to the working class but to all Nigerians both the employed and unemployed (Okoroafor, 2013). According to Adewumi (2019), like its counterparts in different parts of the world, the Nigerian trade union movement has a glorious past, a past characterized by robust struggles and principled opposition to state policies that are inimical to the interests of the working class.

It is also a past that was characterized by conscious efforts at mobilizing the rank – and – file members as a bulwark against state repression which also witnessed the building of alliances between trade union movement and various organizations within larger labour movement. This role can be seen clearly and appreciated by most Nigerians through their selfless services to Nigerian society as a whole. In this regard, unions seek to assert collectively the desire of their members to control their working lives in all its aspects (Farnham & Pimlott, 2019). The concern with their members' interests has frequently led trade unions to take certain actions to safeguard these interests. This paper focuses on the role of trade unions in the political process using the 2023 general elections as case study.

Statement of Problem

All over the world, trade unions had always represented the vanguard of the working class' interests against capitalist exploitations. In the contemporary times however, especially in the developing countries, trade unions have come to assume roles that transcend the traditional role of protection of workers' welfare and class liberation. In Nigeria, trade unions fought against colonial rule and exploitation of the Nigerian State during the colonial period. The activities of trade unions, under the umbrella of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) during the military dictatorship of the late 1980s and the 1990s hastened the return to democratic rule in the country. One of the peculiarities of the new democratic experiment in the country, which started in 1999, is the absence of a vibrant opposition to the ruling party in the country. The other political parties that contested against the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) are either absorbed by the PDP or are too engrossed with intra party squabbles to present a formidable and constructive opposition.

Trade unions as represented by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) in the contemporary times have been the subject of considerable research and commentary, in terms of its nature, role, functionality, and effectiveness in ensuring the welfare of the Nigerian worker and the protection of her rights in industrial disputes with the public and private labour employers. The apparent puzzle of its longevity and continued survival despite attempts to emasculate and undermine it by succeeding regimes especially the military has often depicted it as the proverbial cat with nine lives. Despite the founded fear of its collapse into oblivion or disintegration into autonomous parts as a result of the mounted challenges confronting not only the organizational structure, but also the mechanism of its operations, the organization has demonstrated a high degree of elasticity and resourcefulness in domestic industrial relations as well as political sagacity in the Nigerian political landscape. From the colonial period up till the contemporary times, trade unionism in Nigeria has combined industrial agitation and political activism in varying degrees dictated by the political gladiators and the exigencies of the times. Unlike in other parts of Africa, the Nigerian workers are highly organised as a result of the existence of a strong trade union consciousness. It is therefore the problem of this study to highlight the role trade union play on politics in Nigeria – featuring the 2023 General Election in Nigeria.

Aim and Objective

The aim of this study is to unravel the role trade union play on politics in Nigeria using the 2023 General Election as a case study. Other specific objectives of this study were to highlight the nature

of trade union politics in Nigeria, the overview of the 2023 elections, challenges of trade union during the 2023 elections, draw conclusion and make recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The Marxist or class perspective of industrial relations perspective conceives the trade unions role in industrial relations as comprising both the economic and political aspects. Industrial relations between parties in the workplace - managers and workers, is viewed in this respect as an expression of the conflict and the power relations existing between organized groups in the large society. Consequently, it is contended that industrial conflict between managers and their subordinates should be recognized as an endemic feature of work relations.

The Marxist perspective holds the notion that political and class conflicts are synonymous with industrial conflict since the capitalist structure of industry and of wage labour are closely connected with the pattern of class division in society (Hyman, 2015). The conflict that takes place in industrial relations between labour and capital is therefore, regarded as a permanent feature of capitalism and the class relations of capitalist society in general. Consequently, rather than being restricted to work relations alone, class conflict is seen to permeate the whole society. Similarly, trade unionism is vested with both economic and socio-political responsibilities. By implication then, the trade union is seen as an instrument available for the workers to use in challenging certain anomalies in the world of work as well as the larger society; for instance, such issues as managerial prerogative and the ownership of the means of production and the distribution of national products within the entire society.

Concept of Trade Union

A British Couple Sydney and Beatrice Webb in 1897 were the earliest authors to give the definition of trade union. According to the Webb, trade union is a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining and improving the conditions of their working lives. Okogwu (2020) sees, trade union as an association of workers to promote and protect the welfare, interest and rights of its members, primarily by collective bargaining.

In the view of Fajana (2016), trade union is an association of wage and salary earners formed with the objective of safeguarding and improving the wage and to raise members' social status and standards of living in the community. Section 1 (1) of the Trade Union Act (2004) 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 whether the combination in question would or would not, apart from this fact, be an unlawful combination by reason of any of its purpose, do or do not include the provision the provision of benefits for its members". Section 29 (1) of the Act, provides that a trade union can be described as an organization that either "consists wholly or mainly of workers or employers of one or more descriptions and whose principal purpose is the regulation of relations between workers and employers or employers" association or consists of constituent or affiliated organizations or representatives of such constituent or affiliated organizations and whose established purpose is the regulation of relations between workers and employers or workers and employers associations". The radical school of thought gives a contrasting definition of the concept.

Trade union is defined as the conveyor belt of the workers desires to put an end to wage slavery and radically transform the society (Hyman, 2015). This definition conceives as representing the means of actualizing the impending working class revolution which in the Marxian thought is inevitable in every capitalist society. The various definitions provided reflect the role of trade unions in the society.

Overview of the 2023 General Elections

Nigerians trooped to the polls on February 25 and March 18, 2023, to elect a new President, National Assembly Members as well as 28 State Governors and members of 36 State Houses of Assembly. It was the seventh consecutive general election since the return of the country to democracy in 1999. This represents 23 years of unbroken democracy, the longest in the history of Nigeria. The Presidential election was contested by eighteen political parties and conducted under a new electoral framework. The new electoral framework known as the Electoral Act 2022, allows the country's electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) the use of Technology for the conduct of elections using Bimodal Voter Accreditation System, BVAS for fingerprint and facial biometric identification and authentication of the voters.

The new Act also allows the commission to transmit election results electronically from the collation centres into the INEC servers and results viewing portal immediately after the counting of the votes. Invariably, the new technological innovation introduced by INEC, paved the way for online pre-registration system of voters and new INEC enrolment device which helped to reduce the long queues witnessed in previous voter registration and voting exercises in the past. The new Electoral Act as amended by the Nigerian National Assembly also extended the time for political campaigns from 90 to 150 days which has equally created the opportunity for politicians to visit the nooks and crannies of the country if they so desire. However, instead of reducing how money is used in Nigerian politics, the Act jacked up campaign finance funds from an initial N1 billion to N5 billion for presidential candidates. The ceiling for other elected positions were also increased significantly in the new electoral Act.

There were 93.4 million registered Nigerian voters eligible to go to the polls. However, only a little above 30 million people turned out for the February 25 Presidential and National Assembly elections a far cry from those registered. Prior to the elections, the electoral umpire adopted some strategic action plans to ensure a successful and smooth conduct of the elections. To achieve that, the commission activated 2,673 additional permanent voter card registration centers nationwide, introduced simultaneous accreditation and voting system and created additional polling units nearer to the electorates. It also embarked on continuous engagements with election stakeholders such as security agencies, political party leaders, civil society groups and the media towards improving the electoral processes.

In a bid to ensure that no eligible voter was disfranchised in the General Election, the commission made special provision for persons with disabilities, adequate provision for voters in Internally Displaced Camps to exercise their franchise during the elections. The commission was equally engaged in continuous sensitization programmes on the processes and preparations for the elections by galvanizing the citizenry by ensuring that they understand and participate fully in the electoral proceedings for the peaceful conduct of the elections. Despite the mechanisms and measures put in place by the commission ahead of the elections, there were still some challenges encountered by the commission. Some of these challenges include attacks on INEC facilities and personnel in some parts of the country, vote buying and selling during elections, the malfunctioning of the BVAS in the transmission election results during the presidential election amongst other things.

Despite all the challenges faced, the elections were generally peaceful and winners announced without rancor. The losers have taken the right path by resorting to laws of the land which allows them to challenge the outcome in Special Elections Tribunals set up by the government. Kudos should therefore, not only be given to the electoral umpire but also to the Nigerian government for supporting the commission adequately by ensuring early release of fund to INEC to enable it carry out its electoral activities successful. Nigerian voters on the other hand should also be commended for their resilience by participating in the electoral processes despite all odds. Both Foreign and local observers, the media and of course security agencies should equally share the glory of the success of the 2023 elections.

Going forward, INEC needs to improve on its planning process to avoid the challenges it encountered on its inability to transmit the presidential election results electronically and create strong barriers against vote buying and selling. By so doing, the electorates would have more confidence in the commission. The commission must avoid any act that could create doubt in the mind of voters that their votes will not count. Also, the personnel used during the elections should be only those who have been tested, trusted and persons with integrity to engender believe in the system. The politicians on the other hand, should not always see elections as a do or die affair and avoid the act of desperation. Security agents on the other hand should eschew any corrupt practices and follow strictly, the rules of engagements on election security while the media should play their noble role of the watch Dog and act professionally during elections.

The Role of Trade Unions in Politics

For long, there has been an ensuring debate on whether trade unions have any role to play in the political process. On the one hand, are arguments raised to justify essentially economic (apolitical) role of trade unions. The argument acknowledges that trade unions are specialized groups with specific economic objectives such as wage bargaining, regulation of hours and condition of work, concern about job security including other matters related to the economic and employment terms of workers. Again, political parties are purely concerned with fulfilling essentially political objectives so are trade unions vested with the concern about the economic interest of members. According to Flanders (2012), the first and over-riding responsibility of all trade unions is for the welfare of their own members. That means that their primary commitment is not to the firm, not to an industry, not to the nation but to their members.

In view of the above considerations, therefore, it is argued that trade unions should necessarily concentrate on pursuing economic objectives. The other strand of opinion maintains that the trade unions should necessarily pursue other goals in addition to its economic objective. Specifically, this position contends that trade union must pursue goals for the benefit of members. Arguments in favour of this position include the notion that since economic issues are determined politically, there is the need for local despots to suppress. For instance, trade unions in Nigeria and other nations are members of the International Trade Unions Organizations including the International Labour Organizations (ILO). Along this line of argument, Houssler (2014) maintained that trade unions must necessarily play an active role in the political process due to their democratic potentials. He argues that the inherently democratic nature of trade unions put them in good stead as advocate of a free society. They remain and shall always be a formidable bulwark against anti-democratic forces.

It is possible to conclude in this regard that although trade unions are established for the purpose of serving the economic interest of members, many of their activities are directly political. For instance, trade unions are expected to take political decision in order to protect the interest of members. Furthermore, since the industrial relations involve actors who take political decisions, trade unions, as part of this system are also bound to engage in political action. Trade Unions have certain political responsibilities to their members. More so since the welfare of its members are determined by political action it must necessarily take political action to address these problems. Most importantly, the role of trade union its activities and actions, affect the political tempo of the country, as in the case during a prolonged strike. Again, usually, most members seek relevance in the political process through their unions. A virile union, therefore, offers opportunity for members to actively participate in the political affairs of his country (Galenson, 2019).

As pointed out in the above discussion, trade unions are vested with the responsibility of protecting the interest of members whether economic or political. To this end, the preceding discussion shall be grouped under three broad headings corresponding to different historical phases of the country.

Colonialism and Nationalist Struggle

The political role of trade unions in Nigeria has a long hi dating back to the colonial period. During that period, trade unions provided the forum for agitation for political reform. The Lagos strike of 1892 falls within this category. The strike became a test case for working class action in early

colonial Nigeria. It should be noted that during the early colonial period trade unionism was restricted to Lagos and the Southern Protectorate. Most trade union activities, at that time were directly concerned with grievances about wages and the cost of living. Trade unions did not engage in full political activities until the 1960s (Akpala, 2012).

The first evidence of active trade union involvement in politics in Nigeria was during the agitation for higher wages by workers to cushion the pains resulting from rising cost of living at the end of the Second World War (Fajana, 2020). The General Strike of 1945 marked the real evidence of labour involvement in the political process in Nigeria. It was then that the then Central Labour Union metamorphosed into the Labour Party which formed an alliance with the foremost nationalist movement National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun (N.C.N.C). This collaboration yielded dividend as the new political organization commanded the support of a large majority of Nigerians. This development further strengthened the popularity of trade unions in the country. The alliance aptly demonstrated that the pursuit of basic economic grievance with equally tense political climate provided trade unions with the opportunity to engage in political struggle against the ruling class.

Post Colonial Era

The political struggle that led to the granting of independence to Nigeria in 1960 was waged by nationalists as well as other interest groups in the country, prominent among which was the labour movement (Akpala, 2012). Principally, all the nationalist forces campaigned for an end to colonial exploitation and installation of self rule. Ironically, however, the experience of post-independence era revealed that those who took over power from the colonialists merely replaced colonial domination with internal domination. Soon after independence, the new rulers (like their colonial predecessors) became uncomfortable with the radical posture of trade union leaders. Eventually, the union leaders realized that the struggle against state exploitation of labour has just begun. Hence, the political actions of trade unions had to be intensified as demonstrated by their subsequent role (Fashoyin, 2012).

In 1964, labour engaged in political action because of government refusal to grant its demand for higher wages. The strike demonstrated the unity of purpose which the labour movement could foster among its members. In addition, it also saw the unions as the champions of the masses. In other words, the strike clearly demonstrated that organized labour was the vanguard of the toiling

masses. On the other hand, the political class which had taken over from the colonial administrators were perpetuating the same injustice which characterized colonial rule.

Finally, the anti-corruption rally organized by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) on 8th May, 2008 in Abuja was a demonstration of the prominent role of labour as the vanguard of the movement of transparency and accountability in governance. The rally brought together workers, civil societies, market men and women and students and demanded that government set up a judicial commission of inquiry to investigate alleged corrupt deeds in the last administration and to recover looted funds from culprits (The Guardian, 2008).

Trade Unions and Military Rule

Military incursion into politics in Nigeria dated back to 1966 (barely six years after independence). The military ruled the country for about 20 years. Trade Unions played a prominent role in the democratic struggle that led to the termination of military rule. Along with Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs), civil right activists, religious groups and the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), trade unions waged a fierce battle against dictatorial military rule. The history of the current democratic dispensation would be incomplete without a mention of the contribution of labour. Trade unions mobilized members as well as the general public to protest the harmful effect of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) during the General Babangida regime (Banwo, 2017). This protest forced the government to introduce some relief measures. As Obasi (2018) observed, SAP programme led to economic deprivation of workers, thereby heightening their consciousness which in turn led to increased militancy on their part. The militant posture of workers and their unions forced government to adopt some relief measures, especially in the area of wages and salary increment.

In all, the history of pro-democracy movement in Nigeria would be incomplete without a mention of the role of trade unions. As observed, trade unions are recognized as a political force. As Friedman (2018) points out, the unions had a strategic location in the national economy and held an effective position in the modern sector. Because of their strategic positions in the centres of urban population, they constitute a political threat to the political leadership, particularly as they were traditionally oriented towards channeling discontent. Trade unions in Nigeria have, therefore, played the role of being the vanguard in the struggle of the people against misrule of successive administrations in Nigeria

Trade Unions and 2023 elections

Prior to the 2023 general elections, members of the organised labour movement under the umbrella of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) have said they would kick-start its political engagement for the 2023 general election with political dialogue in a few days time. The congress while reacting to the current scarcity of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), said organised labour was not impressed with handling of the situation by the federal government just as it expressed doubt at the reasons given by government for the return of long queues at petrol stations. Speaking at a press conference in Abuja, President of TUC, Quadri Olaleye said based on current travails and pains Nigerians had been experiencing occasioned by policies of government at various levels, the TUC has decided to play an active role in the 2023 general elections. On the fuel scarcity in the country, Olaleye said the TUC was presently monitoring the situation including the actions and policy decisions of government, adding at the appropriate time will respond. He also said “We are watching the unfolding scenario and we will respond at the right time. They are playing games with the Nigerian people.”

Ahead of the 2023 general election, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has asked all its state chapters to activate their political committees at local government levels to sensitise workers and the public on the need to vote for the Labour Party (LP) candidates in all elective positions in the 2023 general election. The Trade Unions Congress of Nigeria (TUC), at its political roundtable held in Abuja on Thursday, March 10, 2022, sent a laudable electoral political participation awareness and awakening message to its members across the country and to Nigerians at large.

Glaringly, the duo of TUC and the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) are seeking to use the power of numbers, which they have in millions, to make inroads into the country’s political space. Of course, the end product would be to be able to negotiate for the provision of better welfare and socio-economic policies for their members and Nigerian citizens by extension. But considering the timing of the 2023 elections, the peculiarities of politics and how sophisticated politicians in Nigeria are, some are of the opinion that TUC and NLC, that suddenly decided to establish themselves as strong players in the country’s political sphere, woke up too late. Some people also asked if the gathering of people to talk about interest in politics will do the magic.

And the response from the Political Commission Chairman of TUC, Comrade Ayodele Olorunfemi, is that the event was “part of the Political Education Programmes (PEPs) of the Trade Union

Congress of Nigeria to raise political consciousness of members of the Congress in particular and Nigerian workers and masses in general.

Olaleye listed some of the challenges to include: “abuse and neglect of the country’s human and natural resources, threatening unemployment, insecurity, almost N40 trillion debt, devaluation of the naira, subsidy saga”. He said the purpose of the briefing was to inform Nigerians and all genuine progressives of the determination of labour movement to engage and help chart a new course for Nigeria. “We are at a critical time in this country and the silence of the organized labour can no longer be said to be golden. If we miss it at this time, the damage will be too grave to bear. “To this effect, the Congress at its National Executive Council (NEC) in Asaba, the Delta State capital early last year constituted a Political Commission whose core responsibility is to provide a platform for workers to canvass for good governance, economic and social justice in Nigeria. A comprehensive Political Education Programme to achieve the mandate has been designed and we are assiduously working towards that,” he said.

Olaleye said TUC plans to commence a process of organising and mobilising workers and like-minded political actors for political alternative to leadership problem in Nigeria. He said the roundtable is intended to provide a platform for active political engagement of workers, retirees and veterans in trade union movement to broaden the conversation on the need to change the leadership recruitment process in Nigeria through ensuring that credible leaders with great potentials emerge to lead at various level. To strengthen the democratic process and promote social democracy. To generate continuous conversations on free, fair, and credible electoral process and good governance in Nigeria,” he said. He said lack of active participation of organised labour in Nigerian politics had continued to generate a lot of concern amongst trade unionists, scholars, political class, opinion leaders and other commentators. According to the TUC president, organised labour has not successfully tapped into the opportunity provided in a liberal democracy which emphasizes grassroots participation and negotiation of interest. He added that the dividing line between economics and governance is very indistinct and the rationality which propels state’s constant interference in labour matters equally dictates the need for trade unions to take active interest in politics.

Olaleye said unlike what obtained before, Labour is coming from a different angle and has gone ahead to develop an alternative way of running government in the country. “This time around we

are coming in full force. To start with, what we lack is political education but some of us have acquired political education over the years and we are going to use them in our various engagements. He said that all organs of the TUC have approved the new political direction. “As a key and leading actor in the struggle for democracy during the military rule, organised labour and other pro-labour social movements are better equipped through engagement with other genuine change seeking Nigerians to provide the political and leadership alternative the Nigeria masses deserve for transformative governance. “The organised Labour is capable of enthroning Social Democracy in Nigeria. We can bring governance closer to the people. It has become glaring that constant labour agitations either in form of street protest or strike action cannot guarantee decent work, good governance and social justice in a political environment that is self-serving and insensitive to the plight of the workers and citizens in general.

Challenges of Trade Unions in Politics

Trade unions have grown in relevance over the years especially in the light of the belief that a healthy and independent labour movement is essential to democracy (Godard, 2013). Also, there is a growing international recognition of the right to freely associate in unions and to engage in collective bargaining as a fundamental human right. Whenever this is ignored, industrial relations tend to be strained, ending up in industrial conflict (Bankole, 2020). There are a number of challenges that have actually undermined the efficacy of trade unions in Nigeria as instrument of social transformation of Nigerian workers. These challenges are:

Lack of Committed Leadership: Most of the leaders of trade unions do not understand properly the issues and techniques of complex negotiations. They are not well educated and are not skillful in the techniques and art of trade unionism and as such lack the expertise to leader the unions. According to Adebisi (2011), the problem of Nigerian trade union in achieving its goal is based on intransigent and unanswerable elite or leaders. Anyim et al (2013) lent credence to this view, that insincerity and poor commitment of the labour leadership has led to the diminishing and disappointing role of trade union in Nigeria.

Lack of Internal Democracy: According to Fashoyin (2014), a greater challenge of trade unions in Nigeria is the non-institution of internal democracy in Nigeria unions due to the unwillingness of their leaders to acknowledge basic constitutional requirements such as respect for individual rights and to be accountable to their members. The place of union democracy cannot be overemphasized

because any organization which provides workers with democratic rights and protection in the workplace should do so internally (Godard, 2013).

Government Intervention: Nigeria has long been governed by military dictatorship which militated against the emergence of democratic culture that would have ushered in freedom of expression, free competition and exchange of ideas in the economy, e.t.c. The military dictators have used instruments of outright banning of trade unions, withdrawal of registration, dissolution of unions and appointment of their own loyalists to manage the affairs of the trade unions and it continue in the Nigerian state to date. The issue of political interference has been a strong challenge towards strengthening the activities of trade union in Nigeria. The 2005 Labour Reforms Act has made membership of trade union voluntary.

Tribalism and Nepotism: This is the worst plague that is besetting the trade union in Nigeria. Most important views are looked upon from tribal or ethnic implication and not in the interest of Nigerian workers. This plague affects almost the whole sectors of trade union operations including election of members. This had hindered trade union effectiveness in Nigeria today.

Internal Factionalism: Factionalism undermines the performance of trade unions in Nigeria as instruments of promoting workers interest. Factionalism means the existence of small groups within the large ones that oppose some of their belief and activities. Sometimes, this internal division among the members may erupt due to poor leadership and other selfish interest of members, and when this happens it becomes easy for the management or owners of the organizations to penetrate into the ranks of the organization which may lead to some members of the union abandoning their collective struggle (Ananti, 2014).

Apathetic Attitude: Poor attendance at meetings because members see meetings as a waste of time and resources is another serious challenge of trade unionism in Nigeria. The union as a democratic organization cannot achieve the desired objectives when meetings are attended by small fraction of the membership. Also, the few that attend easily take wrong and selfish decisions. Some of the nonchalant attitudes displayed by union members are not without cause.

Poor Economic Climate: The growths of trade unions go side by side with the growth of the national economy. The empowerment of the workers and their unions has been on the decline due to economic recession which has resulted in economic downturn, unemployment and retrenchment.

Also, the economic hardship which is caused by poor governance posed a challenge to trade union activities thereby leading to poor cohesiveness and lack of focus of the union.

Non-Affiliation with Foreign Union: The Federal Government banned any direct type of affiliation with foreign union. This is because they feared that the foreign union will meddle into the policies of the Nigerian trade unions. However, the affiliation with foreign union could have provided the needed financial assistance to our local unions here and their interactions with our local unions would have facilitate development of local union in the art of trade unionism. Hassan (2013) argues that the dwindling financial base due to manpower contraction has tremendous effect on the unions' ability to discharge their legitimate obligations to their rank and file membership.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion this study stressed that it is imperative for trade unions to actively participate in the political process so as to further safeguard the interest of members as seen during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. To some extent, trade unions in Nigeria have over the years fulfilled this laudable objective. This is attested to by their involvement in several political issues especially when the wellbeing of the working class is affected. An overall assessment of the role of trade unions in the political process in Nigeria would show that there is still more to be done in this direction. Specifically, trade unions have some constraints which limit their effectiveness in the performance of their functions. These include among others, poor leadership, lack of internal democracy, government intervention, tribalism and nepotism, poor economic climate, internal factionalism and apathetic attitude, as most unions depend largely on check-offs from their members which is generally insufficient. In addition, is the problem of low participation of members in union activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since most Nigerian workers demonstrate attitude of apathy towards unionism. To improve upon this, workers should continuously be educated on the essence of active participation in the affairs of their unions. Lastly, as earlier pointed out in this paper, Nigerian trade unions have often been the target of attacks by successive administrations in the country. This is because the government considers trade unions as a threat rather than as ally in the quest towards nation building.

Consequently, union leaders often face various forms of harassment like imprisonment, arrests, intimidation and physical assault.

It is hereby suggested that Nigerian government should allow free trade unionism as a way of strengthening the current democratic dispensation.

1. Finally, in view of the paramount role played by trade unions in the political process in Nigeria, it would be imperative to advocate that all the stakeholders in the nation's industrial relations should take practical measures aimed at strengthening trade union movement in the country.

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