

STRENGTHENING THE OPERATIONS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF TRADE UNION OFFICIALS IN AN ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

BY

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PRESENTED AT THE 2018 CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP, FOR OFFICIALS OF THE ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF POLYTECHNICS (ASUP), AT FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC NEKEDE, IMO STATE ON MAY 9, 2018

1.0 Introduction.

The Educational System at all levels has suffered phenomenal crises which rather than abate have intensified, necessitating an urgency in addressing the existential threat that faces our society. Education has been seen in various ways: Paulo Freire (1972) distinguished between teaching and regurgitation of what is taught on the one hand and having the subject matter as mediating between the teacher and the students. The former method was termed Banking Education while the latter was captioned Discovery. In the Banking mode, knowledge is supposedly deposited and the learner is treated as object. In the Discovery method, education is seen as a process in which the issue being studied is presented as a limit situation, on which intellect is trained, by both the teacher and the students, where unravelling of reality results in methodical arrival at truth.

A nation's policy on education is government's method of realizing aspects of the national goals which can be better achieved utilizing education as a tool. According to the National Policy on Education (NPE 2004), the philosophy and goals of education are as follows:

1. To live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice
- 2 To promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.

The five main national goals, which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the national policy on education, are the building of:

- i A free democratic society
- ii A just and egalitarian society
- iii A robust and dynamic economy

iv A land full of opportunities for all citizens.

The attainment of these goals has been feeble at best and non-existent at worst. To understand the forces conditioning outcomes, it would be useful to examine the global, national and local attributes/situations and the interplay amongst them. It is within this milieu that union officials operate.

2.0 The Global Situation

The neo-liberal global world template imposed by the leading economy of the world has impacted adversely on emerging economies, where privatization has resulted in the looting of national resources and asset-stripping which leaves in its wake, conversion of national assets to private property, emasculation of the state with concomitant servicing of the private sector by the state at the expense of the nation. Between January 1984 and July 1999, the military wing of the Nigerian ruling class, while brutally subjugating Nigerians, accumulated wealth massively for imperialism and its 'civilian' and military members. This trend has been reinforced since May 1999. The entrenchment of the power and influence of foreign exploiting European and American corporations and their global financial institutions has intensified, resulting in the control of the politics and economy of Nigeria. Corruption and inequality have escalated, with privatization and deregulation as the fountain of inequality and corruption, leading to violent power struggles within the ruling class, political instability and subversion of democracy and pervasive lawlessness, ignorance and poverty. Primitive accumulation undermines democracy as Samir Amin (2004: p. 4) and others have observed. With specific reference to the USA where the high priests of neo-liberalism reside, Noam Chomsky (2011: Contours of Global Order published by Tom Despatch.com) observed:

A variety of factors converge to create a vicious cycle of radical concentration primarily in the top fraction of top 1% of the population – most CEOs, hedge fund managers and the like. That leads to the concentration of political power, hence state policies to increase economic concentration, fiscal policies, rules of corporate governance, deregulation and much more. Meanwhile, the cost of electoral campaigns skyrocketed driving the parties into the pockets of concentrated capital.... Elections have become a charade, run by the public relations industry.

This has been reproduced in Nigeria with a vengeance, especially in the last decade, in a grotesque form with importers and exporters, 'captains' of industry, fraudulent people associated with the Stock Exchange and many of those fingered in various public probes of scams and frauds, being at the centre stage of ruling caucuses at various levels

The increased economic inequality between a very tiny, scandalously rich, minority and the teeming masses of the people has increased crime rate, insecurity, inter-community, intra-community, inter-ethnic and inter-faith violence and antipathies generated and manipulated by the new owners of Nigeria.

Colonial rule and exploitation resulted from colonization whose aim was dehumanization and unbridled resource exploitation, trade and investment. The resistance to colonial rule made direct colonial rule expensive and unsustainable necessitating 'independence' that morphed into neo-colonial phase of pillage, where erstwhile colonial forces and their indigenous allies maintained economic power while locals assumed a seeming mantle of political power. Indigenous elements hijacked nationalist struggles of the oppressed and their allies and became collaborators of the economic, political and cultural interests of 'departing' colonialists; which remain dominant today. The power behind the political assemblage remained external although overtly strategically disengaged, administratively. In this way, the presaged political doomsday is blamed on the front while the power behind the throne remains shielded.

The IMF and World Bank have been strategically perched to oversee the underdevelopment of Africa. In his critique of the Structural Adjustment Programme, after more than a decade of its touting as "...the economic panacea for Africa" Brown (1995), asserted:

It was the Berg Report, the World Bank Report of 1981 on Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa, so-called after Elliot Berg, the Chief Author, which began an argument for structural adjustment in Africa. The report was a response to the deteriorating situation in Africa in the 1970s, which showed practically no growth in average incomes over the decade and an actual decline in per capita food production. It was also a counterblast to the African governments own Lagos Plan of Action which sought help for a combined African Recovery Programme.

It had been under the domineering influence of the IMF/World Bank that various initiatives touted as 'African government's' initiatives, were conceptualized, formulated, developed, manipulated and then imposed on African peoples. What became NEPAD (New Partnership for African Development) in 2000 had a genealogy, that was at least a decade old.

In 2003, LaRRI (Labour Resource and Research Institute) of Namibia observed (p. 3):

NEPAD is not the first initiative by African leaders that builds on previous initiatives like the Lagos Plan for Africa (1980) and others.

All the so-called initiatives - Thabo Mbeki's, Millenium Africa Recovery Plan, MAP, Senegal's Abdullahi Wade's, Omega Plan, (OP), which were merged at the July 2001 OAU Lusaka Summit became the New African Initiative (NAI). NAI was then presented to the imperialists G8, at their meeting in Genoa in July 2002. Consequently, as LaRRI (ibid. p. 9) noted:

The process (of bringing NEPAD to life) entailed substantial compromise on some of the more radical proposals that might not be welcome by potential western sponsors of NEPAD.

It is important to know that the NEEDS document circulated by the NEEDS Secretariat, National Planning in March 2004 is almost, with regards to its figures, projection and general ideology, a replica of the NEPAD document circulated in 2001.

The convergence of perspectives that became known as the Washington Consensus of 1980s and which was given effect by Uruguay Rounds of 1986 – 1994 also developed organically with the World Bank's Elliot Berg's SAP Report. The key elements of all these are the same liberalization, deregulation and privatization. These elements are controlled and enforced by the three aristocracies (de Rivero, 2001: pp. 45-72): the aristocracy of the industrialized states (USA, UK, France, Germany, Japan), the aristocracy of capital (the transnational corporations, TNCs) and the "supranational clergy" (IMF, World Bank) that monitors "the national economic policies of the Latin American, Asian and African countries" (ibid. p. 55).

The supra-national clergy of the WB and IMF used to work rather discretely until the emergence of political unipolarity of the world and the 'triumph' of globalization in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the clergy started taking residence in the government houses and ministries.

As neo-liberalism became globalized, with its market forces and liberal democracy, it was touted as inevitable and dubbed "There Is No Alternative (TINA). From the perspective of its victims, Escobar (2006: p. 15) describes it as:

...having to do with maximization of profit; a huge concentration of capital and unrestricted power of monopolies...a new world in which poverty with no control by markets or cash coexist with no form of social equality...the uniformization and a cultural and real impoverishment of the world.

Samir Amin was elaborate:

'Globalization' is the name they have given to the set of demands by which they (the monopolies) exert their control over the productive systems of the periphery of global capitalism...The capitalism of generalized and globalized monopolies is a system that guarantees the monopolies of a

monopoly rent levied on the mass of surplus value transformed into profits that capital extracts from the exploitation of labour... in the peripheries of the global system. Monopoly rent is imperialist rent. This shift in the centre of gravity of accumulation of income and wealth...at the expense of the remuneration of labour...This imbalance in continued growth is itself, in turn, the source of financialization of the economic system.

Samir Amin (ibid) concluded:

It is this system commonly called 'neo-liberalism' the system of generalized monopoly capitalism 'globalized' (imperialist and financialized (necessarily for its own reproduction) that is imploding before our eyes.

The imprint of the triad of aristocracies is visible in NEPAD. Thabo Mbeki, (South Africa), Olusegun Obasanjo (Nigeria), Ahmed Bouteflika (Algeria) and Abdulahi Wad (Senegal), presented NEPAD (MAP) to the World Economic Forum in January 2001, at which the TNCs was represented by George Soros (LaRRI op. cit. p. 23). Incidentally, Open Society Foundation of George Soros has established in Abuja. The five initiating states of NEPAD – South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Algeria and Senegal are in NATO's strategic calculations. Thabo Mbeki's leadership of the initiating Heads of State is explained in Naomi Klein's (2007: pp. 194 – 271) account (Democracy in Chains), of Mbeki's central role in erecting a neo-liberal shock therapy for post-apartheid South Africa:

Mbeki had spent many years of his exile in England...breathing the fumes of Thatcherism; of all the ANC leaders, he was the one who mingled most easily with business leaders and before Mandela's release, he organized several secret meetings with corporate executives who were afraid of prospects of Black Majority Rule...Mbeki convinced Mandela that what was needed was a definitive break with the past (with the Freedom Charter)...that ANC was ready to embrace the Washington Consensus...

In July 1996, Mbeki unveiled...a neo-liberal shock therapy for South Africa calling for more privatization, cut backs to government spending, labour "flexibility", freer trade and even loosen controls on money flows...to make sure the message was loud and clear to traders in New York and London, at the public launch of the plan, Mbeki quipped, "Just call me a Thatcherite"

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala's (2012, p. 6) narrative about how she got her job under President Obasanjo, reveals the, constellation of forces which have run Nigeria since independence.

Note though that Okonjo-Iweala was at the Debt Management Office in 2000 before becoming Minister of Finance in 2003 – 2006.:

He (Obasanjo) needed a modern technocratic Finance Minister who was familiar with the fierce politics of the time. My name was suggested to him (Obasanjo) by Lady Lynda Chalker, a former International Development Secretary of the United Kingdom based on recommendations from two other reformers Nasir El-Rufai and Oby Ezekwesili...since President Obasanjo was already familiar with my work, I seemed a logical choice. (Obasanjo) rang up my boss James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank to ask him to persuade me to resign my job as Vice President and Corporate Secretary of the World Bank to become Nigeria's Minister of Finance.

Jeffery Sachs the Harvard Shock Economy therapist, that unraveled the Russian economy, had, working at the Sach's Centre for International Development at Harvard, Oby Ezekwesili, where she was Director Harvard-Nigeria Economic Strategy Programme (2000 – 2002). Since retiring from the World Bank in 2012, she has been working in Abuja in Soros's Open Society Foundation's Africa Economic Policy Development Initiative (OSF-AEPDI), where she advises 'reform-minded' African Heads of State including Kaigama of Rwanda and Eileen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia.

The establishment of state-funded and state-controlled enterprises in a developing economy reflects the need of a backward, "Third World" underdeveloped country, to rise to the challenge of enhancing the well-being of its people [ASUU University of Benin NEC Meeting: Nov. 17 – 18, 2001]. The ostensible reason being brandished for privatization - that public enterprises are not efficient is palpably false. Public enterprises are deliberately made inefficient in order to sell them and the privatization programme is the same process of the IMF, World Bank recolonization process of Nigeria. The accompanying Table gives an idea of the lack of correlation between the value of enterprises and their auctioned price.

Table 1. Sale of Some Enterprises and Their Value

S/N	Enterprise	Valued at	Sold at
1	Delta Steel Company	\$1.5 billion	\$30 million
2	NICON Insurance	Worth over N6 billion	Bought with fake MOU and fake cheques and stripped of most of their assets
3	Ajaokuta Steel Company	\$1.5 billion	\$30 million
4	ALSCON	\$3.2 billion	\$130 million
5	Nigeria Re-Insurance Corp.	N50 billion	N1.5 billion

Source: Modified from Adamu Adamu: “BPE: Behind Closed Doors”(Daily Trust, Friday, August 12, 2011: p. 64)

In the evisceration of the Russian economy in the name of privatization Jeffrey Sachs states:

During the entire period of my advising, I had only a tangential role in the plans for privatization of major industries.... My main concern was governance of the large enterprises, specifically how to establish some measure of corporate governance over management and workers. My proposal was to convert current state-owned enterprises, which by now reported to nobody, into a corporate form with a supervisory board. My hope was that a proper supervisory board, largely appointed by the state as the main shareholder (perhaps a combination of federal, provincial and local government-appointed members, plus representatives of workers and management), would stop the self-dealing of managers and the stripping of enterprise assets. Once corporatization was completed, I envisioned there would be many pathways to privatizing the state-owned shares in subsequent years..... The Government privatization strategy was to move radically and quickly, so that there would be no reversal in political power and no reversion to a communist regime. The idea was to push the assets out into private hands as quickly as possible, even if corruption and unfairness ensued. This was not my approach and I disagree with it. I was worried from the start of this process in Poland, that corruption in privatization or manifest unfairness would not only damage the economy, but also damage the society, by undermining the support for democracy, economic reforms and social justice. In the end, Russia went the course of quick and reckless privatization, to my dismay. Even many of my “reformer” friends accepted this situation. Why did they do so? Did they really fear a return to Soviet communism? Were they naïve? Was the lure of corruption and personal gain too much for some? I do not know. During

my final trip to Moscow in early 1995, the infamous “loans-for-shares” deal was just getting underway. This deal involved a massive and corrupt transfer of natural resource enterprises to the Government’s cronies, disguised as a collateralized loan to the Russian Government by Russian banks. The arrangements were blatantly corrupt from the start. I spent my final visit in Moscow visiting Western officials to warn them about what was happening. I felt that my antennae were pretty sound at that point and that my perspective would be helpful to head-off a disaster. I was stunned by the obtuseness of the response of the IMF, an OECD visiting mission and later from very senior U.S. officials, including Larry Summers.

All we need to do is substitute Nigeria for Russia in the foregoing narrative to understand the emergence of oligarchs and the tiny group of super rich and the sea of poverty co-existing in Nigeria.

3.0 Debt Peonage

The class character of the ruling class, in the peripheries like Nigeria, which committed it to primitive private accumulation during the oil boom days of the 1970s, led Nigeria into the debt trap. The debt trap was initiated by the international financial institutions, their intellectuals and indigenous Nigerian agents through their disingenuous stance that “Nigeria is under-borrowed”. The Paris Club debts were private sector debts guaranteed by the Nigerian Government for the ruling class that profited from the debt accumulation. At the time Nigeria was thought to have ‘exited’ the debt trap, The Guardian Editorial of March 24, 2013 states:

It will appear that public officers are hell bent to again force the country to its knees over huge accumulated debt for which the nation had nothing to show... Going by the recent revelation of the DMO, the euphoria about the (Obasanjo) debt relief would appear to have finally disappeared. The collective burden of the country represents, without any doubt a massive betrayal of Nigeria’s huge resource base, both human and material, especially rising oil revenues and the failure of policy measures targeted at the management of these resources.

Reinforcing the narrative, Henry Boyo, in his back-page commentary in the Punch of May 20, 2013, titled Economic Renaissance: Must We Borrow for the Sake of it? Observed that “inexplicably, in spite of consistent actual revenue surpluses for many years, the domestic debt burden now exceeds N6tr with \$6bn as external debt”.

4.0 The Crisis of Governance and the Eclipse of Nigeria's Sovereignty

Claude Ake in *Revolutionary Pressures in Africa* (Zed, 1971; pp 65-81) showed the nexus between the class that make political decisions and underdevelopment in most African countries; and the acceptance of the ideology of development of the metropolis (USA, Britain, France etc) which flows from the colonial paradigm. In this regard, the Nigerian ruling class sees economic dependence as inevitable. Ake emphasized the weak material base of the African (Nigerian) ruling class, the consequent “disparity between their economic and political power”, and the need to strengthen that material base. It is this need that has created their pre-occupation with primitive accumulation and which had become institutionalized and entrenched by neo-liberalism. The need to strengthen their material base had produced the culture of violence, treachery, opportunism and economic corruption within the ruling class and violence against and manipulation of the oppressed masses through the promotion and incitement of religious, regionalists, ethnic, sub-ethnic and communal antipathies. Ake further noted (Ibid. p.72) that:

The African bourgeoisie interposes itself as a political middleman between international capital and the masses. What they offer in return for a greater share of surplus is political protection; the use of political power to curb labour unrest and control wages. They also promise to refrain from ‘vindictive’ restrictions on licences for foreign concerns, capital movements etc... Despite its attempts at accumulation by coercive means and other means, the contradictions of this situation have not permitted the African bourgeoisie much success in consolidating its material base. Its hold on power remains tenuous and its insecurity persists and may even increase. The high incidence of political violence in both intra-class and inter-class competition underlines this insecurity and the importance of the material base.

Given the foregoing analyses of the political economy of Nigeria, the fluidity and ideological homogeneity of the Nigerian political operatives becomes understandable.

5.0 The Education Sector

Despite the chronic underfunding of the public education sector, Table 2, tertiary institutions have been forced to adopt privatization mode, through the World Bank/IMF System Innovation Project which imposed cost recovery. This has resulted in increased fees for students, poor academic facilities in lecture rooms/theatres, laboratories and workshops and diminution in library facilities to support teaching and research in an increasingly knowledge-based world. The burden of education still remains with the

public-sector. The dysfunctional neo-liberal onslaught on tertiary education derives from the convergence of global national and local forces intent on ensuring a dependence that deprives autonomous, objective, thought process to finding sustainable solutions to our problems. Given the declination in emoluments, in the face of inflation and

Table 2: Federal Government Budgetary Allocation to the Educational Sector, 1960-2013

Year	Allocation as % of Total Budget	Year	Allocation as % of Total Budget	Year	Allocation as % of Total Budget
1960	6.02	1978	11.44	1996	12.32
1961	6.15	1979	3.70	1997	17.59
1962	5.19	1980	4.95	1998	10.27
1963	3.43	1981	6.45	1999	11.12
1964	3.65	1982	8.09	2000	8.26
1965	3.57	1983	4.04	2001	7.00
1966	4.23	1984	4.49	2002	5.9
1967	4.88	1985	3.79	2003	1.83
1968	2.84	1986	2.69	2004	10.5
1969	2.20	1987	1.93	2005	9.3
1970	0.69	1988	2.40	2006	11.0
1971	0.53	1989	3.55	2007	8.09
1972	0.62	1990	2.83	2008	13.0
1973	0.88	1991	1.09	2009	6.54
1974	2.96	1992	3.86	2010	6.40
1975	4.56	1993	5.62	2011	1.69
1976	8.71	1994	7.13	2012	10.0
1977	3.12	1995	7.20	2013	8.70

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria (2013). Statistical Bulletin and Information. Retrieved from www.nigeria.gov.ng

currency devaluation, the crisis prone situation is made worse by the absence of economic respite in sight. Economic well-being in today’s world derives from industrialization, which is inextricably hinged to iron and steel complex. The Nigerian economic matrix is devoid of industrialization-redeeming features, on whose productive base, rests development. The negative impact on human development derivable from this, plays out in the governance of our educational institutions. It is within this difficult environment that Trade Unions operate. To have a better understanding of the contending forces within which Trade Unions operate, it was necessary to dwell extensively on the political and economic substratum that gives rise to the contentious environment in which they have to operate and the ambit in which they are called upon to mediate between the Governing Councils and the Government on the one hand and the lecturers on the other hand.

Table 3: Annual Budgetary Allocations of 20 World Bank Sampled Countries to Education (World Bank, 2012)

Country	% Budget Allocation to Education	Position
Ghana	31.0	1 st
Cote d' Ivoir	30.0	2 nd
Uganda	27.0	3 rd
Morocco	26.4	4 th
South Africa	25.8	5 th
Swaziland	24.6	6 th
Mexico	24.3	7 th
Kenya	23.0	8 th
United Arab Emirates	22.5	9 th
Botswana	19.0	10 th
Iran	17.7	11 th
USA	17.1	12 th
Tunisia	17.0	13 th
Lesotho	17.0	14 th
Burkina Faso	16.8	15 th
Norway	16.2	16 th
Columbia	15.6	17 th
Nicaragua	15.0	18 th
India	12.7	19 th
Nigeria	8.4	20th, Last

The nation-building enterprise of education places enormous responsibilities on the Academic Staff Union because lecturers are in direct line of executing the primary function of the institution. Given the pressures that our institutions are under being under-funded and expected to over-deliver relative to funding, the necessity for creative social dialogue to ameliorate despondency and improve mutual understanding is called forth.

6.0 Qualities Expected of Trade Union Leadership

The Nigerian political economy encourages opportunism and lack of patriotism in action. Compared to decades ago when check-offs could hardly pay for transportation and hotel accommodation, it is a different situation today. The check-off contribution of members has spiked and the coffers of the Union is well endowed, such that Branches can now afford Union vehicles. With increased capital endowment the temptation of capital attraction as contradistinct to service can constitute a pull. Trade Unions of necessity, now, more than ever before, need to be circumspect in the quality of their leadership.

Sacrifice imbued with knowledge, deployed for the greater good is called for. A Union leader cannot expect to be guided by the same standards that informs the operators of the system. In the Administration/Faculty paradigm, the union is at the receiving end and should understand this. Even the Administrator exercising seeming authority discovers that, that semblance of ‘power’ is transient and ephemeral. He is only a tool in the hands of others. A Union leader should be painstaking in explaining to his constituency the reason for certain actions that need to be taken/and are taken and should remain accountable to his members. In these times of crass opportunism, with education standards taking a beating, the tendency to conform is high, with the attendant destructive impact both in the short and long-term for the system. The Education Boards in our institutions, to a large extent, have abdicated their responsibility of upholding academic standards. So, the Unions invariably now also have foisted on it, the added responsibility of filling the vacuum. **Strategic thinking, tact, perseverance** and the **courage and conviction** to keep appealing to the sense of reason and rationality of others would help.

Not many are conscious of the **existential threat** with which we are faced, as a people. It is the mentoring that the student in our care receive today, that will translate into what becomes of tomorrow. It is important in the course of our strategic approach, that the Leadership is not cut adrift from the followers. It is important to understand the methodology of the Administration and the counter measures to creatively deploy. Administration’s progressively applied matrix is thus – **compromising, containment, intimidation** and outright **hostility**. At the compromising stage, the Chairperson of the Union is offered carrots to undermine his Union. The success in passing the first test is evidenced in loyalty to the principles of the Union, while capitulation resides in untenable alibi. Passing the first test kicks in the second mode of containment. Here, members of the executive and other members especially amongst the Faculty Administration are engineered to influence the Chairperson. Where it fails, a member of the executive is used to countermand the Chair. The tactics is to have the House call the erring executive to order. Where containment fails, intimidation is deployed, sometimes through the instrument of the Department. To counteract this phase, it is important that Union officials are exemplars of diligence and probity. In this way, the Administration will only be successful in exposing its inadequacies in its pursuit of the Union official. At the point where outright hostility is exhibited, the Union has won.

7.0 Conclusion

The political economy of Nigeria can only deliver the dysfunctional system that we currently experience. It is not in any way concerned with development of Nigeria to compete on an equal footing with others, given the natural and human resources that abound. It is not the depths where we currently are that matters, it is the height to which

we can attain with persistent constructive work, imbued with a paradigm different from the dependent matrix that has been.

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