

Organized Labour Under the Military Regimes in Nigeria

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Résumé: Dans la majorité des pays africains, les régimes militaires, , sont devenus un fait de la vie. Cependant, dans le processus d'administration de leur pays, les militaires ont eu à avoir des interactions et des relations réciproques avec beaucoup de groupes dont la plupart énoncent et mettent en avant différents intérêts. Parmi ces groupes d'intérêts, les organisations ouvrières dont les relations réciproques avec l'Armée varient d'un pays à un autre jouent un rôle important.

Le présent article examine les relations entre le gouvernement militaire du Nigéria et les organisations ouvrières dans le cadre du processus de développement économique global.

L'argument principal ici est que, compte tenu de l'orientation des deux groupes fondée sur leurs normes et valeurs organisationnelles et expériences respectives, ils diffèrent pour ce qui est du pouvoir politique et de son utilisation dans le processus de développement. Les différents régimes militaires ont donc mis au point différentes stratégies pour assujettir et contrôler le mouvement ouvrier.

Most interested scholars and commentators both within and outside of Africa are agreed that where the military is in power, there is need for it to establish a cooperative relationship with organized labour in the interest of societal development and progress. Ali Mazrui (1973), for instance developed a thesis which sought to explain political instability in the new states of Africa on the cultural deficiency of the Western educated ruling elites. He suggested that the military (the 'lumpen-militariat') and the workers (the 'lumpenproletariat') share the same cultural idiom and the marriage between these two groups, i.e. the forces of destruction and those of production, is a recipe for a cultural rediscovery and resurgence. In other words, Mazrui (1973) advocated the cooperation of the military and labour first for political stability and ultimately for social and economic development. Such a collaboration does not of course preclude occasional conflict. Infact such occasional conflict may be desirable to prevent the ossification of creativity and initiative.

However events all over Africa would seem to indicate that rather than cooperation and collaboration, the relationship has been one of conflict and antagonism. Thus for instance, Adekanye (1984) divided the major interest groups in the typical African country into two broad categories based on the nature of their relationship with the military. The two categories are the 'pro-military' groups and the 'anti-military' groups. Included in the pro-military groups are the military establishment itself, the bureaucratic

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elite, certain business interests, the urban unemployed and the rural mass. The anti-military groups on the other hand include the restoration government, the old aristocracy, the intelligentsia, radical political organizations and organized labour¹. There is no doubt that the nature of the relationship between the military regime and each of these groups will depend on the particular interest each group seeks to represent and how it goes about achieving that objective. The manner which each group operates thus influences how the military regime comes to perceive such a group and determines its (the military) reaction to that group. Where for instance the military regime considers the operation of a particular interest groups as disruptive, that regime's reaction would be in the direction of control or coercion or in the extreme, extermination.

The present paper focuses on an examination of the nature of the relationship between the military-in- government and organized labour in Nigeria. Nigeria with her immense human and natural resources stands on the threshold of modernization and development. But for this process to be realized, there is no doubt that all the strategically located groups must collaborate. The military, on the one hand, which, as already pointed out, has a monopoly over the forces of destruction and has used them to obtain for itself political power and hence the ability to exercise control over the direction and pace of national development, and organized labour which on the other hand, is directly involved in the production of national wealth and is thus in a position to accelerate or retard the development process, are both strategically located in the national political economy. This makes it imperative that they collaborate if the country's resources are to be adequately and efficiently harnessed. Where both parties find it difficult to work together, as is indeed the case in much of Africa, the resultant antagonism and suspicion cannot but contribute to political instability and underdevelopment.

In looking at the prevailing situation in Nigeria, the argument here is that several factors have functioned to make the highly desirable cooperation and collaboration problematic. It must however be pointed out that some of these factors result from the very nature of the two groups themselves, i.e. in the nature of the military organization and the type of orientation it develops and transmits into its members and secondly the experience of the trade union movement since colonial times.

1 Though Adekanye was primarily concerned with what we called 'Post-Military' States, his analysis is still very relevant to the Military States.

The Military

There is no doubt that the phenomenon of military intervention in government has become a fact of life in Africa. This is illustrated by the fact that, of the 51 independent states, no less than 30 are presently under military rule, while a significant proportion of the remaining have either been under the military in the past or have experienced unsuccessful coup attempts; The point then is that in contemporary Africa, there is a preponderance of what Adekanye (1984) referred to as 'military States', i.e. 'states whose governments have fallen overly to the rule and direction of their soldiery, welding supreme executive power'. In such states, the military in addition to its traditional defence functions take on political and administrative functions.

Nigerian is one of these military states, which but for the short period between October 1979 and December 1983, has been under military rule since January 1966. She gained independence from Britain in October 1960 and the first civilian government of Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, weighed down by corruption, nepotism inefficiency etc. collapsed in January 1966 ushering in Nigeria's first military regime. To date, the country has had 5 military regimes², which implies that in Nigeria's 29 years as an independent state, the military has been in power for about 20 years. More than the civilians therefore, the military has had the greatest opportunity to determine the social, economic and political direction of the country. Since politics concerns the behaviour of groups and individuals in matters likely to affect the course of government, the military has had to interact with various groups in the course of pursuing its political and administrative functions. As argued earlier, the reaction of the military to each of these groups usually depends on how the military, on the basis of its ingrained orientation, perceives such a group and its activities; The Nigerian military shares important features of characteristics with other military forces elsewhere. It is the case then that any military organization that is worth being so called must possess the essential characteristics of;

- 1) unity of command
- 2) concentration of authority
- 3) division of functions
- 4) hierarchy of relations
- 5) penchant for discipline

2 These are; the Ironsi regime, Jan. 1966 - July 1966; the Gowon regime, 1966-1975, the Mohammed/Obasanjo regime, 1975-1979; The Buhary regime, 1983-1985 and the Babangida regime, 1985 to the present. No attempt is made to discuss each regime's relationship with organized labour separately.

- 6) network of communications and
- 7) esprit de corps³.

It is the combination of these characteristics that make the military organization what it is and distinguishes it from other organizations. However when the military takes over government, in its relations with the competing interest groups, some of these characteristics tend to become more prominent and thus influence significantly the nature of such relations. The most salient of these characteristics which have influenced the relationship between the military regimes and organized labour in Nigeria have been those of concentration of authority, hierarchy of relations and the penchant for discipline. These characteristics make the military into a highly stratified system, with a system of graded positions and the tradition of unquestioned obedience of orders by subordinates. Such organization places the greatest emphasis on discipline; The content of discipline, according to Max Weber (1964) is nothing but the consistently rationalized, methodically trained and exact execution of the received order in which all personal criticism is unconditionally suspended and the actor is unwaveringly and exclusively set for carrying out the command. The orientation which results from the inculcation of such values as those stated above is a hierarchical conception of authority and political rule. When extended to the day to day governance, such an orientation by necessity rules out the possible existence of any organized group within the country which could function as a centre of 'opposition'. Hence the usual ban imposed immediately on assumption of power by the military on all political parties and other para-political organizations. On the surface, the usual reason for this action is to rid the country of the social ills associated with politicians and political parties; the policization of ethnic cleavages, and intra-elite strife in government structures which result in political and administrative paralysis, corruption, nepotism, government inefficiency and so on⁴.

However a second and perhaps more fundamental reason is that political parties could constitute a source of opposition, a base for social mobilization against the military and their aims and programmes. One consequence of the banning of political organizations is that a vacuum opens up between the military rulers and the mass of citizens, a gap which political and para-political organizations filled hitherto. Dudley (1982) suggests that this gap is occupied under the military by the bureaucracy, a situation in which top civil servants are required not only to advise and execute but also to take on decisional roles. Dudley describes this linkage between the military regime and the bureaucracy as a 'symbiotic relationship' which involves

3 J. Bayo Adeganye (1981).

4 Rafiq Ogunbambi (1985).

above all a greater centralization of political power than ever before. What emerges from all this is that the interests of the lower classes remain unarticulated and unprotected from the negative fall outs of the military regime's programmes, precisely because to a large extent the interests of the bureaucratic elites coincide with those of the military officers in government. Thus given the fundamentally undemocratic nature of military regimes, no matter their pretensions to the contrary, and the absence of intermediary political organizations, experience in Nigeria shows that the Labour Movement gets thrust into the position where it not only protects the interests of its members but also takes on the role of the defender of lower class interests. In these closely related roles, the movement assumes the position of an opposition group, a role it is constrained to undertake because as Adrian Peace (1974) puts it, the great majority of the urban masses have little possibility of such structured opposition - they look at the wage earners to provide the leadership in protests which the wage earners themselves are acutely aware' of. Then evidently in this larger role, it cannot but come against the military's authoritarian conception of power. Hence the desire of the successive military regimes to put down the trade union movement, a desire which has taken several concrete dimensions.

The Trade Union Movement

The development of trade unionism in Nigeria has been attributed to the colonial administration, although conclusive facts on the exact date of unionization in Nigeria have not been established. Current thinking is that the organization of the Nigerian civil service union in 1912 marked the beginning of trade unions in Nigeria. During much of the colonial era, the trade union movement performed two closely related roles. First it was concerned with the protection and advancement of the economic interests of the 'native' workers. In this role, it was relatively successful as on several occasions it was able to win significant concessions from the employers for the workers. Secondly, it was inevitably drawn into the political struggle for independence during which it was closely allied with the nationalist politicians. In this latter role, it came to oppose the colonial administration on two grounds - as the biggest employer of labour and as the political ruler of the colony of Nigeria.

This is not to imply that the trade union movement was one harmonious body, united in the pursuit of common goals. Rather, the entire history of trade unionism in Nigeria has been characterized by competition and internal wrangling. However, it is remarkable that inspite of the internal squabbles which have dogged the movement, unity was usually achieved at crucial points in time and in the face of common obstacles. Thus it is perhaps correct to suggest that the greatest success of the movement during the colonial period was the 1945 general strike which in the words of one

commentator, thoroughly shook the foundations of the Nigerian nation; and involved between 30,000 and 43,000 workers. It must however be pointed out that throughout the colonial era, the colonial administration was primarily interested in nurturing up a strong non-political labour movement along the line of the British Trade Union Congress (TUC). The administration, furthermore favoured voluntary negotiation and collective bargaining in the determination of wages, a policy which was largely unsuccessful because in the social context of the colony, it proved difficult to prevent the politicization of wage determination. Thus on the eve of political independence, a relatively powerful labour movement was in existence, a movement which had weathered numerous storms, internal and external, to emerge as one of the most organized and articulate of the various interest groups in the new nation-state.

However at independence in 1960, the movement was forced to part ways with the politicians as the latter competed fiercely among themselves for political and economic power. The dreams of life abundance conjured up by politicians before independence proved illusory and increasingly the lower classes were marginalised as mismanagement and corruption worsened the country's economy. One major consequence was that real wages failed to keep pace with inflation and resulted in a general fall in the standard of living of wage earners. The trade unions put forward wage claims, and the government prevaricated. But under the threat of a strike by the hastily formed Joint Action Committee (JAC), the government set up what is now known as the Morgan Commission "to investigate the existing wage structure, remuneration and conditions of service in wage-earning employments in the country and to make recommendations concerning a suitable new structure...". Even with the Report submitted to government, nothing happened, hence the 1964 general strike during which Nigeria lost more than 100 million dollars. More than any other thing, the strike 'articulated the class resistance of workers and the popular resentment of politicians'. In other words, the strike went beyond ordinary wage demands to include social and political grievances of the lower classes against the politicians. Also significant is the fact that other members of the lower classes, notably market women and the unemployed joined in the protests that accompanied the strike. One of the major consequence of the 1964 strike was a general disenchantment with politicians' rule and the more or less general euphoria which greeted the January 1966 military coup.

The structure of the Trade Union Movement: Pre-1966

The initial structure of the Nigerian trade union movement was determined by the Trade Union Ordinance of 1930, promulgated by the British Colonial administration. This was the first law in Nigeria to regulate the development of trade unions with its stipulation that 5 or more persons may form a trade

Union. The direct consequence of this stipulation was the proliferation of very small, financially and organizationally weak 'house' unions. Furthermore, as Fashoyin (1981) pointed out, because the ordinance disregarded jurisdictional demarcations, between trade and occupational groups and between different levels of workers, it introduced leadership rivalries which in many cases led to the formation of yet more small unions. Thus, for instance there were 14 unions in 1940 with a total membership of 4629. This however rose to 360 unions in 1960 with a total membership of 274,126. Evidently, the increasing number of wage earners had also functioned to increase the number of unions.

Numerous attempts have been made at uniting these small unions into larger, more viable and organizationally stronger unions, but these have largely failed. Similarly, attempts at uniting all unions under one central union also failed, though as pointed out earlier, the workers usually managed to present a united front in times of difficulties as is illustrated by the joint condemnation of the British authorities after the Enugu shooting of coal workers and the Joint Action Committees of 1945 and 1964. Thus up till the military take over in 1966, the structure of the movement was one of a multiplicity of small 'house' unions, very weak in relationships with employers, but with several fitful attempts made at amalgamation and centralization. As pointed out earlier, these attempts met with varying degrees of failure.

The nature of the Relationship

As Adekanye (1981) had argued basically, military organizations and trade unions are inherently contradictory, for reasons not the least of which centres on the consideration that the former are oriented towards the maintenance of a given socio-political "order" while the latter tend to function more or less through 'agitations'! In spite of the contradictory nature of both organizations, the requirements of development and progress demands that they co-exist and work together. In Nigeria, the attempt at cooperation and co-existence has taken the form of subjugation and control by the military of the Labour movement. While the military regimes recognize the place of trade unions in the development effort, there is however a divergence of opinion on the *modus operandi* the labour movement should adopt. A comparison of the two statements below demonstrates this divergence:

We are compelled to seek the answer to the questions: with what should the trade union movement concern itself?... I feel that the trade union movement with-deviating from its traditional responsibility to seek better working and living conditions and a fair share of the benefits of economic development for its members, must nevertheless concern itself increasingly with the broader questions of social and economic policy...

The potential contributions of trade unions to development planning can take many forms. They can organize or support housing projects, cooperatives health and welfare programmes and vocational training. In all these ways, trade unions can help to effect the vital transformation of the process of development from a movement from above into a movement from below carried forward by the momentum of a people's will⁵.

... The fundamental and enduring concern of the honest trade union is the welfare of the worker and his family. The genuine trade union is above political or compromise betrayal of the workers' interest; it is independent of the government and employers and free of extraneous control. The genuine trade union works for social justice and national progress. It works for these great ideals on their most meaningful level - the greatest good of the greatest number⁶.

It is evident that both parties are agreed that for the trade union movement to be especially relevant to the development process, it must expand its role beyond strictly labour - management or bread and butter issues; However, the manner in which it does it is problematic. Going by Brigadier Adefope's comments, it is clear that the military government recognizes the importance of the trade unions as a vehicle of mass mobilization. However, it has to fulfil this function as partner (a very junior partner at that) of the government. Thus it is expected to restrict itself to 'non-harmful' social programmes expected to benefit the lower classes. In other words what is expected is a docile and servile productionist labour movement without any independence of action beyond the boundaries prescribed by the military government. However, as already pointed out earlier, the Nigerian Labour Movement prides itself for its independence and militance in pursuing its interests. It holds very dear its 'populist' image. Hence the desire to seek 'the greatest good for the greatest number'. This has proved intolerable for the successive military governments, who have reacted by increasingly intervening in the industrial relations process primarily as a means of curbing the activities of the trade unions. As Yesufu (1962; p. 10) pointed out, 'there is nothing that has characterized Nigeria's industrial relations system so much in recent years as the greatly enhanced degree of government involvement since 1966... In Nigeria, before military rule, such intervention was confined to enacting basic legislation which safeguarded the lowest categories of workers from physical exploitation...

5 Brigadier H.E.O. Adefope: Opening address of the National Seminar on *Nigerian Labour Legislation, Impact on Industrial Relations & Economic Development*, 24-30 August 1975.

6 Part one of UCLN Policy Paper titled *A Programme for the Future*, May 1962.

however, the shift that had taken place after the inception of military rule in 1966 had been such as to amount, on the face of it, to an almost complete negation of the principle of voluntarism. This is evidenced by the amount and content of labour and industrial relations legislation that was enacted since 1966, together with the various complementary decrees and administrative actions which had the effect of putting the economy under former state control and severely limiting the areas of initiative open to workers and employees. Some of these mechanisms adopted by the military are examined below

Strategies of Control

The first and perhaps the most fundamental of the strategies of control adopted by the military regimes have been an elaborate system of decrees which by their nature supercede any existing constitutional laws. It is no surprise then that most important political or administrative actions taken by the military are backed by decrees which cannot be challenged in any court of law. Some of the more significant decrees which affect the labour movement need to be examined.

During the Nigeria civil war (1967-1970), several stringent controls were instituted which included a compulsory contribution to a national development fund and a freeze on wages. These brought about increased worker militancy to which the government reacted with restrictive legislation beginning with the Trade Disputes (Emergency Provisions) Decree No. 21 of 1968. This law introduced, for the first time, compulsory arbitration and the requirement that collective agreements should be deposited with the Federal Ministry of Labour. No worker could go on strike until the procedure introduced in the law had been systematically followed. A 1969 amendment abrogated the right of workers to go on strike. While it is understandable that the war situation required some strong measures, however, the 1969 amendment did not reduce or stop the incidence of strikes by workers. In fact as Fashoyin (1978) showed, the incidence of trade disputes and strikes rose significantly while the laws were in operation.

The Trade Union Decree No 31 of 1973 updated the Trade Union Ordinance of 1938 passed by the colonial administration. The ordinance had prevented officials of the Police Force and the Prisons from belonging to trade unions. However, the 1973 Decree expanded the categories of employees who cannot form or join trade unions to include those in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Customs, Central Bank, Nigerian External Telecommunications Limited, Federal and State government employees bearing arms. This implies essentially that a very large number of government employees are prohibited from participation in trade unionism. This decree has not been very effective as on several occasions, some of the prohibited employees have gone on strike. For instance in June 1986,

workers of the Nigerian Security, Printing and Minting Corporation went on a prolonged strike for improvement in conditions of service.

Secondly, section 15 of the Decree prohibits the use of union dues for political purposes. This section states that 'unless the rules otherwise provide, trade union dues under the rules shall not be applied directly or otherwise to the furtherance of any political objectives. Now this is a strange stipulation for by 1973 when the decree was promulgated, the government of the Federation was firmly in military hands and the Gowon regime had extended the proposed handover to civilian politicians until 1979. Thus this section can only be interpreted as a measure to ensure the disassociation of the trade union movement from politics and political organization then, and in the future. This is of course in keeping with the military's longstanding strategy of isolating and controlling the movement. Finally, of equal importance also is that the 1973 decree raised the minimum number of employees who could form a trade union from the 5 stipulated by the Ordinance of 1938 to 50. Similarly the Decree provided for the voluntary amalgamation where desired by the small house unions.

Second, one of the most fundamental steps taken by any of Nigeria's military regimes, with regard to the Labour Movement was that taken by the Mohamed/Obasanjo regime in 1977 which culminated in the Trade Unions (Amendment) Decree No 22 of 1978. The Decree gave legal backing to the Restructuration of the trade union movement. The constant squabbling within the movement since colonial times reached a peak in 1975 with the formation by the 4 existing central unions of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC). A torrent of protests and complaints was directed at the government concerning the manner in which the NLC officials were selected. In reaction, the military government not only refused to recognize the NLC but also withdrew the registration papers of the 4 component central unions. An administrator was appointed to, among other things, examine the existing structure of the trade union movement and to restructure it into a fewer number of unions. What is interesting is that the restructuring of trade unions is a strategy which has been adopted in a number of developing countries with the ostensible reason of making them more capable of positive contribution towards national development. While the intention of the government might be noble and genuine, one cannot ignore Allah Gladstone's (1979) suggestion that the motivation for the restructuring of the trade union movement of a country could be due to, among other things, the need to transform trade unions from a possible centre of opposition of policies (e.g. economic mobilization) to a centre of support for, and an ally and implemented in respect of these policies.

Whatever the motivation behind the restructuring exercise, the numerous small house unions ceased to exist in favour of 42 industrial unions, all compulsorily affiliated with the military government founded and funded

Nigerian Labour Congress. Similarly the leadership of the new NLC was government appointed. The International Labour Organization in a 1983 report had cause to question the whole exercise on two grounds. First the report stated that affiliation of national industrial unions to the NLC by statute implies deregulation which is an infringement of Article I of convention No 87 of 1948. Furthermore the report stated that legalizing only one central labour organization is a violation of workers' Freedom of Association. Secondly the Decree backing the exercise made it obligatory that all trade unions upon official recognition to be recognized by employers. The ILO report regards as unfair Labour practice to force employers by law to recognize and deduct check-off to any unions that are registered instead of achieving such through the voluntary process. Taken together, there is no doubt that by restructuring the trade union movement into bigger industrial unions, the military had unwittingly improved the capability of the movement to function as the champion of the interests of the lower classes. Not surprising the successive regimes have found it expedient on occasions to resort to coercive measures.

The two most important of these measures are the detention of labour leaders wherever the military leaders feel their own interests are at stake and the threat or actual ban or proscription of recalcitrant trade unions. Through the years, the military regimes have found the power to detain labour leaders whenever they prove intractable very effective and they have not hesitated to use this power. During the civil war, the military government, worried about the effect of large scale industrial unrest on the war effort had cause to detain some labour leaders for varying lengths of time, though this did not prove very successful in curbing labour militance. After the war in 1970, two important Labour leaders, Wahab Goodluck and S.U. Basse were detained from February 1971 to June 1972 for what was termed anti-government activities. A more recent instance is the detention of the senior hierarchy of NLC between June 3rd and 6th 1986 over a proposed nation-wide protest to be organized by the Congress. The military government aborted the proposed protests by arresting and detaining the major labour leaders before the protests against declining living standards of the working class could take place. More ominous however is the life-sentence passed on nine National Electricity and Power Authority (NEPA) Union officials in January 1989. They had been detained since the middle of 1988 over a strike by NEPA employees protesting against, once again, low wages and poor conditions of work. After the strike which threw the country into darkness for about a week, the officials of the Electricity and Gas workers Union were arrested and charged with economic sabotage, which culminated in life sentences for each of them.

In addition to detentions and arrests, the military regimes have also found the proscription of trade unions a very useful strategy. This strategy

has however affected mostly the unions of middle class professionals who have increasingly come into the conflict between the military and the labour movement⁷. Thus when the Nigerian Medical Association squared against the Military government in 1984 over a wide range of social, economic and political issues, the government retaliated by proscribing the union and detaining its officials some of whom took refuge abroad. The National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers fared worse also in 1984. After a confrontation with the Federal Military government over salaries and conditions of service, 64 members of the union, mainly officials were dismissed from government service. Perhaps the harshest punitive action taken by any of the military regimes was in 1977, when after a board of enquiry appointed by the government to look into the affairs of the Labour movement recommended the total ban on certain individuals from taking part in trade union activities in the country. These individuals, eleven in number, all veteran trade unionists were "disqualified from holding office in or belonging to any trade union or taking part whatsoever in any trade union including the management of property or any other affairs of any trade union". And what more, this decision could not be challenged in court.

In addition to these more obvious coercive measures, subtle mechanisms have also been adopted by the military regimes. One of the most important of these is the establishment by the government of the National Institute of Labour Studies. This was a step taken to pre-empt the unions from establishing such an institute, after several decades of discussion among the labour leaders on the desirability of such an institution, aimed primarily at improving the calibre of leadership material available to the Labour Movement. The military government took the initiative in "furtherance of the government's objective of devoting attention during the plan period (1975-80) to the education and training of workers in trade union matters so as to make them more responsive to the needs of responsible industrial relations". The institute which commenced full operations in 1986 is run by government officials and it is those officials who will determine for the labour movement what 'responsible' trade unionism is. There is no doubt that a major purpose for the establishment of the institute is to train a new breed of trade union leaders who will view trade unionism from a government perspective and act accordingly. The consequence of a predominance of such individuals in the labour movement is of course a loss of dynamism and independence or action, attributes which have characterized the Nigerian Labour Movement since colonial times.

A factor which has influenced significantly the military-labour relationship in Nigeria in recent times is the downturn of the Nigerian

7 See Austin Isamah (1986).

economy since the early 1980s. Much of what was discussed above took place during what is called the 'oil boom years', a time of economic bouyance. However, since 1981, a combination of mismanagement, world recession and fall in oil prices, has transformed Nigeria into a debtor country. Thus under the prod of the IMF and World Bank, the country has had to introduce a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The SAP, though equally felt by most of country, has however had a thoroughly negative effect on wage earners. As part of the SAP, the military government has attempted to reform several Labour Decrees. In 1986 for instance, the National Minimum Wage Amendment Order sought to exempt employers with less than 500 workers from paying the national minimum wage of ₦ 125 a month. Now this was one of the major concessions the NLC was able to wrest from the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1981. This order is particularly debilitating to the Labour Movement because most enterprises in the country employ less than 500 workers. Of course employers took advantage of the order in several places to reduce their work force to less than 500 to benefit from the Order.

Taken together, there is little doubt that all the measures adopted by the successive military governments, some of which were discussed above, have had the purpose of cowing the labour movement. To a large extent, they have succeeded. Nigeria's hitherto vibrant and militant labour movement has wilted progressively under pressure from the military. The movement occasionally shows glimpses of its old self, however the sum total of everything is that it has become reticent and feeble in its role as an organized opposition to the military.

Conclusion

Without any doubt, the hall mark of a democratic government is the tolerance and even encouragement of opposition. In this regard, the military regimes in Nigeria have proved to be singularly undemocratic. As has been shown in this paper, the disappearance of other political and para-political organizations after a military takeover leaves the trade union movement as the only viable organized opposition to the military and their policies. However, the military leadership because of its training and orientation views labour as a group of subversives who must be coerced into submission. What is significant is that the labour movement in its new role has the support of the lower classes against what is popularly perceived as the authoritarianism of the military.

The point must be made however that the Nigerian Labour movement is perhaps a better organized entity today due to the activities of the military governments especially in the forcible restructuring of the movement. This exercise has eliminated to a large extent the persistent internecine strife which plagued the movement since colonial times. In its new structure, it

has been able to fight more effectively for political and economic democracy in Nigeria.

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