

Civil Society Organizations and Democratization in Nigeria: An Appraisal of the Role of the Nigerian Labour Congress

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Abstract

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a critical role in the democratization process of any country. This is because they enhance the smooth operation of democratic practice by attenuating state power and supplementing political parties as agents of interest articulation and aggregation. Against this background, the article appraises the role the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) has played in etching the contours of the democratization process in the country starting from the colonial to the post-colonial eras. The article adopts the group theory to explain how, through group advocacy and struggles, the NLC have helped in guiding against democratic threats in the country. For its methodological thrust, the article relied on documentary evidence garnered from the literature on civil society and democracy. The finding reveals that the NLC was more adept at negotiating the welfare of workers during the colonial era and ousting the military from power than deepening the democratic experiment in the post military era. This, for the most part, is due to the penchant for corruption and personal enrichment that have pervaded the leadership of CSOs in the post-military era as well as the lack of capacity in terms of knowledge, skills and methods of advocacy to engage the state in a democratic setting. The article concludes, *inter alia*, that for the NLC to entrench democracy in the country, it should eschew corruption from its ranks and fine tune its methods of advocacy with the state.

Key Words: Civil Society, Civil Society Organizations, Democratization, Interest Groups, Nigerian Labour Congress

Introduction

Nigeria as a country has had a chequered history of democratic practice over the years. The various attempts at democratization have been aptly described as epileptic or

vacillatory (Bello-Imam, 2005). This is largely due to the fact that over the years the military had interrupted the democratic process; twice in 1966, then in 1975 leading to handover of power to a civilian administration headed by Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1979 (Akinboye and Anifowose, 1999). By December 1983, the military took over again and remained in power till August 1993 when an Interim National Government (ING) was instituted. Few months later, the Interim National Government was sacked by the late General Sani Abacha who later died in office in June 1998 (Akinboye and Anifowose, 1999) General Abdulsalami Abubakar came in and ruled till May 1999 when he finally handed over power to a civilian administration headed by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Perhaps, due to the quality of governance in the country that pays lip service to democratic principles or the long years of military rule, democracy has been likened albeit erroneously to civil rule by many commentators who do not know the marked difference between the two. Nigeria, for the most part, has exhibited elements of civilian rule more than of democratic rule. For instance, it has been argued in some quarters that even when elections are conducted, citizens are not allowed to go pass the voting process in having a good share in the elected government of the day (Ake, 1993; Adele 2001). The country's abysmal romance with democracy has been blamed partly on the absence of strong institutions to entrench democratic culture in the country. This is, in part, due to the prolonged hold of the military on power since the attainment of independence in 1960. But one institution that has given impetus to the democratization process in Nigeria is the civil society.

The Civil society plays a vital role in the struggle for democratization in any state. This is based on the fact that CSOs supplement political parties as schools for leadership training and fostering of democratic culture (Imade, 2007; Kukah, 2007). They facilitate the growth of the private enterprise and to ensure the state does not suffocate the economy due to its hegemony (Lewis, 1992). Thus, it can be conveniently said that without a vibrant and kicking civil society in a country the latter cannot be said to have a robust democracy. The thrust of this paper, therefore, is to critically examine the role of the NLC, a civil society organization, in the democratization process in the country.

Conceptual clarification

Civil society

There does not exist in the literature a universally acceptable definition of civil society. Writing as far back as the early centuries, Aristotle defined civil society as a ‘civilized and rational society’ which is coterminous with the state (Aristotle cited in Imade, 2007). However, scholars like Keane (1988); Ferguson and Forbes (1966); Paine (1791) and Tocqueville cited in Aiyede (2003), have criticized this classical definition of civil society. They argued that civil society, as a veritable instrument for the creation and sustenance of democracy plays a vital role in aggregating private interest and concomitantly attenuating state authority and so it is different from the state in its roles, composition, shapes and contours. Georg Hegel cited by Gauba (2007), however, sees civil society, as the realm of individuals who have left the unity of the family to enter into economic competition to achieve their self-interest. According to him, it is an arena of universal egoism and divisiveness with a potential for self-destruction.

Mutfang (2003) conceptualized civil society as a wide range of association and other organized collectives capable of articulating the interest of their members, moulding and constraining state power. For the sake of this work, the authors pitch tents with the definition of civil society given by Diamond (1995). According to Diamond (1995, p.5), it is;

the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, self-supporting, autonomous from the state and bound by legal order or a set of rules. It is distinct from society in general in that it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passion, ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals make demands on the state and hold state officials accountable.

Civil society organizations (CSOs), on the other hand, refer to the individual interest groups or trade unions manned by the civil populace operating in the various sectors of the economy, independently of the state to check the state in the exercise of its powers. Structurally, CSOs are made up of five groups, these are; Specialized Research and Advocacy Groups; the Specialized Human Rights and Democracy Advocacy Groups; Networks and Coalitions; Trade Unions and Professional Bodies and Community Based Organizations (CBOs).

Democratization

Simply put, democratization is the process of introducing or returning a society to democracy. According to Alamu (2011), it is the process of establishing and strengthening the institutional principles and mechanisms that define a democratic regime. In other

words, it depicts the deliberate construction of inclusive political mechanisms and institutions which are solid foundations for a sustainable, vibrant and viable democratic system. As used in this work, democratization is the conscious process of cultivating and nurturing a healthy democratic culture through effective check on the powers of the state by instruments of political interaction such as civil society and political parties.

Dahl (2000) has enunciated three essential attributes of a democratic polity. These include meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups for all effective positions of government power; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders; and a high level of enjoyment of civil and political liberties.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical thrust of this work is the group theory of the state. The group theory contends that in every society there are a lot of groups which engage in perpetual struggle for power and domination over one another. Through the process of balancing and limiting each other's powers, groups are able to harmonize their competing interests through group consensus.

The intellectual root of the group theory lies in the doctrine of pluralism which was developed in the early twentieth century by a number of scholars such as Arthur Bentley, David Truman and Earl Latham. Bentley, to whom the origin of the group theory in its present form can be traced, conceives groups as the basic unit of political activity in the society. In his words, "when the groups are adequately stated, everything is stated. When I say everything, I mean everything" (Bentley 2017, p.5). Bentley conceives the importance of groups in terms of their processes or activities rather than as formal structures since the society itself comprises of dynamic processes and not static institutions. The theorist also introduced the concept of "interest" in trying to answer the question as to what gives direction to group activity. According to him, it is this interest that differentiates a genuine group from a coincidental collection of people (Bentley, 2017). However, group interests expressed as demands on the political system occasionally conflict and the capability of the state to manage the various conflicting interests goes a long way in stabilizing the entire system (Varma, 2006).

Another group theorist, David Truman, holds that for a group to achieve its interest in relations to others which are engaged in competition with it depends on whether it possesses certain acumen such as access to those in authority, resources, organization and

leadership (Truman, 1971). On the other hand, a group's inability to influence government decision could be adduced to lack of resources, ineffective leadership and poor organization. But the question is what happens when group interests conflict? The group theorists argue that through an unconscious balancing process, the role of government as adjuster of group conflict, the phenomenon of overlapping and cross cutting membership and the *rules of the game* (however unorganized they are) groups are able to achieve equilibrium in their interactions (Varma, 2006).

The group theory is relevant to this work because it succinctly explains how the struggle and advocacy put forward by interest groups within the NLC has helped to shape the contours of public policy or the exercise of power by the Nigerian state. In this connection, the achievement of independence from the colonial masters and the subsequent enthronement of democratic rule after many years of military interregnum are explainable in the struggles among the different civil society groups in the country.

Historical background to civil society organizations in Nigeria

The evolution of Civil Society Organizations in Nigeria can be considered from two periods; the pre-independence and post-independence eras.

The pre- independence era

The history of civil society in Nigeria can be traced to colonialism. The authoritarian nature of colonial rule paved way for the emergence of nationalist movements, trade unions and interest groups to fight for independence which was granted in 1960. Civil society organizations emerged to oppose the dictatorial and authoritarian nature of colonial rule (Toure-Kajah, 2000). Some of these groups or associations later became political in nature. First among these various groups was a trans-national organization known as the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) led by some intellectuals under the leadership of a Ghanaian lawyer, Casley Hayford. It had the main objective of uniting the four British West African countries -Gambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast now Ghana and Nigeria in their demand for self-determination. The NCBWA was to serve as a catalyst for the emergence of other similar groups in the country. Subsequently, there was the West African Students Union (WASU) formed in 1925 in London by West Africans students. Led by Ladipo Solanke, the Union served as a rallying point for students groups for the fight against colonial rule in West Africa. There was also the Lagos Youth Movement (LYM) that was formed in 1934 by four Nigerians; J.C. Vaughan, Ayo Williams, Ernest Ikoli and H.O. Davies to oppose the colonial educational

policy with regards to the differences which existed in the Yaba Higher College (Masajuwa, 2003). In 1936, the name was changed to the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in an effort to make it a national movement.

According to Akinboye and Olorunshola (2010), the various organizations adopted different strategies such as protests, propaganda, strikes and civil disobedience to press home their demands. The occasional riots and instability such as the Aba women riot of 1929; the Iva Valley workers riot of 1949; the Enugu miners' strike of 1949 and the general strike of 1945 were all evidences of the fact that colonialism was resisted (Falana, 2010). One veritable tool that was used in the fight against colonialism was the vocal press. Newspapers such as the *West African Pilot*, *the Comet*, *the Lagos Daily News*, *the Tribune* and *the Daily Service* were used in expressing vituperative criticisms against the colonialists. This was in spite of the fact that the freedom of association and expression were prohibited and criminalized. All these efforts resulted in the achievement of independence in 1960.

The post- independence era

The post-independent era witnessed the resurgence of civil society organizations with the motives of demanding good governance and challenging the authoritarian nature of military rule in the country. As Osaghae (1997, p.10) puts it;

the combination of foreign debts, structural adjustment and general economic decline have further emasculated the capacity of the state to provide jobs, subsidize education, health care, social services, protect lives and property. This has forced the people to devise various strategies of coping outside the formal structure of the state.

At independence, the form and function of the Nigerian state remained the same; immense, arbitrary, violent and threatening in its power (Ake, 1993). The nature of political competition for power impacted negatively on the social cohesion resulting to the dwindling of the civil society in Nigeria. This was aggravated by the fact that the Balewa regime did little to enable the growth of private interests. But the protest against the signing of the Anglo-Nigeria Defense Pact in 1962 showed some spark in the life of the civil society. The government of Murtala Mohammed encouraged the thriving of civil society by appointing Professor Patrick Wilmot and Dr Bala Usman, both Marxist scholars, as advisers on foreign policy. This explains why the regime had a vibrant foreign policy (Kukah, 2007).

The austerity measures introduced by the Alhaji Shehu Shagari's regime to curb the economic crises that bedeviled Nigeria at that time resulted to economic hardships which were opposed by the Nigerian Labour Congress (Olukoshi, 2001). The Buhari's regime which toppled the Shehu Shagari's administration proscribed many civil society organizations mostly professional associations and trade unions which, according to Aiyede (2003), dared to criticize its policies or embarked on public demonstrations and strikes or called for an announcement of the date of return to civil rule. Several draconian decrees were promulgated such as Decrees 2,4,14 and 17. Decree 2, for instance, caged the press. Two journalists of the *Guardian Newspaper*, Nduka Irabor and Tunde Thompson, became the first casualties of this unpopular decree (Akinboye and Anifowose, 1999).

The economic crises that bedeviled Nigeria persisted and General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (IBB) on assumption of power subjected the issue of taking an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan to a national debate. As Olukoshi (2001) has pointed out, this debate provided occasion for the civil society to react. Various groups opposed the proposal but the state through co-option, threats and intimidation successfully weakened the base of these groups. The regime went ahead to take the IMF loan and implemented Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) much to the chagrin of Nigerians. Amidst the protest and demonstrations that attended the introduction of SAP, the Campaign for Democracy (CD) was formed and provided a rallying point for agitation for the return of the country to civil rule (Kukah, 2007; Imade, 2007).

The annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election further ignited the fire of protests and opposition against the IBB's regime. The protests and demonstrations that greeted this dastardly act led to the stepping down of "Maradona" as IBB was also called, after instituting an illegal Interim National Government (ING). The latter lacked legitimacy and was subsequently overthrown by General Sani Abacha.

Soon after assuming office, Abacha embarked on a plan to transmute himself into a civilian president and tried to eliminate all oppositions in his way. The regime promoted the arrest and imprisonment of human rights and democracy activists particularly leaders of National Democratic Coalition (NADECO). Others who survived the arrest were forced into exile. He also allegedly murdered Ken Saro Wiwa and the Ogoni 8, Kudirat Abiola, wife of the acclaimed winner of the June 12, 1993 Presidential election and Pa Alfred Rewane (Akinboye and Anifowose, 1999).

Civil Society Organizations championed a massive campaign for voters' education, mobilization and enlightenment during the General Abdulsalami Abubakar's administration. With the return of civil rule in 1999, the roles of these organizations have not been less remarkable. This could be seen in the activities of the Nigerian Labour Congress, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Nigeria Medical Association (NMA), Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) and others which have helped to put government in check (Alubo, 2007; Okaneme, 2014).

Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the democratization process in Nigeria

The smooth operation of colonial rule depended on the exploitation of the labour of Nigerians. To protect the interest of the wage workers, the first generation of trade unions was formed and these included the Nigerian Civil Service Union in 1912, the Nigerian Union of teachers in 1931 and the Nigerian Union of Railway men in 1932. In 1943, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) was formed as a rallying point for all these interest groups in the fight against colonialism (Aremu, 2003). Its role in this regard had been monumental. For example, in 1945 Nigerian workers under the aegis of TUC held a nationwide strike when their demands for increase in wages were not met. The strike which lasted for 37 days paralyzed the colonial economy which was already battered by depression. The Enugu Miners' strike of 1949 was another significant contribution of labour to the independence struggle in the country.

Fundamentally, it was in 1978 that the NLC was decreed into existence after the General Obasanjo's regime had earlier banned independent efforts of trade unionists to form a common centre. The congress which is a rallying point for trade unionism has etched the contours of state-industrial relations in the country. Shortly after its formation, the NLC took it upon itself to agitate for a national minimum wage for workers. Though the General Olusegun Obasanjo's regime set up a panel to look into the issue but nothing meaningful was done about it till the regime handed over power to Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1979. The Shagari's regime which was reluctant to treat the issue decided to raise workers wage from 120 to 125 Naira after a two day national strike by the Congress in May 1981 (Aremu, 2003). The struggles of the NLC with subsequent governments have resulted to the minimum wage being raised to 5500 Naira during the General Abdulsalami Abubakar's regime, then to 7500 Naira during the Obasanjo's regime, followed by 18,000 enforced by the Goodluck Jonathan's administration and the extant 30,000 naira approved by the

Tripartite committee but yet to be legislated upon as a new national minimum wage by the Mohammadu Buhari's regime.

Again, the NLC was initially involved in the 'democratization process' by articulating the views of workers on protection of human rights, the role of the military in governance and rural development to the Political Bureau during the Babangida's regime (NLC, 1986). Apart from participating in the review of the 1979 constitution, the NLC also formed the Labour Party which, unfortunately, was not registered by the Junta. Sequel to this, the NLC decided to align with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) which had a socialist ideology (Aremu, 2003).

The leadership of NLC under Ali Ciroma battled immensely with the government of General Babangida. Between 1986 and 1988, for instance, Ali Ciroma led labour demonstrations against Margaret Thatcher, the killing of students at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, the harsh economic realities occasioned by the adoption of SAP and the resistance to fuel price hikes which were common those days. According to Okaneme (2014), organized labour also went on a massive demonstration against the annulment of the June 12 presidential election by the same military regime of General Babangida. The congress resolved to "challenge the legitimacy of military rule if its tenure extends beyond August 1993" (Aremu 2003, p.179).

Consequently, the regime decided to politicize labour by sponsoring Takai Shamang for the Congress' presidential elections which ended in a stalemate (Kukah, 2007). This gave the government the impetus to appoint a sole administrator to run the body. Thereafter, the IBB regime organized elections and installed an inept and corrupt leadership led by Pascal Bafyau through which it effectively neutralized and controlled the Congress. The emergence of Bafyau dampened the militancy in the NLC as he became a lackey of the military government.

The NLC and indeed other members of civil society groups had a rough time with the Abacha's regime. According to Amuwo (2001, p.4) quoting Peter Lewis, "Abacha fully availed himself of ... instruments of control, extending repression, enervating the political class and conducting pre-emptive indictments against political opponents". The government became furious with the NLC in 1994 when it sided with oil workers to embark on a nation-wide strike. The Junta decided to clip the wings of the congress by banning its executive and further appointed sole administrators from the defunct National Republican Convention (NRC); Dr Samuel Ogbemudia; Alhaji Ahmed Uba and Chief Asom Bur to head it (Aremu, 2003; Kukah, 2007). This was done with the intention of

hammering the final nails into the coffins of the congress since the NRC was antithetical to the ideology of the SDP which the congress shared. However, on 11th August 1998, the Abubakar's regime abrogated Decrees 9 and 10 of 1994 and allowed the unfettered operation of the NLC.

The NLC and democratization in the post military era

In the wake of the return to democratic rule in 1999, the Nigerian Labour Congress has been in the vanguard of checking the excesses of the government thus contributing to the building of a robust democratic culture in the fourth republic. In the first place, the organized labour championed fierce resistance against anti-labour policies like hike in price of petroleum products and retrenchment of workers that were the lots of workers during the Obasanjo's regime. Suffice it to say that these hikes in the pump price of petroleum products were not only perpetrated during the Obasanjo's regime. According to Alubo (2007), from January 6, 1978 to May 27, 2007, the various regimes in the country had increased the pump price of fuel about 18 times and the organized labour have led several protests against many of these increases in concert with other civil society groups. Thus, in the words of Okaneme (2014,p.80) the NLC has "become the rallying point against such ostentatious, irrational and incessant increases over the years which has ultimately served one major purpose which is to impoverish the common man and to increase the wealth of the members of the ruling class..."

Not to be left out here is the role the congress played in the 'murder' of the third term agenda of the Obasanjo's regime through its condemnation of the plot in strong terms. This may have informed the regime's long standing feud with organised labour which, not unexpectedly, saw the sponsoring of the Labour Reform Bill of 2005 by the administration to decentralize trade unions in the country so as to limit its unity of action.

Furthermore, the NLC has also lent its voice in the fight against corruption in the fourth republic. This was clearly demonstrated by the organization of the anti-corruption rally held on the 8th May, 2008 which demanded that the Yar 'Adua's Government should set up a commission of inquiry to investigate corrupt deeds of the Obasanjo administration and recover looted money from the culprits. In a similar vein, during the regime, civil society organizations led by the NLC championed the cause of the agitations for the establishment of an electoral reform committee to restructure electoral system towards revisiting the electoral laws and repositioning the electoral umpire and other critical

stakeholders in the conduct of elections in the country (Allah, 2014). This became necessary given the massive electoral corruption that attended the 2007 General elections.

Moreover, the NLC has also been in the vanguard of the clamour of democratization through massive education of its members on the need for them to vote during elections and participating in several electoral debates towards enthroning a healthy democratic culture in the country (Alalade, 2004). This was borne out of the fact that only a massive participation in the electoral process will bring about the needed change through the election of leaders that will put the welfare of workers on the front burner. Similarly, the congress organized a national colloquium in August 2017 to discuss the raging issue of restructuring in which it stated, *inter alia*, that restructuring is not a substitute for good governance. (Fagbemi, 2017)

Not oblivious of the travails of workers in the country due to global economic crunch and incessant increases in the pump price of petroleum resources, the NLC has always advocated for the improvement in the working conditions of workers in the country. While its advocacy for improved worker's welfare has been spirited over the years, the Nigerian state and other employers of labour have not been very helpful in their reaction to this demand. For instance, the congress was only able to extract a marginal increment in the national minimum wage from the Obasanjo's regime which increased it to 7500 naira as against the inherited minimum wage of 5500 for Federal Government workers and 3500 naira for state government workers. This wage stands in stark contradiction with the humongous salaries and allowances enjoyed by law makers and members of the executive.

In a similar vein, the Congress in 2002 was instrumental in the formation of the Labour Party as a platform for projecting the welfare of workers through the cultivation of values such as equity, social justice and provision of gainful employment which are germane to the democratization project in any polity. The party could not muster the requisite political clout to bring on board its pro-worker programmes having won only one state (Ondo state) in the 2007 Gubernatorial elections (Olaniyi and Otaru, 2018)

Again, the congress had made frantic efforts to ensure the new minimum wage of 18,000 initiated about by the Dr Goodluck Jonathan's administration was implemented by the three tiers of governments and other employers of labour. According to Okaneme (2014), the congress fought for the passage and implementation of the Minimum Wage Act in spite of the concerns expressed by some governors about their inability to pay due to the unbalanced nature of the revenue allocation formula in favour of the Federal Government. More recently, on September 26th 2018, the NLC embarked on a one week warning strike

to agitate for an increment in the national minimum wage from 18,000 naira to 65,000 naira. Despite the shortcomings that trailed the organization and suspension of the strike action by the congress, the inescapable fact is that the NLC has been able to bring to the notice of the government that the extant 18,000 minimum wage enjoyed by workers is unrealistic in the face of current economic realities in the country.

Challenges of the NLC in the democratization process of Nigeria

The NLC, no doubt, has faced a myriad of challenges that threatened to limit its operational efficiency as a critical actor in the democratization process in Nigeria.

In the first place, the congress has been faced with the challenge of sustenance of the tempo of democratization in the post independent area. Its roles in military disengagement have been more pronounced than in deepening of democracy under civil rule. Imade (2007) argued that most CSOs including the NLC have not scored well in this regard because of their pre-occupation with putting an end to military rule and once that goal was accomplished, winning control over state power became their primary objective at the expense of building a community of citizens capable of determining what they want and acting in a way that forces the government to respond accordingly.

Again, corruption and personal enrichment have also pervaded the ranks of organized labour in the country. These vices weaken its moral right to engage the state and hinder people of integrity and high moral standard to associate with them. For instance, the involvement of Paschal Bafyau, former NLC President, in the privatization business of the government smacked of personal aggrandizement. Again, the clean bill of health given to the privatization policy of the Obasanjo's regime by the congress by allowing some of its members to serve on the privatization committee in spite of the shady deals that characterized the implementation of the policy sharply contrasted with the anti-corruption crusade of the congress (Okaneme, 2014).

Moreover, closely related to personal ambition or enrichment is the needless infighting that has threatened the unity of the congress as one formidable union fighting a common cause. A good example is the feud that occurred in 2015 which saw the election of two presidents; Comrades Joe Ajaero and Ayuba Wabba at parallel congresses (Ahiuma-Young, 2015). Internal strike like this has detracted from the gains the congress would have made in the task of democratization.

Furthermore, the proactiveness of the NLC in effective engagement with the state over the years has been hampered by government hard-line posture against their activities. The series of proscription, politicization and sometimes weakening of the congress by the appointment of fifth columnists as leaders by military leaders have etched the contours of State-Labour relations over the years. The method of advocacy by the congress has, as a result, been skewed towards suspension of services (strike) to compel government's acceptance of their demands while the Government, for its part, has considered the congress as a threat and not an indispensable ally in the democratic project. This has had ripple effects on democratization process in the country.

Conclusion

Effective state-civil society relations are germane and remain a sine qua non for the thriving of democracy in any country. This is because the criticism and checks from the civil society are the flickers that let us know that a democracy is alive and kicking. Needless to say, that they guarantee the health and robustness of any democratic experiment. Against this backdrop, the study has appraised the role of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) in the actualization of self government (independence) and the struggle for, and deepening of, democracy in the country. The study established the fact that the congress has been able to check the excesses of the Nigerian state (from Pre-independence to Post independence eras) through its resistance to anti-people policies such as hike in pump price of petroleum products, the taking of the IMF loan and subsequent adoption of SAP, the annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential elections, casualization of labour, the removal of fuel subsidy and so on. Through its commentaries on the state of the nation, the congress has also criticized government handling of critical sectors of the economy such as health, education, agriculture and so forth and have proffered alternative course of actions for government to follow.

The congress, however, has faced several challenges in deepening democracy ranging from preoccupation with being in power, corruption and personal aggrandizement to lack of capacity in terms of knowledge, skills and methods of advocacy to engage the state in a democratic setting. To be sure, the nature and character of the state which has remained dominant and arbitrary and the politicization of the organization by most military regimes and self-styled dictators during civil rule have detracted from the gains, the NLC would have achieved in driving the democratization process in the country.

Recommendations

To reposition the NLC to face the challenges earmarked above, the following measures have been recommended;

- i. The NLC should review its method of advocacy from a confrontational style to collaborative partnership with the government and other critical segments of the society. To do this effectively, the congress should be mainstreamed into policymaking and governance through its inclusion in the ranks of government agencies with regulatory or oversight functions such as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Due Process Office and so on.
- ii. The leaders of the Congress should eschew the penchant for personal enrichment through unbridled fraternity with, and involvement in, the shady businesses of those in power. To check this trend, affiliates of the congress must articulate the imperative for the leaders to adhere strictly to the NLC Policy Document which guides its *modus operandi*.
- iii. The NLC should improve its mechanisms of internal democracy, accountability and probity by adopting a self-regulatory framework and peer review mechanism that would enhance its democratic credentials. Such a self-regulatory framework would require extensive, broad and inclusive consultations across the 43 affiliates of the congress leading to effective communication and synergy for course of action.
- iv. The NLC should also do away with the needless bickering and division from their ranks and forge a common front to achieve their goal of improving the welfare of workers in the country. To check needless bickering and promote unity of purpose in the congress, the different affiliate unions congress should close ranks and demonstrate solidarity with the one another in their engagement with the state on issues bordering the individual unions.

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