

A REVIEW OF THE ESSENCE OF TRADE UNIONS IN THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The role played by trade unions in enforcing a change in the Nigerian political development is pivotal. Over the years, trade unions have contributed immensely to removal of political parties and ensured the enthronement others and have fought vehemently for the promotion of socio-economic interests of their members and the nation at large. On the whole, trade unions have developed from being mere bargaining representatives of workers to being a social movement or force contributing to the growth and entrenchment of democracy in the country. Considering the huge role played by trade unions in Nigeria, this study explores issues relating to trade union and political development in Nigeria, reviewing academic studies – theoretically and empirically in order to determine the essence of trade unions in the political development of Nigeria.

Keywords: trade union, political development, essence, workers.

Introduction

Labour union has always been playing a pivotal role in changing the political dynamics of Nigeria right from its inception. As much as it is an independent union that is workers – focused, it has tools, means and methods of influencing the people who constitute the government; the activities of the emerging and existing government and its policies to the favour of its members and by extension, the general public. Over the years, the labour union has partly contributed to the removal of a political party and the enthronement of another party in Nigeria. The union has helped to force a change in specific governmental policies especially the policies that bother, broadly, on the quality of lives of the masses and, specifically, on the working conditions of its members. For instance, in 2012, labour union actively participated in the reversal of the pump price of fuel stipulated by then government. It once undermined the plan to stop the payment of subsidy to oil marketers in Nigeria and has helped its members to achieve some increase in the basic salaries and emoluments. It is crystal clear that the union cannot be ignored or sidelined on political and economic issues but rather, as a body and national stakeholder, its opinions are consulted for these issues to be resolved amicably and appropriately. Mostly, the union employs the use of peaceful demonstrations, warning and the actual strikes in the achievements of its feats. For example, the strike action led by Imodu in 1945; the NUPENG strike led by Kokori against the annulment of the June 12 election; recurring ASUU strikes; the anti-fuel subsidy strike championed by Omar and Esele are some of the strike actions the union has used to enforce and influence changes in the political operation of Nigeria. Succinctly put, Nchuchume and Ajulor, opine that “the struggles of many African countries cannot be complete without mentioning the role of African trade unions and civil servants”.

Considering the huge role played by the union in Nigeria, this study explores the issues of labour union and political development in Nigeria, reviewing academic studies – theoretically and empirically to determine the essence of labour union in the political development of Nigeria.

Labour Union and Political Development: A Conceptual Review

It is appropriate to explain the key concepts of this study which include labour union and political development. In the literature, the concepts of labour union and trade union are used interchangeably while political development is a nomenclature popular in the arena of politics.

Labour Union: In the Trade Union Act of 1973, it is seen as

Any combination of workers or employees whether temporary or permanent, the purpose of which is to regulate the terms and conditions of employment of workers, whether the combination by any reason of its purposes being in restraint of trade and whether its purposes do or do not include the provision of benefits for its members (p.97).

Kelly and Fajana defined labour union as an organization of employees which, as a unit, bargain with employers for suitable working conditions on behalf of their members. Adefolaju explains a labour union to be an organization of a group of employees whose principal aim is to ensure that the working conditions of their members are regularly improved through collective bargaining. In other words, members of labour union act as an entity to collectively demand for suitable working conditions. He further explained that labour or trade unions relate with employers of labour on issues affecting the employees. On the side of the employees, the formation of the union is in response to the emergence of industrial capitalists whose ultimate goal is profit maximization, using both human and non-human materials to realise it. On the one hand, the capitalist want to make more money and increase profitability by reducing their expenses on wages and salaries. On the other hand, employees want to improve their working condition by having their wages increased and having more time to spend outside work with their family. With this, labour union's activities are deemed as a form of struggle to align the goals of the capitalists with the employees. It is therefore the responsibility of the labour union to ensure that the two contrasting goals are achieved especially having improved working conditions for their members.

It is clear that union members collectively ensure that their working conditions are fair. With this objective in mind, employees join labour union based on the belief that as a union they can fight for better working conditions than as individuals. On individual basis, employees are weak and incapable of demanding for improved working conditions. To achieve their aim and serve their purpose, they employ the tool of strike which sometimes forces employers of labour to do the bidden of the employees. However, the effectiveness of the use of the weapon of strike to secure suitable working conditions for their members has been weakening by the Nigerian government. This is confirmed by the Trade Dispute Act 1976 and 2004.

Political Development: Human beings, including the labour union members, are generally regarded as political beings. This assertion implies that human beings are the architects of the existing political systems which they operate within their environments. Basically, man plays a critical role in the creation of their political societies and how they evolve including their nature, systems and objectives. It is a fact that man is free to create, condemn, adopt and dissolve any political system that does not serves his purpose.

But in the case of Nigeria, her emergence as a nation, her political situation and experience over the years are partly created by Nigerians and partly by their colonial masters. This is premised on the fact that the nation was not in existence before 1914 – the year of its creation – but was formed by the Great Britain, through Lord Lugard, who married people of diverse ethnicities, identities and cultural practices together. The marriage of these ethnic groups, estimated to be about 350, created the nation called Nigeria today and it was created out of the need for an effective administration by the British Government. As Aka (p.229) rightly said, “Nigeria is a wholesale product of British colonialism” and his view was re-echoed by Chinua Achebe who posited that Nigeria was a product of colonialism. Hence colonialism births the beginning of the political development currently experienced in Nigeria.

After her colonial experience, the nation evolved into the next phase of her political development which was her nationalism. The struggle for the nationalism of Nigeria led to her

independence in 1960. This nationalism was fought for by the founding fathers of the country – Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Eyo Ita, Herbert Macaulay, and so on. The whole essence of the quest for nationalism was to gain freedom and have a sense of self – actualization for the country. Upon getting her independence in 1960 from the British Government, the nation was allowed to be governed by her people and her resources to be totally managed and dispensed by her nationals as they deemed fit. It is no gainsaying that the country is vastly rich in terms of natural and human resources having her founding fathers exposed to the Western education. In terms of weather and natural resources, the country is highly favoured with crude oil, iron, coal, limestone, and so on. However, after the independence from the British Government, the nation was plunged into series of crises which has hampered her political development.

From 1960 till date, the political development of Nigeria has been greatly threatened by military coups, civil war, religious conflicts, attempted separation, militancy, insecurity, gross discontentment, political corruption, terrorism and social disorder. These problems are largely self-inflicted borne out of greed, the feeling of marginalization, leadership failure and governmental neglect. These problems have persisted unabatedly for over 5 decades, stalling both the economic growth and political development of Nigeria.

Various regimes, systems of government, military interventions and attempted military interventions since independence till date are chronicled and presented in the table below:

Table 1: Regimes and Systems of Government in Nigeria since Independence

Regime	System of Government	Duration	Means of Emergence
Civil Rule	Democratic	1959-1966	Election
Military	Authoritarian	1966-1966	Coup
Military	Authoritarian	1966-1975	Coup
Military	Authoritarian	1975-1979	Coup
Civil Rule	Democratic	1979-1983	Election
Military	Authoritarian	1983-1985	Coup
Military	Authoritarian	1985-1993	Coup
Interim	Authoritarian	Six Months	Appointment
Military	Authoritarian	1993-1999	Coup
Civil Rule	Democratic	1999-2007	Election
Civil Rule	Democratic	2007-2011	Election
Civil Rule	Democratic	2011 – 2015	Election
Civil Rule	Democratic	2016 – 2019	Election

Source: Saka, (2014) and the Author

Table 2: Successful and Failed Coups since Independence

Successful Coups	Dates	Failed Coups	Dates
General Aguiyi Ironsi	January 1966	Major Nzeogwu	January 1966
General Yakubu Gowon	July 1966	Lt. Col. Dimka	February 1976
General Muhammed Murtala	July 1975	Major Orkah	April 1990
General Muhammed Buhari	December 1983		
General Ibrahim Babangida	August 1985		
General Sani Abacha	November 1993		

Source: Olorungbemi (2015)

The political development of Nigeria, since independence, has evolved over the years from the first republic to the current one – the fourth republic. At this juncture, each republic is reviewed and their weaknesses pointed out.

A. The First Republic (1960-1966)

The first republic began on October 1st, 1960 and ended on January 15, 1966 having three political parties representing the three regions. The political parties were Action Group (AG), National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroun (NCNC), and the Northern People Congress (NPC). The three political parties participated in the first general election in Nigeria which was conducted on the eve of the Nigerian independence. The outcomes of the election showed that each political party won in the region in which it was domiciled. For instance, NCNC won in the East, the NPC won in the North while the AG initially won all the 44 seats in the West. However, the number of seats won was later increased to 49 because of some NCNC members that deflected to the Action Group. The result further showed that Alhaji Tafawa Balawe emerged as the Prime Minister, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as the President while Chief Obafemi Awolowo emerged as the Leader of the Opposition which comprised NPC and NCNC. In the first republic, Nigeria practiced the parliamentary system of government.

B. The Second Republic (1979-1983)

There was a 13 – year gap between the first and the second republic. The gap was created by the military rule. However, the military administration under the then Murtala – Obasanjo’s regime determined to return government back to the civilians. In the process, the 1979 constitution was written and it made a provision for the position of an Executive President. This system was patterned after the American system of democracy. Prior to the emergence of the second republic, the then military administration rolled out a series of programmes to ensure a successful transition of government from the military to the civilian government. The stages involved – a state creation before the election, the lifting up of ban on political activities, and then the actual elections of individuals into the states and federal houses before the final handing over of government. In the second republic, Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) emerged as the president polling 5,698, 857 votes. However, the republic failed because of lack of confidence in the electoral body, which was, Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO). Also, during that era, politicians were grossly corrupt, inter and intra party conflicts were rife and the economy was destroyed

C. The Third Republic (1985-1993)

The third republic was initiated by the then General Ibrahim Babangida who emerged as the president through a military coup. His administration trimmed down the number of interested political parties from five into second which were the Social Democratic Party (SDP), and the National Republic Convention (NRC). The election was finally conducted on June 12th, 1993 but General Ibrahim Babangida disannulled it. The disannulment undermined and ended the administration of General Ibrahim Babangida.

D. The Fourth Republic – 1999 till date

The fourth republic has experienced five different elections – 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2016 but not without controversies. The unbroken record of five elections is a testament to the fact that democracy is growing in Nigeria. General Abubakar was instrumental to the emergence of the fourth republic helping to ensure a smooth transition of power from the military to the civilian in 1999. During the 1999 election, 30 political parties registered and participated in the election which eventually produced President Olusegun Obasanjo as the President of the Republic of Nigeria. Nevertheless, electioneering process in the country has been bedeviled by electoral frauds, low voters’ turn out, stealing of the ballot papers, the malfunctioning of the registration machine, godfatherism and imposition of candidate on

various party members, ethnicity, bribery and corrupt practices of INEC officials, post-election court cases, the threat of impeachment, attempted extension of political tenure, the death of a sitting President and a host of other issues.

Labour Union in Nigeria: A Historical Review

Labour union in Nigeria has a long history which dated back to the 17th century where the Europeans and the Africans engaged in trading activities, and in the process, adopting the money system of exchange as against the initial mean of exchange which was the barter system. During this period i.e. the 17th century, two fundamental things happened – one, Lagos was regarded as the British Colony; and two, the slave trade was gradually reducing. Afterwards, the barter system, which was the main medium of exchange, was replaced by the use of money and the slave trade was completely abolished and considered as illegitimate and an inhuman activity done against fellow human beings. In the end, the slave trade was replaced by legitimate trades. The emergence of legitimate trades marked the beginning of labour force in Nigeria. With the increase in the use of money as a medium of exchange, trading activities increased tremendously and members of the labour force were, for the first time, paid for every work done.

Regarding the labour union, it was established and started in Nigeria in 1912 but at that time, it was recognized as the Civil Service Union. Currently, the labour union in Nigeria is being represented by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC).

After the abolishment of the slave trade, there was a surge in the trading activities and relationships in the country and the surge led to an increase in the demand for labour. This demand was further heightened by the need to provide items of infrastructure for the country to enhance the quality of living and the movement of goods within the country. Some of the items of infrastructure needed, as at the emergence of the labour force, include railway lines, sea and airports, physical roads, bridge and so on.

It was recorded by Offiong; Aborishade and other previous authors that Civil Service Union was the first labour union which was established in 1912 before the formation of Nigeria. And after the amalgamation of the two Protectorates – North and South in 1914, its name was changed to Nigerian Civil Service Union (N.C.S.U). From the beginning, the union was forthright and relentless in its fight against discrimination prevalent between the African and European civil servants. Fashoyin posited that one of the major and earliest attempts made by the members of the Nigerian labour union to enforce their rights was carried out by the artisans working for the Public Work Department in 1897. They suspended works for 3 days to fight against the frequent changes in their work hours. Regardless of the threat issued by the Colonial Governor, the workers were firm, persistent and able to force a negotiation.

However, an active trade unionism in Nigeria did not start until the early 1930s when the country witnessed relentless agitations from the labour union led by the Railway Workers Union (R.W.U.) which broke away from the Nigerian Civil Service Union (N.C.S.U) in 1931. The radical Railway Workers Union were of the opinion that Nigerian Civil Service Union were too mild in their dealings with the Colonial Government.

In 1938, a Trade Union Ordinance was promulgated which made it mandatory for trade unions to be duly registered before they could embark on any strike action or engage in collective bargaining with their employers. According to Adewumi, the promulgation of the ordinance was as a result of the disruptive behavior of the then trade unions which the colonial government experienced in her British Colonies, both in West Indies and Northern Rhodesia in 1933 and 1937, along with the general unrest of the workers which was occasioned by the economic hardships of that period.

Fashoyin stated that the provision of the Trade Union Ordinance of 1938 which allowed a group of 5 individual workers to form a union and the success of the Railway Workers' Union in getting some concessions for their members led to creations of many trade unions. However, the proliferation of trade unions and series of internecine among the unions later constituted a barrier to the advancement of the course of workers. Premised on these, the Nigerian government promulgated the Trade Union Decree No.44 of 1976. The decree nullified the already established trade unions and prohibited the creations of new ones. But it allowed for the formation of a Central Labour Organization in which other trade unions are subsumed. In other words, few but strong trade unions were created and were regarded as arms of the Central Labour Organization. This decree was further amended in 1978 under the Trade Unions (Amendment) Decree No.22 of 1978. The amendment recognized the existence of 70 trade unions which include 42 industrial unions and the establishment of the Nigeria Labour Congress as the only Central Labour Organization in Nigeria. However, there are just 29 recognized industrial unions in Nigeria.

In the overall, it is pertinent to say that trade unions are independent organizations that regularly rise to the challenges posed to their members. They work independently of both the government and employers of labour. Unions have grown in status to the point that they are consulted on issues or policies bordering on the welfare of the masses.

The Nexus of Trade Unions and Democracy

Over the years, the operations and activities of trade unions have reflected the values and virtues of democracy. Despite their independent status, the members of trade unions work in and fight for the interests of the unions and take decisions as suggested collectively by their teeming members. In other words, trade unions only do the bidden of the majority. For instance, they fought together for a long time to achieve the weekly work – hour which is limited to 40 hours in a week. This marked pattern in trade unions reflects the generally acceptable definition of the democracy which says that “Democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people” (p.3). The African Charter for Popular Participation explains the key features of a true democracy citing “Popular Intervention, Empowerment of the People, Accountability, Social and Economic Justice, and Respect for Human and Trade Union Rights and Rule of Law”.

While trade unions adopt the ethos, values and principles of democracy in their operation, democracy enables trade unions to thrive as entities and collectively achieve their aims without necessarily having disgruntled members. Their decisions usually emerge from majority votes and voices.

In terms of contribution to democracy, trade unions played a significant role in the struggle to reverse the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections. In some quarters, that struggle was considered as a watershed in the battle for democracy. In the June 12's event, trade unions fought against the perpetuation of the military rule through a mild strike. It was labelled a mild strike because it was only NUPENG and PENGASSAN that declared strike throughout the country to ensure that the wish of the masses, workers inclusive, was respected and granted.

This is not to say that the unions do not usually encounter problems among their members and in their operations. Umpteen times they have had members who betrayed the group and sell their agendas to employers of labour and, at times, compromise with the government in the event of national struggles. For instance, Paschal Bafyau, the then president of the Nigerian Labour Congress connived with the Babangida regime to fight the union members and to undermine their struggle by being reluctant to call for a national strike against the military regime. Trade unions' leaders, sometimes, abuse their position by arrogating

powers to themselves and acting like the untouchables. Nevertheless, the principles of democracy have used to correct anomalies and wrong forms of behavior among them. Hence democracy plays a vital role in checking the excesses of trade union members and instill right values into them.

Statutory Responsibilities of Labour Union

The primary and statutory duty of trade unions is to constantly seek for improvement in the working conditions of their members through tools such as strike, collective bargaining and so on. The unions ensure that their members are well treated and work in a suitable environment by participating in the decision making process of organisations. In general, labour unions are saddled with responsibilities that bother on the well-being of employees which include representing them at all fronts; protecting and fighting for their interests which range from salary to social security. Fajana posited that the function of labour unions include soliciting for “economic, political, social welfare, psychological benefits” for their members and increasing the privilege to participate in the decision making process of organisations. Also, labour union help their members to achieve professional recognition and development by setting up different sub-labour unions such as the National Union of Teachers (NUT); Nigerian Medical Association (NMA); Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU); Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU); Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU); Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN); the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG); the National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institutions (NUBIFIE); the National Union of Hotels and Personal Services Workers (NUHPSHW); and other specific unions in the country.

One other fundamental responsibility of the labour union is to mediate and resolve conflicts between employers of labour, which may be the state or individuals in the private sector, and their members. In other words, they are not only to secure improved working packages for their members but to also resolve any impasse between them and their employers to ensure a smooth working relationship between the two parties. Most times, the disputes between the union and employers, especially the government, stems from the government autocratic ways of ruling the masses including the employees. As a matter of fact, trade or labour disputes occur more during the military eras than the democratic eras.

As a matter of convention, labour or trade unions are expected to champion the course of their members, protecting from the exploitative tendencies of the capitalists. In the view of Beckman, he opined that since the labour unions represent the interests of a large number of people, they are therefore quick to respond to 6 fundamental issues which are: (1) changes in the economy; (2) the emergence and development of new technologies; (3) apparent changes in the global market; (4) globalization of business enterprises; (5) the speed with which money flows; and (6) changes in government policies and the capacities of regulatory institutions; and how these issues affect their members. Because of the power of collective bargaining and a deep sense of solidarity that these unions possess, they are qualified to be called agent of change enforcing the needed transformation in the society.

In Nigeria, right from the pre-independence period till the date, the Nigerian labour union has contributed to social, economic and political changes in the country and has influenced the dynamic of equitable growth and development of the nation. In other words, the unions do not only focus on improving the working conditions of their members but also on the economy of their respective nations. With this being said, trade or labour unions’ activities have practically transcended beyond the welfare management of employees to social movement in which they act as a force to influence democratic movements and activities. This is premised on the fact that they are subsumed in the economy of the nations. And it is needful to say that the

involvement of labour or trade union in political activities is not limited to Nigeria – it is common in the world for labour union to protect employees or their members from the exploitative tendency inherent in capitalism. Nevertheless, the changes achieved or effected are mostly done through a nationwide resistance, strike actions, protests and individual sacrifices which sometimes affect their take-home pay.

Otobo summarized the major undertakings of the trade union which include negotiations on behalf of their members; fighting unfair policies of the government and private sector employers; grievance management; job search; organisations of forums and conventions which enable members to participate in the activities of the union; effective management of the union and regular communication with members; and so on. Okogwu opines that trade union protect its members from unfavourable management decisions and provide a platform for employees to air their demands and expectations from their employers.

To cap the role of labour union in the society and to its members, Jones, in his study on “The Role of Labour Union in a Changing Environment”, categorised the roles of trade union into three according to its relationship with employers, business associations, government and the general public. He opined that, firstly, labour union has the economic role of enhancing economic productivity and fair distribution of the value-added to production. The union usually achieves this role of a fair distribution of value-added to its members through the tool of collective bargaining and shrewd negotiations with stakeholders. Secondly, labour union provides a central and uniform voice for employees in their respective workplaces and in the larger society. The union achieves this role by representing its members discussing their grievances; poor socio-economic policies and favourable working conditions with all the parties – employers and government – involved. Thirdly, labour union ensures that its members are not excluded from the industrial society. The body achieves this role by inculcating a sense of solidarity into all its members in all sectors of the economy and providing a platform for social movements that have common goals, values and identity.

In the overall, it is fair to say that labour union is an entity that focuses on the well-being of its members and protect them from unfair practices of exploitative employers and harsh policies of bad government.

The Role of Labour Unions in the Nigerian Political Development

To extensively explore the role of labour union in the political development of Nigeria, one needs to go back to the colonial era when the labour union was more or less the major force that made the colonial government to do the bidden of the masses. As a matter of fact, the labour union was actively involved in breaking the stronghold of the colonial government on Nigeria. The union fought vehemently for the socio-economic interests of its members and the nation at large. At the national level, labour union has helped to demonise corruption and poor management of the nation’s resources and always clamour for projects beneficial to the masses at large. Labour union is a unifying body that has members across the whole country. Hence it is ready to support government and individual politicians that have good plans and programmes for the people. Contrarily, the union works against autocratic government and any person in power who exhibits narcissistic tendency in the administration and management of the nation’s resources.

Since the emergence of democracy in Nigeria, labour union has grown in influence and power to be regarded as an active player in the Nigerian democracy. As Ebbinghaus and Visser opined, trade unions have metamorphosed from just being bargaining representatives of workers in the society or lobbyists for employees’ welfare to a social movement or force that has contributed tremendously to the growth, expansion and entrenchment of democracy in the world. The union has apparently become a formidable interest group in societies where

democracy is being practiced. In Nigeria, the labour unions have become an entity that politicians seek for their supports and the votes of their members to emerge victorious in electioneering process. Without their votes, there is a tendency that political aspirants will fail in their bid to serve their fatherland.

It is also needful to say that the formation and management of the trade union takes the pattern of a democratic setting in the sense that the labour union has executive members and committees saddled with diverse responsibilities. Its members are free to support or oppose any decision of the executive members like in a normal democratic setting. The union equally adopts the use of electioneering method to select qualified and popular individuals into positions of responsibility. This process does not allow the union leaders to be autocratic, imposing their wishes on their members. Hence labour union is well positioned to influence the political development of Nigeria because their system of operation aligns with the adopted democratic system of the Nigerian government where there are checks and balances.

Specific Interventions of the Labour Unions on National Issues

Right from its inception, labour unions in Nigeria have been seen as platforms to fight the excesses of the people in government – military and democratic government alike, and instill the democratic culture in them through a wide range of tools, among which is the industrial strike. Flanders (p.1) posited that trade unions are like a two-edged swords which focus on “justice and vested interest”. Industrial strike has been used to not only defend the right of the employees and but also to effect meaningful changes across the country. Over time in the long history of Nigeria, labour unions have helped the masses by forcing the hands of the government – the policy makers to reverse unfavourable and harsh policies and stall their implementations. The masses enjoy these interventions from time to time and when they are necessary. It is pertinent to say that these interventions usually make the members of the union to be at a loggerhead with the policy makers i.e. the government. However, with these interventions, the union has successfully contributed to the growth, development and transformations being experienced in the country today. At this juncture, some of the interventions of the Nigerian Labour Union (NLU) are chronicled here but not necessarily in the order they occurred.

Firstly, Ademolekun traced back the influence of the labour union on the ability of the Nigerian government to provide quality services for its citizens to the period of mid-1950s to early 1960 when the government was pressurized into instituting the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme. This was done through the collective efforts of the Nigerian Civil Service which ensure that the yearning of the masses for primary school education was satisfied. Hence it is clear that the labour union has the power to influence political decisions and activities within a given country.

Also, it is noteworthy to say that the endless struggles of the Academic Staff Union of Universities in Nigeria, which is an arm of the Nigerian Labour Union, through incessant strikes of the 1990s birthed the establishment of the Educational Trust Fund (ETF) which helps to garner financial supports from both the private sector and the government towards specific academic research works and projects to enhance the performance of the Nigerian educational system.

More recently, labour unions played an active role in the recognition of Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as the Acting President in the event of the hospitalization of the then President Yar’ Adua. It was initially rumoured that he would not be allowed to play the role of a President when the actual was sick. Labour unions in the country joined forces with other substantive bodies to pressurise the Senate to evoke the “Doctrine of Necessity” which made Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan the Acting President till the subsequent election was conducted.

In a nutshell, there are myriads of cases in which labour union had caused the reversal of unfavourable and harsh policies for the sake of the masses, especially the minority groups. As a matter of fact, labour union remains relevant in the present and future democracy.

Conclusion

In the overall, the intervention of the trade or labour union in political development or political issues in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. As pointed out already, the union has served as a mechanism to check the excesses of politicians who have exhibited the tendency to be autocratic and irrational in their policy formulations and the implementation of economic programmes. The union has fought for the interests of, not only their registered members but also the general public. With the labour union being active and non-political in the discharge of its responsibilities, it possesses enormous power to enforce equity, fairness and good governance in the society at large.

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