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The Politicisation of Trade Unionism: The Case of Labour/NCNC Alliance in Nigeria 1940-1960

Rotimi Ajayi

Abstract: Trade unions generally played a major role in the nationalist struggle for independence in Nigeria. A major highlight of this role was the alliance between organised labour and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), one of the prominent political parties in the vanguard of the anti-colonial struggle. This paper traces the genesis of the labour movement in Nigeria with a view to establishing the background to the labour/NCNC alliance. It also identifies the impact the resultant politicization of labour activities (which the alliance engendered) has had on post-colonial Nigerian political setting.

Introduction

This paper is an analysis of the alliance between organised Labour and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), one of the prominent political associations in the vanguard of the anti-colonial struggle in Nigeria. The paper examines the background to the alliance and its impact on the trade union movement in Nigeria. The study dates back to 1940 when trade unionism was injected with radical political values and consciousness, and ends in 1960, the date of independence from colonial rule. The work is divided into four major sections. The first part shows the emergence of the early generation of trade unions in Nigeria. The second and third explain the process of radicalisation of trade union consciousness, and the politicisation of the Labour movement respectively. The fourth part discusses the state of organised labour following its involvement in partisan politics and its implications for the post-colonial state.

Background to Union Formation: From Fragmentation to Centralisation

The first generation of organised trade unions in Nigeria

comprised of such bodies as the Nigerian Civil Service Union, formed in 1912, and the Nigerian Union of Teachers, which came into being in 1931. The Marine Daily Paid Workers Union joined the league in 1937. One significant feature of these organisations was their aristocratic background. Because they were formed largely by senior civil servants who were equally interested in preserving the colonial status-quo (of oppression and exploitation), these unions could only offer feeble and inconsequential resistance to the colonial order.

By December 1941, a total of 41 unions with a total membership of 17,521 had registered under the 1938 Trade Unions Ordinance (Bingel 1997, p.25). Among these groups were the Posts and Telegraphs Workers Union, The Nigerian Marine African Workers Union and the Public Works Department Workers Union. But each of these unions acted on an individual basis in defending their members' interests. There was no unity of purpose.

The first attempt at centralising trade union activities started in the 1940s. The immediate factor responsible for this was the enactment of the General Defence Regulations in 1942. The legislation outlawed strikes and lockouts. But the unions considered the legislation an affront and were set to challenge it. This determination led to the call by the unions for a Trade Union Congress "through which they could demonstrate the strength of labour." The aftermath of this was the formation in November 1942 of the Federation of Trade Unions (FTU). In July 1943, the FTU changed its name to the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUCN). The TUCN became the first central labour organisation in Nigeria. It was headed by T.A. Bankole and M.A. Tokunboh, who served as President and General Secretary respectively. Other members of the executive council were I.M.S.O. Sonekan, Kofi Austin, and F.O. Ogunbanj, all of whom served as UnderSecretaries. P.S. Taiwo was the Treasurer and Obafemi Awolowo served as the editor of the Nigerian Worker, TUCN Publication.

The agenda of TUCN was reflected in its aims and objectives. These included:

1. ensuring the unity of labour unions into one body;
2. tackling efficiently problems confronting Nigerian workers;
3. establishment of a workers newspaper;

4. establishment of a worker secretariat; and,
5. establishment of a labour college.

These objectives turned out to be mere imaginations as persistent frictions in the ranks of TUCN undermined the efficiency of the new body. These disagreements, which culminated in splits within the union, could be located in a combination of ethnic, political and ideological factors (Cohen 1974, pp5-15).

The ethnic conflict in the TUCN has been traced to June 1948, following Charles Daddy Onye's famous assertion that "Ibo domination of Nigeria is a matter of time" (Ananaba 1969, pp.20-25). To some scholars, that statement ignited what came to be known as the Ibo-Yoruba rivalry in Nigerian politics. But with regards to the labour movement, the reaction of the Yoruba was very significant. For instance, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, a pan-Yoruba Organisation, openly interfered in the activities of many trade unions and canvassed the removal of Ibos in leadership positions. The Organisation also insisted that Ibo officials removed were to be replaced by Yoruba. This was exactly the situation in the Railway Workers Union and the Amalgamated Union of UAC African Workers, two unions whose officials were to play important roles in the nationalist struggle. Thus was planted in the labour movement the virus of ethnicity that has become endemic ever since.

The Age of Radicalism

The advent of the Nigerian Railway Workers Union (NRWU), however, marked a turning point in Nigeria's labour history. Its emergence heralded a departure from the conservative ideology of union leadership toward a radical approach to labour issues. A number of reasons have been advanced for this sudden change in labour's orientation. Some of these changes included the emergence of a new corps of committed leadership led by Michael Imoudu, the increasing tempo of the anti-colonial struggle, and the worsening social and economic conditions of the workers, especially in the 1940s.

The NRWU, to which Imoudu belonged, has been described as the "laboratory for the development of workers consciousness." The determination of the union to confront the colonial government

over their poor working conditions was unparalleled. Consequently Imoudu as the leader of this crusade became a major factor in Nigeria's anti-colonial struggle. This purposeful leadership style, and the strong political will to triumph (even against odds) placed Imoudu in an enviable position in the Nigerian labour movement. Imoudu, as the leader of the RWU, had demanded a halt to retrenchment in the colonial service and the replacement of the system of "daily pay" with that of "hourly pay". A concession to this effect was granted the union in 1940. But that did not stop a protest march to the Government House by the railway workers following what they perceived as the Government's lukewarm attitude to the earlier agreement. This action by the union was indeed unprecedented in Nigeria's labour-management relations. Consequently, not only were the workers demands met, but further concessions were granted them. These Draconian government reactions including imprisonment of labour leaders like Imoudu, and the enactment of anti-labour laws which, rather than reducing the tempo of union activities, intensified it. The results were lock-outs and work stoppages to press workers demands for improved working conditions. For instance, between June 22, 1945 and August 4, 1945, about eleven cases of work stoppages were reported in different government departments. These departments included Custom and Excise, Colliery, Veterinary, Public Works, Land and Survey, the Marine, Posts and Telegraphs, Medical, Agriculture, Printing, and Lagos Town Council. The approximate number of workers involved in these incidents was 21,370, and the aggregate number of working days lost was put at 821,324 (Dept. of Labor 1945, p.6).

Labour/NCNC Pact

The Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUCN) received its first political baptism with the formation of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons on August 26, 1944. The TUCN attended the inaugural meeting of the Political Party, and later became an affiliate member (Iweriebor 1996, p.110). But more significantly, the association of the leadership of TUCN with the Zikist Movement exposed labour to the radical elements within the nationalist fighters (Ohiare, 1997). The Zikist Movement was founded on February 16, 1946. Its cardinal programmes centred round "the eviction of British imperialists from the shores of Nigeria and thereafter to chase all European usurpers

wherever they may be found, out of Africa" (Ajuluckukwu 1998, p.28). The movement immediately gave vibrant youthful impetus to the raging liberation struggle against British imperialism. Its strategy was to mount offensive raids against the British interests in Nigeria as well as harass their officials resident in Ikoyi, Lagos, and some other up-country locations (Asaju 1999). This strategy of active assault was in contradiction to the non-violent, constitutional and reformist approach professed and adopted by the pre-independence Nigerian leaders of the period, except Herbert Macaulay whose radical, and often extreme anti-imperialist activities pre-dated the emergence of Nnamdi Azikwe, Obafemi Awolowo and Ahmadu Bello on the political scene.

In October 1948, leadership of the Zikist movement decided on a programme of "positive action" which encompassed civil disobedience, working class activism and armed sabotage (Iweriebor 1996). A fall-out of this was an order to pay all taxes, not to the British government in Nigeria, but instead to Nnamdi Azikwe, who however spurned the move, saying that he was not a legitimated authority for revenue collection. As a result of this positive nationalist activism, government agencies in February 1949 conducted mass arrests of the movement's leaders nationwide.

Organised labour played a significant role in this anti-colonial crusade. For instance, in 1948 when the NCNC delegation visited London to protest the provisions of the Richards Constitution, labour was represented on that trip by Michael Imoudu, who had become the Secretary General of the TUCN. Similarly, individual workers, in their personal capacity, joined the anti-colonial struggle, even at the risk of colonial brutality and repression. These individuals identified themselves with politics through their membership in Zikist movement. Some of these include Adewale Fashanu and Idise Dafe, who led the Abeokuta branch of the movement. The Ibadan branch was led by Tom Idowu. Peter Osugo and D.I. Umoiru led the branch in Kaduna while Bob Ogbuagu spearheaded the Jos branch. In Ilesha, J.O. Fadahunsi was both leader and financier. The Kano branch had Raji Abdallah, Philip Ohiare, Osita Agwuna, S.O. Achara and J.C.J. Anakwe among other activists. Within the inner city of Kano, Mallam Mogaji Danbatta headed a Zikist cell. In Gusau, Onyejeke Uchedu was at the helm of affairs, while in Bauchi, Abubakar Zukogi and Sa'ad Zungur held sway. In Zaria, H.A.P. Nwana and J.M. Hevbara led the outfit.

In Benin, it was H. Omo Osagie as Yamu Numa manned the

Warri branch, while in the Delta area, Prince Aduaye Emeni was in charge. At Onitsha were P.K. Nwokedi and Ikenna Nzimiro. In Aba were S.O. Masi and D. Okafor, while F. Jibunoh took control of Nnewi. Port Harcourt had J. Asuzu and J.O. Umolu. In Calabar, Andrew Bassey was in control and at Ikot Ekpene, Ekukinam Bassey. M.I. Okpara was both the Chairman and Financer in Umuahialo (Ajuluchucko 1998, Ohiare 1997). On the whole, more than thirty branch organisations of the Zikist movement operated in various parts of the country and these individuals, among others, expended their financial and material resources to prosecute the cause of nationalism. More significantly however, is that the individual efforts that helped to complement the role of organised labour in the political agitation of that era.

In the late 1940s, the Zikist Movement began to expand its strategy to include armed sabotage. Though the basic strategy of the movement remained civil disobedience, some members like Yama Numa and some eastern branches of the movement added "terrorism as an instrument of the anti-colonial struggle" (Quoted in Iweriebor 1996, p.213). Discussion in the Zikist circles at this time was on plans to acquire arms and embark on sabotage. Arms and ammunition, including rifles, explosives and bullets were to be acquired from sailors or through theft (P.R.O. CO 1949). The Port-Harcourt and Onitsha branches of the movement proceeded to form armed cells and to embark on sabotage. Plans for the military training of selected members were actually concluded by the Onitsha branch. The situation was such that by mid-1949 armed sabotage had been adopted as a movement strategy (Iweriebor 1996).

But one significant point for our present study was the attempt by the movement to use organised labour for the propagation of its activism. This move was facilitated by the fact that some of its leaders, notably Eze, were already involved with the labour movement. Similarly some of the radical trade unionists such as Imodu, Coker and Emejulu were also members of the movement. In the words of Iweriebor, "the career of the radical labour leaders embodied the intersection of labour activism and political radicalism in the nationalist movement" (Iweriebor 1996, p.213). The attempt at politicising the labour movement, as Eze put it, was to establish an "identity... between the trade union movement and all the agencies of national revolution" (Eze 1962, p.935). In furtherance of the politicising of the working class, the movement began to espouse the doctrine that:

working class solidarity and economic freedom of the workers depended not on parleys with the employers, not on negotiating machinery for the settlement of disputes, but on the overthrow of imperialism. To confine working class agitation to the strict issue of wages, conditions, pension etc., was to pursue the shadow instead of the substance (Iweriebor 1996, p.213).

In addition, the Zikist movement recruited into the nationalist movement trade union officials. These were mainly made up of young school-leavers whose stipends ranged between 2.10 to 13 pounds monthly. By this time, according to Iweriebor, Zikists in the nationalist movement were the same as those in the labour movement (Ohiare 1997). The situation was such that the movement has succeeded in linking political radicalism and labour activism.

Aftermath of the Alliance

Labour's decision to affiliate with the NCNC led to a series of events with far-reaching implications for the unity and oneness of trade unions. Prominent among the consequences was the division of the TUCN along ideological lines. Thus, when the nationalist fighters disagreed, over tactic and strategy for the independence struggle, this split bounced into the TUCN. Some union leaders wanted the TUCN to withdraw from the NCNC. Others supported continued affiliation. In 1947, the TUCN voted in support of the inseparability of labour from politics, and hence, its continued affiliation with the NCNC. This did not halt the protest against affiliation from the conservatives. On December 27, 1948, the TUCN held its sixth annual delegated conference in Lagos. The meeting was called to discuss the controversy surrounding affiliation and other labour problems. A motion to disaffiliate from the NCNC was sponsored by the conservatives. It was upheld as the conference voted to withdraw from the NCNC. This decision became a major victory for the colonial government which had become wary of the increasing militarisation of the labour unions. Powerful unions, led by the radicals, which favoured continued affiliation with the NCNC withdrew from the TUCN. In March 1949, these unions formed another central labour organisation known as the Nigerian National Federation of Labour (NNFL) to rival

the TUCN. That decision marked the first split in the Nigerian labour movement (Ohiare 1997).

Efforts were made throughout 1949 to reconcile the TUCN with NNFL, but these efforts were negative. However, the Enugu Iva valley shooting of 1949 provided workers a platform to organise a common front against the colonial government. The killing of the coal miners was widely seen as an affront against the entire working class, and subsequent reaction to the event cut 'across ideological persuasions (Sunmonu 1987, pp.13-14). Hence, even while still holding to their ideological positions, both the NNFL and the TUCN decided at that point to come together under the National Labour Committee (Bingel 1997, p.28).

Between March and April 1950, representatives of TUCN and NNFL met and agreed to merge and form one organisation. On May 26, 1950, this was achieved as the merger of both unions led to the formation of the first Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). In December 1950, mercantile workers went on strike. The failure of the strike and the dismissal of workers reduced the influence of the first NLC as many unions withdrew from it. But the problem with the Organisation was much more than the fall out of the failed strike. (West Africa 1980).

The marriage of convenience (which the merger came to be) proved difficult to maintain. The initial problem was with the leadership of the NLC, which was dominated by the radicals. The ex-TUCN officials who felt slighted and dominated refused to co-operate with the NNFL executive council. In addition the TUCN refused to surrender their assets to the new body. With problems associated with inadequate funding, the first NLC could be said to have existed only in name. Its influence was definitely not felt among the workers or in the country general (Bingel 1997, p.28).

But some unions, including the Railway Workers Union (RWU), were of the opinion that the pride and dignity of the NLC must not be lost, especially given the efforts that led to its formation. Hence, in July 1953, the RWU called a labour unity conference which elected a working committee to actualise the plan for a labour summit. In 1953, 48 union leaders held a conference in Lagos and formed the All Nigeria Trade Union Federation (ANTUF) to replace the NLC. But the ideological differences that crippled the first NLC soon reared its head in ANTUF, whose leadership was dominated by the leftists. Bent on preventing "the drift of the Nigerian trade union movement to the left," many union leaders under the "democratic" coalition

withdraw their interests from ANTUF (Omolasho 1998).

Another controversy that crippled ANTUF was the issue of international affiliation. While the 'moderates/democrats' within ANTUF preferred affiliation to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the 'radicals' preferred the World Federation of Trade Union (WFTU). In 1957, the democrats sponsored a motion calling for the affiliation of the ANTUF to the ICFTU. In March of that same year, the group formed another central labour Organisation, the National Council of Trade Unions of Nigeria (NCTUN) to rival the pro-left ANTUF. What irked the labour movement was the speed with which the splinter body was recognised by the government. This indeed confirmed the suspicion in labour circle that the 'democrats' were government agents working against the perceived excesses and militancy of the leftists.

The animosity between ANTUF and NCTUN continued until March 7, 1959 when representatives of both organisations met at Enugu and merged to form the second Trade Union Congress of Nigeria. The meeting was a follow-up to the setting up of the National Labour Peace Committee charged with the task of effecting a lasting unity within the trade union movement. The Peace initiative became inevitable following the need to unite and present a uniform position to the Mbanefo Commission on the review of wages and salaries of workers in the public services. The commission had earlier been constituted in response to workers agitation. Also, as independence was approaching, it was felt in labour circles that organised labour must remain undivided if it was to maximise the benefits for its participation in the anti-colonial struggle.

But like the first TUCN, the rejuvenated body was confronted with the same problems of leadership, ideological polarisation and international affiliation. The new TUCN was like the old – an amalgam of radical and conservative trade unionists. This was reflected in the leadership structure of the new body as attempts were made to incorporate the two groups in the new dispensation. Consequently, Michael Imoudu of the ANTUF became the President, while Borha of the TUCN was elected the General Secretary. This 'unity' however was short-lived due mainly to different interpretations by the factions on their role and their *modus operandi*. For instance, while the TUCN recognised the desire for a strong union that would be committed to the emancipation of Nigerian workers, it also believed that this could be achieved by focusing on purely economic needs of the workers.

But for ANTUF, a trade union must radically seek to influence societal power relations in addition to fighting for its members' economic interests.

The contradictions in the viewpoints of both factions led to the split of the second TUCN on March 5, 1960. This time, the split was couched in an ideological tone- one pro-west and another pro-east. In April 1960, both factions held separate conferences in Lagos and Kano. The Pro-East Lagos conference ended with the formation of another central labour organisation known as the Nigerian Trade Union Congress (NTUC). The Pro-West Kano group reorganised the TUCN after "leftists" union leaders were replaced with "democrats" (Asaju 1999). At this period, the crisis in the labour movement, aside from being a product of internal differences, could be described as a reflection of the East-West rivalry in the international system, especially the attempts by both to expand their spheres of influence worldwide. Given the capitalist orientation of the colonial government, it is easy to see its preference and support toward the pro-west splinter group and its distaste for the pro-communist workers union. But the desire of the communist bloc to gain an in-road into the country (politically and economically) led to its covert and overt support for the pro-east workers organisations.

The East-West rivalry in the labour movement was also aided by the internal dynamics of colonialism in Nigeria. Because colonialism was exploitative, labour leaders took solace in the Marxist ideology of freedom, equality and justice which became the slogans of trade unions worldwide. Communism thus emerged as a counter force to the status quo, and, less surprisingly, found ready allies in the emergent militant labour leaders in Nigeria. The ideological rivalries, rather than subsiding, found greater expression in the post-colonial Nigerian state. Thus the labour movement entered the new era of political independence disjointed, fragmented and lacking a common purpose.

Post-Independence Political Developments

While it is true that the NCNC/Labour alliance represented the first major attempt at politicising the trade union movement in Nigeria, more of such working pacts were to emerge between labour and political parties in the postcolonial period. For example, under Nigeria's first republic (1960-1966) some political parties found trade union solidarity an irresistible opportunity to widen their mass base.

Notable among these parties with roots in trade union consciousness were the Action Group (AG) founded by Chief Obafemi Awolowo; the National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) led by Nnamdi Azikiwe; and the Northern element Progressive Union (NEPU) piloted by Aminu Kano. For instance Aminu Kano, the leader of NEPU not only attempted to become a full-time unionist, he ensured that the NEPU established a close relationship with the trade unions and was instrumental in the formation of the Northern Federation of Labour and the Northern Progressive Front in the late 1950s. Until the demise of NEPU, labour was represented in its executive council such that by 1959 there was a labour attache within the NEPU. Similarly, Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of AG, was both a politician and trade unionist. The party's quasi-socialist ideological orientation endeared it to the Nigerian working class, especially in Awolowo's Yoruba ethnic enclave.

Under the second republic (1980-1981), Chief Awolowo also founded the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) whose mass appeal centred around its promise of full employment opportunities, free education, free health services and integrated rural development. How the sloganeering actually helped to sway the opinion organised labour toward the direction of the party is a matter of conjectures but we see here a deliberate appeal to sentiments and emotions of the Nigerian workers by the UPN. Also during this period Peoples Redemption Party was founded by Aminu Kano. The PRP's 'revolutionary' credentials compared makedly with that of the NEPU, its progenitor. It was less surprising therefore that the party support was firmly rooted in the mass of the downtrodden the popular 'talakawas'- of the Northern part of Nigeria, especially in Kano and Kaduna States. Aside from the UPN and PRP, we see no evidence of either covert or overt attempt by the other three political parties - the Great Nigerian People's Party, (GNPP); Nigerian People's Party, (NPP); and National Party of Nigeria (NPN) to align forces with organised labour in Nigeria during the second republic.

But another opportunity for labour to manifest its political relevance came with the General Babangida political transition programme between 1985 and 1993. The accounts of the entire transition programme have been aptly documented (Ajayi 1985, pp. 21-40). But suffice to say that the democratisation process of the Babangida administration brought to fore the reminiscences of the NCNC/Labour alliance of the 1940s and 1950s. General Babangida

had created two political parties to contest the 1993 General Elections. These were the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). But the leadership of the Nigerian labour Congress became a major ally of one of the parties, specifically the SDP. It was such that notable officials of some labour unions, including Frank Kokori of National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers Union (NUPENG) became officials of the SDP, holding important party positions. For example, Kokori was, in addition to his position as the party's National Financial Secretary, the party organising secretary in two states (Osun and Oyo) during the 1991 party primaries for the governorship elections. He later played a major and decisive role in the crisis that followed the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections by organising and spearheading the oil workers resistance to that decision. The episode not only led to the proscription of the workers union, but the suppression and incarceration of Kokori and some other leaders for more than four years. Similarly, the then NLC president, Pascal Bafyau, not only openly supported the SDP, but bid for the party's vice presidential candidature. Although that attempt failed, Bafyau's position, and by extension, ambition, was predicated on what he called the harmony of interests between labour and the SDP populist manifestos. Even though some see Bafyau's intention as opportunistic and an undue personalisation of labour power, there is no denying the fact that the victory of the SDP at the polls owed much to the broad-based support of the party by the Nigerian working class. This is in addition to the personal charisma and philanthropic gestures of Moshood Abiola, the party's presidential candidate, attributes that over the years endeared him to various communities in the country.

But as it was under the pre-independence NCNC/Labour alliance, the SDP/NLC pact was not without a corresponding impact on the labour movement in the country. In particular, the decision to align with the SDP sharply polarised the NLC and its leadership along ideological and ethnic lines. For instance, aside from those favourably disposed towards the alliance, there were two other opposing groups, one in favour of a completely new labour party, and the other, completely opposed to labour association with any political party. Their common ground was that affiliation of labour with any political party would further exacerbate the ethnic and religious tendencies that had bedevilled the labour movement.

Events in the NLC later justified the fears expressed by those opposed to the working pact between the Congress and the SDP. For example, given the southern origin of Moshood Abiola, the SDP Presidential candidate, most labour leaders of northern origin were quick to interpret the alliance as an attempt by their southern colleagues who dominated the leadership of Congress to favour their own kinsman using the instrument of organised labour. That to them was politically injurious to a fellow northerner, Bashir Tofa, who was the NRC presidential candidate.

This line of thinking was evident in the reaction of these northern labour leaders to the cancellation of the results of the presidential elections. For instance, it was glaring that labour opposition to the annulment of the election results was limited to the southern part of Nigeria. Unions in the north refused to heed the call for strikes declared by the NLC or partake in other forms of both industrial and political activities aimed at forcing the military government to hand over power to Moshood Abiola and the SDP. What started as a general 'mass revolt against the military in labour circles thereafter assumed a declining dimension, with Abiola's Yoruba ethnic group virtually waging the opposition solely against the military's continued usurpation of political power in Nigeria. Of course, the result was not only the inability of the fractionalised labour movement to gain major and important political concessions from the government, what remained of union solidarity at this period was completely destroyed by the military through the proscription of perceived radical unions like the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Worker (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), and the dissolution of the National Executive Council of the Nigeria Labour Congress. The Congress was only resuscitated as part of measures toward a return to civil democratic rule on May 29, 1999.

Conclusion

This study has shown the forces behind the first major attempt at politicising the trade union movement in Nigeria, and the resultant hiccups the move generated both within and outside the labour circles. It is important to note that the fruits of that seed, notably the intensification of ethnic and ideological rivalries, the personalisation of power, leadership squabbles, and the attendant fractionalisation of

labour organisations have remained significant features of trade unionism in post-colonial Nigeria. For instance, the first incursion of labour into partisan politics served as a basis for understanding also the failed attempt by a section of the leadership of the present-day Nigerian Labour Congress to dabble into partisan politics under General Babangida's transition to democratic rule through its affiliation, with the now defunct Social Democratic Party. The rancour that attempt generated was reminiscent of the pre-1960 incursion of labour into partisan politicking. The reactions of the state to both events was also similar. The proscription of the NLC in 1993 and the arrest and incarceration of its leaders was similar to the draconian attitude of the colonial masters to trade unionism in the period between 1940 and 1960. Nevertheless, the study underlies the fact that despite the negative posture of the state toward organised labour, it has remained a potent part of the Nigerian political process from the colonial era to contemporary times.

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