

Unionism in Tertiary Institutions: The Example of the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), 1993-2022.

Sunday M.A. Aloko

Department of History, Faculty of Arts
Kaduna State University
Kaduna, Nigeria

Abstract

The study is a pioneering one, essentially based on primary sources. It historicises and examines the contributions of the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) to university unionism as well as its role in protecting workers' rights and advancement of their collective interests and welfare through the democratic instrument of collective bargaining in relation to its set objectives. It contends that trade unions, in Great Britain, where it began was the result of the ruthless exploitation of the working class by the bourgeoisies during the period of industrial revolution and also the consequence of the merciless plunder of colonized territories, which Nigeria was one. The paper finds out that SSANU broke away from the Senior Staff Association of Universities, Teaching Hospitals, Research Institutes and Associated Institutes (SSAUTHRIAL), a diversified University union in order to concentrate on a specific section of the university staff so as to better articulate their interest and more effectively pursue the realisation of same for the good of their members and the smooth running of Nigerian universities. It suffices to observe that although the university management and the government of the federation did not receive the newly formed union well due to the wrong held notion that trade unions and their leaders are trouble makers, the union has beyond reasonable doubt established itself as an agent of change, conflict management and continuity in the Nigerian university system. The paper also shows that despite the tremendous challenges the union has faced since its formation in 1993, especially during Nigeria's brutal military regimes, it has managed to record considerable successes in the overall interest of its members.

Key Words: Unionism, Tertiary Institutions, Universities.

Introduction

The industrial revolution which started in England in the second half of the 18th century and spread to other European countries and the United States in the 19th century spontaneously created two mutually antagonistic classes; the bourgeoisies, who owned factories and managed the factors of production, and the proletariats, who depended on the daily sale of their labour to earn a living. The class structure that emerged gave rise to what is now known as industrial/capitalist relations, historically characterised by class struggle and tensions, sometimes resulting in conflict, due primarily to capitalist obsession with profit maximizing at all cost while minimizing the cost of production to the barest minimum possible for the purpose of accumulating tremendous wealth at the expense of wage labourers. The result of this philosophy was the savage exploitation of the proletariats who were heavily laden with factory work, devoid of safety measures in unhygienic environment and pitiable housing



conditions for unattractive wages. Thus, hunger and poverty characterised the experience of the proletariats in the newly industrialised Western Europe and North America, who resorted to the formation of trade unions in order to secure good wages and allowances, improved conditions of service and other welfare packages capable of alleviating their misery and hopeless conditions of living.

Colonial capitalism in West Africa and Nigeria in particular aggravated the situation with the introduction of forced labour. Apart from the racial segregation and discrimination which featured prominently in the colonial civil service and the colonial private sectors, wage labourers were also exploited and dehumanized beyond measure in the interest of capitalist advancement which prioritised the home country over the host country and withheld the most basic rights of the colonised workers. Hence, trade unions in colonial Nigeria emerged as resistance movements for the emancipation of the working class from the ruthless exploitation and oppression of employers of labour. This attempt which started in 1912 with the formation of the civil service union, was extended to institutions of higher learning in the 1950's and have expanded at all levels since then.

This paper traces the origin of the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian University (SSANU) and examines its contributions in tandem with the objectives which it sets out to achieve since 1993.

The Establishment and Development of SSANU in Nigerian Universities

SSANU is a university trade union that brings together all senior non-academic staff to work and advance their collective interests in areas such as salaries, working conditions, working environment, work hours, benefits etc. The union also exist to serve as a link between its members, the university management and government and to represent them in negotiations and renegotiations and convey their grievances when the need arises.

Like every development in history, SSANU has its own historicity. Its establishment and development in Nigeria's tertiary institutions is traceable to events between 1950 and 1960 though the activities of trade unions are noted to have become vibrant in the 1970's. Scholars have speculated that workers high expectations of a considerable increase in wages and staff welfare owing to the increased revenue that accrued to the country as a result of the oil boom era informed their vibrant activism (Jega, 1996). The oil boom which fostered the expansion of tertiary institutions in Nigeria also created the need for staff members to advance their collective interests in order to achieve security of job, better conditions of service and to protect themselves against the exploitative tendencies of employers of labour. Therefore, unions emerged in Nigerian tertiary institutions as platforms for the integration and articulation of workers interests' and grievances ultimately for the protection of their labour rights as well as the realisation of their common objectives, interests, aspirations and needs.

It is instructive to note that between 1976 and 1979, the Obasanjo regime restructured Nigerian trade unions and issued a decree which formally recognized and approved their existence in tertiary institutions by the

provision of section 37 of the 1979 constitution (now section 40 of the 1999 constitution).¹ The provision which guaranteed freedom of peaceful assembly and association gave trade unions the needed legal backing to pursue their objectives. The provision states that every person shall be entitled to assembly freely and associate with other persons, and in particular he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interest. This was part of the regime's honest transition program which culminated in the birth of Nigeria's second republic which lasted between 1979 and 1983.

Against this backdrop, the Senior Staff Association of Universities, Teaching Hospitals, Research Institute and Associated Institute (SSAUTHRIAL), the Non Academic Staff Union (NASU) the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) were formed to represent all categories of university staff which include Senior and Junior staff as well as academic and non-academic staff. Polytechnics and colleges of education were not left out in this democratic overtures. For instance, the Polytechnic Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (POSSAN) was also established to replicate such feats in polytechnics across Nigeria (Gadzama, 1979:45).

It is pertinent to note that the history of SSANU from 1979 to September 1993 is shrouded in the history of the SSAUTHRIAL, a union which cut across different government parastatals such as teaching hospitals, research institutes and senior staff of Nigerian universities. It was one of the most important organs of the SSAUTHRIAL. As a splinter group, it pulled out of SAUTHRIAL in 1993, October to be precise and established its own union which constitutes mainly university non-teaching senior staff. The pull out was facilitated by its maiden leadership led by Sir B.A.C Onwurah and other notable comrades from different universities across the country who also helped to manage and sustain the union in spite of the meagre resources available to them at that time. The drafted constitution of the union at the time of its establishment stated clearly that it shall be known and called the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities, herein after referred to as the union.²

Factors that Led to the Emergence of SSANU

The official website of SSANU claimed that SSANU pulled out of SSAUTHRIAL because it considers the practices and procedures of the former to be inconsistent with its own aspirations, visions and interest.³ To this end, it is said to have emerged to pursue the philosophy and objectives that entrench industrial harmony and stability within the university system through the machinery of focused trade union in accordance with the spirit of section 37 of the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN). However, sources recovered in the course of this research underplays the claim. This reason advanced for the emergence of SSANU is to a large extent excusatory and intended to justify the split given the fact that despite the split on October 1993, SSANU did not achieved the status of a registered trade union until June 29,

¹FRN. (1996). Trade Unions Act (Amendment) 1996. Lagos, Government Printer. P.p. 25.

²SSANU Bye-laws (2015). Ndahi Press, Revised Edition. p.2.

³ See www.ssanunigeria.org.

2005 when it was registered and achieved the full status of a trade union, with registration certificate 0105, dully signed by Mr. LA Fagbemi, the registrar of trade unions. If it indeed it broke out with the intention of becoming a registered trade union, the union would have registered or pursued registration as soon as it pulled out in 1993 or within few years after its emergence. But on the contrary, it achieved the purpose which made it exit the SSAUTHRIAL 12 years after its existence.

A more logical and convincing factor that led to the emergence of SSANU was provided by one of its former Secretary, Barrister Dabo Joseph Augustine and was affirmed by other officials and a onetime president of the union at branch level. According to Dabo, the largeness of the then SSAUTHRIAL membership holds the key to the emergence of SSANU as a separate and distinct university union. He argued that SSAUTHRIAL cut -across different government Parastatals such as the West African Examination Council, Educational Research and Development Council, Teaching Hospitals, among others. It was by implication a bulky body and hence negotiations consist of divergent interests. Similarly, disturbing issues are different due to different conditions of service, orientation and so on. The result of these diversities is that, the call for strike may not be effective because other branches problems may have been solved (S.Aloko, Personal Communication, 2022).

He further maintained that as university staff, they felt if they come together to pursue their specific goals and objectives, it would better serve their interest since university discontentment is to a great extent the same all over Nigeria, especially in federal and state owned universities. This was the major factor that led to the emergence of SSANU; the desire to make the union more effective by pursuing its own common goals as against the former divergent and congested goals of the SSAUTHRAIL, which the union split from to advance its own separate and rather unique course. Dabo himself attests to the fact that the claim of the need for a registered trade union status was not really the issue and that it was insignificant in relation to the complexities evident in the former SSAUTHRAIL.

On the question of the relationship between their salary structure and exit from the SSAUTHRIAL, Dabo, Alfa and other active members of the union dismissed the speculation. According to Alfa, prior to 1993 and even in 1993 when the union emerged, the salaries of administrators and professors were almost the same in comparison to the obvious discrepancy which later characterized the salary structure of Nigerian universities. He noted that the period was a period of normalcy and peace, when there used to be a singular salary structure in which each university worker fitted into his/her appropriate role within the scheme. Discrepancy, according to him existed only in their allowances. Hence, differences in salary structure became an issue after the emergence of the union, which the union has worked very hard to put an end to because it amounts to marginalization (S. Aloko, Personal Communication, 2022).

Therefore, the major and cogent factors that led to the emergence of SSANU was the need to decongest the diverse and varied interest evident in SSAUTHRAIL and also the need to become specifically focused in order to more effectively and efficiently promote their own interest as university workers with common

aims, objectives and problems. Hence, the view that the union emerged for the purpose of becoming a registered trade union is largely underplayed. The other view which sees disparity in income as another factor that led to the emergence of SSANU is also spurious.

Reactions to the Emergence of SSANU

The history of labour movements and industrial relations the world over have shown that employers of labour have been antagonistic to trade unions. In exceptional cases where they are seen to support or encourage the formation of unions, the objective has always been to rival the most formidable unions already on ground and considered to be threat to their undemocratic behaviour, just as the recent case between ASUU and the government of Nigeria which led to the registration of the Congress of Nigerian University Academics (CONUA) on the 4th of October 2022. The fact of the matter is, the greatest victory of the working class since the emergence of the capitalist mode of production is their success in bringing together and organizing workers into trade unions, which gives them a collective voice as opposed to their weak individual voices as seen in pre-trade union era in Europe.

Hence, the emergence of SSANU in Nigerian universities was perceived wrongly. They were seen as trouble makers trying to disrupt the effective and smooth running of the universities. According to Jega (1996), the continuous crisis in Nigeria's educational sector and in tertiary institutions in particular, fostered an ill-conceived impression that unions are largely responsible for fomenting trouble rather than managing and regulating conflicts. This preconceived notion is borne out of the assumption that unions and their leaders were and are trouble makers' hell bent on causing mischief and in giving headache to the administrators of their respective institutions. In line with this school of thought, a former secretary of SSANU at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) branch, Dabo, pointed out that university management staff across the country were against the union because they prefer to govern individuals instead of an organized union or body of people with common interests (S. Aloko, Personal Communication, 2022). This probably stems out of the fact that negotiations with an organised group which speaks with one voice on behalf of all is far more complex and tedious than engaging the weak individual worker due to the unquestionable power of unity of purpose that results from collectivism.

In fact, such negative perception was nurtured, sustained and reinforced especially during military dictatorship. This negative trend is not far-fetched; it is not unconnected to their insecurity in industrial relations. An example of such could be seen in the words of Mr. Ben Nwabueze, a onetime secretary of education in his infamous address to Vice Chancellors and Pro-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities. He opined that unionism has done nothing but caused senseless distress in and destruction of our tertiary institutions (Cited in Jega, 1996). This probably explains why government in Nigerian resorted to hard - line posture in order to counter SSANU'S strike actions. This includes banning of the union, seizure of SSANU's members' salaries under the guise of no work no salary, ejection from government quarters, detention and so on. Alfa noted that to some extent the situation has changed since the return to civil rule because they have received fairer treatment, had their long due allowances paid and

conditions of service improved upon (S.Aloko, Personal Communication, 2022). In contrast to government's wrong perception, SSANU should be seen as a necessary stakeholder in the task of ensuring survival, growth and development of Nigerian tertiary institutions, considering the indispensable role it plays in conflict management and resolution through dialogue aimed at settling differences between employers of labour and employees.

The Organization of SSANU in Nigerian Universities

SSANU is organised at national, zonal and branch levels. The National body, also known as the national secretariat, is based in Abuja. It is the Executive wing as well as the administrative headquarters of the union. Key officers at the national level constitute the National Executive Council (NEC) and the National Administrative Council (NAC).⁴ The National President is the administrative head as well as the spokesperson of the union. He coordinates the general policy and conducts of the union. Most importantly, he represents the union in negotiating with the Federal Government, conducts the affairs of the union at the National level and organized NEC and NAC meetings. The president who is elected for a term of three years can only be re-elected once (S. Aloko, Personal Communication, 2020).

The Zonal level is divided into three: the North zone, East zone and West zone, consisting of all the universities under their jurisdictions and are administered by a National Vice President (S. Aloko, Personal Communication, 2020). The primary function of the Zones is to coordinate the affairs of the union at zonal levels. In situations of emergency, they disseminate information to the branches in their respective zones. They are equally responsible for conducting election in their respective zones. The Zonal structure plays the important role of ensuring strict compliance to the rules and regulations of the union in the various branches under their watch. This is achieved through zonal meetings where the procedural rules, regulations and conducts of the union are re-emphasized to ensure strict compliance. Similarly, the zonal leaders occasionally visit the branches to supervise their activities to see whether they are in line or have deviated from the provisions of SSANU's constitution, which guides the conducts and operations of the union and its members nationally.

Finally, there is a branch of the union in all federal and state universities of Nigeria. Each of the universities in this light is allowed to take charge of its own affairs but subject to the directives and guidance of both the national and zonal leaders. Nonetheless, interactions with some SSANU officials has shown that Programs and actions of the union as decided by the national body are not effective at the zonal and branches of the union. Also, decisions and settlements between federal government and SSANU's national representatives are hardly implemented at the local branches. For example, the payment of outstanding salaries in 2002 did not reach the SSANU members of ABU. It took effort by the ABU branch executives before their members were paid. Thus, branches are particularly needful since the national and the zonal body may not guarantee effective coordination and regulation of activities in all the universities (S. Aloko, Personal Communication, 2020). The challenge makes it necessary for the

⁴See www.ssanunigeria.org for more details on the organizational structure of the union.

establishment of branches of the union in each university to cater for the immediate needs and welfare of members. It is however worth noting that the branch structure puts SSANU in a situation where by each university is concerned primarily with its own member's interest before articulating the interest of the union at large. The earlier the union takes concrete steps to address its poor coordination at all levels, the better its chances of realising its stated aims and objectives

The Contributions of SSANU to Nigerian Universities

It is widely believed that Sir Onwurah alongside other foundational members laid a solid background for the union which subsequent leaders built upon. Thus, the first SSANU/Federal government agreement was achieved even before the formal registration of the union during the leadership of Sam Pinuwa of the University of Jos. It is however interesting to note that the major achievements of the union came under the distinguished leadership of Chief (Barr) P.A.K Adewusi, who appears to be the most successful leader in the union's history. His burning desire to see to the improvement of the welfare of SSANU members nationwide and his able and dynamic leadership earned him the title, 'the progressive leader' (S. Aloko, Personal Communication, 2020). Within one year of his election into office in 2004, his enterprising charisma led to the establishment of a national secretariat for the union in a rented building in Abuja, which employed so many Nigerians as staff and his prudence made it possible for the union to buy a building also in Abuja, which now serves as their permanent secretariat.⁵ The registration of the union in 2005 after 10 years of efforts in futility is another achievement of Adewusi.

In addition to this, he integrated SSANU into the mainstream of unionism in Nigeria through regular workshops and seminars aimed at improving member's relations capacity and in the process secured various welfare packages for SSANU members. Under his watch, SSANU had its constitution codified and affiliated to the Congress of Free Trade Unions (CFTU) in 2006 and was able to produce the deputy leader of the CFTU due to its immense contributions. SSANU also became affiliated to the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) in 2009. The result of his indisputable achievements was his re-election in 2007 and his emergence as the Deputy President of the NLC in the same year, a position which he held until 2015.⁶ The SSANU/Federal government agreement of 2009 under Adewusi's leadership succeeded in securing 65 years retirement age for its members and put registrars and bursars, who are their members on the consolidated salary and to a large extent returned parity in the salaries of university workers across board and had earned allowances negotiated and signed as against the antagonistic position of ASUU, the academic wing of Nigerian universities.

SSANU, since its inception has worked for the establishment and maintenance of equitable and proper working conditions of service for its members in Nigerian universities.⁷ Not only has it catered for the rights of workers in the

⁵www.ssanunigeria.org, Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷ SSANU Bye-laws (2015), op.cit, p.18.

areas employment, welfare and discipline, it has also ensured that they are well paid, are in good health, enjoy good allowances and have their rights protected. In connection to the aforementioned, SSANU campaigned and is still campaigning for an improved condition of service, especially when their working hours and high standard of work ethics and professional practices are considered in relation to that of ASUU which they argued work less than they do.⁸

In furtherance of their cause, SSANU embraces educational activities as part of its strategies for realising its objectives. These educational activities are geared towards the advancement of member's interest by a way of training, retraining, and further education.⁹ The objective of the training is to ensure that their members are duly promoted as at when due and to enhance effectiveness in the discharge of their assigned duties. Therefore, it can be argued that SSANU encourages the promotion of its members through hard work and dedication to service in the overall interest of the Nigerian university system.

SSANU has also been able to Champion the cause of its members promotion. The first promotion in the history of the union came between 1994 and 1996. However, it has been observed that the promotion was so little so that the number of members that benefitted cannot be remembered. Between 2001 and 2004, some Vice Chancellors of Nigerian universities were said to have refused to promote some members of SSANU who were deserving. In response to this misnomer, the executives at branch levels articulated the problem, wrote a memo to the chairman of the university governing council and discussed the outstanding promotion. The promotion came in 2006, with a handful of deserving staff members duly promoted to the next level of their careers (S. Aloko, Personal Communication, 2020). The promotion recorded within the period in question, though far below expectations, is a testament to the fact that SSANU's commitment to its members interests is unshakable and unwavering even in the face of social alienation, intimidation and victimisation.

Furthermore, it has painstakingly worked for the increment of its member's salary and its implementation since 1993. For instance, between 1999 and 2008, SSANU achieved a 12.5% salary increase for its members.¹⁰ This increase came during the Olusegun Obasanjo's administration though the circular was misrepresented in some of the branches of the union and the increase was treated as other allowances which had been withheld. SSANU, through its emolument committee ensured that the circular was properly interpreted and the increase reflected on their members' salaries thereafter. In 2009, it achieved a 40% increase in salary for its members alongside ASUU while NASU secured a 20% increment.¹¹ In September 2022, it rejected a 23.5% pay rise after months

⁸SSANU's Chairman Report to Congress, 2010. P.p. 5-7.

⁹SSANU's Chairman's Report to Congress, 2007.P.p. 10-15.

¹⁰ SSANU's Chairman Report to Congress, 2008. P.p.8-11.

¹¹Nigeria: Strike Paralyzes Public Universities (2009). In University World News, African Edition.<http://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20090813171043239>. Retrieved 9/10/22.

of strike actions alongside other university unions, which paralysed academic and administrative activities in Nigeria's institution of higher learning.¹²

Equally important is the fact that the union had succeeded in persuading university administration to upgrade librarians to Consolidated Tertiary Institutions Salary Scale (Contiss) 13. Prior to the emergence of SSANU, university librarians other than those of the academics were terminating at Contiss 12. SSANU's activities in Nigerian university successfully wrestled the perceived injustice such that the non-teaching Librarians are now terminated on Contiss 13. In addressing members on this issue, the chairman said the former situation is now "history."¹³

Similarly, it has been involved in enlightenment campaign aimed at creating awareness and consciousness among its members. In 2007, SSANU in conjunction with NASU organized a joint workshop and invited experts to talk to them on the new pension scheme. According to SSANU officials and some members, the exercise turned out to be very educative and quite rewarding as they were deeply refreshed and more importantly reminded of the need to save and plan for their future after retirement. In the same year, they organized another workshop and invited the pension fund administrators to address their members on the services they are offering to enable members make informed decision on their future.

Some of the burning issues that troubled the union between 1999 and 2007 were the non-implementation of their proposed retirement age for senior Non-Teaching staff of universities based on the 2001 federal government/SSANU agreement; undue delay and procrastination in the payment of the 24 months areas of monetization (2003- 2005) in spite of numerous letters and meetings with federal government and most importantly, the struggle to close the parity in salary structure between SSANU and ASUU and the proposed salary structure which provides for a lecturer 1 to earn more than a bursar and a registrar in the university, which in their view constituted unnecessary marginalization, inequality and injustice within the university community (S. Aloko, Personal Communication, 2022).

It is worth noting that most of these outstanding issues have been attended to by the Goodluck Jonathan administration. Chief of them all was the 65 years retirement age for senior non-teaching university staff, which was first agreed upon in 2009 and finally signed into law in 2012.¹⁴ In response to what SSANU had long considered the regime of discrimination which lasted for over 15 years and resulted in avoidable disruption in academic activities for same period, the union praised and thanked President Goodluck Jonathan for the courage he demonstrated in doing what five previous Heads of State could not do. The union further described him as a covenant keeper who matches words with

¹²SSANU Rejects 23.5% Pay Rise, State Varsities Kick, In Punch Nigeria (2022).

<http://punchng.com/ssanu-rejects-23-5pay-rise-state-varsities-kick/>

¹³SSANU's Chairman Report to Congress, 2012. P.p. 13-15.

¹⁴Retirement Age: SSANU Lauds Jonathan (2012). Vanguard Nigeria.

<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/05/retirement-age-ssanu-lauds-jonathan/retrieved> 10/10/22.

actions by ratifying and concluding on the issue of earned allowance which was part of the 2009 SSANU/Federal agreement.

According to Felix, a SSANU member, the difficulty in bridging the gap for a long time is due to the perception nursed by the Government, believed by majority and advanced by their counterpart in the university, ASUU that the university is first and foremost an academic environment for teaching and learning. Therefore, it suffices to observe that this long held view is the foundation as well as the premise for salary discrepancy between teaching and non-teaching staff in Nigerian university. For Felix, though it is difficult to challenge this claim, it does not justify what he termed unequal and unfair treatment because as far as he was concerned, the university is a system which cannot function properly and accordingly without the complementary role of other stakeholders in the system (S. Aloko, Personal Communication, 2021). What can be deduced from his assertion is simply the fact that it is the joint effort and inseparable interrelated functions of the different segments of the university system that makes for smooth running of tertiary institutions. Hence, the concessions made by President Goodluck Jonathan in 2009 and 2015 was the result of improved activism, more productive service rendered and enhance bargaining capacity, since the country's transition to its Fourth Republic in 1999.

SSANU has also succeeded in combating the non-regular payment of salaries. In Nigerian universities, salaries are often delayed. This situation has persisted since the establishment of SSANU but felt more seriously during military regimes. In ABU for instance, Professor Abdullahi Mahdi who served as its 9th Vice Chancellor between 1998 and 2004 was notorious in delaying workers' salaries. Salaries were often not paid until 15th or thereabout of the following month. The officials of SSANU at both zonal and local levels combated this abnormally, so that members began to receive their salaries on the 19th day of the month between 2005 and 2008 though on rare occasions, it spilled over to the following month.¹⁵ SSANU role in addressing this abnormally is praiseworthy and worth emulating by other unions in the country.

In the area of regulating relationship between members of the union and management; conflict management, a critical factor in achieving stability and continuity in the university as well as advancing the interest of members, SSANU has demonstrated capacity and has brought its fundamental influence to bear. Commitment to dialogue as well as keeping channels of communication open at all times are inevitable requirement of conflict management. This is because most often than not, conflicts in industrial relations occur when channels of communication are closed and when dialogue breaks down. SSANU always communicate their grievances to the school administration and the federal government through dialogue, which leads to peaceful settlement of differences rather than resort to violence capable of halting economic stability, growth and development. SSANU's commitment to dialogue is clearly enshrined in its constitution. The constitution stipulates that strike is only a weapon of last resort; an elaborate procedure has to be followed after exhausting all peaceful avenues before a strike can be declared and this requires a referendum of

¹⁵ SSANU's Chairman's Report to Congress, 2008. P.p. 18-20.

members which must secure the endorsement of the majority.¹⁶In addition to this, it regulates the relationships of its members with those of other unions as well as management staff in Nigerian universities, thereby promoting amicable settlement of disputes.

Apart from pursuing its major objectives, SSANU has also performed other secondary functions. These functions are basically welfare in nature. The welfare packages are aimed at improving the standard of living of its members. In this regard, a car-hire scheme was established and successfully executed. This hired scheme is intended to be loaned out to members at an affordable price. From 1998 to present, so many members have benefited from this scheme. According to one of its ex officials, beneficiaries can testify on the grade I quality of the cars delivered to them, and at a very affordable costs. In conversation with selected members of the union, they affirmed the Chairman's assertion and observed that the kind gesture was highly promotional in the spirit of unison and oneness because it made it possible for some of them to own cars which had hitherto been very difficult and a possibility only among the privileged few(S. Aloko, Personal Communication, 2021).

SSANU has also been involved in social welfare packages to its members in accordance with the conditions laid down in the bye-laws of their constitution. These packages come often in times of difficulties such as strike periods and long delayed salaries. SSANU, since 1993 has been supplying rice to its members at affordable prices to cushion effects of economic hardship. In 2005, it supplied fertilizers to members at affordable prices. In addition to this, the union also provides financial assistance in times of great need. For example, the union had obtained bank loans for its members, and in 2008, particularly in May, they obtained a loan of 260 million desktop for members with interest rate of only 18%(S. Aloko, Personal Communication, 2021). Sources recovered, perused and analysed have shown that the strike actions embarked upon by the unions were in pursuance of the implementation of SSANU/federal government agreements and were intended to influence the government to respond to their demands and to press for their long standing allowances from their respective university administrations. Some of such strike actions since 1993 includes but are not limited to the following; February 1993, 2001, 2002, October 2003, 2017, as well as the most recent one which started on the 25th of March 2022 and was suspended in the month of August of the same year.

The period 1993 to 1998 represents an under-achieved era in SSANU's history. This is because the demands of the union frequently met with stiff resistance. This under-achievement is informed by military dictatorship which negates the principle of democratic industrial relations. During the period, for instance, salary of SSANU members was nothing to write home about, this was in addition to poor welfare packages and allowances. The unfortunate situation was not limited to SSANU members as all university workers under the platform of NASU, ASUU, among others as well as their partners in other tertiary institutions such as polytechnics, mono-technics, colleges of education, etc. encountered the same neglect and the resultant untold hardship. However, the situation gradually changed with the coming to power of General Abubakar

¹⁶SSANU Bye-laws, op.cit. P.p. 1-15.

Abdulsalami in 1998 after the sudden death of General Sani Abacha whose leadership led Nigeria to its darkest moment in history. The transitional Head of State is said to have increased workers' salaries and allowances and met some of their outstanding demands(S. Aloko, Personal Communication, 2021).

It may be apt to argue that the suffering highlighted seemed to have distracted and deviated the union from its primary objective in the given period, which is bridging the gap between its salary structure with that of the Academic Staff Union of Universities. This is palpable in the major activities of the union which focused more on welfare packages than the more important objectives spelt out in its constitution. The situation has no doubt changed since the return to civil rule as the union took advantage of democratic principles of negotiations and the potent weapon of strike to exert pressure on government to make concessions.

Ironically, however, it has been observed by SSANU officials that the achievements of the association that have been brought to the fore were insignificant in relation to expectations. This is particularly thought in relation to the country's transition to civil rule, which many had thought would tremendously change the fortune of the union. But the fact of the matter is the successes recorded within its relatively short existence is a great leap forward which can be built upon for future gains. To sustain the considerable progress it has made since 1999, SSANU must be committed to its core mandate and pursue it more vigorously and sacrificially even when the government credibly threatens them with no work, no pay, as ASUU has modelled in its current negotiations with the Federal Government, which started in the Month of February 2022 and has lasted for about 8 months, with no end in sight.

Conclusion

The complex historical processes that produced and is still shaping the history of SSANU has been brought to the fore and examined in relation to its role in university education, management and staff welfare. It is now clear that employees can no longer afford to be without effective representation given the great economic injustices in industrial relations which the individual worker cannot defend himself or herself against given the financial resources of the employer. The representation of its members has helped to moderate the administrative excesses of management especially in regards to conditions of service; salary, allowances, welfare, discipline, promotion and dismissal, achievable only through collective bargaining and when necessary the declaration of strike to exert pressure on the government and university management to be considerate in decision making and implementation or to reconsider their policies and actions. Hence, unionism in tertiary institutions and other sectors of the economy are not only a legitimate enterprise but also a necessary class collaboration that is fundamentally important for the organization of employees against employers' tyrannical tendencies. As centres of resistance and joint actions against oppression and exploitation, university unionism has played and is still playing a dominant role other than partial role among many other forces at work in the society and state for improving the standard of living of the people in a given society.

But in order to further their cause and ensure industrial harmony in the university system and the country at large, the herculean task before them is how they can convince the university administrators, the government and citizens of the country at large that their struggles are not exclusively for the realisation of their narrow personal interests but for the good of all and the progress of the country. This will go a long way in erasing the public's perception and conventional belief that trade unions retard economic growth and development through sustained strike actions that ground socio-economic activities to a halt in pursuit of their sectional and self-centred objectives and interests. More so, to achieve more, there is need for SSANU to reevaluate its set goals and objectives and understand the changing nature and patterns of industrial relations as well as its peculiar environment in order to rediscover itself and go beyond petty politics and gross opportunism in its negotiations and renegotiations with university administration and the government. This will require the enthronement of honest and committed leadership, willing and determined to subordinate itself and its interest to the overall interest of members. It is the contention of this paper that these are the surest ways by which SSANU can live up to its expectation in Nigerian university.

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