

# **UNION BUSTING IN COLONIAL NIGERIA'S PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT: A STUDY IN THE DYNAMICS OF LABOUR RELATIONS, 1938-1948**

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## **Abstract**

Incessant industrial disputes, an outgrowth of the discord between labour and management, no doubt have had grave consequences for the Nigerian economy. The sour relationship between the two parties has assumed different dimensions over time. In 1938, the Colonial Government enacted the Trade Union Ordinance (TUO) which legalized the existence of labour unions. However, this did not bring about a fundamental change to government's old anti-unionist stance. It brought only a new dimension to the scenario and thus heralded a change in the dynamics of labour relations in all government departments. This paper enquires into how this new dynamics played out in the Public Works Department (PWD). It finds that during the period under review, labour relations in the PWD was characterized by an increasing effort by the unions to grow their bargaining powers, and the management's attempts to diplomatically weaken them as a way of balancing powers. A case of union busting in the PWD, which led to the breaking up of the Union in 1947 is presented to justify this claim. The paper contends that this labour relation pattern is counterproductive, and that the management and the unions must work together for better economic result. Primary and secondary sources of information are used for this study.

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The primary sources are archival materials and oral interviews. The secondary sources include books, journal articles and internet materials related to the study.

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### **Introduction**

In 1938, the Trade Union Ordinance (TUO), which formally legalized the operation of trade unions, was enacted in Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> Before this date, the colonial government had refused to recognize the existence of trade unions. Those that operated did so without a legal and official backing, and some did operate under cover.<sup>2</sup> After the passage of the TUO, the formation of labour unions became legal. The law granted legal status, not just to the newly formed unions, but also to the already existing ones and tried to lay down a code of conduct for them. One of the requirements of the 1938 legal code was the registration of all trade unions with the government.<sup>3</sup> The number of registered trade unions increased after 1938, as any five workers could combine to form a trade union.<sup>4</sup> This resulted to an excessive proliferation of unions.<sup>5</sup> For example, in 1940 only 14 unions were registered, and had a total of 4,629 members.<sup>6</sup> By 1941, a year later, a total of 27 unions with a membership size of 17,521 had been registered.<sup>7</sup> However, by 1948 this had increased to 129 registered unions with a total of ninety thousand, eight hundred and sixty four members.<sup>8</sup> This tremendous increase in the number of labour unions also found reflection in the PWD. Workers in the PWD formed many unions, the most important of which was the Public Works Department Workers Union (PWDWU) of Nigeria.

With this growth in the number of workers' unions, came a lot of union activities that sought to undermine the

master-servant relationship that existed between management and labour generally. It therefore became necessary to keep the unions under check and thereby maintain the balance of power. A change in labour management approach also became a *sine qua non*. During the pre-1938 era, the government and other employers of labour suppressed union spirit and denied workers of the right to unionize. With the passage of the TUO in 1938, the suppressive approach to labour management changed to a supervisory one. Although the right to existence was given to the unions, the right to expression was not given in the true sense of it. It was actually increasingly checkmated. The enactment of the Ordinance itself was an action that came out of expediency, not out of principle. It was not an *ex-gratia*. In the face of the gathering signs of war in Europe, the Colonial Office resolved to minimize future industrial disputes in the colonies.<sup>9</sup> It was in line with this reasoning that the British Government passed the TUO. It was more of a pacifist move aimed at reducing to the barest minimum, incidents of labour disputes. It was believed that if the workers were allowed to unionize, they would be happy and busy with union administration. The reasonable calmness that will result will allow the British Government face only the enemies in Europe. The TUO was thus a currency used to buy time. As soon as the labour force jumped on this new privilege and began to exploit it to the extent that beat the imagination of the colonial government, they had to be reminded that things had not really changed. The anti-union mindset had not died completely. Although it had died in letters it had not died in spirit. The new law had given the government overwhelming powers through its numerous provisions to control or 'supervise' the new unions.<sup>10</sup> Apart from these, however, the government used other means possible to see that the powers of the unions were

curtailed. One of the play-outs of the transition from suppressive to supervisory method of labour control was the increasing use of union busting weapon. Union busting involves series of subterranean actions carried out to undermine the unity and powers of a labour group. It more often than not involves setting the leaders against each other, getting at least one of them to be secretly on the side of the government with the promise of specific rewards in return. This played out in the colonial Nigerian PWD.

Admittedly, a lot of researches have been done on labour relations in Africa in general,<sup>11</sup> and some scholars have paid attention to the Nigerian colonial era. These include but not limited to, T.M. Yesufu, Wale Oyemakinde, R.O. Nwabueze, Ajayi Rotimi and Nwoko Kenneth among others.<sup>12</sup> The works of these scholars and other available works in this category have one thing in common; they have thrown some lights on the dynamics of labour relations during the colonial period. However, while some did not even mention the PWD, some just mentioned it in a passing. None of them historicized labour unionism in the PWD. Scholarly works focusing on the Nigerian PWD are hard to come by. A.G. Hopkins' work, on the Labour strike of 1897 in the PWD<sup>13</sup> and Ibiyemi Salami's work, *The architecture of the Public Works Department (PWD) in Nigeria during the Early to Mid-Twentieth Century*,<sup>14</sup> seem to be the only known and significant works on the Nigerian PWD. Salami's work centers on the composition and outputs of PWD's architectural unit between 1900 and 1960. Its overall aim is to find out the circumstances that shaped or influenced colonial architectural forms and practices in Nigeria. Although the work captures the work force of a very small unit of the PWD, the architectural unit (which was also composed of mainly Europeans), it failed to discuss their efforts to

unionize. The larger workers in the PWD are not given attention. More so, Salami, being an architect wrote from an architect's point of view and not from a historical view point.

Hopkin's work is the only known historical work focusing on labour in the PWD. However, the work only aimed at relating the story of the Lagos Strike of 1897, and not on holistic labour developments in the PWD. Thus, both in terms of period and purpose, it differs from the current study. The PWD Workers' Union was not yet formed during Hopkins' period of study, so he could not capture the changes and continuities in the dynamics of labour relations in the PWD within a reasonable period of time. In addition to these, Hopkins' work placed huge emphasis on the actions of the workers and not on the management, which cannot be overlooked in determining labour relations dynamics. The work did not also examine any case of union busting in the PWD. Thus, apart from Salami's work of 2016 earlier mentioned, which obviously did not address these huge gaps, no other significant work known to this author has given full focus to the Nigerian PWD and its labour history, let alone filling these gaps. The PWD was one of the major departments of the colonial government that had both African and non-African workers, and played a key role in the development and expansion of socio-economic infrastructure in the country. The continuous existence of these huge gaps concerning its history in general and its labour history in particular leaves an unpardonable lacunae in the body of literature bordering on colonial Nigerian history in general, and industrial relations in particular. It is with the aim of closing these identified gaps that this study is embarked upon. It is also on this ground that the relevance of this study becomes obviously incontestable.

This study focuses on labour relations dynamics in the PWD, with special attention on union busting activities that threatened the existence of one of the major labour unions in the Department. The nature of labour relations in the PWD has some striking resemblance with many other colonial government departments. It changed in 1938 from the initial out rightly suppressive approach of handling the workers' union spirit to a supervisory one. The rest of the paper is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on the background and organization of labour unions in the PWD, the second on the growing powers of the unions manifested in their ability to oppose unpleasant labour policies in the PWD, the third on a union busting case in the PWD used as a strategy by management to reduce and undermine the powers of the Union, and the fourth is conclusion.

### **The Background and Organization of the PWD Labour Unions**

The seed of labour unionism in the Nigerian PWD was most probably sown by the event of the PWD Lagos Strike of 1897. Although the root of the strike stretches back to long time disputes and bickering between the government and the labour force, it took place within the immediate context of government attempt to get more from workers and at the same time drive down their pay.<sup>15</sup> The swift reaction of the nearly 3,000 PWD workers was to go on strike on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1897.<sup>16</sup> One major impact of this strike on the PWD workers was that it ignited the spirit of unionism in them. It made them come to the consciousness that if they united, they had greater chances of getting the government to pay attention to their demands than the use of individual bargaining method. The PWD workers also drew inspiration for unionism from their colleagues in other departments and parastatals. The

Nigerian Civil Service Union was formed in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, and embraced workers from across all the departments. Between the periods, 1919 and 1922, the Union agitated for equal pay for European and African workers and higher posts for the latter.<sup>17</sup>

The next stage in the development of unions in the PWD was the coming together of workers in the same department to take uniform decisions. They grouped themselves according to their trades and work specialization such as carpenters, messengers, artisans among others. Even though they did not call themselves by the name "union," they all acted in unison in their various groups. A good example is the PWD Carpenters that joined their colleagues in Railway Department for a strike in 1920.<sup>18</sup> This strike, said to be the first to be led by a union in Nigeria, is recorded to have taken place on January 9, 1920. On that day, the Nigerian Mechanics Union of the Railway Department stopped work to re-iterate its demand for war bonus due to an acute rise in the cost of living, arising from the effect of the First World War (1914-1918).<sup>19</sup> Four days later, carpenters in both the Railway and PWD joined the strike for the same reason. From Lagos, the strike spread across many Nigerian cities both in the far North and South. It was eventually called off on January 19, 1920.<sup>20</sup> In 1921, many PWD workers again joined their colleagues in the Railway Department to go on strike.<sup>21</sup> It can therefore be argued that before the 1920s, formation of quasi-labour unions had begun to take place within the PWD and elsewhere. In the Railway Department for instance, several unions existed before 1938.<sup>22</sup>

By 1938, there were more labour unions. The TUO also elicited the formation of others. One example of those formed before the 1938 was the African Staff Electrical Workers' Improvement Union (ASEWIU), which later

metamorphosed into Nigerian Electrical (PWD) Workers' Union (NEWU). The ASEWIU was formed in January 1938, before the enactment of the TUO.<sup>23</sup> The NEWU had members across the whole country, but was based in Lagos. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, 1938, after the enactment of the TUO, the Union wrote a letter to the Electrical Engineer- in- Chief (EEIC), Lagos, explaining the origin, activities and goals of the Union, and also asked the said engineer to accept the offer of becoming their 'PATRON.'<sup>24</sup>

Like the NEWU, many smaller unions existed in the PWD, but all gradually came under the umbrella of the PWD Workers' Union (PWDWU), which was the most inclusive union in the Department. These included the PWD Progressive Ex-Servicemen Union, the PWD Technical and General Workers Union (PWDTGWU) among others. The most important and influential among these in the early 1940s was the NEWU. Although the two had their members drawn from across trades in the PWD and had branches nationwide, the PWDWU was the most inclusive.<sup>25</sup> While the NEWU was open to all categories of workers in the electricity unit, the powerful PWDWU had its doors open to all categories of workers within the Department. Although the NEWU grew to be involved in extra-Departmental union politics by 1945, it became amalgamated with the PWDWU in the same year after the General Workers' Strike.<sup>26</sup>

The PWDWU got officially registered with the Department of labour in 1941.<sup>27</sup> This was the same year that the Posts and Telegraphs Workers Union and the Nigerian Marine African Workers Union were registered.<sup>28</sup> It was originally formed by the merger of some of the earlier smaller quasi-unions in the PWD. The workers had realized that it was wiser for them to act as one. The more they united the better. The same understanding led to the formation of the



Railway Workers' Union, which started operation in 1931.<sup>29</sup> The PWDWU continued to grow in size with time as it absorbed more and more unions through merger, and in the process, had its name changed from time to time. The amalgamation of the NEWU with the PWDWU in 1945 changed its name to PWD Technical and General Workers' Union (PWDTGWU).<sup>30</sup> The aim of the PWD unions was the improvement of the welfare and working conditions of all their members.<sup>31</sup>

The PWDTGWU had branches across the country, which had their activities co-ordinated and harmonized at Lagos. It was there they had their headquarters, run by the General Secretary (GS) and Assistant General Secretary (AGS). The president was the ceremonial head of the unions and the GS was a dominant figure in the Union. The PWD Workers Union had more than thirty branches across the zones and cities of the country. The Southeastern branches included Aro (Aro-Quarry) Aba, Onitsha, Calabar, Abakaliki, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Afikpo, Uyo and Victoria (for Southern Cameroon), nine branches altogether. Southwest included Ikoyi, Ijora, Apapa, Oshodi, Ikeja, Agege, Iju W/Works, Ibadan, Oshogbo, Ile Ife and Akure, Oyo (thirteen branches altogether); the North had only six branches which were Kaduna, Yola, Mina, Makurdi, Zaria, Gusau; and the middle belt had the remaining three.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from the President, the General Secretary and the Assistant General Secretary, the other main executive members of the Union were the vice president, treasurer and the financial secretary.<sup>33</sup> To join the unions one had to pay a token as registration fee to show commitment. There was also a token to be paid every month as monthly contribution. Appointed collectors in the various internal departments and branches helped to collect the monthly contribution from

workers in the afternoon break of each day, especially of the pay day. The financial secretary and the general secretary managed the funds so generated. The financial record book of the Union was kept by the financial secretary. In return for these and other responsibilities given to him, the Union extended some benefits to the GS. He and some other labour leaders were sent on scholarship abroad with money from the Union purse. The GS had an official car he used for movement about his duty across the country.

### **Oppositions to Unpleasant Labour Policies in the PWD: A Demonstration of the Growing Powers of the PWD Workers' Union**

The forming of trade unions was against the backdrop of workers maltreatment and abuse by European senior officers. It was a form of power balancing mechanism, a way they could acquire power to seek redress. Issues that needed to be addressed included the use of workers for duties they were not employed for and paying them less than their efforts, imposition of heavy fines on the African workers for minor offenses, engagement of majority of Africans as daily paid workers regardless of how long and how satisfactorily they had served in the Department and so on.<sup>34</sup> These maltreatments and many other unpleasant labour policies were the underlying factors that propelled the workers to seek ways to increase their bargaining powers. Apart from the formation of more unions, this was achieved through the gradual amalgamation of the unions in the department to enable the workers speak with one strong voice. Another way they tried to increase their powers was to join forces with labour unions in other departments and even beyond. Unity among the leadership was also evident and was a veritable source of power for the labour unions.

Unpleasant labour policies were vehemently opposed by the PWDWU which made the management to notice their growing powers. These oppositions were not mere manifestations of "exasperation" as some think,<sup>35</sup> but also power demonstrations. Actions of exasperations are not usually coherent as these. A powerless man cannot coherently oppose his oppressor. Various logical methods were used to carry out this opposition. One of the methods was the use of the threat of strike. Many times, too numerous to number from the records the researcher discovered at the archive, the workers of PWD employed the instrument of the threat of the use of strike to call the management to order. Usually an ultimatum was given at the expiration of which the workers threatened to stay away from work. Many times, the government did not call the bluff of them, but quickly responded. Sometimes when response was not seen, the workers gave another ultimatum in form of final warning, and the management usually feared to ignore them.<sup>36</sup>

Another method was the actual use of strike. As already noted, one major aftermath effect of the 1897 Lagos PWD Strike was that it opened the eyes of the PWD workers and workers in other departments to the fact that strike was one instrument that would work for them in getting the management to respond to their grievances. This lesson remained with them even after many years. As pointed out by some PWD workers in 1947, "Government of the day has no respect for constitutional procedure but for undignified language and strike threats."<sup>37</sup> On the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1947, some PWD workers went on strike, which lasted for two hours.<sup>38</sup> It was that short because the management quickly pleaded with the strikers and persuaded them to go back to work.<sup>39</sup>

Uniting and joining forces with labour unions from other departments and parastatals to put pressure on the Government was another method. The pressure was either in the form of strike or threat of the use of it. The PWD Workers Union and its subsidiary unions for instance were involved in the labour politics that led to the 1945 General Workers Strike that shook the nation to its foundations. They were among the seventeen (17) labour unions that signed the COST OF LIVING RESOLUTION which was championed by the African Civil Servants Technical Workers Union (ACSTWU) and heralded the strike.<sup>40</sup> These were the PWD Workers Union, Nigeria Electrical (PWD) Workers Union and PWD Ijora (Sawmill) Workers Union.<sup>41</sup> The resolution was adopted at the Mass Meeting assembled in the Glover Memorial Hall on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of May 1945.

The representatives of these seventeen unions had on March 22<sup>nd</sup> demanded a two shillings, six pence minimum wage and a 50 per cent increase in the Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) back-dated to April, 1944.<sup>42</sup> The Colonial Government turned down the demands.<sup>43</sup> It was seventeen days after this negative response that the seventeen labour unions made the COLA Resolution, with a one-month ultimatum given to the Government to heed the demands of labour or expect strike. At the expiration of this ultimatum, workers, led by Michael Imoudu (a foremost Railway Department labour leader), stunned the colonial Government with the 45 days strike. The Issues and full proceedings that led to the strike are well documented.<sup>44</sup> The strike eventually made the government to concede to the demands of the workers.

Apart from the methods already noted, PWD workers employed the use of correspondence as a powerful tool to fight for respect and better working conditions for its

members. For instance, The PWD Technical and General Workers Union warned and cautioned, in clear terms, a European designated as an 'African Boss,' on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 1946, for slapping two "valued members of the Union," an action which was pointed out to have become his stock- in trade. The Union asserted: "It is the irrevocable determination of this Union that a halt must be called to such official inconsistency... we of the PWD Technical and General Workers' Union shall tolerate no official bullying."<sup>45</sup>

The man's action was also seen as an assault on the Union. Consequently, he was summoned by the Union. He was to appear to explain himself at the Union's meeting taking place three days after.<sup>46</sup> The letter was signed by S.A. Olukoya, the powerful General Secretary of the Union. Through the power of the pen, the PWDWU and its subsidiaries, condemned the unreasonable retrenchment of union members, poor conditions of service, workers' casualization, victimization, and so on. The secretaries were powerful crafters of words and did not show any sign of deficiency in the mastery of communication through correspondence. Petitions, letters, and all forms of correspondence flew here and there, to the level that overwhelmed the management.<sup>47</sup>

This and other actions of the union showed the management that suddenly, the union was becoming more powerful and workers were unanimously questioning the authority of their bosses. Explanations for management actions were vigorously demanded in a manner that was unprecedented. More importantly, the PWDWU was increasing in size as it absorbed smaller unions, signifying that the workers were speaking more with one voice. Also, unity existed among the leaders. With these developments, it became obvious to the PWD management that the growing

powers of the Union had to be put to check. Since it was not the intention of the government and management to increase the powers of the unions by the TUO, their gradual but steady increase in power became alarming. It had to be checked. And it was against this backdrop that the management used every means possible to puncture the pride of the Union.

### **A Case of Union Busting in the PWD: A Management Response to the Growing Powers of the PWD Workers' Union.**

One of the most effective weapons used by government and management to weaken the PWD labour unions was union busting. This is the act of using various means to disunite a union so it would become weak by concentrating on fighting itself rather than the management. This played out in the PWD. The management used the government labour relation officer for PWD to set the PWD Technical and General Workers Union (PWDTGWU) officials against themselves. Mr Olukoya, the Union's GS was a no-nonsense labour leader, and the management did not like him for that. The PWD management and Government officers from the Labour Department connived with some top leaders in the management of the PWDTGWU to fire Olukoya. These top leaders were chiefly A. Olutunda, president, and R. Aghodo, the AGS. Olukoya was fired on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1947. A press release to that effect, signed by O. Olatunde and R. Agbodo was published in the Daily Service Newspaper of 12<sup>th</sup> December, 1947.<sup>48</sup>

Apart from Olukoya's radical nature, the immediate reason that made these union leaders and the management to connive to relieve him of his job was the fact that he supported the strike action carried on by some PWD workers on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1947.<sup>49</sup> These were builders,

carpenters and labourers of the PWD engaged in building works at the Mechanical workshop, Ijora. This strike lasted for only two hours because the Labour Relation Officer quickly persuaded the people to go back to work. Judging by the fact that he met Olukoya at the scene of the strike, the Labour Relation Officer obviously took it for granted that he was either the engineer of the strike or was in support of it. No enquiries were made to ascertain the nature of his involvement in the strike. Having nothing tangible enough to hold against him concerning the strike did not stop his enemies from still relieving him of his job. In the press release that announced his dismissal, nothing was said to justify his dismissal. The Department of labour and the PWD management saw an opportunity to deal with Olukoya, the radical union leader. Their body language showed that they were involved in the dismissal of Olukoya. Immediately after the sack of Olukoya, rather than organize a reconciliatory meeting, the management de-recognised the two groups. Also, the Registrar of Trade Unions from the Labour Department, through the Labour Relation Officer, called for the account books to be submitted to him to stop further expenditure. The control of the purse of the union would mean the crippling of the union because money was needed to run the Union's activities. This was also to create a scene that made it appear as if Olukoya had feathered his nest from the Union's funds. The sack of Olukoya was also tacitly approved by the PWD authorities. Some other members and leaders of the union therefore saw Olukoya's dismissal as unwarranted, unfair and a slight on their pride as they were not carried along in the whole process. They could also see the hand of the Labour Relations Officers and the management behind the whole drama. Mr Olutunda and Mr Aghodo were believed to have been compromised. To show their dissatisfaction, they

quickly dissociated themselves from Olutunda-led PWDTGWU and the sack of Olukoya. Calling themselves by the old name, PWD Workers Union, they announced the employment of Olukoya as their new Secretary General. This employment was to take effect from a backdated date of 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1947 with advanced salary from the union purse.<sup>50</sup> They gave the notice, which was signed by presidents and secretaries of 14 branches of the Union on the newspaper.<sup>51</sup> Regarding the call for the closure of the account book and its immediate submission to the Registrar of Trade Unions, this group said it was not perturbed.<sup>52</sup> Apart from this, they made it clear that the union's car bought for the sacked GS' use would not be withdrawn as well as the scholarship given to him to study Trade Unionism in the UK. They dared Olutunda and his group to sue them to court if they wished. "Whatever happens, we are supporting Mr Olukoya to the last," the group said.<sup>53</sup> By so doing, the house was divided against itself, union leaders against leaders, and their loyal members against each other. The battle line was drawn.

The next move of the PWDTGWU was to wage a legal war against Olukoya and his supporters. At that time, there was no special court for hearing labour related cases. The Nigerian Industrial Court of Nigeria (NICN) charged with the duty of hearing and judging labour related cases in Nigeria was only created in 1976.<sup>54</sup> The Court, whose judgments are appealable, was established by the Trade Dispute Act of 1976.<sup>55</sup> The case against Olukoya, after having obviously passed through the lower courts, got to the Supreme Court in Lagos. When it involved criminal cases, the matter was first heard at the Magistrate Court.<sup>56</sup> Non-criminal labour matters were heard first at the High Court after internal peace mechanisms provided by the Trade Dispute (Arbitration and Inquiry) Act of 1941 had failed.<sup>57</sup>



The Supreme Court case was filed by O. Olutunda, R. Aghoro, A.K. Lanval and P.O. Fagbeyiro on behalf of the PWDTGWU. Mr S.A. Olukoya was the first defendant, and his chief supporters S.A. Antonio and M.A. Onalaja were the second defendants. The plaintiffs wanted the return of the properties of the Union in Olukoya's custody or the payment of £500, the money value of the properties, which he had refused to return.<sup>58</sup> The court case was probably also, a move to discredit him. But the other faction, going by the name PWDWU, was not moved a bit. Before instituting the court case, the Olutunda loyalists had assaulted Olukoya on the road, took him to the police station and asked him to surrender the union car in his possession. Acting on the support of other union leaders on his side, he refused to oblige the assaulters. Thus the management and the Labour Relation Officers had successfully driven a wedge between the PWDTGWU leaders. During this period, of course, the management had reprieve, even though the labour union leaders were fighting one another. During this whole drama, the two unions were de-recognized. Much later, the Commissioner of Labour urged the PWD management to restore recognition to PWDTGWU in "order to destabilize the 'confusionist' group."<sup>59</sup> To avoid making management support for a particular group obvious, the recognition was not given. All forms of delay tactics were used because the management also preferred they all remained de-recognized. This whole drama was what resulted to the change of the name of the Union in 1948. The Union had to be re-registered with the Labour Registrar as the PWD Staff and Unestablished Workers Union, absorbing the PWD Progressive Ex-Servicemen Union.<sup>60</sup> This happened when the Union had put its house in order and the leaders had ironed out their differences. However, since obviously the union

members could not put in their best into their works due to this rancor during this period, the management also felt the heat of their own fire. Nothing much can be achieved in an atmosphere void of peace, understanding and collaboration.

### **Conclusion**

The paper has demonstrated that the enactment of the TUO in 1938 led to the proliferation of labour unions, and that this proliferation also found expression in the PWD. Gradually, the unions formed within the Department united to form a formidable force. Thus, the increase in union activities resulting from the enactment of the TUO increased the bargaining powers of the PWD workers unions. This offset the balance of power to the alarm of the management. Although the Trade Union Ordinance lifted the ban on the formation of Trade Unions, it never meant a fundamental change of attitude of the colonial government towards trade unionism. The Ordinance itself was a product of expediency. The fact is that it was not the intention of the government to change the pre-1939 status-quo and to have it essentially altered. This reflected in the response of government to the increase of labour union power. Although the suppressive approach to labour management had changed to the supervisory approach, both essentially took the same colouration. The practice of the authorities in both cases was to hinder the PWD unions from being strong enough to constitute a serious threat to management and government authority. During the supervisory era, this was achieved by different means, but mainly by driving the wedge of differences between the leadership of the unions, and making them to work at crossed directions.

This kind of industrial relation which sees the workers and management as two great divides, and which still

characterizes industrial relations in Nigeria is detrimental to economic development. The hot and cold wars between the two camps can only cripple, strangle and stifle economic growth and development. Disunity both within the unions and between the unions and management are detrimental to the economy. While it is true that the goals of the unions (workers' welfare) and that of the management (increased output) are different, both can be achieved faster in a united environment. They are not irreconcilable. Managers of labour must realize that a united labour force will increase productivity. The deployment of union-busting weapon against the labour force is thus bound to be counter-productive. It may win short-term reprieve for the management, but the long-run effect is unprofitable especially in government-owned enterprises. Also, while it is necessary for the unions to develop strong, incorruptible and united leadership to withstand the blow of union busters,<sup>61</sup> they must not see the management as opponents.

There must arise a new form of industrial relation in which the labour unions and the managers of labour will work together. In this new form of labour relations, they will respect each party's rights, and find a way to resolve differences quickly when they arise. In this way, productivity will increase and the economy will fare better and will rub off on the welfare of workers. This is the only way forward, another is a way backward, and the nation can't afford to go that way in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen, Robin, “The Making of West African Working Class,” in *The Politics of Africa: Dependence and Development*, edited by Timothy M. Shaw and Kenneth A. Heard, London: Longman and Dalhousie University Press, 1979, 14

<sup>2</sup> One of these is the African Staff Electrical Workers Improvement Union (ASEWIU) of the electrical branch of the PWD. The Union had been in operation since January 1938, and had members across the whole country.

<sup>3</sup> Nwoko, C. Kenneath , “Trade Unionism and Governance in Nigeria: A Paradigm Shift from Labour Activism to Political Opposition”, in *Information, Society and Justice*, Volume 2 No. 2, June 2009,139-152, sourced from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/36771585.pdf> , February 15th

<sup>4</sup> Anyim, C. Francis et al, “Industrial Unionism and its Bargaining Correlates in Nigeria Industrial Relations,” in *Journal of Management and Strategy*, 56-64 (57), Vol. 4, No. 3, 2013

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Nigeria Department of Labour Annual Reports, 1945

<sup>7</sup> Ajayi Rotimi, “The Politicisation of Trade Unionism: The Case of Labour/NCNC Alliance in Nigeria, 1940-1960” in *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*,49. Vol. 1, No. 2, December 1999, accessible at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6pb0b8hz>, 15th, February 2019

<sup>8</sup> See the table showing data of annual registration of unions and members from 1940 to 1975, R.O Nwabueze, “Trade Unions and Economic Development: A Study of the Nigerian Situation,” in E.J. Alagoa, *Readings in Social Sciences*, NAE, NHB/C/8, 189 (183-200)

<sup>9</sup> Carolyn A. Brown, “The Dialectics of Colonial Labour Control: Class Struggles in the Nigerian Coal Industry: 1914-1949,” in *Journal of African and Asian Studies*, Vol. XXIII, 1-2, 1988, 46 accessed

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<https://The%20dialectics%20of%20colonial%20control.pdf>, 16<sup>th</sup> September, 2020

<sup>10</sup> For instance, the new unions were to be registered with the government, had to submit their finance books to Government for scrutiny when the latter called for them, could be de-registered if they did not behave acceptably and so on.

<sup>11</sup> Good examples are R. Cohen's "The Making of West African Working Class;" Britwum Akua's "Labour in African History Trends and Organisational Forms," Paper presented At the Second ITUC-Africa New Year School, Kisumu, Kenya Jan 22-27, accessed at [https://ituc-africa.org/IMG/pdf/LABOUR\\_IN\\_AFRICAN\\_HISTORY\\_Kisumu\\_2012.pdf](https://ituc-africa.org/IMG/pdf/LABOUR_IN_AFRICAN_HISTORY_Kisumu_2012.pdf), 21st February, 2019; T.M Yesufu, "Shortage of Skilled Labour" in Edith H. Whetham and Jean I. Currie, eds., *Readings in the Applied Economics of Africa Vol. I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 126-132, sourced from the National Archives, Enugu, ED/14/EDU, 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2020; Allen, Christopher "African Trade Unionism in Microcosm: The Gambian Labour Movement, 1939- 67", in C. Allen and R. N. Johnson (eds.) *African Perspectives*, Cambridge, 1970, 393-426, and many others, some of which are cited in the body of this paper.

<sup>12</sup> See Oyemakinde, Wale, "Michael Imoudu and the Emergence of Military Trade Unionism in Nigeria, 1940-191942," in *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. VII. No. 3 Dec 1974; R.O Nwabueze, "Trade Unions and Economic Development A Study of the Nigerian Situation" in E.J. Alagoa, *History of the Niger Delta: Readings in Social Sciences*, 182-200, sourced from the National Archives, Enugu, NHB/C/8, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2020; Ajayi Rotimi, "The Politicization of Trade Uniuionism," 49; and others.

<sup>13</sup> Hopkins, A.G., "The Lagos Strike of 1897: An Exploration in Nigerian Labour History," in *Past & Present*, 133-155, Vol. 35, 1966, [JSTOR 649969](https://www.jstor.org/stable/649969), accessed 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2019

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<sup>14</sup> Ibiyemi Salami, “*The architecture of the Public Works Department (PWD) in Nigeria During the Early to Mid Twentieth Century*”, ( Phd diss., University of Liverpool, United Kingdoms, 2016)

<sup>15</sup> Hopkins, A.G., "The Lagos Strike of 1897: An Exploration in Nigerian Labour History," 133-155,

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Nwoko, C. Kenneath , “Trade Unionism and Governance in Nigeria,” 139-152, sourced from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/36771585.pdf> , February 15th, 2019, 141

<sup>18</sup> Ahmed, B., “A Critical Appraisal of the Right to Strike in Nigeria,” in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 305. Vol. 4, No. 11, September, 2014, accessed at [http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol\\_4\\_No\\_11\\_1\\_September\\_2014/32.pdf](http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_4_No_11_1_September_2014/32.pdf), 20<sup>th</sup> February 2019

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Cohen, “The Making of,” 17

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 14

<sup>23</sup> African Staff Electrical Workers Improvement Union to the Electrical Engineer-in-Chief, 7<sup>th</sup> May, 1938, PWD,” PWD 31. 528/C.475, 2

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> This Union, apart from the PWDWU signed the “Cost of Living Resolution,” 19<sup>th</sup> March 1945, PWD/C. 650, Vol. III, 193

<sup>27</sup> Ajayi Rotimi, “ The Politicisation of ,“ 49

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Oyemakinde, Wale, “Michael Imoudu and the Emergence,” 541-561

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<sup>30</sup> General Meeting of the PWD General Workers' Union Held at St. John's School-Room, Aroloya, 24/11/45, PWD/ C. 650, Vol. III, 210

<sup>31</sup>“The Constitution and Bye Laws of the Nigerian Electrical Workers' Union,” PWD 3.1. 528/C.475, 6, 7

<sup>32</sup> General Secretary PWDTGWU, to the Director of Public Works, 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan, 1947, PWD. 31.709/ C. 650 Vol. III, 237

<sup>33</sup> General Meeting of the PWD General Workers Union, 211

<sup>34</sup> Nigerian Electrical Workers' Union to the Director of PWD (through the EICC), 15<sup>th</sup> September, 1938, PWD 3.1. 528/C.475, 16

<sup>35</sup> Britwum, O. Akua, “Labour in African History,”

<sup>36</sup> Committee of Government Technical and General Workers, Enugu” in “Conditions of Service of Government Employees (Unqualified Interpreters, Motor Drivers, Messengers, Warders Etc.)” NAE, CSE 1 / 85 /3089 // 5679 Vol. V

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Daily Service Newspaper Cutting, “PWD Workers Go On 2-Hours Strike,” in Public Works Department Workers Union, NAI, P.W.D. 3. 1.709 C.650 Vol III, 236

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from the ACSTWU to the PWD, ACTWU /2/29A, 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1945, and also PWD Workers Union to the Honourable, Director of Public Works, H/q Lagos, 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1945, PWD/ C. 650 Vol. III, 184

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Owei Lakemfa, “Colonialists Wrong Steps Caused 1945 General Strike,” Tuesday 5 February, Vanguard News Paper, accessed at <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/08/colonialists-wrong-steps-caused-1945-general-strike/>, on 22nd of February 2019

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.; Ajayi Rotimi, “The Politicisation of”, 49; Oyemakinde, “The Nigerian General Strike of 1945,” in *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 693, Vol. 7, No. 4, June 2017, accessed at

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[https://www.jstor.org/stable/41971222?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/41971222?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents), 22nd February 2019 e.t.c.

<sup>45</sup> Public Works Department Workers Union, NAI, P.W.D. 3. 1.709 C.650 Vol III, P. 236

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Annual Report of the PWD, 1947-1948, Government Printer, Lagos, 13

<sup>48</sup> Daily Service Newspaper, "General Secretary, P.W.D. Union Relieved of His Duty," in PWDWU, NAI, P.W.D. 3. 1.709 C.650 Vol. III, 236

<sup>49</sup> Daily Service Newspaper Cutting, "PWD Workers Go On 2-Hours Strike," in PWDWU, NAI, P.W.D. 3. 1.709 C.650 Vol. III, 236

<sup>50</sup> Daily Service Newspaper Cuttings, "PWD Workers Union of Nigeria Notice," in Public Works Department Workers Union, NAI, P.W.D. 3. 1.709 C. 650 Vol. III.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> In oral discussion with Barr. (Mrs) Ifeoma Nnadozie (50 years old), Assistant Principal Archivist, National Archives, Enugu, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2020, at her office in Enugu

<sup>55</sup> In Oral Discussion with Barr. Benjamin Siyaka (50), a Legal Practitioner, Akoka, Lagos, 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2020, See also Etefia E. Ekanem and Bassey J. Ekanem, "An Analysis of the Jurisdiction of the National Industrial of Nigeria as a Court of First and Last Resort in Civil Matters," IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Volume 22, Issue 4, April 2017, 58-68, accessed <http://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JLPG/article/viewFile/14988/15226>, 16th September, 2020

<sup>56</sup> NAE, Police Versus M.B. Forum, Provincial PWD, Port Harcourt, to the Assistant Director of PWD, Enugu, 10<sup>th</sup> Jan 1946, in Forum, Mr M.B. Senior Time Keeper, PWD, Personal File, A.6/18



<sup>57</sup> In Oral Discussion with Barr. Benjamin Siyaka (50), a Legal Practitioner, Akoka, Lagos, 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2020

<sup>58</sup> Daily Service Newspaper Cutting, "PWD Union Dispute Results in £500 Court Action," in PWDWU, NAI, P.W.D. 3. 1.709 C. 650 Vol. III.

<sup>59</sup> Public Works Department Workers Union, NAI, C.650, P.287

<sup>60</sup> PWD Staff & Unestablished Workers' Union, to the Director of PWD, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1948, NAI, P.W.D. 3. 1.709 C. 650 Vol. III,

<sup>61</sup> In oral discussion with Mr Yusuf Sarki (54 years), Principal Archivist, National Archive, Enugu, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2020