



CONGRESS OF UNIVERSITY ACADEMICS (CONUA)

1. Preamble

The history of the Congress of University Academics (CONUA), a newly registered lecturers' union in the Nigerian university system, is the story of ripples generated in 2018 by events set in motion in 2016 by inanities engaged in in 2013. In 2013, elections were duly conducted into various offices of the Executive Committee of the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Branch of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), to which virtually all the academic members of staff belonged at the time. Regrettably, the National Executive Committee (NEC) of ASUU annulled the already declared results of the duly elected contestants, because the leadership of the union did not like those who emerged victorious. Out of the electoral destruction of trust and widespread demoralisation wreaked by the despicable unconstitutional annulment, an ASUU-NEC-favoured Dr. Caleb Aborisade-led Executive Committee emerged to run the affairs of a by-then-divided ASUU-OAU.

Six years ago, in 2016, it would have been unimaginable that, arising from the unconscionable acts of the tainted Dr. Aborisade-led Executive, the ripples from the crisis rocking the process of appointing a new Vice-Chancellor (VC) for OAU, could have been so far-reaching and so long-lasting. There was widespread dissatisfaction with the process which was perceived as manipulated, sometimes subtly and at other times blatantly, by the University Administration and the Governing Council, to produce a predetermined identifiable candidate as the VC. The Dr. Aborisade-led Executive Committee of ASUU-OAU was believed to be in cahoots with the University Administration and the Governing Council in the travesty.

The indignation of the non-academic members of staff in the University boiled over and made it difficult for the VC selection process to be concluded on the university campus. The University Authorities therefore thought it would be



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preferable to move the interview for the shortlisted applicants to Abuja. This relocation further undermined the credibility of the process and the acceptability of the candidate selected, making it problematic for the favoured candidate, the incumbent VC and the Council members to return to the OAU campus thereafter. Following the intractable nature of the impasse, the Federal Government disbanded the Governing Council, cancelled the VC selection process and directed the University Senate to meet and recommend an Acting VC for the University.

Meanwhile, the belief that the ASUU-OAU Executive Committee had been a collaborator in the unethical gambit that the VC selection process was had started creating disaffection between the Executive and very many members of the union. Complaints against the Executive included the mischievous alteration of Congress resolution and the misrepresentation of Congress position to the press on the serious matter of the appointment of the 11th substantive VC of the University. In one specific instance, in spite of the obvious flaws in the process, the Chairperson of the Branch at the time, Dr. Caleb Aborisade, sent to the press a statement claiming that the VC selection “followed due process” and “was free, fair and transparent”; and he failed to comply with the Congress directive to him to withdraw the misleading statement.

In addition, in 2016, a Congress of ASUU-OAU observed some manifest financial irregularities and the flagrant breach of the Branch’s Constitution and Code of Ethics by the Branch Chairperson and his entire Executive. The allegations involved matters of unlawful/unauthorised spending of the union’s money on a family ceremony and the clearing of unqualified candidates to contest for positions in the Branch’s elections. Several complaints were made to the Executive but no positive response was received, indicating that the Executive had become largely disengaged from the followership.



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The problems in the Branch were therefore reported to ASUU-NEC. NEC delegated the Vice-President of the union at the time, Professor Emmanuel Osodeke, to visit OAU to investigate the allegations. Professor Osodeke attended the Branch's Congress, and members freely expressed in clear terms what the problems were, especially the unethical collaboration of the Branch Executive with the University Administration and Governing Council on the VC selection process. Despite appearing to see the problem and pledging to be objective, Professor Osodeke wrote and got to be published, seemingly by subterfuge, a report in which he claimed the selection "followed the process", ostensibly in collusion with the Branch Chairperson.

The impolitic and contemptuous action of walking out on Congress by the Dr. Aborisade-led Executive in response to queries regarding the gravely flawed Professor Osodeke-led committee's report set in motion consequences unimaginably beyond the control of the Executive.

2. Walking Out on Congress

On Thursday 20th October 2016, at a Congress called by the Dr. Caleb Aborisade-led Executive, after discussing the substantive matter, Congress demanded to know how the report of the Professor Osodeke Visitation Committee got to the press, and whether that report reflected the views of ASUU-NEC. Rather than address the matter, the presiding officers impetuously walked out on Congress. The aggregate contempt of this new debasement of Congress by the de facto Executive of ASUU-OAU and the earlier indignity we suffered in the ASUU-NEC's annulment of the victory of duly-and-popularly-elected candidates in our Branch got members thinking about how to shake off the leech.

Members reasoned that heedlessly abandoning the Congress midstream by the Executive amounted to disdain for Congress and that repulsive action was taken as the abdication, by the Executive, of their responsibility to



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continue to provide leadership to the Branch of the union. As a consequence, Congress resolved that rather than disperse in a rudderless and disoriented manner, the meeting should continue and end properly.

Congress further resolved that since there was no constitutional provision to deal with the abdication of leadership by the Executive in the middle of a meeting, a three-person Caretaker Committee should, as dictated by the exigency of the moment, be nominated at that instant to steer the affairs of the union in the interim.

The three persons who were duly nominated and unanimously supported were:

1. Dr. 'Niyi Sunmonu – Chairperson
2. Dr. Henri Oripeloye – Secretary
3. Dr. Monica Orisadare – Financial Officer.

This redemptive Caretaker Committee ran the affairs of the OAU Branch of ASUU from 20th October 2016 to 12th February 2018, with popular support.

3. Stoppage of Check-Off Dues

Upon instituting the Caretaker Committee on Thursday, 20th October 2016, and the self-suspension of the Dr. Aborisade-led Executive, the ASUU-OAU Congress directed the Dr. Sunmonu-led Caretaker Committee to write the Branch's Bankers to stop any form of transactions on its accounts. Skye Bank responded in writing, promising to comply, but there was no response from Wema Bank.

After having been given fair hearing by the investigation panel set up by the Congress over sundry allegations against the suspended Executive, the Dr. Aborisade-led Executive, with the exception of Dr. M.O. Awoyemi (the Treasurer), was removed from office by the Congress on 14th December



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2016. About seven hundred and fifty (750) members subsequently signed, endorsing the removal, and the document was sent to ASUU-NEC in Abuja through the National President at the time, Professor Biodun Ogunyemi.

The Branch's Bankers later showed the Chairperson of the Caretaker Committee, Dr. 'Niyi Sunmonu, two letters written to the banks by the ASUU National President. One of the letters was dated 12th November 2016, and informed the banks that the only recognised signatories to the Branch's accounts were Drs. Caleb Aborisade, Saheed Adekilekun and M.O. Awoyemi (as stipulated in the Constitution and the mandate with the banks). The other letter was dated 10th April 2017, and informed the banks that Drs. Aborisade and Adekilekun would thenceforth be operating our Branch's bank accounts (excluding the Treasurer, Dr. Awoyemi, who had been duly appointed as the mandatory signatory to the accounts). In other words, the National President unilaterally removed the Branch's duly elected Treasurer, Dr. M.O. Awoyemi, who had neither been accused nor found guilty of any offence. The arbitrary directive to the banks from Professor Biodun Ogunyemi contravened the Constitution of the union, contradicted the National President's earlier letter and violated the mandates to the banks.

Earlier, on 14th March 2017, Drs. Aborisade and Adekilekun withdrew the total sum of five hundred and fourteen thousand, five hundred naira (N514,500:00) from the Branch's Welfare Account in Wema Bank (in violation of the Constitution and the mandate with the bank). This development was reported to the Convener of the Visiting Trustees, Comrade Hassan Sunmonu, and subsequently to Congress.

On 12th May 2017, Dr. 'Niyi Sunmonu was reliably informed by the Branch's banks that Drs. Aborisade and Adekilekun could now operate the Branch's accounts as they deemed fit. It was subsequently gathered that some undisclosed amount of money had been transferred from the Skye Bank



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account to both the Wema Bank account and the National Headquarters of ASUU; again in violation of the Constitution and our mandate with the bank.

At its meeting of Wednesday, 17th May 2017, the ASUU-OAU Congress charged the National President, Professor Biodun Ogunyemi, with being arrantly contemptuous of and further dividing the OAU Branch of the union. It noted with disappointment that, at a time when there was a crisis in the Branch, the President was only interested in our money and not how to resolve the crisis. His unilateral letters to the union's banks to violate our mandates was regarded as a clear violation of members' rights as contributors.

Through the questionable set of circumstances, about eleven million naira (N11,000,000:00) was, cumulatively, transferred illegally from the ASUU-OAU bank account to the ASUU-National bank account. This unilateral, authoritarian and unconstitutional action of the National President of ASUU infuriated the mass of ASUU-OAU Branch members.

The Congress therefore directed the Caretaker Committee to write a letter to the Acting VC to request for the stoppage of the deduction of our check-off dues from our salaries, since the bank accounts of ASUU-OAU had become vulnerable to illegal withdrawals.

4. Mass Expulsion and Suspension of Members

As the problems of ASUU-OAU continued to be aggravated, an ASUU-NEC Visitation Committee was sent to OAU. The members of the committee were as follows:

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|----|-----------------------------|---|----------------|---|----------|
| 1. | Professor V.E. Osodeke | – | Vice-President | – | Convener |
| 2. | Dr. David Jangkam | – | Legal Adviser | – | Member |
| 3. | Professor Rabiun Nasiru | – | IPZC, Kano | – | Member |
| 4. | Professor Suleiman Mohammed | – | IPZC, Abuja | – | Member |
| 5. | Dr. Alex Odiyi | – | ZC, Akure | – | Member |



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|----|-------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|--------|
| 6. | Professor Segun Ajiboye | – | ZC, Ibadan | – | Member |
| 7. | Dr. Ademola Aremu | – | Past National Treasurer | – | Member |
| 8. | Dr. C.C. Ononuju | – | Investment Secretary | – | Member |
| 9. | Dr. Adesola Nassir | – | IPZC, Lagos | – | Member |

According to the Professor Osodeke-led committee's report, the terms of reference (TOR) of the committee were:

“(1) To further verify the allegation of the petitioners: Prof. Akinola and Prof. Owolarafe: that the Branch Financial Secretary, Dr. Saheed Adekilekun was actually on Sabbatical leave while in office and also when seeking re-election [contrary to the provisions of the ASUU constitution on eligibility for elections].

(2) To investigate circumstances leading to the suspension of the Vice-Chancellorship election process and also the dissolution of the University Governing Council by the Federal Government.”

The Professor Osodeke-led committee's report itemised its findings on these TORs.

On TOR 1, the Professor Osodeke-led committee claimed to have found as follows:

“7. The financial secretary [Dr, Saheed Adekilekun] suspended the sabbatical leave when he was told to resign his post [after the election] or suspend the sabbatical leave. He showed evidence of suspension of the leave.

8. There were petitions on these matters before the elections and they were resolved and the petitions withdrawn. This enabled Dr. Adekilekun to contest in the elections. ...

9. At the time of election, he was not on sabbatical leave.



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10. At a congress to review the elections, the petition by Prof Akinola and Owolarafe was presented. It was thrown out on the grounds of validity. ...”

In other words, going by Finding 7 above, Dr. Saheed Adekilekun was not qualified to contest the election. That he was asked to resign “his post” implies that he had contested and ‘won’ without being eligible. This fact is implicit in Finding 7 and contradicts finding 9. In spite of this fact, the committee recommended as follows:

“On the eligibility of Dr. Saheed Adekilekun for election: the committee recommends that he should not be disqualified since he was not on sabbatical leave at the time of the election.”

We would return to this recommendation for more critical consideration later.

On TOR 2, the report claimed as follows:

“On the Vice-Chancellorship selection process and dissolution of the Governing Council: from our findings, the Governing Council followed the process to its conclusion.”

In respect of this finding, note that the committee said ambivalently that “the Governing Council **followed the process**”, and not categorically that “the Governing Council **followed due process**”. The committee then recommended as follows:

“On the Vice-Chancellorship selection process and dissolution of the Governing Council: ... The committee recommends that the action of the Visitor be condemned in dissolving the Governing Council for violating the ASUU-FG agreement.”

As a general recommendation, the Professor Osodeke-led committee stated as follows:



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“The Chairperson [Dr. Caleb Aborisade] should be cautioned to desist from going to the press on major issues without going through the congress.”

This recommendation confirms the allegation that the Chairperson of ASUU-OAU had disengaged from the followership in the Branch and, rather than stay neutral, had put his office, through unconscionable press releases and other disagreeable actions, at the disposal of the University Administration and the Governing Council who were manipulating the VC selection process to ensure the emergence of a favoured candidate.

The Professor Osodeke-led committee also claimed as follows with respect to allegations of financial impropriety against the Chairperson, Dr. Caleb Aborisade:

- “1. The Chairperson actually had the wedding of his niece in Niger republic. He travelled there on his own expense.*
- 2. He invited the branch to the wedding and two members of the executive were chosen to represent the branch.*
- 3. Arising from the disagreement in the congress meeting on that expenditure, the chairperson opted to have the money refunded by the members of Executive who represented the branch.*
- 4. There was no panel set up to investigate the matter, or any evidence of an indictment over wrongly spent funds.”*

The Professor Osodeke-led committee then recommended as follows:

“On the allegation of financial misconduct by the Chairperson, Dr. Aborisade, the committee recommends that he should not be disqualified since he was not indicted by any panel for financial misconduct.”



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The findings of the Professor Osodeke-led committee were largely false and the recommendations were mostly not in consonance with the desire for harmony. The report as a whole was perceived by a wide range of the members of ASUU-OAU as essentially whitewash for dishonourable conduct by the branch, zonal and national leadership of ASUU. The discredited report was therefore roundly rejected. As was to be expected, rather than resolve the crisis in ASUU-OAU, the Professor Osodeke-led committee's report worsened it.

Possibly due to the questionable value of the Professor Osodeke-led committee's report, a more well-respected delegation of Trustees of ASUU was sent to OAU to conduct another investigation into the crisis.

The Trustees committee comprised:

1. Comrade Hassan Sunmonu – Former President of NLC – Convener
2. Professor Assisi Asobie – Former President of ASUU – Member
3. Professor Abdullahi Sule Kano – Former President of ASUU – Member.

The committee's first visit was in November 2016, but it did not yield much success as very few members were able to interact with it. The second visit was in February 2017, and more members were able to interact with the committee. This, in the words of the Trustees committee, facilitated a "deep insight into the nature, dimensions and roots of the crisis." The report of the Trustees committee was dated 14th August 2017 and was made readily available.

The findings of the Comrade Hassan Sunmonu-led ASUU Trustees committee are presented below, with our own comments following each finding:

1. Finding 1: Caretaker Committee



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Trustees' Finding:

With respect to the formation of the Caretaker Committee, the Trustees committee reported as follows:

“This was the peak of illegality. There is no provision in ASUU Constitution for a Caretaker Committee. It is not recognised by NEC.”

Our Comments:

We are still fervently of the opinion that an Executive Committee loses legitimacy once it contemptuously walks out on Congress. In any case, the Caleb Aborisade-led committee was an extra-constitutional and illegal contraption, right from the beginning, as would become clear from our comments on Findings 2 and 4 below. Since the constitution did not envisage that kind of disengagement by a leadership from its followership, and therefore did not make any clear provision for handling such situations, appointing a Caretaker Committee was Congress's patriotic effort to save the situation. Further comments on this finding would be made after considering the second finding below.

2. Finding 2: Perverse Annulment of Elections

Trustees Finding:

The Trustees committee found as follows in respect of this issue:

“... [T]here was a petition against the election of Prof Akinola as Branch Chairperson, but apparently NEC decided that the election of all the executive members be cancelled. The trustees could not uncover any justification for that wholesale annulment



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of the entire election; and therefore, considers NEC's action wrong."

Our Comments:

The background to this is that Professor Peter Akinola was deemed not to have been duly nominated to contest for the position of Chairperson of ASUU-OAU. After the election, his victory was challenged, and his election annulled. Meanwhile, all the other members who won their elections into the other offices of the Branch were found to have been duly nominated. All that legality, common-sense and fairness required was for a bye-election to have been conducted into the office of Chairperson, and for the victory of all the other candidates into all the other offices to have been upheld, since it followed due process. Rather than take this constitutionally-valid and electorally-just course, ASUU-NEC ordered a wholesale unconstitutional cancellation of the elections, ostensibly in the long-term preparation for a grander travesty, a key component of which was to install a malleable Executive. The Dr. Aborisade-led Executive therefore lacked legitimacy, in real terms, from day one, and appeared to have been the stage-managed, potentially-handly Executive envisaged by the manipulating principals. Meanwhile, the Professor Osodeke-led committee's earlier report had considered the injustice that was perpetrated in installing that Executive to be in order.



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3. Finding 3: ASUU-OAU Chairperson's Falsehood

Trustees' Finding:

On fidelity, the Trustees committee noted as follows:

"In the case of the appointment of the vice chancellor, the ASUU OAU Branch Chairperson, Dr Caleb Aborisade, did not speak the truth about the procedure followed by Council in shortlisting candidates and determining the person who purportedly emerged as the vice chancellor."

Our Comments:

This finding is critical because it relates to the tendency of the ASUU-OAU leadership to be unfaithful to the followership. This disloyal local leadership went into a dubious falsehood-peddling alliance with the Vice-President at the time, Professor Emmanuel Osodeke, whose Visitation committee claimed **fuzzily** in its report that the VC selection "**followed the process**".

It is important to note that the propensity for falsehood is now becoming a defining characteristic of Professor Osodeke, considering his continuing lying episodes even now that he is the President of ASUU. He had in his characteristic impertinence referred to state universities in Nigeria as "quacks" on 26th August 2022, and the video of this unguarded denigration of a significant section of the Nigerian academia went viral. (See, "State-Owned Universities Are Quack – ASUU President, Emmanuel Osodeke": <https://youtu.be/BYWCgTrzxQM>) In response to the widespread condemnation of this verbal



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indiscretion, Professor Osodeke, on 27th August 2022, shamelessly denied making the offending statement. (See, “Strike: ASUU Denies Calling State Varsities Quack”: <https://strike-asuu-denies-calling-state-varsities-quack/>)

Moreover, just on 12th August 2022, in one of the worst shows of lack of restraint, the President of ASUU said as follows in an AIT interview:

“The beauty of what we have done is that we have mobilised Nigerian people. We have educated Nigerian people to know that this present set of leaders have no feelings for Nigerian people, have no feelings for Nigerian students, have no feelings to Nigeria as a country. And that is why they are looking down on the education system, allowing the universities to be shut down for almost six months without response. ...”

“We also appeal to Nigerians; this is your life. And the beauty is that, in the next five months, six months time, there is an election. They should hold their PVC. And for all those who have subjected them to this, they should vote them out. It’s their right. They voted these people in. ... They should use the Permanent Voter Cards (PVC). ...” (See, “2023: ASUU President Asks Nigerians to Vote out Ruling APC”; AIT: <https://youtu.be/d2a7HklEDh0>)

In an undignified volte-face on 2nd October 2022, in response to the Minister of Labour and Employment’s reference to the unguarded partisan political statement, the ASUU President, Professor Osodeke, denied making the statement, and said to the Minister, “You’re lying to the public.” (See, “Strike: Ngige



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Excuses Himself from ASUU/House of Reps/FG Negotiation Meeting”; Channels Television: https://youtu.be/EB-OQK_GujM)

4. Finding 4: Branch Elections Infractions

Trustees’ Finding:

With respect to election-related impropriety by some officers of ASUU-OAU, the Trustees committee found as follows:

“The two officers contesting for elections in 2016 [Dr. Saheed Adekilekun and Dr. Ayo Sakpere] were on sabbatical leave and leave of absence respectively in 2016, and as such were not qualified to run for office. The action was contrary to section 14.2(b) (i) of the ASUU constitution and code of Practice. One of the two, Dr. Saheed Adekilekun, claimed to have suspended his sabbatical leave at KWASU. The attempt to confer legitimacy on the improper action of Dr. Adekilekun was made by the Zonal Coordinator, Dr. Alex Odiyi, with the full cooperation of the Branch Chairperson and some of the members of ASUU OAU branch.”

Our Comments:

This finding contradicts the Professor Osodeke-led committee’s dubious finding. It is noteworthy here that the same Dr. Alex Odiyi indicted in this finding of the Trustees committee report was a member of the Professor Osodeke-led committee. The Trustees committee’s indicting finding shows that the constitutionally-invalid Dr. Aborisade-led Executive was the product of a structural inanity involving branch-level, zonal and



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national ASUU collaborators. Since ASUU-NEC which was supposed to remedy the situation had become compromised and was deeply enmeshed in the shenanigans, thereby losing the confidence of the mass of the Branch's members, removing the illegal, disloyal, untruthful and contemptuous ASUU-OAU Dr. Aborisade-led Executive and replacing it with a Caretaker Committee, using the doctrine of necessity, was expected to be regarded as a commendable act.

Considering the dubious antecedent of ASUU-NEC regarding fidelity to the ASUU constitution, NEC had no moral authority to sanction us on account of the creation of the Caretaker Committee. As Finding 2 of the Comrade Hassan Sunmonu-led committee had shown, ASUU-NEC had shown its lawlessness by annulling the victory of members who had been duly nominated for various posts and who had gone ahead to duly win elections into the posts in the ASUU-OAU elections. ASUU-NEC engaged in this gross violation of rights because it did not like those who won the elections. NEC had also subsequently hypocritically condoned the victory of a candidate who had clearly not met the eligibility requirement for election into the office of Financial Secretary, as Finding 4 had revealed. Normally, the damning findings of the Trustees ought to have generated contrition in and stimulate cautious conduct by ASUU-NEC. Rather, the findings seemed to have incited ASUU-NEC to engage in more unconscionable muscle-flexing.

Seemingly out of the desire to take their pound of flesh for our principled stance, ASUU-NEC sent members of the Ethics, Grievances and Crises/Conflict Management Committee, led by its Convener Professor Suleiman Muhammed, to OAU between 7th and 11th January 2018 to interact with those mentioned in the report of the committee of Trustees. It is important to note here that Professor Suleiman Muhammed was one of the



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members of the Professor Osodeke-led committee which came up with findings that were gravely contradicted by the more credible Comrade Hassan Sunmonu-led Trustees committee's findings. Congress deliberated on whether or not its members should appear before the Professor Suleiman Muhammed-led committee especially because the Convener was a member of the "discredited" Professor Osodeke-led committee. It then decided to bend over backwards in the interest of peace and the unity of the union. Hence, Congress directed the invited members to appear before the committee.

Of key importance here is the fact that based on what were considered to be its findings, the Professor Suleiman Muhammed-led committee recommended, in its report of 30th January 2018, that some members of ASUU-OAU be suspended from the union and that some be expelled. Specifically, the committee stated as follows in the report:

"The Committee found that seven hundred and nine (709) members have withdrawn their check-off (appendix 12), while seven hundred and sixty-four (764) are still on check-off (appendix 13)."

The committee then recommended as follows:

"Those who have stopped their check-off dues should be considered as having withdrawn their membership of the Union, and shall only be re-admitted in accordance with relevant rules."

The recommendations for suspension and expulsion were ratified on 4th February 2018 at the ASUU-NEC meeting held at Gombe State University. Hundreds of members of the ASUU-OAU were then suspended from the



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union for durations ranging from six (6) months to one (1) year, and members of the Caretaker Committee and some other members of the union were expelled outright from ASUU.

In other words, rather than heed the several well-intentioned pieces of advice for the swift and pragmatic resolution of the Branch's crisis, and rather than appreciate the cautionary note to avoid cataclysmic developments in the OAU Branch of the union, ASUU-NEC, in its omniscient and omnipotent posturing, was overwhelmed by its sense of self-righteousness and invincibility and was more enamoured with wielding the big stick, without restraint. Rather perversely, some of the ASUU-OAU members whom ASUU-NEC suspended or expelled from the union were very senior academics, some of whom were former and serving Heads of Departments, former and serving Deans of Faculties, former and serving Provosts of Colleges and even former and serving members of the OAU Governing Council.

To rub salt in the wound of especially these distinguished members of the OAU intelligentsia, ASUU-NEC set draconian and humiliating conditions for readmission into the union which no self-respecting academic would even contemplate to attempt to meet. Affected colleagues then started to ask questions like: Is it inescapable to be a member of ASUU? Why is ASUU-NEC conducting itself as if it believes that losing ASUU membership is tantamount to losing one's job as a lecturer? Should ASUU membership be allowed to subject anybody to so much indignity? Must ASUU-NEC's arrogance and connivance with arbitrariness and illegality be allowed to continue unchallenged? Should effort not be made to break out of ASUU's cocoon of shenanigans? Is it not possible to form a new academic union?



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5. Formation of CONUA

At the ASUU-OAU Congress held in Auditorium I, Humanities Block I, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, on 12th February 2018, and presided over by the Caretaker Committee, the ill-advised expulsion or suspension of about seven hundred and fifty members of the Branch from the union was deliberated upon exhaustively, and the need to provide a refuge for the academics who had been arrogantly driven out of ASUU was a key issue. At the end of the discussions, Congress took the following key decisions:

1. **To constitute itself into a new Union that is totally independent of ASUU, adopt an appropriate name and open a new bank account for the check off dues of its members.**
2. To constitute an Electoral Committee to conduct elections into the Executive Committee of the new Union within two weeks of the meeting.
3. To constitute a Constitution Drafting Committee to draft a new constitution for the new Union.
4. To constitute a Media Committee to periodically and constantly inform members and the general public on the state of our new Union in the Branch.

Virtually all of these landmark decisions of Congress were duly implemented instantly.

With respect to finding a **Name for the New Union**, a request was made, right there on the floor of the Congress of 12th February 2018, for the suggestion of prospective names for the new Union. After a critical review of the different names proposed, “**Congress of University Academics (CONUA)**”, was unanimously adopted there and then, with the membership



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of the Union cutting across all ranks of the academic profession, ranging from the entry rank of Graduate Assistant to the highest rank of Professor.

We were quite conscious of the fact that standing up to ASUU would be a humongous and fearsome undertaking with a difficult-to-predict outcome. All the same, with courage buoyed by our desire to protect our dignity, we forged ahead. On 6th March 2018, the formal inauguration of the new Union, **CONUA**, was held, with representatives of the University of Ilorin and Kwara State University, Malete, in attendance. In the meantime, academics under the yoke of ASUU in other universities heard about the principled and definitive resistance to the excesses of ASUU in OAU and the resultant formation of CONUA. These victims of ASUU's highhandedness and disdainfulness found hope for relief in joining CONUA.

From 4th to 6th October 2019, the first National Stakeholders Meeting of the Union held at OAU, with the following five branches represented: Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; Kwara State University, Malete; Federal University, Lokoja; Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma; and Federal University, Oye-Ekiti. At present, some of the branches of the Union include Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike; University of Benin; Federal University, Lokoja; Federal University, Oye-Ekiti; Kwara State University, Malete; Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; University of Nigeria, Nsukka; University of Jos; and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

The Union has continued to grow steadily, and many other universities are in the process of inaugurating CONUA as their academic union of preference. The growing membership of the Union has strengthened our hands tremendously, and has kept our spirits high in trying times, especially with respect to the registration of CONUA.



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6. Registration of CONUA

Pursuing the registration of CONUA was a quite exacting and chequered experience. It tested our determination and staying power. Between 12th February and 30th April 2018, documents relevant to the application for the registration of CONUA as a Trade Union were prepared. These include the registration form which was procured on 28th March 2018. The application for registration was dated 30th April 2018 and was submitted at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, Abuja, on 2nd May 2018.

The first test of our mettle as a Union occurred when the application was rejected. The refusal of our application for the registration of CONUA as a Trade Union was communicated to us in a letter dated 23rd January 2019, with the caveat that “you also have the right to appeal the refusal of the application to be registered as a trade union to the Honourable Minister within 30 days of the receipt of this letter in line with section 5(b) of the Trade Union Act CAP.T.14 of 2004”.

We identified twenty-three grounds of appeal and prepared six annexures, and the appeal, dated 28th January 2019 and addressed to the Honourable Minister of Labour and Employment, was promptly filed by our counsel. About a year later, the Ministerial Committee that was set up to review our appeal invited the leadership of CONUA to a formal meeting scheduled for 22nd January 2020. The meeting was held in the Conference Room of the Honourable Minister of Labour and Employment.

Subsequently, the Honourable Minister of Labour and Employment invited the CONUA leadership to a public meeting held on 19th November 2020, where the justification for the registration of CONUA as an academic Trade Union was further elucidated. The Honourable Minister, in his response, gave the



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Ministerial Committee on the appeal for the registration of CONUA four weeks to turn in its report for his consideration.

A long and, for us, worrisome hiatus followed this interaction. CONUA appeared to be like a four-year old pregnancy, and understandably, the pregnancy came with its physical, psychological and emotional strain. The trauma was aggravated by those who taunted us by saying that the pregnancy could only result in a stillbirth. The constant refrain of the ASUU President, Professor Emmanuel Osodeke, was that CONUA was an unregistered and therefore illegal association, and that the government should ban the Union. Specifically, Professor Osodeke was reported to have declared as follows about CONUA, in a news item titled “Earned Academic Allowance: ASUU president, CONUA chair in war of words”, in the 5th February 2022 edition of *Premium Times*:

“They are liars. They are pretenders and they are fake and illegal. And ordinarily the Ministry of Education or NUC needs to step in, because you cannot allow an illegal group to be run in a university ... And is there anything like CONUA that is registered in the Nigerian system? There is none. So, it is a fake group, an illegal group ...”

In this taunt, Professor Osodeke was walking in the footsteps of his predecessor in office, Professor Biodun Ogunyemi. In a 27th December 2019 piece titled “ASUU, CONUA in fresh clash over legitimacy”, in *The Guardian* (a news item coming close to two years after the application for the registration of CONUA had been submitted to the Ministry of Labour and Employment), Professor Ogunyemi was reported to have said:



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“I do not believe there is a faction in ASUU. What you see playing out is the expression of misgivings by some of our members who are dissatisfied with the sanctions meted out to them for violating the provisions of our constitution.”

“And you will find the largest concentration at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. In that University, you will also find that we still control up to 60 per cent or more of the membership. And if you leave Ile-Ife, and go to other campuses where they are pronouncing that they want to join one group or the other, you cannot count more than five in those universities. That tells you that the group we are talking about just exists in the air, that group is not on the ground.”

In spite of the taunts and grandstanding of these presidents of ASUU and their equally delusional sundry backers, CONUA kept hope alive.

Then on 8th August 2022, the Honourable Minister of State for Labour and Employment, Mr. Festus Keyamo, SAN, made a public declaration, in an interview on Arise Television, that CONUA had fulfilled all the requirements for its registration as a Trade Union. This renewed our hope and reinforced our belief in the justness of the CONUA cause.

And on Tuesday, 4th October 2022, close to four-and-a-half years after we applied for registration, the ultimate happened. The Minister of Labour and Employment, Dr. Chris Ngige, granted the registration of CONUA as an academic Trade Union in the Nigerian University system.

So, today, CONUA is delivered! Yes, with pangs of birth; but, also with overriding and overwhelming joys of motherhood. As a Yoruba idiom would put it, *a gb’òhùn iyá, a gb’òhùn omo*. (‘We’ve heard the voice of the mother



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and we've heard the voice of the baby.')

We recognise and accept our bounden duty to nurture this happy child of necessity.

We deeply appreciate all the personalities – members as well as non-members of CONUA – and the innumerable well-wishers, who assured us that we were on a noble course, and who acted positively to get us to this immeasurably joyous destination.

7. Conclusion

The famous philosopher Socrates said, “Let those who would move the world first move themselves.” In line with this principle, we believed that we could not perform the transformative duty that being intellectuals imposed on us, if we could not transform our own immediate environment into a more humane habitation. The formation of CONUA is, as such, the culmination of the desire to resist highhandedness, impetuosity and disdainfulness, in order to be able to ply our trade as academics, with our dignity intact.

We subscribe to the revolutionary principle that “Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God.” In the formation of CONUA, we have demonstrated resistance to tyranny and impunity with our hearts, our words, and our hands. We have therefore kept faith with Edmund Burke’s assertion that “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.”

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