



NIGERIA LABOUR CONGRESS

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PRESS RELEASE

WE ARE WORKERS NOT SLAVES

**A Press Statement Issued by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC)
in the Wake of Renewed Onslaught Against Organized Labour
Through the "No Work... No Pay" Directive by the Federal
Government of Nigeria**

The attention of the Nigeria Labour Congress has been drawn to a memo by the Federal Government dated November 29, 2018 directing all Vice Chancellors of Federal Universities to apply the "No Work... No Pay" rule. We understand that the Federal Government has since rescinded this order. Nonetheless, Nigerian workers are concerned that for the umpteenth time, the Federal Government and many state governments have resorted to bullying and draconian threats in dealing with matters that strictly reside in the domain of industrial relations. This is truly sad, highly unfortunate and extremely provoking.

We recall that the current struggle by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) for improved conditions of learning in our public universities is not the first time that the Federal Government is issuing the "No Work... No Pay" threat. During the last warning strike by the NLC on the new national minimum wage, the Minister of Labour and Productivity, Dr Chris Ngige issued a "No Work... No Pay" threat against workers. Also, during the last nationwide strike action by health workers, the Federal Government did not only issue a "No Work... No Pay" threat, it went ahead to implement it. Till now, government still withholds about three months of salaries due to health workers.

The Nigeria Labour Congress considers the application of the “No Work... No Pay” rule as an autocratic attempt to cow workers into abandoning their legitimate demand for decent wages, conducive work spaces and social justice. As far as we are concerned, government’s invocation of the ‘no work, no pay’ clause in the Trade Disputes Act is selective, erroneous and hypocritical. As we speak, the Federal government and nearly all the states in Nigeria are owing workers varying arrears of salaries, allowances, pension and gratuity – some running into years. Yet, workers have continued to endure such profound neglect by political leaders elected to prioritize the welfare of citizens. Given the grand betrayal of workers by government, workers stand the higher moral ground to invoke a “No Pay... No Work” action.

Section 43 of the Trade Disputes Act of Nigeria has always been in our statutes but successive governments had hardly ever invoked it to punish an already impoverished workforce. It is sad that the current government is making a lot of fuss on just one aspect of our laws while holding in contempt several provisions in our labour laws and even our constitution demanding just and humane treatment of workers.

It is important to reiterate that Nigerian workers will never accept slavery in their own country. The right to strike is both a human and trade union right protected by our laws and international conventions particularly ILO Convention 87. It is the right to strike that distinguishes a worker from a slave. Do we need to remind government at all levels that Nigerian workers are worthy partners in nation building and not slaves? As a matter of fact, labour builds the commonwealth that political leaders and their cronies, more often than not, squander. It is, therefore, regrettable that government continues to behave as if Nigerian workers are slaves who have no rights or privileges to claim.

It is truly unfortunate that our political leaders act with a failed sense of history. On June 22, 1945, organized labour in Nigeria commenced a general strike action that shook the foundation of British colonialism in our country. Not a few historians would argue that our journey to nationhood started with the strike action of June 1945 as millions of Nigerians from every part of the country for the first time in their lives rallied around a common cause. Succinctly put, the 1945 general strike action was the foundation of Nigeria’s independence and sovereignty. It is therefore heart rending that latter day politicians would use the



legitimate weapon of strike action to intimidate, hound and oppress the working class which sweat and blood procured the freedom we enjoy.

We warn government at all levels to desist from using the "No Work... No Pay" rule to shirk away from their responsibilities. We also demand immediate release of workers' salaries withheld on the account of "No Work... No Pay" rule. Also, we ask government to respect agreements it freely entered into with ASUU in order to restore normalcy and sanity to our public institutions of learning especially our universities. Our children have suffered enough already! Enough is enough!!


Comrade Lawal Dutsinma
Ag. President, Nigeria Labour Congress
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