



BREAKING COCONUT WITH YOUR HEAD

(Akowe's Journey in Student Unionism)

LANRE AROGUNDADE

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by Lanre Arogundade.

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to:

Segun Aderemi, LLB, BL (Segun Sango) - a student and working class socialist revolutionary par excellence, founding General Secretary of Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM), comrade, friend, mentor and confidant;

Christopher Fajemifo, BA Eng. - a forthright leader, great humanist and progressive president of the University of Ife Students' Union (1982/83);

Chris Abashi, LLB, BL - a passionate leftist fighter for students' and people's rights, grassroots politician and my immediate predecessor as President of National Association of Nigerian Students (1982/83), under whom the NANS Charter of Demands was produced;

Chima Ubani, MA, Mass Comm - a fearless and principled student and civil society mobiliser and leader, firm believer in the struggles of the working class and the socialist future of Nigeria, first General Secretary of Campaign for Democracy, and former President of University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Students' Union (1986/87);

All those who have paid the supreme price in fighting for students' rights and the interest of the oppressed and downtrodden masses of Nigeria; and

All the living heroes of the struggle against commercialisation of education.

"The past is a story told that the future may be written in gold"

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The road to this memoir has been long. The idea was originally muted about a decade ago, ahead of my 50th birthday. Now 60, I felt it would be unwise to delay further, in a country where the Association of General and Private Medical Practitioners of Nigeria (AGPMPN), put life expectancy at 54 as of 2021.

In the above context, it is perhaps a matter of poetic significance that the book is coming out under the civilian presidency of General Muhammadu Buhari. His military government was in power for almost the entire period of my leadership of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) between December 1983 and April 1985. The narratives, however, extend to my interventionist roles in student unionism in the civilian era of President Shehu Shagari. In both circumstances, I performed the roles as part of a generation of students' union activists and youths, who fought against the denial of education to the poor through the policy of commercialisation.

The events were momentous and the actors many. Recalling the chain of activities was tasking, particularly as they occurred in an analogue era. I therefore would not be at this juncture without the value-addition and support of many individuals, all of whom, I wish I could name. I owe those who may not be mentioned here a load of apology for such omission. I plead with them not to see it as deliberate.

I thank Comrade Segun Sango (posthumously), Adeyinka Olumide-Fusika, Adewale Bashir, Hassan Soweto and Peluola Adewale, for the initial push and encouragement because they insisted that a documentation like this is necessary to help bridge the gap

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between the past and current generations.

The push became a shove when a group of young men and women around me at the International Press Centre (IPC), Lagos-Nigeria, agreed to serve in the research team. They conducted and transcribed interviews; meticulously sifted through volumes of newspapers and other materials and made copies of relevant ones. Technically speaking, the research team produced the first sketch of this memoir. For this invaluable service, I extend my gratitude to Sanmi Falobi, Keye Ewebiyi, Grace Balogun and Chidinma Anyanwu. I also commend David Adeleke, Adeola Olanrewaju, Chizoba Anuforom, Chinwe Nwani and Omolola Arogundade who later assisted in conducting more interviews and further transliteration.

Because the events captured in the memoir happened at great speed, it was necessary to rely on the records and institutional memories of other actors, some of whom agreed to be quoted verbatim, to enhance factual accuracy. For their enriching contribution, I am full of gratitude to: Gbenga Amusan, John Odah, Ahmed Aminu Yusuf, Denja Yaq, Chris Uyot, Prof. Olu Oguibe, Prof. Olugbenga Ige, Prof. Lucky Akaruese, Wale Adeoye, Rima Shawulu, Biodun Aremu, Engr. Ngerevara Adumu, Shola Aiyebola, Soji Longe, Fayemi Johnson, Olumide Akanmu, Taiye Abiodun, Dr. Okon Ariba, Bash Olasupo, Bolaji Adebisi, Imoni Amarere, Tony Iyare and Justice Bunmi Oyewole.

Before a manuscript can be upgraded to a publishable book, it must undergo rigorous scrutiny to detect and correct errors and ensure logical presentation. The work done in this regard by my team of editors is highly appreciated. For this, I thank Muiyiwa Adebajo, Adeyinka-Olumide-Fusika, SAN (who additionally wrote the foreword), Ayo Aluko-Olokun and Adeola Soetan.

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I say many thanks to the beautiful team Lanre Arogundade, comprising my wife, Ogunsola and daughters – Omolola and Eniola, for their moral support.

Irrespective of the contribution by the above named individuals, the entire responsibility for the content of this book and any mistakes therein is mine.

Lanre Arogundade
Author, September 10, 2022

FOREWORD

One of the calamities that has befallen our Country and made it to fall into the low depths in which it currently wallows was the deliberate undermining and destruction of traditional pressure (and/or organised interest) groups, the most important of which, in the history of Nigeria, are the labour unions and the students' unions.

Pressure (and/or organised interest) groups are organised groups of individuals whose principal aim is to protect the interest of their members through the process of influencing government policies and decisions in the areas of their interests or as it affects or concerns their members or class of persons within the larger society. Other than trade unions and students' unions, the category includes professional groups such as the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), Nigeria Medical Association (NMA), National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD); trade groups like the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) and the Chambers of Commerce and Industries; community based groups such as market associations and neighbourhood (landlord and tenants) associations; religious groups such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the J'amatul Nasril Islam (JNI), etc.

All organised societies and governments that are forward looking deliberately encourage the formation and the activities of such bodies because there is the realisation that through the process of collating, promoting and agitating for their group interests, they invariably serve as ramparts of democracy and bulwarks against those who, if allowed, will sooner subvert and supplant the common weal. Apart from promoting the interest of their members, they act as watch dogs on governments, foster citizen participation

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in the governmental processes, guide government in the formulation of policies and serve as platforms for galvanising citizen resistance to tyrannical policies and unaccountable leadership.

Where they flourish or are allowed to flourish, such bodies go about their 'pressuring' roles through lobbying, protest letters, making demands backed with ultimatums, engaging in propaganda and agitations, public interest litigations, strikes, sit-at-homes, public demonstration, etc.

Generally, pressure or interest groups that endure and remain continually effective in serving the purpose of their formation and existence are those whose members maintain a strong and incorruptible sense of ownership of the organisations and its affairs, and who, in that sense, serve as the source of its finances. They invariably lose their effectiveness and die out abruptly or in slow motion if they are unable to preserve their members' sense of ownership or are manoeuvred to become dependent on sources of finance outside their memberships. Dependence on third-party finance open such groups up to manipulation by outside interest and serious compromise, if not complete undermining and jettisoning, of the purpose for which they were formed.

Throughout the history of Nigeria, pressure groups, including the labour and student movements have made significant contributions in articulating and agitating for the interest, not only of their members but the public at large. For instance the anti-colonial struggle was more of speechifying until the labour movements put fire on it. The General strikes of 1945 is widely recognized as one of the most important events, if not the most important event, in the movement towards decolonisation. That

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singular movement which commenced at midnight on June 21, 1945 and which lasted for 44 days, shook the foundations of colonialism more than all other events, combined, from the inception of the anti-colonial struggle up till then. Suddenly, the colonial power and its eyes and hands in Nigeria who had before then saw the anti-colonial agitation as a benign or toothless one, easily manageable and putdownable by charges of seditions and jail terms, realised that their Lilliputian subjects, when organised, had great power capable of challenging, defying and bringing down the colonial construct.

In the same category was the student movement against the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact which the colonial power purportedly “negotiated” with Nigeria in 1958 and signed shortly before the “independence” they granted in 1960 to ensure that Nigeria is perpetually yoked to the British wagon. The pressure group role played by the student movement, through agitation and street protests, forced the eventual abrogation of the Pact in 1962.

It is no wonder that the colonial government maintained a cat and mouse relationship with such unions, especially the labour unions; although this did not get to the point of active subversion which was introduced and perfected under the various military regimes that we have had, in particular, the Buhari junta of 1984 to 1985, the Babangida one of 1985 to 1993, and the Abacha one of 1994 to 1998.

In this autobiography that focused on his journeys in student unionism, Lanre Arogundade has accounted unto history the epoch defining struggle of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) under his leadership (as President of the body) during the military dictatorship, styled the Buhari/Idiagbon regime,

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between 1984 and 1985. It is a story of misplaced expectations, of unfulfilled and betrayed promises of redemption from the rot and corruption of the overthrown civilian regime, of mass resistance by the student populace to reversals of the gains of the past and the demotion of their right to be educated in the right atmosphere, of lives lost or almost lost, of truncated studentship, of bravery in the face of adversity, of arrogance of power, of short-sightedness in power without consideration for the future, etcetera.

Any perceptive mind reading this book will easily understand how and why pressure groups, and especially the student movement, is currently in the state it is now, and of the eternal struggle going on between enemies of the open society who will rather do without such pressure groups, and those who insist on a society that works for all and against governments that serve only the interest of those involved in it and those connected with them.

As pointed out in the book, in order to defeat that movement, the then military regime, apart from targeting individual activists for harassment, suspension, expulsion, and such like, resorted to the temporary advantage of cancelling the existing system of compulsory membership and financial subscription of all students to their students' unions in order to starve the unions of their independent source of finance for their activities. Thus, while in real and practical terms, all students continue to be members of their students' unions, and therefore free and entitled to participate in and benefit from the activities of their unions, it became difficult, and in most cases, impossible to collect or enforce membership financial subscription. By this, a dual purpose of weakening the students' unions and opening them up for manipulation was achieved.

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It is now almost forty years since the 1984 struggle against commercialisation of education led by NANS under the leadership of the author. Ironically, many of those that played active roles in that movement have since risen to join the ruling elites. At least two have either ruled or still ruling as Governors of their States (Rauf Aregbesola and Kayode Fayemi). Several have been Senators, members of the Federal House of Representatives or state House of Assemblies. The one who was President of the University of Ibadan Students Union at the time later joined the Police and recently retired having commanded some of Police formations. Some have been University administrators.

Unfortunately, many of the potential victims of those days, many of whom could not have afforded to remain in school or complete their education, and for whose sakes and to whose benefit the 1984-1985 struggle against commercialisation of education was successfully waged have turned out worse than the Buharis, the Idiagbons, the Ango Abdullahis, the Jubril Aminus of their era of student activism.

By this book, Lanre Arogundade has made an important contribution to our body of knowledge on student unionism in Nigeria. I strongly commend the book to all and sundry, but especially to all those involved as members and leaders of pressure groups such as labour and students' unions who earnestly seek a Nigeria in which life, rather than continuing to be brutish, nasty and short, is more abundant.

Adeyinka Olumide-Fusika, SAN

RETROSPECTIVE 1 1

"Lanre is like a golden fish. He is a comrade that is principled and stands as one who is bent on making the society better. He would rather serve the people than be in government to gain for self-purposes"

MEETING LANRE AROGUNDADE

I met Lanre Arogundade at the University of Ife in 1981. We both got admitted for the 1980/81 session but due to some reasons, I resumed late.

The incident that really made Lanre visible to me happened in 1982. The Ife University was established in 1962, so by 1982, it was 20 years old. The university administration under Professor Cyril Agodi Onwumechili as the Vice Chancellor decided to put up an elaborate 20-year anniversary celebration which was going to cost a lot of money, against the background of the worsening condition of the economy on the campus at that time. There was already heavy stress on the accommodation as the institution was admitting more people than it could provide accommodation for and so many other things were not going on well like electricity instability and water shortage. Before that time, I had joined the student socialist movement which was on campus then. It was called Alliance for Progressive Students. ALPS, and Lanre was already a member.

So the ALPS played a frontal role in mobilising the entire students including the Students' Union to oppose the celebration; that instead of using the money for celebration, it should be used to improve infrastructure and other facilities on the campus. Subsequently, there was a resolution by the SRC that the Students' Union should boycott the ceremony. However, the then Secretary General of the students' union was alleged to have attended one of

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the programmes and the issue of sanctioning him came up in the parliament. When the matter came up, there was a proposal to impeach him and three people were given opportunity to speak for and against, and Lanre Arogundade, who was then already in the SRC, was one of the people who spoke for his impeachment. He spoke so passionately that he captivated my own kind of reasoning and mind. Though we were in ALPS together, that was my first time of seeing him speak in public and the issues were passionate, profoundly moralistic in my own perception and I said, 'this is the kind of reasoning one expects of student leaders seeking to change society'. It was at that point that I picked interest in him.

There were issues we prioritised as socialists. Issues like State sponsored free and qualitative education. We were also interested in the issue of workers being paid adequate remunerations and wages including support for ASUU's struggles for improved conditions of service. We were generally against privatisation and commercialisation which have now become the foundation of present society. At that time, Nigeria was just evolving from what you can call typical State dominated economic arrangement called Keynesianism in economic parlance. It was not like today that you have neo-liberal ideas predominating. It was in line with the universal concept that the state should spear head education and health sector development and that was the background from which the movement evolved, and it was in these regards that Lanre and I became close in promoting and spear-heading pro-student, and pro-poor policies.

Soon after that, the general elections of the students' union approached, and ALPS normally always like to support radical and principled students for Union position. So after the incident of the debate to impeach the secretary that participated in the so-called

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20th anniversary jamboree of the university, there was a meeting of ALPS where I learnt that ALPS had already decided to support Tony Iyare, who is now a Special Assistant to the Edo State Governor, as the candidate for the PRO. I then told them, 'why not somebody like Lanre?' I told them that this is the kind of students we should be supporting because Lanre spoke so well in the cause of the impeachment saga; that though, he was not the only one that spoke, he received the highest ovation and that we should consider his other antecedents. At the end of the day, the movement accepted my proposal, but the agreement was that he should run for the position of Secretary General. And that was how I became close to him, campaigning and supporting him for the elections, which he won.

At that time, our contest was against those who we regard as right wing student elements who were pro-management. Who when the management says 'we are going to increase school fees' they will always find argument to make the students support it or discourage students from protesting whereas we would oppose and fight such.

Lanre was Secretary alongside other radical minded students who were not members of ALPS, like Mafo Ola John, who was the PRO and Christopher Fajemifo who was the president, and these were generally progressive elements, not necessarily ALPS members and there was a kind of broad consensus in defending general radical ideals.

NANS then was generally a vibrant progressive and radical body, not like the one we have now where many people are parading themselves as presidents and going here and there to collect money from politicians. NANS was progressive and radical largely

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due to the intervention of the socialist movement. As we had ALPS in Ife, there were equally other socialist movements in other institutions like ABU, UNIJOS and other places. NANS leadership usually was politically supported and visibly supported by the generality of socialist students. NANS leadership used to be based on zones. It was divided into four zones - A, B, C and D - and the western axis of which Ife was part, used to be called zone D at that time. So by 1983/84 session, the leadership of NANS was coming to zone D. The convention usually takes place around December and there were discussions amongst socialist movements in the zone on who to present. We held a meeting and eventually, the progressive socialist elements in the zone agreed that it was UNIFE that should present the candidate for the NANS leadership because of the radical position it was known for, and the consensus was that it was Lanre, that should be presented.

But that was the first step because under the OAU constitution at that time, before you proceed to contest an external election, you must seek the mandate and approval of the students' parliament. So there was this day when we came to a programme in UNILAG and I went because I was also a member of the SRC then and as we were going, I brought up the discussion of who we should present and Mafo said, why not Lanre? At that time, Lanre and I were going to part four and usually, students in Part 4 which is the final year, (Part 5 for few others) hardly contest for elective posts. I pointed that out to him, and he just said, 'what does that mean, he simply would just take a sabbatical for one year' and that was how his name came up again. However along the line, it was the same Mafo who made the initial suggestion that later also wanted to become the NANS president. So there had to be a contest in the parliament and Lanre won.

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I recall that during the debate and campaign, a student came up with an argument in the parliament that, "what would be the assurance that if Lanre became NANS president, he would not favour ALPS just as he did as Secretary General when he gave ALPS a cyclostyling paper". I was very uncomfortable though I was an active member of ALPS, I couldn't recall the incident. It looked like his argument was going to mar Lanre's chance and I was expecting Lanre to defend the allegation. However, I soon regained my confidence when Lanre responded to the allegation and that was a part of him which many of his friends know him for.

Rather than defending himself, he said, "though it was true that I gave some materials to ALPS, to print on, as secretary general of the students' union, all the student organisations are under my office, and it is not only ALPS that I rendered special assistance to". He then began to list the names of all groups he had rendered assistant to, including Christian groups, Islamic groups and others and what he gave them. So when the votes were taken, Lanre won the slot for the presidential candidacy. One good thing that also came out of it was that though Mafo Ola John contested with Lanre, he became one of the solid supporters of the struggle such that when the authority's hammer came through Professor Wande Abimbola who probed an alleged violent conduct of some students including myself and about seven others, he was also suspended. Incidentally, Lanre's presidency coincided with the beginning of military rule in December 1983.

There have been a lot of fundamental paradigm shift in the evolution of student Union. At that time, we had the most radical expression of radicalisation in the society. There was what in the public media what was known as the bi-polar world between the East and the West. The Eastern bloc regarded as socialist was

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represented by the Soviet Union and others while the Western bloc was represented by UK, France and the rest. At that time the concept of running society was totally different. Government officials have always stolen but there is a remarkable difference from what it was then and now. There was also a general acceptance by the government and the governed that government should be responsible for the expansion of education, road construction, building of hospital, job creation and stuffs like that unlike now where all these fundamental bases of governance have been jettisoned and everything now is private. When you talk of road construction, you say Public Private Partnership (PPP), if you talk on mass transportation, they say it can only work with PPP.

Also in UNIFE then, there were sufficient elements of socialist oriented lecturers who helped in the evolution of socialist ideas among the student movement and helped in the radicalisation too. They also went through their own struggle on the platform of ASUU. There was a pattern then that if you were appointed a commissioner or minister and you suddenly began to exhibit stupendous wealth, people would be worried. As a matter of fact, in those days, politicians would resort to a lot of disguises to keep their loot, maybe using their mother's or grandmother's name, but nowadays in the name of privatisation, a local government chairman can decide with his caucus to acquire government asset and use it for his personal benefit. This is the difference in the kind of decadence that has now become the fabric of the modern society and the absolute immorality that rules today.

If you go round most cities including Lagos, you find shops in the frontage of every house facing the road. It was not so before. This started around 1986 and 1987 when there was serious economic down turn and impoverishment of the salary earners; and the

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unemployed petty traders now became the main stay of the family and that is how everybody started trading in one petty thing and business or the other.

At that time, there was a general progressive support for the development of the society and not now where someone is the richest man in Africa amid total squalor for the majority. This is absurd.

That was the milieu under which we grew up. When we entered the university, virtually all the States in the country were operating free education, it was a philosophy of good governance that the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) implemented and even those States that were not under UPN strove to carry out similar measures by subsidising education. The UPN States were paying bursary of five hundred naira to students and what you needed to feed as student for the whole month was just forty-five naira at about one naira, fifty kobo per day, that is, fifty kobo per meal.

When the Buhari-Idiagbon regime came, they wanted to introduce school fees and scrap feeding system. Lanre, because of his socialist background was opposed to such and we mobilised the NANS to hit the road protesting the policy. He had just become the NANS president and one of the high points of the struggle was the boycott of lectures from May 3rd 1984 to prevent the federal government from introducing school fees. Over 51 higher institutions of learning participated in this boycott. It was the success of the boycott that made the Minister then, on second or third day of the boycott to reach a consensus and announced on national TV that the introduction of fees be suspended for the 1984/85 session when it was supposed to start.

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As a result of that massive mobilisation, the federal government has not been able to uniformly increase school fees in the higher institutions of learning up till today, though some have managed to do so independently. The OAU remains the lowest paying institution of higher learning in the country, paying about twenty-five or thirty thousand Naira in the first year.

It is worthy of note that before the NANS struggle, so many other groups like the Nigerian Medical Association and the Pilots have had struggles with the government and had always been defeated. It was through the NANS' struggle under Lanre's leadership that students were able to extract the first concession from the government of that time.

Student activism, like other social aspects of the economy has lost steam and is not what it used to be, and this reflects the paradigm shift in the international politics of the world. With the collapse of communism, the capitalist world has an edge and engages in propaganda that capitalism is superior to socialism and because of that, the forces which used to fight for injustice and promote the cause of socialism have been politically weakened. However, we can see that capitalism has not brought any remarkable development.

Today, you have student leaders who just go about as consultants. There must be a paradigm shift, ideological reorientation and the building of a sense of collective responsibility.

The society can only move forward if there is consciousness for a collective development. For student unionism to be seen as being progressive, students' unions they must ab initio strongly oppose commercialisation of education.

Segun (Aderemi) Sango, LLB.

RETROSPECTIVE 2

1983/84 NANS NATIONAL STRUGGLE & THE UNN STUDENTS UNION

This is only a very brief recollection, and I should preface it with the caveat that 38 or 39 years on from the events, it's quite a challenge for me to recall details without access to records. I regret that I did not keep a diary during the events but, given the risks at the time, we were also disinclined to keep elaborate notes on activities, contacts, and discussions lest they fell into the hands of the authorities or the Buhari regime's many agents on the campuses. What papers or notes I might have kept I left with the union or have lost from so much moving across five decades of living in multiple cities in multiple countries. It's uncertain whether any such material in the union's possession has survived. In the many years that have followed, someone has written about the period as part of a general history of student unionism on the Nsukka campus, but the details or the identity of the author presently escapes me. These can be unearthed with a bit of time and research.

I would say that we the students' union officials at Nsukka did a decent job of preparing our members for a nationwide action. We were also fortunate enough to count on broad support from the academic staff and the local ASUU which itself had been considerably radicalised during its own nationwide action in 1981/82 led by its national secretary, and local activist, Dr. T. Uzodinma Nwala. Additionally, the non-academic staff and their union were also very sympathetic because they understood the imminent consequences of the Buhari government's plans regarding the higher education subsidies policy. The catering staff were particularly supportive since they were lined up to be

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disproportionately impacted by the proposed policy changes.

The aforementioned ASUU nationwide action also had its effects on student and parent attitudes toward the NANS action. While it prepared the 1983/84 cohort of students for a boycott of classes, the experience nonetheless did divide opinion. For many students and guardians, there was a sense of *deja vu*. However, for some students and their guardians, especially some students in their final year of studies, there was a feeling that yet another major disruption of classes was one too many, and therefore, unfair and undeserved. I return to this presently.

Preparation on the Nsukka and Enugu campuses was additionally helped by the active work of progressive student organisations, especially the Reggae Movement and the Marxist Youth Movement, to name just two. The student union leadership had a good working relationship with these organisations, and a number of members of the union parliament belonged to one or the other, although none of our officials belonged to either organisation. In subsequent years this would change when Chima Ubani, one-time Emperor of the Reggae Movement, eventually became president of the UNN students union, also. At any rate, both organisations, as well as a number of other smaller groups, provided positive platforms to reason with union members on why nationwide student action would be appropriate if it became necessary.

Last but not least was the visit of NANS officials to the campus in the lead-up to the national action. The officials were led by the president, Lanre Arogundade, who addressed a large rally on the campus Freedom Square along with local union officials, and further explained to students why NANS was compelled to respond to the regime.

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A somewhat less expected organisation which also largely responded positively, if not wholly, was the student Scripture Union. Besides factors including those already mentioned, this also owed in part to the fact that the student union assistant secretary-general, Mr. Nwokocha, my deputy as it were, was also a devout and well-respected member of the student Scripture Union. While not every member of the SU was enthusiastic about actions which they considered drastic, many were positively disposed as long as there was no violence.

My own modest role as union secretary-general was to articulate the issues at stake as clearly as possible, and communicate same to union members in speeches and through regular fliers and bulletins many of which I stayed up all night at the union secretariat drawing up, typing on stencil paper, and personally cyclostyling for mass publication. I was fortunate to enjoy a close rapport with the students who looked to me as the de facto leader of the union, although Emeka Nwodo, our president, also did his part with devotion. I happened to have a stronger gift for oratory which I honed over many years as a real life child preacher, and put to effective use during the struggle.

My rapport with the students and, especially, my propensity at the time to often speak directly to the students whenever I worried that the university administration was effectively pressurising other members of the student executive, didn't always go down well with those officials. 38 years on, I still bear a scar on one finger from a physical altercation when, on one occasion, I was literally locked up in the secretariat by the rest of the union executive to make sure that I was unable to circulate one such direct communication to the student body. This is by way of noting that positions within the union leadership weren't always fully aligned, including with regard

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to the NANS action.

Notwithstanding, I believe it accurate to say that once the decision was made at the national level to embark on a boycott of classes following the charter of demands, the boycott got off to an uneventful start on the Nsukka campus. There were tensions, no doubt, but student and staff cooperation was almost complete even if it did not receive the blessing of the university administration. The university vice-chancellor, Prof. Frank Ndili, was difficult to read. However, my feeling is that, although officially the administration was strongly opposed to our participation in the national action, Mr. Ndili and a few other senior administration officials were privately sympathetic even if others were vehemently averse to it.

It is, perhaps, necessary, useful at any rate, to mention one very important context to senior academic and administration attitudes toward student activism at the University of Nigeria in the many years that I was a student there (1981-1989). When I arrived there as a student in 1981, shortly before the Academic Staff Union went on national strike under the strategic leadership of Dr. T. U. Nwala, it had been only 11 years since the university and the Eastern Region emerged from the devastation of the Nigeria-Biafra war. Many important buildings on campus, such as the Princess Margaret Auditorium where thousands of freshmen received their General Studies introductory philosophy lectures, were still without a roof, having been bombed to ruins by the federal government during the war. Students sat on the bare floor to take classes because the university had yet to recover enough to replace furniture and other infrastructure destroyed by federal forces while the university served as the University of Biafra just over a decade earlier.

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With this still visceral background in mind, there was constant anxiety among university officials and senior academics who not only lived through the horrors and devastation of the war, but had spent those few years working so hard to rebuild the university, that we could not afford to give the federal government any excuse to either shut down the university, or otherwise target it for special victimisation as a hotbed of not just student radicalism, but lingering Igbo and Biafran secessionist discontent. As much as we young students did not share this anxiety and fear of reprisals, or even fully understand it, having been only mere children, even infants, in the civil war, it was nevertheless very palpable among the older generation, and a significant factor in determining their attitude toward any hint of radicalism in our activities. There was a conviction that no matter how nationwide or widespread any student struggle or action was, Nsukka and Enugu, as institutions, would be treated more harshly and unforgivingly by the federal government.

In effect, as student leaders we were operating under quite peculiar circumstances which colleagues in other regions did not share and were probably unaware of. It's also a fact which, to the best of my knowledge, has never been placed on public record. That this anxiety was often instrumentalised by certain university officials for more ulterior motives cannot be denied. Nevertheless, the anxiety was real, and it did circumscribe our activist work.

This brings us back to events that followed only a few days after boycott of classes began on the Nsukka campus. In so far as the vast majority of students were fully supportive of a boycott of classes, as happens with any such struggle there were nevertheless a small cohort of especially senior year students who remained opposed to the action. Along with them were an equally small number of

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lecturers who were intent on conducting classes to break the boycott. Such was the case in the Economics Department where, a few days into the boycott, a smattering of students reportedly gathered for classes. The identified students were from current presidential candidate Peter Obi's senior class.

According to eye-witness accounts, the group who gathered for a class was confronted by another group who took offence that they would dare break the collective boycott. A physical scuffle reportedly broke out and the morning class was successfully scuttled by the alleged loyal union members. To date it remains unclear whether the class itself was genuine at all, or was rather staged by the university authorities as a deliberate provocation to ensnare activist students, because what happened next was entirely unpredictable.

Within an hour of the reported scuffle in the Economics Department, 8 activist students including a number of union officials were placed on suspension from the university. The 8 were all accused of being present and taking part in the altercations. In truth, hardly any of the suspended students was anywhere near the scene of the incident, let alone a participant. Although my name was first on the list of suspended students, and I was alleged to have been present, in fact, at the time of the incident I was miles away at the Zik's Flats residence halls, which were off-campus. The first I learnt of the incident at Economics was along with the quickly spreading news that I and the others had been placed on suspension. This fact does lend some credence to the theory that the list of students to suspend was already drawn up, and that the incident was staged by the administration as a pretext.

The 1983/84 student cohort at University of Nigeria, Nsukka was

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arguably one of the most politically active and radicalised in the history of Nigerian student activism, right there with the customary hotbeds of Nigerian student radicalism such as University of Ife and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. It was a privilege to play a small part in that radicalisation. This also meant that including my name on the list of students to suspend was a strategic mistake on the part of the administration because it further incensed the students. Within a half hour of the news spreading, and before the administration could anticipate or prepare for their reaction, students quickly gathered at the administration building and surrounded it, effectively holding hostage the Vice Chancellor and all officials present in the building. This siege would last all day and overnight, and into the following morning, without once being breached. Thousands of students spent the rest of the day surrounding the building, and slept the night there, also.

An emergency session of the students' union house and senate was convened, and an ultimatum was drawn up demanding the immediate and unconditional recall of all the suspended students. This demand was then served on the university administration. Union members would not leave the grounds of the administration building, or permit any administration official to leave, until the demand was met. Students were advised to take turns fetching necessary supplies including food, and prepare for a long siege. Having already spontaneously mounted the siege by themselves in the first place, they had little trouble organising for the anticipated long stand-off or, indeed, for any confrontation with police or security that might result.

My view is that it quickly dawned on the administration that they had inadvertently orchestrated the very situation they always wanted to avoid on account that it might provide an excuse for

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unduly punitive reprisals from the federal government. Although a contingent of military police were sighted on campus, there was indication that they probably had instructions not to approach the students who were holding the administration hostage, or confront them.

Throughout the evening and into the night, the administration engaged with a delegation of student officials and representatives excluding the officials who had been suspended. The union delegation was under clear instructions not to negotiate, which they did not. Before noon the following day, the union officials and representatives emerged with official declaration from the administration that all 8 suspended students had been recalled unconditionally. This was less than 24 hours since the suspension announcement was made. It was certainly one of the most spectacular victories in the union's history, albeit one that ought not to have been necessary in the first place. The university was unaccustomed to such strength of collective resolve or tactical agility on the part of the students, and the non-violent manner in which both students, union officials, and the administration successfully handled the particularly incendiary situation not only spoke to remarkable maturity on the part of both the students and the Vice Chancellor, but also gave the lie to the narrative which resulted in the stand-off in the first place. Under the university's next Vice Chancellor, Chimere Ikoku, a less sophisticated and quite mediocre administrator, the restraint which prevented bloody confrontation during the 1984 students suspension stand-off did not survive. The results were catastrophic for both Mr. Ikoku personally, and the university and students alike.

My recollection is that it was only days after the suspension and quick recall of the students at UNN when the military regime

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moved to try and circumvent the NANS national action by shutting down the universities. Nevertheless, the national action was adjudged successful under the circumstances. Although the association's demands were not fully met, there were significant victories. The national struggle, under Arogundade's brilliant leadership, also radicalised and prepared an entire new generation of student activists and young leaders who would eventually go on to champion not only further student struggles, but most importantly, the long and ultimately victorious struggle to unseat the military from power and return Nigeria to democratic rule. Although the later would take all of another 15 years to accomplish, it would not be possible without the active leadership of the student leaders and cadres who organised and led the historic 1983/84 NANS protest against the Buhari military dictatorship and its proposal to terminate education subsidies in Nigeria's public institutions of higher learning.

Prof. Olu Oguike

(Secretary-General, UNN Students' Union, 1983/84)

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PREFACE

This memoir is an awesome chronicle of significant events in the history of the Nigerian student movement by a man who was in the eye of the storm at the time.

It could not have come out at a better time. The ruling class , unable to cope with the yearnings of the youth for a functional educational system, is preparing a massive attack on the rights of students through a policy of commercialisation of education and ultimately, selling off the federal universities to their rich friends, just like they did with NEPA , NITEL, etc, to make money.

Unfortunately, in the face of this coming onslaught, the student movement is in a crisis, a crisis of identity, leadership and organisation .

What is the way forward? In times like these, we need to look back, as the author said, in order to leap forward. In looking back , Lanre Arogundade's racy and juicy narrative includes a wide gamut of experiences and engagements between Nigerian students and the Nigerian State on its education policy, revealing its incompetence and intolerance of opposing views and divergent opinion. In that sense , this memoir is an handbook for that purpose.

I highly recommend it for student activists, unions, human rights activists, NGOs, university management bodies and government itself.

But beyond that, you will see the enormous sacrifices of a generation of activists who rose to the challenge of building

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independent students' unions in order to resist the wave of attacks on the right to education by a declining ruling class groping in the dark under the influence of IMF and other forces of neoliberalism .

As he leafs through these pages, it will become clear to the reader what is to be done and how to go about the challenging task of rebuilding independent student unionism.

Muyiwa Osunkoya-Adebanjo, BL LLB.

CHAPTER 1

THE MORNING ILLUMINATES THE DAY

It was time for thanksgiving at the burial service of the famous man known to all town folks by name and fame.

“Oya gbogbo eyin omo Abagbedi, e maa bo” (all you children of Abagbedi, step forward): that was the commanding voice of our charming headmaster at St Paul's primary school, Osi-Ekiti, Mr. Gabriel Aina Ojo. We joyously thronged the altar at the St Paul's Anglican Church. Yes, Chief Samuel Ayeni, the high chief Egbedi of Osi-Ekiti, for whom the service was being held was our 'father'; he delivered our mothers of their pregnancies inside his hut in the Iwaro quarters of the town.

I was one of the three siblings of Thomas Akinyemi, called Akin Onikoko on the account of his prowess in cocoa trading, and Layoonu Hannah Arogundade born in that popular traditional maternity. My immediate younger sisters, Lamide and Adesola, were the two others; born on Sunday, three years apart, they were celebrated as Bose agba (elder) and Bose kekere (younger). Eldest

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child Titilayo and elder brother Ayodele were both delivered inside the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Awo-Ekiti, established by my paternal grandfather, Ogunlana Arogundade, with the support of his wife, paternal grandmother Omolaju. They respectively hailed from the Arogundade/Oginni/Osungbohun family of Ijebu-Jesa and Ilesha, and the Adegbua family of Ijebu-Jesa also comprising the Fadares and the Owofolajus. It was our fathers' younger brother, Oluwabusuyi, who kept the CAC flag of Ogunlana flying. He became a Pastor, established the Christ Apostolic Church Students Association (CACSA) and rose to the position of National Publicity Secretary of the church. He had dramatically changed his surname to Arijesudade through a newspaper advertisement in the Daily Sketch after he became a born-again Christian at the University of Ibadan. Having crossed to the Anglican Church, Akin Onikoko served as church lay-reader for close to fifty years.

Our last two siblings – Deji and Sade - were privileged to be delivered at the maternity centre in Ijebu-Jesa and the famous 'Ile Abiye' hospital in Ado-Ekiti, respectively. For we the Abagbedi 'children', there was no immediate immunisation, but we survived on local herbs, a variety of fruits and an array of fibres, carbohydrates and vegetables. We also developed physically and mentally through moonlight tales and plays, street football, street wrestling, street races, meandering runs from pursuing masquerades (we call them Agbo Yeeye) and all the daring adventures in the streams and the bush. By the time immunisation came, the giant machine was scary. Some of us were wrestled down and held by elders to be injected in the upper part of the arm. Some nursed the resulting sore for months.

Yet, at some stage I was sickly. So sickly that following consultations, it was said that it was an egbe to which I am supposed to belong but

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whose members had not fully embraced me, that was responsible for the incessant illness. Appeasements of all sorts had to be made and, at a stage, a special black 'aso etu' was sown for me so I could appear in the same attire and be forgiven by fellow egbe members, mostly elderly females in the same age bracket with my mother. But which of the egbes was it exactly? After a bout of sickness, CAC Prophet Olojede convinced my parents to let me live with him for few days so he could force the confession out of me and exorcise the egbe spirit from my body. The magic he performed before we departed our No. 28, Isao street residence was even more sickening. He asked my parents to wash my left leg inside a bowl and forced me to drink the dirty water. I vomited the more. At his building he tortured me in the middle of the night with the blazing fire of the oguso. I maintained that I didn't know of any egbe despite the trauma.

Surviving meant I attended primary school from 1967 to 1972. We were taught in Yoruba language in the first two years and only got introduced to the English text in the third. We had good teachers who, outside the classroom had their specialisation. Mr. Oludare Isaac Familuji oversaw football and Messrs. Durodola, Oluremi Abioye and Adeyemi Ranking in charge of drama. All were disciplinarians and we knew we had to avoid the heavy canes of Abioye and Ranking. The later, nicknamed Boogie-ranking, was the only one who regularly threatened to deal with our parents, should we report him to them. "Too baa lo ile lo fejo mi sun, to gbe iya e wa, maa naa; ti o ba tun lo gbe baba e wa, maa naa, omo Osi ni gbogbo wa, aa rororo, a tun pari e" (if you go home to report me and you then bring your mother to confront me, I will flog her and if you bring your father, I will flog him too. We are all from Osi, we would argue for long but ultimately settle), he would boast to our disapproving murmurs. Flog our parents?

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Before Jide Hotel came into being, the classrooms of St Paul's primary school served as the hall or arena where we watched performances by some of the leading travelling theatre groups of the era. From Duro Ladipo to Akin Ogungbe; from Jimoh Aliu to Oyin Adejobi; from Ayox Arisekola to Fabusola; from Omilani to Olosunta, and to Funmilayo Ranco, they came in turns. I loved them all. I mimicked some of them as a member of the school band, as I developed early interest in entertainment and drama. The dramatic exploits of their generation were also brought to our door steps through the Yoruba language 'Atoka' tabloid, which serialised their plays.

I fought to be included in the end of year drama performances and rained abuses on the headmaster whenever excluded. In the cultural ones, we sang in praise of the founder of Osi-Ekiti – Ogunmegbokanle – and took dramatic excursions into the history of a town that was once highly populated, and therefore originally known as Osi-Emimu. That was before it lost its glory to a war that allegedly reduced it to just six persons and one dog. In the ones where we were required to pick and sing about our future profession, I picked Akowe (writer or secretary). Why not? In those days, we helped parents who didn't have western education to write letters for despatch through the post-office. Once selected, I would insist that the entire household, particularly Moomi as we affectionately called Layoonu, should attend. My proudest moment was when they watched me sing:

“Eyin egbe mi
(My dear peers)
Akowe lemi o se, Akowe
(I will be a writer, a writer)
Ki n nkowe, ki n gbowo
(To write and earn money)

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Ki n ngbowo, ki n kole
(To earn money and build house)
Ki n kole, ki n gbeyawo
(To build house and marry)
Ki n gbeyawo, ki n bimo
(To marry and have children)
Akowe le mi o see"
(I will be a writer)

The all-round development prepared us for life in secondary school. In my own case, I headed to Ekiti Parapo College, Ido Ekiti, six kilometers away, at the age of ten and five months. As it was common then, I took the entrance examination at least three other secondary schools and was admitted in all. My preference was African Church Grammar School, Ilesa where my elder brother Ayodele was already schooling, but Akin Onikoko, thought we were too troublesome to co-habit in the same school. "Hin maa foju siwe riin, boolu ni a ma gba" (You won't concentrate on your studies but play football) he had decreed, and you dared not oppose. Koboko (horsewhip) that he seemed to permanently hide under his garment would be the answer and it would leave tell-tale marks. The koboko was the weapon of Akin Onikoko instruction to read your books and pass your examinations; not to go swimming in Omi-Isun stream when you were supposed to be in school; not to play when food was being prepared, and to forfeit your ration if you didn't partake in the preparation. It was his weapon to stop you from sneaking out with his Raleigh bicycle for rides with other kids. It was his weapon to ensure compulsory attendance at the morning prayer at 5am and the evening one at 9pm at home, and the morning and evening services in the church. My siblings and childhood friends like Olasoji Tehingbola and Sunday Fakuade can attest to the power of Akin Onikoko's koboko.

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The koboko never appeared though, each time I jumped the fence separating our house and the mosque to partake in the prayers; or when I was hailed as Aafa Lanre during street-to-street Islamic evangelism despite being a regular member of the choir at St Paul's Anglican Church. Praying the Muslim way was a habit I picked during stays with Alhaja Ajirin Amoke Sagimojo (nee Abu), who assumed the role of our grandmother after the death of her younger sister, Wuraola Ayoade, whose second child and daughter is our mother. The other children of Wuraola for our maternal grand-father, Chief Sekoni Ayoade, the late Saba of Ijebu-Jesa are Bibiire Ogunkola, Modupe Olumorin, Lalekan Ayoade and Dotun Ayoade. Akin Onikoko held Alhaja Ajirin in reverence, but he was also sufficiently liberal to overlook my romance with the Islamic faith. It also explained why he did not object, when my younger sister, Lamide, who grew up under Alhaja Ajirin's care in Ijebu-Jesa, became a full-fledged Muslim, and married a Muslim.

Akin Onikoko didn't joke with education, being disappointed himself that his father withdrew him from school despite his brilliance. Among his classmates in early school at Ijebu-Jesa were G.O. Onibonoje of the famous Onibonoje Publishers and late Oba Taiwo Aribisala, Ajigiteri II of Ijebu-Jesa. He invested in our education and that of his siblings and cousins. He was always among the first set of parents to pay school fees. Even when he ran into debt, he borrowed to cover up. Our mother shared his dream and together, they provided the wherewithal for us to excel academically.

Invariably, it was Professor Sola Ogboja, a product of EKPACO who influenced my choice. He said it was the best school anyone could attend. He was right. From 1973 to 1978, I attended my first 'University' whose 'Vice-Chancellors' during the period were

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Principals Olu Yoloye, Paul Oyeyemi (Omo Oyee) and Chief Adeleye Fasuba, the high Chief Oisa of Ado-Ekiti. Chief Fasuba's preferred mode of teaching Economics was gathering us under the tree by his house in the evenings. The atmosphere was serene, we assimilated faster, and each page of his preferred O. Teriba's Economics text book was locked somewhere in our brain. When I unlocked mine, I scored A3 in the subject in the West African School certificate examination.

I remember that on my arrival, we were assembled and asked to stay anywhere we liked pending being informed of our houses. In my first abode at Kiriji house before being moved to ENA house permanently, I got acquainted with new friends including Yinka Adeloye from Ilesa and Ayo Egunjobi from Ibadan. Both were however Ekiti indigenes. In those days, parents who lived or worked in cities like Lagos, Ibadan, Benin, and so on, would bring their children down to rural areas for high education confident that they would be imparted with quality knowledge in a disciplined environment, away from the social indulgence of the city. When I repeated the first year, my adjustment mechanism included having a new circle of friends that comprised Toyin Ajayi, Taye Akerele, Adebo Okpeta and Ayodele Adeleye (McCarthy), who later became the senior prefect of our set, while Juliana Agboola was the Senior Girl.

At EKPACO, we had good classrooms, and of course great teachers. Sometimes, two to three teachers would combine to take a single subject. In form two, about three teachers including the vice principal, taught us literature; in forms three and four, about three teachers, including a white man, handled Geography. Their efforts were complemented by student teachers from the Adeyemi College of Education, which, years later, I got to know was affiliated

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to the University of Ife. Biology became one of my best subjects because of the way one of them explained the human body system, particularly blood circulation. We were made to catch rats alive and dissect them to improve our knowledge of the functioning of animal organs. It was possible because the Biology, Chemistry and Physics laboratories were well equipped. Science students didn't have to go to other schools to take the West African School Certificate examination due to lack of facilities as is common with some secondary schools today, despite charging higher fees, compared to what we paid.

Our sports arena was like a stadium, and it served the dual purpose of footballing and athletics. We partook in track and field events like the short, long-distance and relay races, hurdles, shot, long and high jump, javelin, discus, and volleyball. Hockey was no longer being played, but we used the sticks as weapons in post football match clashes with rival schools. Inter-house sports competitions were colourful carnivals to which invited relay teams added special flavour. Talented students had the perfect environment to showcase their skills. In Ekiti land and the western region, we had some of the best stars in football and athletics. In football, there was dribbler Aiyesimoju Patrick (system) and in athletics there were gangling long distance runner Oni Theophilus (Otio) and bow-legged relay anchor, Adeyanju Julius (Jawando). Lanky Aisegame Jimoh, stood out as an all-rounder. At his peak, he was the foremost striker in the football team, the best in 110-yard (as 100 meters was then called) race and the anchor of the school relay team.

A tragic and regrettable blot on an otherwise rich sporting history was the October 25, 1977 Road accident involving the school football team along Ilogbo-Ijero-Ekiti road. It led to the loss four students including my classmates, Kole Faleye, a mid-field creative

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player and Samuel Adetayo, a sprinter, who was Assistant Sports Captain and fellow house-mate in ENA House. Two of the students died on the spot and the fatalities could have been more but for the great job by the medical team at the General Hospital, Ido-Ekiti, who had the equipment to perform immediate surgeries and had enough drugs to administer free of charge. There were also functional ambulances to convey those who hanged between life and death to other General Hospitals including at Ado-Ekiti. The blares of their siren as they made repeated trips drew the attention of villages and towns on their routes to the fact that something was amiss. Parents and guardians trooped to the school compound and the hospital in droves upon learning about the accident. My mother instantly abandoned her cooking, when a worried Dupe, elder sister of my friend, Ebenezer Olorunfemi, rushed into our house with the news. "Lanre Osi, Lanre Osi" was the way she screamed as she desperately tried to locate me among the crying students. She became more worried when told I had gone to the hospital. When she finally located me, she grabbed my wrist and we both cried. Laid near we stood was the body of the student we called, 'Omo Eleran', who also died in the road accident. Some students thought I was involved in the accident because they saw me by the school van shortly before departure for the ill-fated trip. Since my first year, I had been a fee paying fan of the football team and regularly attended matches as a cheer leader. As a result, I wanted to travel with the team that day, but Adetayo discouraged me because the van was full. Since we were also preparing for the debut performance of a new play in which I was the lead character that night, I heeded his advice and chose to take a nap instead. By the time Debo Okpeta came to wake me up, I was the only one in the entire block. The news of the accident had forced very other student to rush towards the accident scene, the school gate and the hospital.

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The College library was well-stocked with a variety of books, and we were encouraged to spend quality time there for studies. The newspapers however got the better of my attention. Daily Times stood out with its beautiful sports pages. The reigning football clubs included Rangers International of Enugu and seeing them in their all-white jerseys instantly made me a fan.

Between form four and form five, I became the social prefect, a position which automatically entrusted me with responsibility for the school's social, literary and cultural activities including drama, for which my primary school exploits had prepared me. Under the tutelage of Mr. Bayo Adeniran, an old student and English teacher, we staged a few plays including *Kiriji*, an epic on the Yoruba internecine civil war of the 19th century. As a member of the cast, I played the role of Alore, the Ibadan spy. Vice-Principal Chief Adebayo Fatoye tutored us to perform 'The Open Secret' while Youth Corps Service member, Mr. Erinle, also an old student, scripted and directed the performance of 'Son of the Slave Parents', in which I played the lead role of King Jomi, the Sasa of Esa land. Unlike *Kiriji*, we couldn't perform "Son of the slave Parents' in other schools because it was the same day, we were to have the inaugural performance at Doherty Memorial Grammar School in Ijero-Ekiti that the football team was involved in the road accident. With all the above, the college was renowned for drama. Foremost dramatist, Duro Ladipo, donated a wooden carving called Ori Erinla, as prize for the inter-house drama competition. It was a regular feature to watch on stage in the dining hall, the likes of Duro Ladipo, Akin Ogungbe, Oyin Adejobi and Ray Eyiunmi. Ray Eyiunmi was of particular interest because he exuded pride and intellectual prowess. "I am not a comedian but an artiste", he would boast to our applause, whatever he meant. He specialised in staging historical plays about the tragedies that befell some of the

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Alaafins in the old Oyo empire. When Lere Paimo left his famous role as Eda in Duro Ladipo's group to form his own theatre group, it was at EKPACO that the then fresh graduate of the Ladipo school of drama staged his first play – 'Irin Ajo Eda'.

We also organised literary activities, including debates. I was one of the three students who represented the college in an inter-school debate at the newly established Ondo State Broadcasting Corporation and was named the best single debater in the individual category. All these were foundational in the development of our communications skills.

The choice of text books, especially in the literature classes, some of which I was privileged to read during lessons, expanded our horizons of knowledge. *Tell Freedom*, by Peter Abrahams and *Zambia Shall Be Free*, by Kenneth Kaunda, opened our eyes for the first time to racial injustice and the struggle of the blacks in Southern Africa for liberation.

Tell Freedom was the captivating story of Peter Abraham himself, growing up in apartheid South Africa. Written in simple and flowing prose, it was intriguing to read about how blacks had to carry passes before they could move from one location to another. It was hard to imagine a society where people were not free, how they were victimised and how those who were born under white masters were treated as slaves. It provoked both resentment and empathy in us. I felt living in such manner was not supposed to be. In a sense, I would say that Peter Abraham's *Tell Freedom* was the first book that gave me some radical inclination and feeling that something was wrong with such a society.

Zambia Shall Be Free chronicled the anti-colonial struggle in

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Zambia and the personal sacrifices of the author to get his people liberated. To mobilise against white colonialists, he rode on bicycle from town to town and was once confronted with the sight of a lion which leapt onto his path. Rooted to a spot, he courageously beat the bicycle's metal with an object for some noise. The giant cat watched him for a while and suddenly sprang into the opposite side of the bush.

It was not all about radical literature as our history books were equally rich.

Having read Yoruba classics such as Igbo Olodumare, Ireke Onibudo, Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale, and so on, thanks to the encouragement of my paternal aunt, Aduke Arogundade, it was easy to fit into literature classes. We were enthralled reading about the old empires – Benin, Oyo, Dahomey, Ghana, Mali, Songhai and others. I won the best prize in History in the promotion examination from form four to the final year. The knowledge was therefore broad, and it enlightened the otherwise gloomy atmosphere to which the brutality of some seniors subjected us. Thankfully, it provoked a disdain for the inhuman treatment of fellow human beings. I actually repeated form one, not just because I was initially playful but because I was made to serve a bully of a senior who beat the hell out of me, consumed my provisions, took my pocket-money and made my first six months in the college a complete misery. He was not the one to emulate, so I told myself in those formative years that when eventually I became a senior, I would treat the junior ones differently. As for the bully, the failure he recorded in his higher school certificate examination served as poetic justice.

By the time I became the social prefect in the 1977/78 session, something happened that perhaps marked my introduction to activism. School teachers were then up in arms against the Ondo

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State military Governor Naval Officer Ita David Ikpeme and suddenly we had some shadow-like visitors who invited us to a meeting at Aramoko Commercial College in Aramoko Ekiti. Even though a prefect, I stood on the fringes as the discussions took place. In the end we were told that students were going to stage protests, and we would be required to join.

On the day of the protest in February 1978, which we only understood as being against the government, we asked all the students to come out and we proceeded to Ido town looking for some government property to damage to show that we were also part of the action. We went to the post office, broke some louvers and demonstrated round the town. All schools were subsequently shut down and when they were reopened, we were asked to pay a special levy as punishment. It was compulsory to produce the receipt before readmission. Two months later in April, the 'Alli-must-go protest', a nationwide students' revolt which shook the whole country broke out. Our earlier protest was perhaps one of the unsung mini dress rehearsals.

Ijebu-Jesa Grammar School (IJGS), where I repeated my school certificate examination while simultaneously working as a Laboratory attendant, was also an early 'university' of high standards. Magisterial principal, Samuel Adewole, would not settle for less, be it in academics, sports or other extra curricula activities. Another early 'university' was the Federal School of Arts and Science, Ondo (FSASON) where I studied for higher school certificate examination in 1979. I really loved FSASON and was taking my 'A' levels examination when I got admitted to the University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile Ife, in Osun State to study Psychology. I did not wait to finish my HSC examination because an uncle, Archdeacon Kehinde Olowokure of

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the All-Saints Archdeaconry in Ogbonkowo in the town and who later became the Bishop of Ikare-Akoko Diocese, ordered me to proceed to the university. I had wanted to complete the A-level examination because I was admitted for Psychology, my second choice, having missed the 253 cut-off point of Economics, the first choice, with a score of 249 in the JAMB examination. The existence of those Colleges of Arts and Science helped to prepare our generation for life in the university. They were good buffers, and you wonder why they were abolished.

I recall that between my last days in secondary school and admission to FSASON, I had spent one of my long vacations with my maternal uncle, Mr. Dotun Ayoade, a geologist at Ilorin. Happy that I was admiring the array of carefully arranged books on his shelf one day, he said it meant I liked reading. He then gave me a James Hadley Chase novel titled 'Not Safe To Be Free'. It was so captivating and from that moment, I became a James Hadley Chase addict. At FSASON therefore, we had a small circle of James Hadley Chase readers made up of Supo Atobatele, Hadji Adebayo Buggable, and one Laolu. At two naira or so per copy, they were affordable, so we would go to the bookshop, buy two or three, read simultaneously, discuss the stories and name our favourite stars – the likes of Garland and Malik – who respectively were supposed to be American and Soviet agents. We wondered then why Garland was always presented as a suave and intelligent spy, while Malik was always represented as raw and brutish. Even fictional literature was not neutral in the cold war era.

It was at FSASON that I had my first but unsuccessful shot at elective office when I contested for the position of the secretary of the Press Club and lost to one Jide popularly called Jenduu. Each contestant addressed the members and it provided valuable experience on

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mounting the rostrum and facing a crowd. Our own media group was called the Kenpicolo organisation, made up of myself, Kenlast (Kehinde Rosanwo), and another friend called Picolo who is now a lawyer. The group was named after the other two. That was my second experience at being a student journalist, the first being at the secondary school where I was named Social Editor of EKPACO Voice at the instance of the Vice Principal, Mr. Fatoye. We wrote articles under pseudonyms that were pasted on the notice boards.

By the time I enrolled at FSASON in 1979, the ban on politics had been lifted and the person that registered an impact on my young mind then was Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Sunday Tribune, our preferred newspaper, provided enriching information on the Awo persona, thanks to columns like 'Aba Saheed' and 'Till Death Do Us Part' by Tola Adeniyi; 'The Fun, The Fair and The Fury' by Banji Ogundele and Ink in my blood by Bimbola Awofeso. Justice Adewale Thompson was another great columnist; so also was Tai Solarin of the Mayflower College, Ikenne fame. Reading his book 'Message to Young Nigerians' led to my self-declaration as a Taist.

The summary was that my elder brother Ayodele, and I approached the leading mobilisers for the UPN in Ijesa-land – Chief Titilayo Ajanaku and Mr. Olwadamilare Awe – for registration as members of the youth wing. We asked how much we should pay as party members buoyed by our relative economic well-being. As laboratory attendants at Ijebu-Jesa Grammar school we earned N96N per month, an amount so sufficient that we used to buy cartons of drinks for our mother's beer parlour, fed, clothed and still have some change left. Since Awolowo professed democratic socialism, we had to be socialists too. In 1979, we energetically campaigned and voted for the UPN, much to the opposition and chagrin of Akin Onikoko, who was a supporter of the National Party

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of Nigeria (NPN). It was exciting to see Awo in person at Ijebu-Jesa during his presidential campaign as he customarily touched every town, village and hamlet. But it was in Osi-Ekiti where I registered that I voted in the five elections of the year.

Along with cousin Fayemi Johnson, we had by then also come across Fela, whose numbers including Sorrow Tears and Blood, Zombie, etc, to which we had ready access in Uncle Ajayi Arogundade's electronic repair and record store, which raised our consciousness about injustice. It was a phenomenal development that I captured as follows in my book: 'Fela – Yesterday's Message As Today's Reality': "While listening to those numbers, we would as young adults also energetically gyrate to the danceable beats. Neighbours started thinking that we had really gotten possessed when we started doing so in underwear having seen Fela in pants on the back cover of his albums and in newspapers. Staying then in the boys' quarters of another uncle, late Salau Ojelabi, within his Country Hotel premises, we became some spectacle. A Ghanaian teacher who lived upstairs would always drag his wife inside anytime our noisy 'live' performance (in underpants only) of the Ijebu-Jesa version of the Kalakuta show attracted her to the balcony".

In retrospect, the early schools we attended, the books we read and the fledgling activism in which we engaged, prepared our generation for the kind of activities that marked our later years in higher institutions. The addition for me and my brother were the political adventures with Awo and the lyrics of Fela. They marked the beginning of the journey to the world of radical and revolutionary activism for the socio-economic transformation of Nigeria.

CHAPTER 2

FROM SIDELINES TO SEC-GEN

For many people in my generation, the overarching circumstances that shaped our journey were the tumultuous global events of those days which shook the world: the liberation struggles in Southern Africa, the Vietnam war, and various uprisings across the planet. It was a season when the entire world experienced shifts like quicksand.

Here in Nigeria, the objective circumstances that informed our initial activism was the ideological character of the second Republic. Chief Obafemi Awolowo espoused a kind of socialist ideology that is woven around the welfare and social economic issues of free education, free health care, free housing and rural integration. There were welfarists like Chief Gabriel Akinyede who called his political party 'The Welfare Party of Nigeria' and whose memorable campaign slogan was that he would not earn a salary if elected president. His party was however not registered to contest the 1979 elections by the Olusegun Obasanjo and Sheu Yar' Adua military regime. The Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) was pro-poor while the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) and the Nigeria

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Peoples Party (NPP) could be said to be centre right parties. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) did not disguise its conservatism. Thus, when the UPN said it would pursue free education, NPN said its own would not be free but qualitative, which tended towards elitism. At least ideas contended.

I hated the loss of Awo in the rigged elections of 1979 and argued over it here and there. But, when my elder brother who had led me to join the UPN came around on holiday one day, he was no longer excited about the party. He said he had come across a new movement that was working for the real socialist revolution. He had already become a member of the Black Nationalist Movement (BNM) and was familiar with the Marxist Youth Socialist Movement. Following our discussions, I pledged to join a similar movement whenever I got admitted to the University. It took a little while to happen, but it did in 1980.

The day I arrived on the University of Ife campus, the students were being mobilised to a protest in Lagos by the out-going Wole Olaoye led radical executive with Femi Falana (now a Senior Advocate of Nigeria) as the PRO and Greg Obong Oshotse as the Secretary General. Although freshers were welcome, I did not join because I was just finding my bearing; yet it was some kind of introduction. Thereafter came the students' union elections in which we were not eligible to vote or be voted for since it was believed that freshers needed at least one year to get acquainted with campus politics. We were free however to participate in the campaigns as cheer leaders, singers and distributors of leaflets. The singing, drumming and dancing was impressive and before long, I found myself in the crowd of Femi Kuku, a presidential candidate.

But then another candidate was pulling a crowd. It was Wale Olajire,

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(now Wale Ajao) whose opponents accused of being a socialist because he was a leading member of the Alliance of Progressive Students (ALPS). They felt he should not be voted for, since according to them students unions should not be for the revolution. Kuku also had it rough at some stage, with some saying that, although he was the Welfare Officer in the Olaoye executive, he did not have the radical pedigrees of prominent members of that exco. The brilliance of Wale impressed me though; his responses to questions at the 'Press Night' organised by the Association of Campus Journalists (ACJ) were sharper than Kuku's. Wale seemed to be having it so good until the 'Speech Night' the following day, when his opponents tried to boo him off balance by alleging that he appeared proud. Another candidate who was labelled a socialist was Owei Lakemfa who ran for the position of PRO. His brilliance too could not be doubted, so all his opponents did was to break the rhythm of his presentation. Thus, when in the 5-minute speech, he said: "Great Ife, don't you want to listen to me? You will listen to me", there were concocted shouts. It was Femi Kuku that won the presidential election.

Unlike the press night which might be attended by hundreds of students, the speech night, which could attract thousands was always a delicate turning point. There you would see the erratic nature of students as politicians and voters whose moods could sometimes swing faster than the pendulum. The extremes to which the students occasionally travelled could be intriguing and shattering for some candidates.

Take the case of Ayodele Orji who ran for the position of Assistant Secretary in the 1981/82 session. He appeared dead drunk on the press night and answered questions incoherently. Indeed, he would stagger to the stage, seemingly misunderstand the question and

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spilled gibberish. For each of his appearances to answer questions, there would be shouts of "Ogogoro Orji, Ogogoro Orji", 'ogogoro' being the name of a local gin reputed to be deadly intoxicating, while his opponent, one Osiyemi, was loudly hailed with the song: "You don win, you don win, you don win". To Osiyemi and his supporters, victory was already secured at the press night; the speech night would be a simple walkover.

The turnout for the speech night that year was larger than usual because most students were there to see another display by the "Ogogoro Orji". He was called before his opponent and shouts of "Ogogoro Orji", rent the air once more. But it was a different Orji that stepped on the stage. He was not staggering; he appeared neat in a two-piece suit, and he was holding a wooden box. His opening remarks brought dead silence: "Great Ife, first and foremost, I want to apologise for what I did yesterday at the press night. It is true I was drunk, and I am very sorry. I will be serious and to show you my seriousness, I have constructed this suggestion box, which if I win, I will place in the students' union office for you to drop your complaints". In that moment of magic, the villain became the hero. There was a spontaneous outburst of the chorus: "you don win, you don win, you don win". Osiyemi who had so impressed at the press night the previous day was barely heard as he was booed. Orji not only won, but he also did with the highest votes cast for any office in that year's election.

After the campaigns of the 1980/81 session during which I heard about ALPS through Wale Olajire's exciting presidential campaign, I went in search of the organisation. My first contact was Owei Lakemfa, who nodded in approval and asked: "Which socialist books have you read?". I told him I have read Awolowo's books. I was stunned when he said those were not real socialist books.

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Where then can I find the real ones? Owei said I should not worry because they would be available when I join the organisation. I joined in that first year, but the theoretical discussions were a bit tasking, especially when the likes of Femi Fatonade (Boxer) talked about the urban and rural bourgeoisies. So, I drifted on and off. I read socialist literature and only occasionally attended meetings. I read socialist literatures like 'The Communist Manifesto' by Karl Marx and got convinced me that capitalism was exploitative and needed to be replaced by socialism.

Even if I wasn't attending meetings regularly, I encountered the socialists at symposiums and lectures where they argued for radical student unionism and tackled guest speakers particularly if they were politicians or those tagged bourgeois elements. The students' union, radical and leftist groups, staff unions, faculty and departmental associations, campus magazines, social and cultural clubs, all used to organise those lectures and they spiced up the dynamic atmosphere by taking on local, national and international issues. Except for examination periods, hardly would a week pass without one form of lecture or the other. Through them, second republic Governors Abubakar Rimi of Kano State, Lateef Jakande of Lagos State and Jim Nwobodo of Enugu State delivered speeches on the campus. Of the lot, it was Rimi who best understood how to play to the gallery. He unleashed polemical venom on the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN). When he got to that point in his speech when he said: "...The NPN leadership in most cases is superbly reactionary, ethnically chauvinistic, decidedly feudalistic.....", a roaring applause shook Oduduwa hall. For effect, he paused and repeated the sentence twice. There was tension however when at the end of the speech, members of the Palm wine drinkers club attempted to initiate Rimi as a fellow, as was the tradition. Host Governor Bola Ige would have none of that saying

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the one-finger salute of the club was like the NPN's one-finger display whenever their supporters shouted 'NPN...One Nation'. The students were angrier when Bola Ige said: "In Yoruba culture, only a bastard will use one finger to point at his father's house".

Others that came for lectures included Fela Anikulapo Kuti, who additionally staged live shows, renowned educationist Tai Solarin, and Prof. Ayodele Awojobi who launched a one-man campaign against corruption by the Shehu Shagari government. I remember that after his lecture, hundreds of students followed him round the campus singing anti-corruption songs he had specially composed. One of the assignments I undertook much later in my student unionism career as President of National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), was to pay his wife a condolence visit at the University of Lagos campus following his sudden death on September 22, 1984 at the age of 47.

We enjoyed watching films in Oduduwa hall, just as we enjoyed participating in the lectures. The films were affordable and in the first two years of my studentship, the epic ones I watched included, 'Enter the Ninja', 'Ben Hur', 'Spartacus', 'The Exorcist', 'I don't want to be born', 'The Car', and so on. Ife campus was also an ultimate destination for Nigerian and international musicians. Thus, apart from Fela, foreign musical groups like 'Sky Band', 'Shalamar' and 'Third World' entertained us with electrifying performances at the amphi-theatre. We enjoyed the room birthday parties and other ones at the staff quarters and far off in the town. Myself and my good friend, Tope Ibitoye, who studied Urban and Regional Planning, were professional gate crashers at some of the parties. We knew how to blend unnoticed.

We enjoyed the academic lectures too as the lecturers generally demonstrated total commitment. The likes of Dr. Fabayo (Mich-

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Fabro), Dr. Dipo Fashina (Jingo), Dr. Funmi Togonu-Bickersteth, Dr. Oladimeji Alo and Prof. Akin Olowu were among the exciting ones who taught some of my courses.

It was not all lectures and fun as in our first year we got caught in the web of police brutality. It was an experience that took me nearer active participation in student unionism. Word had gone round that a student, Bukola Arogundade, had been beheaded in Ile-Ife town leaving most in shock and fear. Following calls for justice, the students' union under President Femi Kuku called a Congress, which resolved that there should be a protest by way of funeral procession to the town. For we the young ones in Awo Hall room 78, it was all elation that we were going to participate in our first protest. So excited were we that we rehearsed how we would run should the police pursue us by making 100-meter dashes in the open field in front of our block.

On June 7, 1981 we trooped out with other students. An adventurous me was among those in the frontline of the protest march because I wanted to see it all. Close to Mayfair Hotel, the police suddenly demanded a halt to the protest march, which the divisional police officer himself approved, and fired both tear gas and bullets. There was commotion. I was directly hit by the impact of the tear gas and ran blindly into the hotel and down one of the corridors, which unfortunately had no exit. Despite the fumes from the tear gas forming thick white smoke, I ran back to the road gasping for breath. About five armed policemen who were waiting ordered me to lie down with others who had been nabbed. As I did one of them violently hit the back of my shoulder with the stock of his gun. In that moment, we had some people saying that some students had been killed. Too many students were running helter-skelter and as the policemen tried to make more arrests, I

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summoned the courage to bolt with others. My cousin Dupe Olowokure couldn't believe I had joined the protest. "Don't you know you are a new student? Who asked you to join the demonstration?", she questioned me in alarm. For the next two weeks or so, I reported in her Moremi Hall room for hot water massage of my aching back. Happily, some of the sessions ended with good meal.

The atmosphere became that of deep mourning at, yet another congress held that night of June 7, where president Kuku announced that four students had been killed. They were Paul Alonge, Wemimo Akinbolu, Fatima Adebimpe and Bukola Dorcas Ojewole, our classmate. June 7, 1981 was indeed a black Sunday.

Outside the congress, the ALPS comrades met and resolved to help the students' union to fight for justice for the dead, a decision which also required contact and joint plan of action with pro-student lecturers particularly the left leaning ones. In this regard I accompanied other senior comrades to see Dr. Fashina. In my tribute on his 70th birthday in 2017, I recalled the encounter: "Jingo was about the first on the list and I found myself trudging behind 'senior comrades' to see him in his office. The humanity in him immediately registered. His immediate concern was about the safety of the students and when told that four had died, he first locked himself up to weep, and then later opened the door, red-eyed, for discussions on way forward". In that tribute I also said that the June 7, 1981 encounter, meant that Jingo was the first comrade I knew among the Ife collectives with others, including Prof. Toyé Olorode, Dr. Segun Osoba, Dr. Idowu Awopetu, and so on, coming into the picture thereafter.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU under the

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presidency of Dr. Biodun Jeyifo stepped in by constituting a two-man administrative panel of enquiry comprising Chief Gani Fawehinmi (head) and Mr. Labanji Bolaji, a social critic and famous columnist in the Daily Sketch (member). The mandate of the panel was to investigate the circumstances surrounding the police assault on the peaceful protesters and unravel the mystery behind the killing of the four students. I was witness number 78 at the panel which sat at the university's conference centre. The panel held that the police were guilty of the murder of the four students and recommended the prosecution of the concerned policemen.

I took the first step into student unionism in the 1981/82 session when I contested for a seat in the Students' Representative Council (SRC), which under the democratic structure of the students' union that time, was a powerful organ through which checks and balances, were exercised. The students' union administration was fashioned after the parliamentary system in the United Kingdom, where the secretaries (Ministers) are elected from their different constituencies and are members of the House of Commons. I have often advocated a return to the parliamentary system in Nigeria as it makes the leaders more accountable and is cheaper to run. Since it was a parliamentary system, the SRC consisted of the representatives of the faculties, the central and the hall executives. The SRC was presided over by the Speaker and in his/her absence, the Deputy-Speaker. All members were similarly robed in academic gowns, The only way you could distinguish the executive members from the rest was that they sat in front to the right of the speaker. It was the same one meat pie and a bottle of soft drink that each member was served at the end of the sittings. The arrangement also guaranteed accountability since the executives were required to present their budgets to the SRC. It was the SRC that also constituted the other important arms of the union including the

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Students Judicial Council and the Electoral Commission, which however operated independently.

I had witnessed a few sittings of the SRC and the submission of the likes of Mallam Dele Olapeju inspired my interest in becoming a member. That was one of the reasons I chose to vie for one of the seats allocated to the Faculty of Social Sciences, being a student in the Psychology department. In those days, the campaign was simple. You were required to move round the classrooms or meet the students wherever they converge to sell your candidacy. Because I had been used to speaking from my secondary school days, it was easy going round to canvass for votes. In the end I got elected.

By the time I became a parliamentarian, I had become a more committed member of ALPS, which operated on the principle that the students' union must be responsive and accountable. The SRC in which I served was very dynamic. It was headed by Remi Lawal a radical and left leaning Law student, who stood tall in stature and in fighting for students' rights. He was ably assisted by Tunde Babawale, now a professor and former Director General of the Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilisation (CBAAC). Eddy Olafeso, an English student was the president. A giant in his own right the exchange of polemics between him and Lawal often charged the atmosphere. There was a time the secretary of the union ran into troubled waters for alleged disobedience of the directive by the SRC, that the executives should boycott the 20th anniversary celebration of the establishment of the university. The decision arose out of the belief that the anniversary activities were wasteful at a time of collapsing facilities on the campus. The secretary attended one the events and was therefore tried by the SRC. I was one of the parliamentarians who spoke in favour of the

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motion for his impeachment, which was supported by majority of the members. Although I was often recognised to contribute to debates, that incident led to more recognition by Congress members who were always welcome at SRC sittings. Some of them were occasionally granted the privilege to address the house on topical issues especially those bothering on welfare like food, electricity, water, etc. It was therefore easy for a good parliamentarian to be noticed and singled out; if you were not good, you were equally spotted.

Being in the SRC was exciting and afforded me the opportunity to showcase my passion to foster measures that will be beneficial to the students. However, each time I made a good presentation at the SRC, there was usually someone who would come around, commend me but express concern that I was still not ideologically involved as I should. That person was Segun Sango (real name Segun Aderemi). He was also an ALPS member. Though I joined before him, he was more committed than myself. He usually would come and tell me "you have to be consistent; you have to come more regularly to ALPS meetings, you need to have more information, you have to read more, you have to develop yourself ideologically". By the time the session was rounding off, different student groups started looking for candidates that can win elections during the next academic session. I began to think that perhaps I should run for the position of PRO. Segun Sango however kept on encouraging me to be committed and sometimes, he would follow me to my room at Fajuyi hall where I was squatting with Tope Ibitoye and Gbolahan Gbadamosi, another friend and classmate in the Psychology department. This continued till the end of the session when we left for the 1982 long vacation. I took a vacation job at the NNPC clinic in Warri where my Uncle, Engr. Jibola Agbola, one of the first set of UNIFE Chemical

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Engineers was working at the Warri refinery.

Sango persisted when we resumed and said comrades like him believe I should run for the position of Secretary. I told him I wasn't too sure I could because during the long vacation, I had surgery for appendicitis and felt not fully physically fit. Sango nevertheless refused to give up and so one day, one of my friends, Gbadamosi and others said if only for the sake of Sango who so much believed in me, I should run, pledging to be part of my campaign team. When I launched the campaign for the office of Secretary General, I had a formidable campaign team comprising comrades, friends from secondary school and FSASON, radical elements in the SRC, and so on, backing me. Apart from comrades my spokespersons included cousin Muiyiwa Olowokure and Tope Ibitoye. In those days you needed a band to add flare to the campaign choruses:

"Lanre for Sec-Gen je ko wole
(Lanre is running for Sec-Gen, let him win)
Lanre for Sec-Gen jeko wole
(Lanre is running for Sec-Gen, let him win)
Lanre tee le o mo re ooo
(Here is the Lanre you said you did not know)
Tee lee oomo
(That you said you did not know)
Adumaradan tee lee oo mo ree oo
(Here is the ebony black you said you did not know)
Tee lee o mo"
(That you said you did not know)

My one-man band was talking drummer and theatre artist Fatai Adiyelaja, who is now a retired seasoned broadcaster. His dexterity drew the needed crowd and attention as we moved round the halls of residence – Fajuyi, Awolowo, Mozambique, Moremi, Angola,

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Post-graduate and Sports halls. Although we campaigned in the classrooms, the concentration was on the halls of residence because elections then were hall-based. The campaign had its ups and down and there were students who questioned my socialist credentials.

I needed a powerful team because my three other opponents for the office of Sec-Gen were very formidable. During the campaigns, some wondered why one of us did not run for the position of president. Ademola Adeyemo (of blessed memory) from the English department was a roaring speaker, Wole Iyamu from the Law faculty (now the Solicitor General and Permanent Secretary, Edo State Ministry of Justice) was a superb orator and Adebisi (Oloro) from the English department like Adeyemo, was a great grassroots mobiliser and active member of the Palmwine Drinkers club. He is now a retired educationist. I also belonged to the Palmwine Drinkers club; my other extra-curricular activity being membership of the 'Man 'O War club.

One of the benefits of membership of ALPS was exposure to national student politics and through that, I had knowledge of the NANS Charter of Demands. It became a selling point as most students were knowing about the document for the first time through me. I would speak about how it was a compendium of students' demands and that if elected, I would produce copies for each student to create awareness about NANS and for UNIFE to be effectively reintegrated into national student unionism. I pledged that the secretariat would be open to all students and that indeed minutes of meetings of the executive would be published for transparency and accountability. They were unique selling points beside drawing from my rich knowledge of international politics, which particularly counted at the press night.

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That year's press night was something else and by the time we were done, it was tough determining who had performed best among the four of us. The speech night therefore was going to be decisive. The tradition was for all the candidates to be kept inside the Oduduwa hall and invited to address the students in the 5000-seater Amphi-theatre, in the order of the offices they were vying for. The candidates had to pick a ballot to determine the order of speaking for their offices. Some did not like being the first and preferred to speak last, because if you spoke first, the others could come and rubbish your presentation or provide a superior argument which may not favour you.

I picked the ballot as the first speaker for the office of Sec-Gen. I decided there and then to utilise the allotted five minutes to the best of my ability and leave the other contestants with the difficult task of catching up. Dressed in a cream coloured three-piece suit my cousin Dupe Olowokure bought for me in London for just fifty Naira, I started with the customary Great Ife salute, but did so only once. If you greeted too much, the students could become impatient and feel you did not have much to offer. There was pin-drop silence as I detailed my campaign promises and ended my captivating speech with my famous campaign slogan: "Great Ife, the past is a story told, but the future can be written in Gold". I got a very good ovation. Adeyemo charged to the stage next and played the populist card. "I would mobilise all the mobilisables", he repeatedly chanted. Iyamu deployed his knowledge of Law and spoke fluently while Oloro made the last charismatic appearance. Spectacularly, after the speech, someone came to me and said: "Look you have done well. You have won. But I heard something. They said you a socialist. No, no, you cannot be. See, you in a fine suit, how can you be a socialist. Please don't join those socialists. I will vote for you!" That was the perception then because some of

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the early socialists used to dress in bohemian fashion. Also, the typical approach then was for those who wanted to run for the top posts of the Student Union to sport beards and wear berets, even if they were not radicals. My generation and I did not see any need for that.

What an election year it was! The person who became the president was Chris Fajemifo of the English department who at the initial stage was trailing his main opponent, Gorge Oguntuase in the popularity rating. He was heard of in whispers as nobody really knew him. But Oguntuase, backed by the likes of Tive Denedo was everywhere as he ran a flamboyant campaign. In that year, the office of the outgoing PRO, Sanya Awosan, organised a debate for the presidential candidates, perhaps for the first time in the history of elections on the campus. Supporters of Oguntuase came to the debate in fez caps and other materials while those of Fajemifo were barely noticeable.

When called to speak, Fajemifo admitted he was too poor to print posters since he came from a poor background. He said he wanted to be the president to fight fellow poor students. After that, he said he would like to quote John Locke. As he began saying: "John Locke said, and I quote, 'For men, freedom.....'", the students went haywire and burst into choruses of "you don win, you don win". Some who wore Gorge's fez cap turned it inside out and wrote Fajemifo's name. Some volunteered to contribute money for him to print posters. "John Locke said" echoed at the press night and speech night. In one the most dramatic turn arounds in UNIFE campus politics, 'Fajee', as he was better known, won the race.

The election of that year was unique. Funmi Olonisakin, who was initially labelled 'e dey happen girl' because of her sociability and

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fanciful dressing, won after her dazzling speech laced with quotes in French language. Urging the students to look beyond her small stature, she said it was not about size but the stuff. She won the hearts of the students and got elected as Vice-president. She is now a professor of leadership, peace and conflict at King's College, London.

At a time of gradual withdraw of subsidised feeding, beginning with the disappearance of ice-cream from the menu, all Sola Ebiseni, a candidate for the position of Welfare Officer needed to do at the press night was to ask: "Great Ife, what has happened to your ice cream? The pledge to bring ice-cream back gave him the votes.

In getting elected as the Sec-Gen, I was following the tradition of other founding members of ALPS who held similar position. For example the Sec-Gen in the 1978/79 session around the period of 'Alli-must-go" crisis was Akin Akingbulu, now a PhD holder and the Executive Director of Centre for Media and Society. Jika Attoh, seasoned broadcast journalist was the PRO in that exco while the President was Bamidele Adedeji. Gbolahan Gbadamosi, Sec-Gen in 1981/82, was an ALPS sympathiser. He was a journalist before joining the legal profession.

Generally our executive was rated highly as we substantially delivered on our campaign promises, particularly fighting for students' rights, a narrative that qualifies for another book. Also elected to that exco were the PRO, Mafo Ola John, (MOJ), who like Ebiseni was a Commissioner in Ondo State; Assistant Secretary Kembi Adejare (now a Lawyer), Assistant Welfare Officer Gerard Iyamabo and Sports Director, Jide Josiah, who served as a member of the Board of the Athletic Federation of Nigeria (AFN).

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Notable among the battles we fought was opposition to the scrapping of the subsidised cafeteria system, under which a meal ticket cost a mere 50kobo and therefore, a three-square meal, N1.50k. Most average students that time did not actually spend up to that as they had devised the 1-0-1, 1-1-0 or 0-1-1 formula that ensured feeding fee did not exceed N1 per day by skipping one of breakfast, lunch and dinner. Meals were even cheaper in the old Buka where you could have a full meal of pounded yam, goat or cow meat and a bottle of soft drink or calabash of original palm wine for less than 40k. Both the middle class and the poorer students patronised the old Buka just as they did the 'Iva Valley', for the alcoholic side of rendezvous. The richer students who patronised the higher class 'Forks n Fingers', were also not spending much despite all their grand-standing. With N2 they could have full meal and drinks for two.

Acting on behalf of majority of the students, we were incensed that while the cafeteria system was being slated for cancellation as part of the military regime's withdrawal of educational subsidy, the old Buka and the Iva Valley were equally marked for demolition to give way for the the 'new Buka'. We protested and addressed rallies over the double-assault. I was particularly active at the 'old Buka' front, where on more than one occasion I addressed the market men and women who eked out a living by selling food, foodstuff, provision, drinks, etc, and rendering tailoring, shoe mending, hairdo, barbing and other services that meant that they were also patronised by lecturers and other campus staff.

Invariably both the university authorities and the regime had their way and the 'old Buka' and 'Iva Valley' were demolished. The demolition of the 'Iva Valley', however had a political undertone even though the authorities alleged that it aided the convergence of

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dangerous students including alleged cultists. 'Iva Valley' was a symbol of resistance that the authorities were never comfortable with, more so as the shops were under the control of the students' union through the office of the Welfare Officer. The union collected monthly rent from the owners in addition to the initial lease of the plots. The proceeds helped to strengthen the union financially and hence contributed to independent unionism.

'Iva Valley' was symbolic of the commemoration, every November 17, of the 1949 massacre of colliery workers in Enugu, Eastern Nigeria, by the British Colonial Masters, who felt insulted by the effrontery of the workers to demand for better conditions of service and brutally repressed them. The exploration of coal in Enugu and its export to the United Kingdom for use by the railways, supply of energy at homes and power generation was one of the forms of commercial and economic exploitation of colonial Nigeria. The other was the transportation of agricultural products like ground nut from the North, cocoa from the West and palm oil from the East (now South East and South South) to Europe and other places as raw materials for the manufacturing of food products which the country then imported at unfavourable exchange rates. Political historians have explained that the main purpose of the initial railway lines from Kano to Lagos, for example, was precisely the ease of transportation of the commodities to coastal Nigeria and from the seaports to Europe and North America.

We issued press statements on key students and national issues, and while distributing some of them, we had audience with seasoned journalists like Duro Onabule, Editor of National Concord, who was later made Chief Press Secretary to General Ibrahim Babangida and Dele Giwa, Editor of Sunday Concord who moved on to establish the Newswatch magazine together with Dan Agbese,

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Yakubu Muhammed and Soji Akinrinade. Dele Giwa was killed via a parcel bomb on October 19, 1986 by agents believed to be working for the military regime of General Babangida.

There was a time we boycotted a dinner invitation by the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Wande Abimbola, because we were not satisfied with the studying and living conditions on the campus. In rejecting the invitation, we wrote a letter in which we threatened a protest because "we could see the red flag flying". The letter, drafted by me, was sufficiently provocative for the Vice Chancellor to hurriedly invite us to a meeting with the principal officers of the University. We met charming Prof. Sikiru Sanni, the Chairman of the Committee of Deans, in the lift on our way to the Vice Chancellor's office. As we stepped out, he lashed at us for using strong words to address the Vice Chancellor. Declaring that what we wrote was a stupid statement, he charged: "it is better to ask a stupid question than to make a stupid statement. If you ask a stupid question, you can be corrected, but when you make a stupid statement, it is unpardonable". His attack was indicative that the meeting would be tense, so we quickly put heads together on the strategy to adopt. Trust Fajee, the diplomat. He said he would apologise on behalf of the exco, but myself, MOJ and Ebiseni should maintain tough stance during the meeting. However, the Vice Chancellor himself softened the ground for our discourse. After saying that by rejecting his food, we had declared war against him, he jocularly added: "Emi o rii red flag Kankan oo, ifaa mi ni mo n bo" (I did not see any red flag, I am busy offering prayers to my Ifa). There were reasons why Prof. Abimbola was called 'Babalawo. The meeting ended well as the authorities agreed that our grievances were genuine.

Our exco did not forget the massacre of four students on June 7,

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1981. In their memory, we erected a figure-7 shaped statue in front of the students' union building. The sombre ceremony was attended by students' union leaders from other higher institutions, and that was how I first knew Tunji Bello, who was the Vice Chairman of UI Students' Union. We later became colleagues at the National Concord newspapers before he joined the state government where he served in different capacities including Secretary to the State Government and Commissioner for Environment.

In line with the tradition of attracting popular academics, activists and politicians to the campus for lectures, president Fajemifo, vice-president Olonisakin, PRO MOJ, welfare officer Ebiseni and myself travelled to Kaduna and Zaria to invite Balarabe Musa, the leftist Governor of Kaduna State who was impeached by the National Party of Nigeria dominated State House of Assembly. We also wanted to invite leftist Dr. Bala Usman of the Ahmadu Bello University. We left Ife campus late in the evening, and by the time we got to Kainji, then in Kwara State, we could not proceed. We drove to the NEPA headquarters, introduced ourselves and humbly requested that we should be accommodated for the night. Our request was granted as we were allowed to stay in a guest house. During the second leg of the journey the following day, the union bus was blown off the road by a powerful tornado between Kontagora and Kaduna. It took the effort of some local folks to lift it back to the road. Balarabe Musa was not at home when we arrived his residence, a bungalow to which we had easy access as there were no security personnel – state or private – in sight. We left a message for him and headed to Samaru campus of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU). Bala Usman only had few minutes for us. He said he was no longer interested in addressing students because they were petty bourgeois and would rather go to the farm to address

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peasants. Being a leading member of the PRP, he told us he had also warned Balarabe Musa to stop speaking on campuses. We were stunned. I decided to make a bold attempt to convince him. "The question is..", I started, but before I could complete the sentence, he jumped up and shouted: "The answer is, I'm not coming". We returned to Ife campus empty handed. As Fela sang in 'Power Show', we suffered for nothing.

We suffered more, and indeed ran into crisis on another occasion, when we had an accident with the Students' Union old Peugeot 504 car, at a time we had indicated in the budget that our exco would like to purchase a new one. We were to address a press conference in Lagos on the state of the Nation and I felt the draft ought to have been critical of both the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and the opposition Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) over some of the policies of some of its governors like Bola Ige of Oyo State that was stopping the payment of bursary. MOJ had a contrary view and we ended up with different drafts, which president Fajemifo then offered to harmonise. The plan was to get to Lagos a day before the press conference, but the disagreement caused a delay. We then decided to leave the campus and stop by at the Ibadan Polytechnic to complete and type the draft. We continued with the disagreement in the students' union office at Ibadan Poly, so we departed for Lagos late at about 9pm. I was on the wheels and few kilometers outside Ibadan, we suddenly sighted a corpse in the middle of the road. To avoid running over it, I lost control of the vehicle, which made a dramatic turn towards the opposite direction and crashed into the railings. We had minor injuries, but MOJ who was asleep, was unscathed.

We trekked for about two hours to the Ibadan toll gate, got a towing vehicle to remove the car and in the early morning headed for the

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Institute of Agricultural Research and Training, Moore Plantation, Ibadan, to elicit the support of the students' union in getting to Lagos. Now riding in the Union's Mitsubishi bus driven by the president, we succeeded in addressing the press conference at NUJ Lighthouse. On our way back, while trying to connect the Third Mainland bridge from Obalende, a car rammed into the bus and it somersaulted about three times leaving us to nurse injuries but luckily, there was no fatality. Kehinde Nubi, Secretary of the IART union and now a Lawyer remembers:

“Sunday Temilade Williams was the President, of the Students' Union, and he drove our Students' Union bus, Samuel Akinola Olotu, the PRO was there. A cousin of mine, Muyiwa Oludimu, who was a student at the University of Ibadan, wanted to travel with us. We picked him from our house at 81, Igbosere Road, Lagos Island, Lagos. The accident happened at the Obalende end of the Third Mainland Bridge. The Police twisted the case against us even though it was clear that the driver of the other vehicle (an Audi), one Ime Akpan, caused the accident. Sunday Williams was later charged before a Magistrate Court on the Island. We went to look for Femi Falana to defend him, but he wasn't around. It was the late Mr. Mabo that eventually stood for him”.

Two accidents within twenty-four hours were too much for me, so I headed to the LUTH residence of Dr. Tunde Adetunji, now married to my cousin, Dupe Olowokure, for a medical check-up and rest.

Back at Ife campus a few days later, the exco, particularly I, who drove the car instead of the union driver, were put on trial at the SRC. The debate was so heated that we were accused of deliberately crashing the car so that the SRC could be compelled to buy a new one for us. A sympathetic parliamentarian, Muyiwa

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Osunkoya, observed that the debate had to be rescued from its unacceptable level of degeneracy. Impeachment loomed and it was as if I was facing poetic justice as I had led the debate on the impeachment of my predecessor over a misdemeanour. Then Segun Sango came to the rescue and asked: "Are people suggesting that Lanre and co were experimenting with their lives just to buy a new car?". Everyone came to their senses, and we were let go. The entire debate reflected the opposition from the more conservative elements within the SRC, who saw the incident as an opportunity to clip the wings of the radical elements around the banner of ALPS with which I had become clearly identified on campus.

CHAPTER 3

THE ROAD TO NANS

The leading comrades of the Alliance of Progressive Students (ALPS) at first spoke in whispers. They were agitated by the question of who would be nominated to stand as candidates for the NANS secretariat – president and secretary - among the active students' union cadres. The search for suitable candidates became a task that must be done after they had successfully convinced the Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria (PYMN) majority that the NANS secretariat should come to the University of Ife as the election approached.

The political, ideological, intellectual, revolutionary and radical backbone of NANS in the 1980s was the PYMN, an umbrella body for socialist, marxist, black nationalist, anti-apartheid, pan-Africanist and other radical or left leaning students' groups in institutions of higher learning. The PYMN cadres were the main brainbox of the formation of NANS between 1979 and 1980 as successor to the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) which was banned by the Obasanjo military regime in 1978 following the

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'Ali-must-go' nationwide protest against increase in feeding fees in the Universities.

The PYMN comrades believed that the new national students' body must be knowledge-based and that its leaders need to be clear-headed while being politically, ideologically and intellectually oriented. They correctly envisaged that battles would subsequently be fought at the multi-levels of ideas, protests, demonstrations and alliance with the mass organisations of the working class, the peasants and the youths. They also envisaged that NANS must defend the welfare of students in the face of growing government attacks on education.

Within the context of the new orientation at the core of which was also the need for the mass of the students to understand the basis and the characteristics of their struggles, the PYMN founders were instrumental to the conception and articulation of 'The NANS Charter of Demands'. With the main slogan of EDUCATION – A RIGHT, NOT A PRIVILEGE, the Charter was developed under the leadership of Chris Mamah in 1981/82, the organisation's first substantive president from the University of Port Harcourt and produced under Chris Abashi (1982/83), from the University of Jos. Before he moved into private business and politics, Mamah was a distinguished journalist who rose to the position of Deputy Editor of The Punch and Managing Editor of the defunct The Week magazine. Abashi made a mark in governance and politics and was executive chairman of Eggon Local Government Area of Nasarawa State before his demise. Okoye, his secretary, is now a lawyer by profession. He ran a civil society group – Human Rights Monitor - before he moved to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) where he is the National Commissioner for Information and Voter Education.

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The Alliance of Progressive Students (ALPS) was one of the strongest units of PYMN in the 1980s. Its strength was a major consideration for the insistence by a significant number of comrades that the NANS secretariat should come to the UNIFE campus. The strategic thinking was that ALPS together with other PYMN branches in the zone such as at the Ibadan Polytechnic, University of Lagos, and elsewhere would provide needed backbone for the NANS secretariat. Since it was the organisational policy and political philosophy of PYMN that members of its constituent bodies should play active roles in the students' union executives and the students' parliaments, its cadres regularly contested students' union positions and in our period were dominant forces in student unionism.

It was towards the end of my tenure as Secretary-General of UNIFE students' union that it became the responsibility of the NANS Zone D, which comprised the western part of the country, to have the NANS secretariat. Then, the secretariat rotated between four zones – A, B, C and D - and since Chris Abashi, and Festus Okoye, outgoing President and General Secretary respectively of NANS were from the University of Jos in Zone C, the lot to produce candidates for the secretariat fell on the D zone.

In those days, in making a choice about the location of the secretariat you look for an institution where you have a very strong students' union. The other consideration was the existence of powerful radical and revolutionary groups who usually belonged to PYMN. Looking at our environment then, a few institutions like The Polytechnic, Ibadan, the College of Education, Ila-Orangun, the University of Ibadan, the University of Lagos and UNIFE met the criteria.

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One of the traditions of the student revolutionary movement of that era was to discourage the idea of individuals unduly promoting themselves for union offices without prior discussion with the collective or the organisation. Those who toed the path of self-aggrandisement were considered potential opportunists who, should they succeed, might end up working against the collective interest, since ab initio they had put the self above the rest. It was, therefore, usually the duty of the leadership of the collective to analyse the objective situation and decide on who among the comrades would subjectively fit into particular positions. The approach also derived from the understanding that the right balance had to be maintained between the need to build the students' unions and the need to build the PYMN branches politically and ideologically, a task for which the best of the cadres were equally needed.

Sometimes, a cadre might also think him/herself fit for an office, but the organisation could decide otherwise; and such a cadre was expected to abide by the organisational or the collective thinking. That was I conceded the position of PRO to Tony Iyare in the 1982/83 election and contested for the position of Sec-Gen, which I won, while Iyare unfortunately lost his bid to become the students' union official spokesperson.

Based on this approach, it was usually not all the leading cadres that vied for executive positions, although in our time, most comrades contributed to radical students' unionism by being members of the Students Representative Council (SRC), which was a very powerful organ for policy and decision making. That was why the position of the Speaker took precedence over the central and hall executives in the house.

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If you were in the SRC, you also had the added opportunity of being selected to the committees which were important frontiers for strengthening the students' unions and promoting accountability. It was also a training ground on how to engage in debates through logical and factual presentation of issues. There was hardly any room for rabble-rousing as shouts of 'point of order' would rent the air if your submission was not backed by relevant provisions of the constitution; if you quoted the constitution wrongly or if you introduced an issue without following the correct procedure. Because a point of order must always be heard by the Speaker, it was an embarrassment comrades were trained to avoid. Issues in the SRC could be debated for hours and there were occasions when students who went to bed when the SRC started sitting, would wake up in the morning to see that the meeting had not been adjourned. Yet, what could be regarded as sitting allowance then was one meat pie and a bottle of coke for each member. Nothing more. It is a salutary lesson for some current generation of student leaders who insist on being paid sitting allowances by the authorities and for political office holders today whose greed is unlimited.

One afternoon, as a group of comrades exited the Fajuyi Hall cafeteria after a students' union function, they openly raised the issue of who would run for NANS offices. My name had apparently featured in their earlier whispers on the subject. Dapo Olorunyomi (Baba Dapsy), now an award-winning investigative journalist and the Publisher of Premium Times, broke the ice and confronted me with the thinking of the activists, particularly the comrades, that I should vie for the position of NANS president.

My immediate reaction was to decline because of my regressing academic performance, at a time when I was going into the crucial final year. The issue of my academic relapse had first come up in the

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second semester of the 82/83 session. One day, the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Professor of Geography, Omolade Adejuyigbe, summoned me to his office for a chat which I thought might lead to a warning or even notice of suspension since by that time the union under our leadership had waged several battles, key moments of which have been documented in the previous chapter. Professor Adejuyigbe's head propped up from a heap of files on his table as I entered his office in response to his summon. He immediately stated the purpose. He had been going through the academic file of each student in the faculty and while perusing mine, it struck him that my academic performance was rapidly declining. He was particularly shocked that between the first, second and third years, I had slipped from second class upper, to second class lower and was now hovering around third Class. Warning that I could end up graduating with an ordinary pass, all he wanted to know was if I had any problem that was negatively impacting my academics which he would like me to share with him for possible counselling. "Oh, you are the Arogundade of the students' union", he exclaimed when I told him that it was my time-consuming duties and activities as the Sec-Gen that I believed was responsible for the poor results. He said he understood, but that while it was good to be a unionist, it was important for me to devise means of ensuring that the primary purpose of my being in the university was not jeopardised.

The encounter with Prof. Adejuyigbe was sobering. It was revealing of the nature and character of the University system in that period and how functional the administrative offices were, such that a dean keenly screened the performance of each student in each department in his faculty. Looking back at that encounter today, and against the experience of some students who in the face of challenges have resorted to suicide and other strange behaviour,

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counselling should be given more prominent place in the educational and social curriculum of the primary and secondary schools, and the institutions of higher learning.

I left Prof. Adejuyigbe's office with the resolution to wind down my students' union activism. I therefore told Dapsy and the other comrades about the challenge with my studies. They expressed some sympathy but quickly added that because of their belief that I was a perfect fit for the NANS presidency, a way out would be found through application for one-year academic leave or sabbatical should I win the NANS presidency. It was difficult to provide an immediate No or Yes answer although for a comrade like Segun Sango, who had been instrumental to my becoming Sec-Gen of the union, the answer had to be yes. I reached out to a soft spoken, handsome, level-headed and urbane classmate of mine in the Psychology department, Folayan Osekita, fondly called Osay Baba. He said he understood my situation but urged me to accept the challenge as he believed moving up the ladder of students' unionism was a kind of destiny. On my 56th birthday in 2018, Osay recalled the incident when he wrote: "Happy birthday to you Lanre Arogundade....A very driven motivated young man of great conviction....willing to sacrifice all for what he believes in positively...a man of impeccable integrity....I'll never forget how you told me in Unife around 35 years ago that you were taking a year out to pursue a student political portfolio. I was stunned but encouraged you". Now based in the UK, Osay is a change, learning and management consultant, author and prophet.

To complete the team for the secretariat, Wale Adekunle, a post-graduate student of Agriculture was nominated for the position of Secretary. Wale was a leading students' union activist, leading member of the ALPS, leading member of the Association of

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Campus Journalists (ACJ) and one of the editors/reporters for the 'Combatant', a leftist journal published by the ALPS. Wale had a slender frame and a smiling boyish face. The smiles could disappear in a jiffy if drawn into combative polemics – moments which he cherished, and I admired, because it enabled him to vent his revolutionary anger. Wale is currently a Professor of Agriculture who consults internationally.

We both accepted our respective nominations and the battle shifted to the Students Representative Council (SRC). By virtue of the provisions of the UNIFE students' union constitution then, the SRC had to first approve and nominate you as the local union's candidate for the NANS presidency before you can venture out to campaign. In other words, one was not contesting as an individual but as the flagbearer of the students' union. The system was akin to the American method of selecting presidential candidates wherein the candidates would first slug it out at the party primaries for selection before stepping forward to confront the other parties' candidates. The system was also one of the democratic characteristics of the student movements of the era in terms of the checks and balances embedded in it.

The battle to pick the ticket was a tough one as I had to confront a friend and fellow member of the Chris Fajemifo led 1982/83 executive, Mafo Ola John (MOJ), the Public Relations Officer. In fairness to him, MOJ probably wouldn't have run if I didn't have some moment of prevarication during which he sought to know my stand. Because I told him I was not likely to contest, he launched his campaign ahead of mine. By the time I told him I was going to contest after all, it was too late for him to withdraw, and we both had to sell our candidacy to the SRC.

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Our camp was optimistic of my victory because by that period I had become associated with NANS since, as stated before, I used my office as Sec-Gen to popularise the NANS Charter of Demands.

In the early 80s, the national student movement was just being rebuilt after the 1978 students uprising. In most campuses the consciousness of a new NANS was not there. It was therefore a consensus in the leftist and radical movement that we should promote NANS among the students using the Charter of Demands. The Charter was such a rich compendium of students' aspirations and views on education, the economy, international relations, etc. It provided statement of actions for the government to take to develop the educational sector.

So it was my number one campaign issue as Sec-Gen, that we needed a very strong umbrella association to lead the struggle for solution to the myriad of problems students were facing. We believed we were facing problems then but looking back, it cannot be compared to what we have on ground now. The issues of welfare – electricity, water shortages, etc, that we complained about can be likened to child's play against current development. Complaints over the quality of food in the cafeteria and related issues are no-go areas today as some of those privileges that we had on campus have been wiped out.

We believed that the struggle for improved educational funding in the individual campuses had to be linked to the larger struggle to transform society as demanded by the Charter, which most students had never heard of. Some heard about it when Ngozi Ojidoh, NANS Public Relations Officer in the Chris Abashi exco, made an appearance at one of our symposiums in Oduduwa Hall and spoke eloquently about the struggles of Nigerian students in

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furtherance of which the Charter had been put together. Now Ngozi Iwerre and founding Director of Community Life Project (CLP), she was a hero for our generation, and one of the people who elicited our interest in NANS.

In those days, NANS was running on dues paid by students. We had an automatic deduction system through which the authorities deducted student union dues and paid into the students' union account. The students' union based on the population would in turn pay what was called capitation fees to NANS, so students had been paying money to a body they didn't really belong, and we felt that the best way to popularise NANS was to produce the Charter for UNIFE, which must have been the only campus, or perhaps one of the very few campuses, to have recorded the feat.

I was also able to dwell on the fulfilment of my campaign promises in other areas including but not limited to constant pursuit of the welfare interests of the students, the making of the union secretariat accessible and the circulation of the minutes of the executive council meetings in an unusually bold step to make the union open to all and convey the message that it was not a cult.

All this became selling points when MOJ and I stood before the SRC to present our manifestoes and take questions from the parliamentarians. In the end I was elected as UNIFE candidate for the NANS presidency. The contest didn't mar my relationship with MOJ, and he was indeed magnanimous enough to be part of my campaign team. I once travelled to visit him in his hometown of Zion Pepe in Ilaje area of Ondo State. The five-hour journey by boat from Igbokoda to the town was a thrilling experience on life in the creeks and riverine areas.

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I won the NANS presidency as envisaged. I therefore applied for and was granted one-year leave from academic studies. Each time I jocularly told Dapsy that he and those other senior comrades way back then at UNIFE were also guilty as charged for my 'crimes' as NANS president, it was because of that development.

The expectation that Wale and I would complement each other ideologically and temperamentally materialised. We struck a comradely and brotherly chord throughout our tenure. Upon the expiration of our term in NANS, Wale went back to campus unionism to become the Chairman of the Post-Graduate Hall (the hall I stayed in my fifth and final year), and therefore, also a member of the SRC to which I too returned. Our becoming parliamentarians after occupying NANS offices partly reflected the character of the students' revolutionary movement of our era. Even if you had occupied higher positions, you might be required to undertake tasks at lower or if you like, less flamboyant levels by the movement. It was always about the collective interest and goal.

However, it was a herculean battle before we got elected that memorable December evening in the cold harmattan that enveloped the University of Jos campus.

CHAPTER 4

SWEATING IN THE COLD ON THE PLATEAU

“NANS is an idea, and as an idea, it will outlive all of us” - Chris Abashi

The initial news reports on the University of Jos NANS convention were not revealing of the crisis that characterised the exercise because the communique did not give the impression. It was only later that it became public knowledge in the media.

Abdul Oroh's news report in The Guardian of January 2, 1984, simply said that 350 delegates and observers from 70 institutions of higher learning in the country had converged on the campus of the University of Jos for the convention of the National Association of Nigerian Students and had elected a new executive on December 20, 1983. They also constituted the committees on Technical Education, University Education, Teachers Education and Degrees\Schools of Basic Studies, he reported.

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The new hands to whom the Chris Abashi and Festus Okoye led NANS had passed the baton of leadership were University of Ife's Lanre Arogundade, President and Wale Ahmed Adekunle, Secretary; Ahmadu Bello University's Ahmed Aminu Yusuf, Deputy National President (National Affairs); Federal Polytechnic, Idah's Sam Ejimogu, Deputy National President (Special Duties) and Bendel State University, Ekpoma's Gbenga Odulaja, Deputy National President (External Affairs) and University of Benin's Harry I. Iyo, Assistant Secretary.

Elected too were University of Jos Chom Bagu, Public Relations Officer; Ogun State College of Education, Ijebu-Ode's Jirren Tunde, Financial Secretary; College of Advanced Studies, Zaria's Banake Sambo, Director of Sports; College of Education, Ila-Orangun's Oladeji Amusan, Treasurer; University of Port-Harcourt's Abdul Nasamu, Director of Travels and Exchange and Bauchi College of Arts and Science's, Yusuf Helma, Ex-officio member.

To affirm the seeming smoothness of the outcome of the convention, Oroh's comprehensive report captured the details of the communique that emanated from the convention. According to his report, the communique:

- “Expressed NANS unflinching support for ASUU and POSSAN (the Polytechnic Senior Staff Association of Nigeria, the precursor of ASUP – Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics);
- Denounced the obnoxious policies of the National Universities Commission (NUC) on students' accommodation and feeding;
- Condemned “the devious scheme” by various school authorities to “extort money from students to salvage themselves”; and
- Denounced the “intransigence of the authorities of the

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University of Maiduguri to readmit the 28 illegally expelled students in spite of a court order”.

The communique also:

- “Condemned the National Assembly and the Federal Government for their “criminal silence” over the unacceptable invasion of Grenada by the United States;
- Denounced the Federal Government's “complicity” in the invasion;
- Condemned alleged American-inspired call by South Africa for the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola in exchange for Namibian independence;
- Asked the Federal Government to put at the service of the Southern Africa Liberation Movements, the services of NTA, VON and FRCN;
- Denounced Nigeria's collusion with America to impose Hissene Habre on Chadians; and
- Called on the Federal Government to introduce new peace initiatives aimed at withdrawing French troops from Chad”.

Other highlights of the convention duly reported by The Guardian was the conferment of honorary awards and life membership of NANS on Chris Mamah, former President of NANS from the University of Port-Harcourt for “his immense contribution and selfless services to NANS”; Mr. Umaru Aji, former Director of the Agency for Mass Education “for his selfless service to the Nation in the promotion of literacy, a feat that also earned him UNESCO award; and Mr. Nelson Mandela, “the legendary South African Liberation Fighter, jailed for life by the racist regime for the past 20 years”.

What the communique did not capture, and therefore Abdul Oroh could not have reflected in his report, was the turbulence that

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characterised the convention by way of dramatic intrigues, threats of disruption and hot polemics. Indeed, by the time The Guardian was publishing its elaborate report, a contestant for the NANS presidency from the University of Lagos by the name C.D.C Nwaneche had reportedly flown with few of his supporters from Jos to Lagos to denounce the convention. Students' union activists and leaders travelled mainly by road and rail in those days and the fact that Nwaneche and few of his supporters could afford a flight to and from Lagos and Jos suggested that they had some powerful financial backing. It was the then National Party of Nigeria (NPN) controlled Federal Government that was fingered.

Following this development, it was the same Guardian newspaper that had comprehensively published the report of the election of our new leadership, that gave elaborate space to Nwaneche and his team later, thus opening a media battle in the second phase of the turbulent take-off of the new executives.

The first phase of the battle was during the convention itself. We expected to sail smoothly when we arrived in the chilly embrace of the Jos weather at the Naraguta main campus of the University of Jos. The delegation not only comprised us and the students' union leaders of UNIFE, but others from neighbouring institutions in the Western part of the country now called the South-west.

Our confidence was buoyed by the energetic campaign we ran across campuses with the UNIFE students' union in the front-foot after I had emerged its official candidate. The large campaign team reached as many campuses and students' union leaders as possible, with the response overwhelmingly favourable. My familiarity with students' union leaders from other campuses provided a further boost since as students' union Sec-Gen in the

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82/83 session, I had participated in NANS Senate meetings at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, the University of Ilorin and Ibadan Polytechnic.

We equally enjoyed the endorsement of powerful students' union leaders including Hajia Naja'atu Mohammed, President of ABU students' union. Her husband, Dr. Bala Mohammed, a political adviser to Governor Abubakar Rimi of Kano State, was killed in the July 1981 riot that engulfed Kano following a query issued the then Emir of Kano for alleged disrespect to the state government. Her presence reflected the hard work that the ABU comrades like Rima Shawulu, Sec-Gen of the executive (now a member of the House of Representatives) had done.

By the evening of December 19, 1983, the UNIJOS campus had become a lively beehive of activities as students' union activists and leaders, and NANS officials converged for the convention. Once on the ground, we launched person-to-person campaigns to woo the delegates. It was a full house on December 20, 1983 as the NANS convention took off under the Chairmanship of Amah T. Amah, president of the University of Calabar students' union. Remi Ogunlana of the Ibadan Polytechnic, and now of blessed memory, was the out-going Senate President. The agenda of the Senate meeting that preceded the convention included the state of the campuses, the state of NANS and the state of the Nation, but it was the pending election that pre-occupied most minds.

During the meeting, the Nwaneche camp which was already sensing political doom would occasionally throw up disruptive tantrums; especially as the agenda moved towards the dissolution of the executive and election of a new one. The repeated threats of disruption and sometimes violence were met with stiff resistance

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but on occasions when it seemed things would get out of hand, Chris Abashi, the out-going NANS president would step forward to make passionate appeals, which often ended with the memorable lines: 'NANS is an ideal and as an ideal it would outlive all of us'.

Comrade Amah T. Amah, a retiree of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) and now in his 70s, recalled the battle of Jos over two encounters in Uyo. "You know NANS has affiliate unions - Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, Schools of Basic Studies - and every state government that time was trying to set up either a Polytechnic or a College of Education or a School of Basic Studies. Government went everywhere, mobilising all these institutions to come and flood the convention and they lodged them in hotels. They also gave money to well established Polytechnics who were willing to work with them and made them comfortable in hotels. These were not affiliates because the NANS constitution says for you to be voted for in any NANS convention, your institution must have been nominated for membership at least three months before the convention".

According to Amah, NANS had never had that kind of high number of delegates, leading to concern and worry that the convention and NANS would be hijacked. It was even contemplated that it should be postponed. But he said he assured that as the convention chairman, he would come up with a surprise. The meeting went on until it came to the point of dissolving the former exco and setting up the electoral committee. That was when Amah played his 'surprise' card. He announced that to participate and be qualified to vote, an institution must fulfill the requirements of the constitution.

From that moment Amah ordered all entrances shut. He also

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ordered that all cameras be seized because he feared that the pictures of the chaotic scenes being taken were meant for publication in the media by state agents who might want to discredit NANS. Amah continues: "So they went round recovering cameras, heaps of cameras, so, as they were bringing the cameras, they were registering the cameras with the names of the owners. I said that people had thought that I had confiscated their cameras but that was not the intention. I was protecting NANS. I asked the owners of the cameras to come forward and claim them provided they release the films. People lined up and were coming to collect their camera. When you take the camera, you open, and you release the film. I said the films will go to NANS archives as evidence of the battle to save the life of NANS because the intentions of the people who recorded the scenes was to divide us".

It was after common sense had prevailed that Amah called for nominations for the chairman, secretary and members of the electoral committee while reiterating that only delegates from institutions that were affiliated to NANS for at least two years would participate in the election. He urged those not qualified to go and find a way to be affiliated to NANS so that they would participate fully in future elections. "See how people were shaking their head and trooping out so that at the end only people who were affiliated to NANS were to vote and the voting was done and the Lanre Arogundade and Wale Adekunle team emerged", Amah further recalls.

Our election received instant applause and I still cannot forget the songs, dances as the atmosphere became carnival-like. Hugs and handshakes came rapidly; with my brother Comrade, Ayo Arogundade who was one of the delegates from Ibadan

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Polytechnic among the first to hug me. But it was 'Masses', an activist from Ahmadu Bello University whose real names I do not remember, who took it upon himself to lift me shoulder high amidst singing and jubilation. Abu Mashi, president of Ahmadu Bello University Students' Union, Kongo campus, planted a kiss on my cheeks in ecstasy. Mashi from Katsina State was a jolly good fellow and is unfortunately one of the great students' unionists who have passed on. As for 'Masses', by the time I ran into him several years later at the local wing of Murtala Muhammed Airport in Lagos, he had become a senior officer in the Nigerian military.

At the end of it all close to 50 institutions of higher learning elected our leadership. But a different picture was presented by Jullyette Ukabiala, in her report of January 9, 1984, titled 'NANS heading for split over its leadership'. The front page story read:

"A crisis was brewing at week-end for the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), whose members appeared to be heading for a split over its leadership.

The quarrel is over whether the union elected a new government on December 20 when it met at the University of Jos, Plateau State. Fifty-five universities and polytechnics attended. Seventeen were disqualified from voting. And 32 walked out in sympathy.

The elections were held nonetheless and Mr. Lanre Arogundade, of the University of Ife, emerged president. Eleven national student officers also surfaced, most of them from institutions which are alleged political vassal of Ife University.

The poll outcome seems to have cracked NANS vocal members into three groups.

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ONE: The qualified 17 institutions;

TWO: The 32 protesters, and

THREE: The six alleged to have held the election unilaterally and imposed a leadership.

The crisis has been smouldering since Mr. Arogundade's widely reported backing for the military government on behalf of NANS, which he also said would soon meet Head of State Muhammadu Buhari with a "charter of student demands."

A communique jointly signed by all 32 dissenting members institutions claimed that NANS had no new leaders yet because the elections were held in circumstances which "centre on gross violations of the constitution of NANS, and the non-existence of atmosphere for free and fair elections."

On these grounds, they have dissociated themselves from proceedings of the convention and the conduct and "results of the purported elections."

Besides, they claimed that: "The convention and all the decisions reached by the minority Abashi group of 12 members are null and void and of no effect.

"We majority members of the accredited group have resolved to dissolve the former executive council of the union."

"A caretaker committee is set up with immediate effect to run the affairs of the union and arrange for another convention as soon as possible."

Their communique contains two-week deadline in which outgoing

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officials were ordered to surrender all NANS property in their possession or face "other actions" by the caretaker committee.

Four key spokesmen of the protesting group are:

- Mr. Chidi Nwaneche, Chemical engineering student at the University of Lagos and chairman of the caretaker committee;
- Mr. Kolawole Oladoja, Mechanical engineering student and union president at Yaba College of Technology;
- Mr. Steve Ojumu, Town planning student at Yaba College of Technology and NANS member;
- Mr. Kunle Oshidibo, electronics student at Yaba College of Technology and NANS member.

According to their account, disagreement ensued during the convention when members of the outgoing executive stopped 17 accredited members from participating, on what they described as "unconfirmed grounds"

It was in protest against this that 32 other members decided to withdraw from the convention, with a unanimous resolution of forming a caretaker committee to run NANS.

Mr. Nwanneche, known more as "CDC" at the University of Lagos. Said it was only a convention arranged by the caretaker committee that can conduct election, the results of which would be acceptable to NANS majority".

Ukabiala's report was evidently one-sided. We wasted no time in rebutting it through a press release, which fortunately, was widely reported by the same Guardian newspaper and others. This was why on January 16, 1984, the newspaper again published another story titled, 'STUDENTS UNION LEADERSHIP ROW DEEPENS', which

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contained our refutation of the allegations by the Nwaneche camp. The newspaper said:

"Student leaders whose hold on NANS- National Association of Nigerian Students- appears threatened, by a "caretaker group said at the weekend, they were still in charge and wrote off the challenges as impostors.

The row over NANS presidency and 10 other executive offices, broke out on December 20, when NANS met at the University of Jos, Plateau State, to elect new officers.

The presidency went to Mr. Lanre Arogundade, of the University of Ife, in an election which contender Chidi Nwanneche and others allege, was boycotted by 49 of the 55 participating polytechnics and universities.

In their annoyance, the dissenters declined recognition of the new leaders and formed a caretaker committee, of its own members to pave way for another election.

In their fight back at the weekend, NANS executives announced a senate meeting from February 3 to 6 to:

- < Prepare a "programme for action for Nigerian students for the rest of the decade."
- < Name a committee which will accompany the executive to Head of State Major General Muhammadu Buhari,
- < Draft a communique on the state of the nation and student views on developments;

A statement signed by NANS president Lanre Arogundade and Mr Wale Adekunle the secretary, said "While we invite students to the senate meeting, the national secretariat has decided to make a

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brief clarification on the so-called caretaker committee.

“For the benefit of Nigerian students who were not at the Jos Convention these are the facts as they are:

- < Mr C.D.C Nwaneche, chairman of the “caretaker committee” was one of the contestants at the Jos Convention. The said C.D.C Nwaneche mobilised some institutions to the Jos Convention.
- < The institutions by virtue of article three section a (1), of the NANS constitution ordinarily are supposed to be members of NANS. The provision says...
“NANS shall be essentially a confederation of autonomous unions of tertiary institutions of a higher learning in the Federal Republic of Nigeria” provided they offer post-secondary schools certificate course of not less than two years duration.
- < These institutions referred to by Mr Nwaneche (17 of them) were disqualified under article four of NANS constitution in respect of application for membership.

“This article says applications for membership shall be submitted to NANS secretariat at least, three months before the next annual convention” Such application shall be accompanied by the constitution, current programme of activities, list of educative members and total membership of the applying union”

All the 17 institutions led by Mr Nwaneche were appearing for the first time in NANS at the Jos Convention about 24 hours before its commencement. They were disqualified by virtue of article four, sections A-D. But they were subsequently allowed in as observers- this means they have no voting rights.

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During these period of election, Mr Nwaneche had no one to be his secretary-general, thus failing to comply with article 24 section B. He was then, as reported by The Guardian, on December 24, disqualified because article 24 (b) makes it compulsory for a presidential aspirant to have a running mate.

The NANS statement said Mr. Nwaneche, and his followers were walked out for the election to start.

“After 17 schools walked out, there remained 48 schools among which are universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. Eleven officers from 10 institutions were elected (after a contest), the president and secretary were elected unopposed” the statement cited”.

After the media fireworks, which tilted in our favour, we realised that the real victory lies in the acceptance our leadership by majority of the students' unions, particularly those that were not at the Jos convention. We agreed that we had to stamp out authority to prove that there was no division in NANS. The task would not be easy as the military had unexpected returned to power, thus opening an unexpected frontier of battle.

CHAPTER 5

CONFRONTING UNEXPECTED MILITARY COUP

The demands contained in the communique of the Jos convention of NANS were directed at the civilian government of President Shehu Shagari, controlled by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). Shehu Shagari first came to power in October 1979 to mark the advent of the second republic after thirteen years of military rule that spanned the military juntas of Generals Aguiyi Ironsi (1966), Yakubu Gowon (1966 – 1975), Murtala Muhammed/Olusegun Obasanjo (1975 – 1976) and Olusegun Obasanjo/Sheu Yar' Adua (1976 – 1979).

The NANS convention took place barely three months after Shagari was sworn-in for a second term following a general election that was marred by massive rigging and violence. One of the most loquacious elements in the leadership of the NPN, Transport Minister Umaru Dikko described the outcome as 'moon-slide victory' for his party, jettisoning the more commonly used 'landslide victory' in the political vocabulary.

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Conducted by the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) under the leadership of Justice Ovie Whiskey, there were illegal thumb-printing, snatching of ballot boxes, destruction of polling centres, maiming and killing of political opponents, during the elections. When the then Director of Organisation of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Chief Ebenezer Babatope (Ebino Topsy) accosted Justice Whiskey with the allegation of having collected N1million (One Million Naira) bribe to rig the elections in favour of the NPN, the judge comically retorted that he would faint at the sight of such an amount. Truly One Million Naira was a huge sum then and to steal such was akin to completely emptying the treasury as state budgets then were rarely above that sum. These days, politicians being investigated, prosecuted and jailed by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) are accused of thefts quantified in Billions and Trillions of Naira.

Five political parties contested the 1983 elections – the Adisa Akinloye led National Party of Nigeria (NPN); the Chief Obafemi Awolowo led Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN); the Chief Adeniran Ogunsanya led Nigeria People's Party (NPP); the Waziri Ibrahim led Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) and the Mallam Aminu Kano led Peoples Redemption Party (PRP). Except the NPN and the NPP whose chairmen were not the parties' flagbearers, the leaders of the three remaining parties – Awolowo, Ibrahim and Kano - were also the presidential candidates.

Prior to the 1983 elections the NPN controlled seven states (Sokoto, Niger, Bauchi, Benue, Cross River, Kwara, and Rivers); the UPN five states, (Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo and Bendel); the GNPP two states (Borno and Gongola), the PRP two states (Kano and Kaduna); and the NPP three states (Anambra, Imo, and Plateau). The ethnic or geo-political base of the five presidential flag bearers, partly

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reflected the political strength of each party. The unwritten but clearly visible game plan of the NPN was to snatch as many states as possible from the opposition political parties, which by 1983 had tried to coalesce as the 'Progressives' but the plan to present a single presidential candidate to give the NPN a good run at the polls never materialised.

The NPN was set to retain the presidency, a purpose for which it attempted to take some of the states controlled by the four opposition political parties. NPN's ambition in that regard was dead on arrival in Lagos where Alhaji Lateef Jakande had become extremely popular by virtue of his hugely successful social service programmes of mass housing, education and health care. NPN failed in Ogun the home state of Chief Awolowo where journalist and columnist Chief Bisi Onabanjo held sway while it failed to dislodge Prof. Ambrose Alli from the government house in Benin. Oyo and Ondo were actually the key battle grounds. Akinloye as chairman of NPN was desperate to deliver his home state of Oyo while the NPN calculated that they would be able to swing the votes in Ondo since the erstwhile deputy governor, Chief Akin Omoboriowo had decamped from the UPN and was now standing as its gubernatorial candidate. NPN succeeded in Oyo partly because the governor Chief Bola Ige had issues with some strong constituencies particularly Polytechnic students, who waged running battle with him over non-payment of bursary awards and threatened to either vote against him or 'assist' those hell bent on rigging him out. As the rigging machinery bared its full fangs, Bola Ige drew from his oratorical arsenal in live broadcasts on the state Radio and Television calling for mass resistance to protest the results. There were protests and violence in some parts of the state, but they were not decisive enough to force a reversal of the verdict, although that shouldn't have stopped the judiciary from doing

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justice to the UPN in Oyo State.

Ondo State was however a different kettle of fish. Victory was initially awarded to Chief Omoboriowo and it spontaneously provoked unprecedented protests and violent reaction during which many political leaders were slaughtered or burnt alive with the State Radio playing leading role in mobilising against the election riggers. For the days the protests lasted, however, the citizens were not bothered about the overt partisanship of the station as all that mattered was that Ajasin's stolen governorship should be returned. In the face of mass discontent expressed in the protests, the judiciary restored Chief Adekunle Ajasin's mandate, with thousands of people thronging the court premises and the streets the day the judgement was delivered.

The NPN managed to hijack Kano and Kaduna States from the PRP. In Kaduna State, the NPN which controlled majority of seats in the State House of Assembly, had made governance difficult for Governor Balarabe by repeatedly rejecting his list of nominees to serve as commissioners. In effect, Balarabe ruled without a cabinet for years.

In its retrospective analysis of the state of the second republic and the elections of 1983, the U.S, Library of Congress had this to say: "The second elections under the Second Republic were to be its last. When the results were tallied in 1983, it was clear that there had been fraud. The NPN increased its control of states from seven to twelve, including Kano and Kaduna. Shagari was re-elected president, and the NPN gained 61 of 95 Senate seats and 307 of 450 House of Representatives seats. Not even the supporters of the NPN expected such results. Considering the state of the economy and the public outcry over the rigged election, the Shagari

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government stayed in power for a surprisingly long time”.

The UPN labelled Shagari's re-election as the stolen presidency. The outcry against the rigging resulted in post-election violence; in response to this, the Inspector General of Police, Sunday Adewusi, deployed mobile policemen to the streets. Their mission was to crush the rebellion by any means possible, including maiming and killing.

With corruption having been rampant in the first four years of the second republic, the rigging of the elections provoked greater disenchantment with the Shagari government. Among the disenchanted were students who linked the worsening living and studying conditions on the campuses with the massive corruption at the top. Indeed, during Shagari's four-year rule, protests were periodically staged by students' unions across the country, with the most popular being the demonstrations against the fire that consumed the headquarters of the Nigeria External Communications (NET). It was strongly suspected that the building was deliberately touched to erase traces of corruption.

Significantly, some sections of the political class that had lost out in the federal power equation in the wake of the 1983 elections were openly calling for the return of the military. It was not long before their wish was fulfilled although many of them suffered for it as the military junta that toppled Shagari clamped them into various jails.

As newly elected NANS leaders, we were caught unawares by the coup of December 31, 1983. That was why, by the time the communique of the Jos convention was being published in most newspapers, it was a military government that was already in power.