

ASUU NEC DECLARES A TOTAL AND INDEFINITE STRIKE

Written by

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For over two years, the Federal Government and ASUU Negotiating Teams searched for a minimum point from which the Nigerian University system could make significant progress towards reversing the brain drain that has deprived our country of a vital causal agency in national development, i.e. the development and sustenance of a large pool of scholars whose intellectual and scientific production would reposition Nigeria for greater responsibilities in national development.

The Negotiating Teams searched for, and arrived at minimal conditions for reversing the decay in the University System. Our University system needs immediate and massive financial intervention in order to fulfill the potentiality which it had shown but which had been called into question because of steady decay;. We realized that the way to the survival of our country in the 21st Century lies in our countrys ability to produce applied and theoretical knowledge in Science, Technology and the Humanities. We understood ourselves as having the task of producing an Agreement that is capable of revitalizing and accelerating the development of Nigerian university system into one of the best in the world, a task which can no longer be delayed if Nigeria is to become one of the leading economically and culturally advanced countries in the world. The Two teams agreed, to begin the process of repositioning the University System as envisaged, that a required minimum of funds should be provided both in the public universities and Federal and State, with increased efforts by universities to generate funds without compromising the goals and integrity of universities. In view of the enormous importance of education for national development, education must continue to be funded heavily by public funds through Budgetary and non-Budgetary provisions.

We expect the funds agreed upon to be used to effectively remedy deficiencies in programmes and facilities, to systematically upgrade programmes and facilities, to advance research, create adequate living and learning conditions for our students, and to attract brilliant graduates into the universities as teachers and researchers while keeping excellent academics in the system. The Negotiation Teams agreed that if Nigeria is to get where it ought to be, a minimum of 26% of the Annual Budget of the State and Federal Governments ought to be allocated to education. With this level of funding, we can halt the growing inability of the children of the underprivileged to get education. The Teams also agreed that, in line with what the Nigerian Constitution allows, the Federal Government should as appropriate, provide assistance to states in the areas of Higher Education. The Negotiating Teams have agreed upon and proposed the Amendment of the Education Tax Fund Act to make it more effective as an intervention to rehabilitate, restore and reposition the Tertiary institutions in order to develop a knowledge-based society in the twenty-first century.

We arrived at an agreement on conditions of service that could motivate scholars sufficiently to

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stay in our country and teach, do research and community service, assuming that a good degree of patriotism would make up for the differences that might obtain in African countries that raid Nigeria for academics.

Both Teams agreed upon a series of provisions that would actively protect and promote university autonomy and academic freedom. We agreed on better qualification for members of university Councils. We have agreed to propose to the National Assembly as amendment of certain laws in order to give the universities more autonomy.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING THE AGREEMENT

To arrive at an Agreement well thought-out and having the potential of leaping Nigerias education to a higher level is one thing, signing and implementing the Agreement to achieve the desired goals is another matter.

Since December 2008, when the negotiation between FGN-ASUU Negotiating Teams was completed, ASUU, despite having persuaded its members to exercise patience for over two years, once again resolved to do its best to avoid a crisis. But Government did not treat ASUU patience and restraint with sincerity. In March we were first told that the Agreement would be signed before the end of April. At the end of April we were told it would be signed on May 7, on May 7, we were told the Permanent Secretary was not in the country (The Permanent Secretary has no role in signing or implementing of Agreement).

On May 10th, we got a text message inviting ASUU for the signing of the Agreement on Tuesday May 12, 2009 at the National Universities Commission (NUC). Although we considered this an unusual mode of invitation, we decided to go.

There was no programme, no indication of the exact venue at the NUC. We were only told that there would be communication in the morning when the Agreement would be signed. Despite our reservations, we reported at the venue. The event turned out to be a classic case of deception. The Federal Governments Team told us it had no authority from its principal to sign the Agreement.

The Governments Team could not explain to us why our Negotiation Team was invited to sign

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the Agreement when Government did not intend to sign the Agreement. We realized the Government had set up the fake meeting because it believed that ASUU was preparing for a strike on account of the failure of the Federal Government to sign the Agreement.

This led to the warning strike of May 18-31, 2009. It is significant that in pursuit of its programme of deceit, government consistently timed every ASUU NEC meeting for an invitation to a phoney meeting, the purpose of which was to trick NEC into believing that government was serious.

The Union has since seen through the gimmicks and will not fall for them any longer. Enough is enough.

We have embarked upon this strike because the situation had remained unchanged since the end of the two -week warning strike on May 31, 2009. We keep hearing actions that are entirely foreign to the collective bargaining process: Government setting up a Technical Committee on an Agreement without reference to the negotiating team, a ministerial committee set up with terms of reference that would entirely nullify the essence of the negotiated agreement. There were even attempts to unilaterally change the agreement on the conditions of service. There was the false propaganda in the newspapers declaring N78 billion as the requirement of ASUU Agreement.

Our members have come to the conclusion that over two and a half years of patience is enough. They feel betrayed, duped and do not want to suffer any more psychological or moral trauma. NEC considered carefully the views of the branches and resolved that ASUUs major concern in engaging in such a long, painstaking negotiation – the revitalization of the university system, will not be compromised. In view of Governments failure to sign the Agreement reached by the Negotiating Teams, NEC, after a thorough review of the total situation, resolved that all ASUU branches shall embark upon a total and indefinite strike until government signs the agreement with ASUU. For the avoidance of doubt, it is the Government that has forced us to embark upon this strike. We have done all our best to avoid it. And it can be as short as possible if the Government respects and signs the Agreement reached with ASUU by Governments own Negotiating Team.

We appeal to the public, parents, our students, patriotic groups and individuals to appeal to government to sign and implement the Agreement reached by the Negotiating Teams. The ultimate consequences of not doing so should be blamed on Government and not ASUU.

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Indeed, this action was clearly avoidable. Government need not also prolong it, in the interest of students, their parents and our country. Should Government prolong it, Government should also bear the responsibility.