

THE STORY OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ORGANIZED LABOUR

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ABSTRACT

The process of achieving the set objectives of structural adjustment programme (SAP) produced adverse social effects that put to question the sincerity of purpose of the SAP policy designers and implementers. To be able to generate conclusions concerning how the politics of enhancing the "well-being" of the people via SAP played out in the Nigerian society, in terms of how well the programme served the intended purpose, questions have to be asked, and responses elicited. Earlier attempts at appraising the SAP were geared toward examining the successes or failures of the adjusting countries in implementing the policies. Such appraisal gave rise to concern on the issue of good governance as a necessary and inevitable prerequisite of effective economic reform. At the same time, not much effort was made at ascertaining the social fallouts of the entire reform process. Even when the outburst of public outcry within the adjusting countries necessitated the recognition of the importance of the social dimension of SAP, little effort was made at understanding the problem from the perspective of the aggrieved populace. What we see is a proliferation of World Bank sponsored studies on the issue that hardly take cognizance of the people's feelings. Thus the findings of such studies cannot be said to be representative of the views of all the stakeholders. This paper attempts to fill this gap by examining organized labour's/interest groups' response to SAP from the lens of the public sector workers and why they reacted the way they did toward the entire process. A sample of 357 respondents was randomly selected from university teachers, students and other public servants within Calabar metropolis. The findings, which were described in simple percentages, show significant relationship between economic hardship, repressive attitude of government, political uncertainty and interest groups' protests against SAP. The author recommends the provision of adequate safety nets whenever stringent policies are to be introduced so as to cushion the adverse effect on the people; utilization of the collective bargaining tool by the parties in industrial relations as well as the implementation of SAP with 'a human face', among others.

Keywords: *structural adjustment programme, organized labour/interest groups, protests, conditionality.*

INTRODUCTION

Over the past couple of decades, there has been a steady increase in the scholarly literature on organized labour and industrial relations systems in developing countries the bulk of which is on trade union militancy, strikes, and union organization and membership (Seidman, 1994; Scoville, 1988; Fashoyin, 1992; Cooper, 1996). Recently, however, a number of studies have appeared in the literature increasingly focusing on comparative studies of the phenomenon of industrial relations systems among developing countries (Verma, Kochan, and Lansbury, 1995). This was not the case prior to this time and even the recent development has not been massive when compared to the enormous amount of literature generated in the field among the developed industrial nations of the West.

The recent upsurge of interest in this area on developing countries in the last couple of decades among scholars could be accounted for by the much debated globalization issue especially the global economic crisis that has left most developing countries with huge debt burden. Of particular importance is the economic deterioration of the late 1970s and early 1980s that compelled most developing countries to adopt one form of economic transformation and adjustment programme or the other with the help of the World Bank/ International Monetary Fund (IMF). This study is informed by the need to understand the effect of the adjustment policies on public sector industrial relations in Nigeria through the spectrum of organized labour and other interest groups.

By the late 1970s and the turn of the 1980s, African countries like their counterparts in other developing parts of the world were confronted with massive economic decline and overbearing debt burden which were accentuated by the global economic down-turn (Nwagbara, 2004). Consequently, the absence of necessary finances brought to a halt the implementation of vital national programmes of economic development and political modernization. This warranted the option of seeking the aid of the international financiers, which was not easily forthcoming due to the uncertainties about the ability of the borrowing countries to pay after accumulating huge

arrears of debt. As a result, subsequent granting of financial assistance was tied with stringent conditionality of some form of structural adjustment in the internal structure of the economy of the borrowing countries. Thus, one of the obvious outcomes of developing nations' response to economic crisis is the mandatory adoption of structural policies manifesting either in the form of stabilization or structural adjustment, or both.

The introduction of SAP, and the subsequent implementation of the IMF/World Bank conditionality attached to it, came with some negative consequences that affected many sectors of the economy such as agriculture and industry. In fact, SAP came at a time when Nigeria was beset by a charged political atmosphere fueled by the biting economic hardship that hit most families. Cognizant of the situation, the government in power still went ahead to implement the IMF conditionality that led to many unpleasant consequences such as workers losing their jobs through retrenchment, many people not being able to afford most of the necessities of life due to wage cuts and withdrawal of subsidies, skyrocketing inflationary situation occasioned by currency devaluation, high rates of unemployment, etc.

It is the people at the centre of it that can attest to the effectiveness or otherwise of SAP in improving their living standard. In other words, they are the ones who can say how their lives as individuals or groups have been positively or negatively affected by SAP. How did they – individuals and groups view the phenomenon of SAP and its consequences on their lives?

Eliciting responses from people on the above issue will no doubt touch on certain perceptive economic, social, and political problems that need to be tackled as a matter of necessity. While many a Nigerian – rural and urban – have been affected by SAP, it was the urban dwellers, especially organized labour and other interest groups that felt its pangs the more and so opposed its introduction accordingly. This assertion corroborates the view of Herbst (1993:61) as he observes, "...urban workers are one of the chief targets of economic reform programmes that hope to bring about fundamental changes in African economies". Indeed, three of the five conditionality of the World Bank/IMF were directed against this category of the population.

Organized labour generally reacted against SAP and all it stood for by using its grievance weapons and other available subtle strategies. These included but not limited to demonstrating along the streets, public enlightenment rallies, distribution of handbills, inciting and receiving the sympathy of the general public, strike actions, etc. How did the Babangida administration deal with the situation? In other words, what were the factors that influenced the attitude of organized labour and how government handled the opposition.

An attempt to answer the 'why' aspect of the question brings us headlong with the industrial relations situation in Nigeria under the military administration of Gen. Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida during the SAP period. By so doing, the study will lead to a deeper understanding of the Nigerian industrial relations practice in the public sector in comparative perspective with previous regimes in Nigeria as units of comparison. An examination of various regimes in Nigeria in comparative perspective will, no doubt, reveal the divergences and similarities in industrial relations practice between the different regimes.

There are divergent views as to the nature of the impact of the SAP on the economy of African countries. Some of the views, especially those sponsored by the World Bank, are pro-SAP and blame failures on government 'softness' and other factors outside the adjustment policy itself. World Bank research studies present SAP as beneficial with varying degree of successes and failures among adjusting nations, while other studies tend to condemn it as anti-development and a failure. Several reasons such as corrupt and inept political leadership; turbulent and unstable political environment; lack of credibility on the part of leadership and incessant opposition from interest groups, etc, have been adduced for its inability to achieve the desired result of economic transformation and set the developing economies on a sound path of development (Beckman, 1992). While this study does not concern itself with the debate on whether or not SAP is success, it will attempt to ascertain the impact of SAP on an aspect of the economy – the public sector employment.

In Nigeria, the most prominent and vocal opposition against SAP came from the public sector employees ably represented by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC). Some of the stringent conditionality of the IMF has direct adverse consequences on this category of workers in the country. With its articulate and vantage position in the society, organized labour was able to mount public enlightenment campaigns against the adoption of the SAP by educating the general public on the adverse implications of such measures on their well-being and those of the next generation yet unborn. But this attitude had the potency of stalling the implementation of the adjustment policies.

Thus, in a frantic attempt to earn legitimacy and credibility for itself and its transformation policies, the Gen.

Babangida's administration launched series of enlightenment campaigns and applied repressive measures to counter the devastating effects of the activities of organized labour on the stability of the regime. The sponsors of the SAP believe that a more authoritarian regime was a prerequisite for successful implementation of SAP (Bangura and Beckman, 1993). It was within this kind of scenario that industrial relation was practiced in the public sector during this period. By carrying out this research, the researcher intends to capture a somewhat first-hand account of what transpired during the era from the active participants in the scene.

One of the foremost assumptions in this study is that the extent of organized labour reaction to the introduction of SAP is a function of the extent of its power in relation to government's power in the country's industrial relations system. In other words, there is a relationship between the extent of organized labour opposition to SAP and the amount of power it wields in industrial relations in Nigeria. This seemingly one to one relationship derives from the fact of organized labour being government employees and both are actors within the industrial relations scene. The relative power of each of the actors derives from the society and influences their respective ability to influence the rules of the game (Dunlop, 1993). Government in its dual capacity as the umpire and employer of labour in Nigeria tends to utilize its superior power to its advantage against organized labour. A typical example of the interplay of power between government and organized labour in industrial relations is manifested in the events during SAP. Thus, an attempt to answer the question of how and why organized labour in Nigeria reacted the way it did to government's introduction of SAP will lead to another related issue, that of government's repressive strategy and intention.

President Babangida's authoritarian style of leadership exhibits characteristic features of statist corporatism (Cawson, 1986) similar in many ways to other known cases in recent history. In none of the known cases was the resistance of organized labour so severe as to stall the political stability of the leadership right from the onset as in Nigerian instance under Babangida's regime. Apart from the adverse consequences of SAP, Babangida's transition to civil rule programme dragged on endlessly beyond the stipulated deadline for no apparent cause that his "good" intention became suspect and robbed his administration of the little credibility it earlier had.

The combined effect of these discrepancies was increased discontentment and opposition from organized interest groups and the members of the general public. Babangida's strategic response to interest group opposition in ways that were sometimes, subtle inclusion and exclusion of opposition and some other times, overt repression and incarceration earned him nicknames such as a master schemer and Nigerian 'maradona'. What was the Nigerian industrial relations system like under the Babangida's administration? How does it compare with industrial relations in other regimes that preceded it in the country?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the 1980s, the structural adjustment programme, SAP, a phenomenon associated with developed nations as observed by Toye (1995) was transferred to governments of the developing countries as an avenue to enable them correct recurring resource imbalances and also adjust to structural changes on the terms of acquisition and expenditure of foreign exchange. In its original sense, SAP was a ploy used by economically advanced countries to hands-off responsibility on those state-owned industries that were no longer capable of competing "with the new industrial capacity in developing countries" (Toye, 1995:1). That had been the trend from the 1940s until the 1980s. It was in the 1980s that SAP acquired a new meaning, the occurrence of which, according to Toye (1995), remarkably changed the history of world economic development. With its new connotation, SAP since then came to be associated with the developing countries, including Nigeria.

The SAP for the developing countries was occasioned by the desire to combat deteriorating economic conditions coupled with the socio-political crises of the time. By the 1980s, Nigeria was already in the midst of economic decline especially in the prices of crude oil, which was the country's main source of foreign exchange earnings. When it came on board in the political leadership of Nigeria, President Babangida's regime was mainly concerned with redressing the external debt crisis facing the country. Thus, alongside the initial conditions, the Babangida regime, like those of other African countries, was motivated by the desire to improve the domestic economic performance by increasing domestic savings, higher export earnings, and greater domestic production, among others factors (Faruqee and Hussain, 1994 cited in Nwagbara, 2004).

As outlined by Babangida's regime, SAP as introduced in Nigeria had the following key objectives: to reduce the preponderance of unproductive investments in the public sector; to achieve viable balance of payment; to reduce dependence on oil and on imports by restructuring and diversifying the productive base of the economy, etc. In other to achieve the said objectives, the IMF prescribed means which include adoption of appropriate pricing policies in all sectors with greater reliance on market forces; restructuring and rationalization of the public sector through privatization, commercialization, and removal of subsidies; trade liberalization; adoption

of a realistic exchange rate were pursued. The idea of reliance on market forces and liberalization was to make the economic environment attractive for foreign investors to come in and do business (Edward, 1993; Tybout, 1992; Mkandawire, 1995; Havyrlyshyn, 1990). What was the outcome of SAP?

With all its connotations and exigencies, SAP generated so many upheavals among the civil society in many adjusting countries. The World Bank sponsored studies on SAP concentrate mainly on the area of assessment of the overall policy environment in countries that embarked on the adjustment programmes with a view to ascertaining the successes or failures of the reform policies. In 1994, one of such reports concluded that there were some improvement among 29 countries that embarked on SAP in the spheres macroeconomic, and agricultural policies. Other spheres such as deregulation and liberalization of markets were scored low marks while the areas concerning public enterprises and the financial system, were said to be resistant. While acknowledging that such improvements were not uniform across the countries and sectors, the report pointed out areas that required improvement (Faruqee and Hussain, 1994 cited in Nwagbara, 2004). In those countries where SAP did not succeed, the World Bank blamed the failure on the 'soft' attitude of the political leadership on organized interest groups who kicked against the implementation of the economic reform policies.

While the impact of the SAP policies on the economies of the adjusting countries was emphasized in the literature, the aspect of negative outcome of SAP on the people was not given priority attention. Where such studies exist, the literature did not lay emphasis on the impact of SAP on national industrial relations systems. Such negligence tend to ignore a more profound account on the role of organized labour and other interest groups on the success or failure of the IMF sponsored economic reform programmes.

Having accepted SAP after a long period of public debate, the Babangida administration began the reform processes without concern about how such reforms might adversely affect some interest groups. Urban dwellers especially public sector employees were hard hit by the austerity measure, which began before SAP. This deplorable situation was exacerbated by the introduction of SAP. Some of the reforms led to cut in the take home pay of workers; massive retrenchment of workers; high cost of living and removal of subsidies, among others. This led to the decline of the real incomes of civil servants (who are mostly urban dwellers) by almost 50 per cent.

While the wages of urban dwellers declined and remained stagnant since 1986, the real income of rural dwellers increased by up to 40 per cent in the same period (Faruqee & Hussain, 1994 cited in Nwagbara, 2004). This disparity, coupled with high inflationary rate; low purchasing capacity of the naira; job and food insecurity led to unprecedented protests by the aggrieved interest groups. The government on its part took the situation into its strides by employing repressive measures on opponents of its reform policies. It was within the context of this crisis situation, which characterized public sector industrial relations operated in Nigeria that this research study was situated. The essence of it was to delineate its specificities (if any) from other periods and proffers some explanations.

Organized labour in Nigeria has historically protested against unfavourable government policies (Offiong, 1983, Nwagbara, 1999). Beginning from the colonial era up to the Babangida regime, the literature is crammed with account of labour protests or impact of organized labour on government policies of various regimes that had shaped government – labour relationship. Oftentimes, these protests manifest in the form of strike action, a more potent weapon employed by organized labour over the years to press home its demands.

For instance, following unfavourable and discriminatory colonial regime policies against black workers in the public sector employment, organized labour in Nigeria was able to stage, as far back as 1945, one of the most important strikes that could not be easily forgotten in the nation's history. Part of the intriguing aspects of the 1945 General Strike is the fact that organized labour in Nigeria was at its budding stage, being formed through the ingenuity and expertise of Henry Libert, a Liberian migrant labourer and some of the educated elites in the nationalist struggle (Offiong, 1983).

The presence of military dictatorships in the nation's political scene and their use of repressive decrees could not stop organized labour from using the strike instrument whenever the need arises. At best, such legislation could cause a temporary setback on organized labour after which organized labour develops some immunity against the harsh and hostile confrontations of the military (Cohen, 1974; and Ubeku, 1986) Thus, lack of fair policies and perceived inequity as a result of a blockade has been beneath most of the overt factors that motivate strike action among organized labour in the public sector of Nigerian industrial relations system.

To underscore the increasing trends in the phenomenon of industrial grievances in the Nigerian industrial

relations arena, Cohen (1974:174) and Ubeku (1986:167) chronicled the list of strike actions that occurred both in civilian regimes of voluntarism and the interventionist era of military rule by decrees. In both periods, trade unions have increasingly embarked upon strike action. From 1960-68, Cohen (1974:174) recorded a total number of 706 strikes involving about 254307 workers with at least 1213088 man-days lost. On the other hand, Ubeku (1986:167) recorded a total number of 1,078 strikes between 1968 and 1976. These strikes involved about 474,864 with about 144, 4516 man-days lost.

A breakdown of the number of strikes compiled by the scholars shows that there was a steady increase in the number of strikes in the so-called military interventionist era. For instance, from 1968-70, there was obviously a steady increase in the number of strikes totalling about 199 for the period. This figure amounts to about 18.46 per cent of the total number of strikes during the period of 1968-76 or about 28.19 per cent of the total number of strike for the period between 1960-68 (Nwagbara, 1999:11).

A one-year period – 1970-71 alone – witnessed 124 strikes or 11.50 per cent of the total number of strikes between the period of 1968 and 1976. Ubeku (1986:168) observed that there was a momentary downward slope in the incidence of strike after which it phenomenally ascended to “an all time high of ” 723 within a three-year period of 1973-1976.

A further analysis of the strike figures for this three-year period indicates that the year 1973-74 has 105(9.74%) strikes while 1974-75 and 1975-76 have 354 or 32.84 per cent and 264 or 24.49 per cent of the strikes within the period, respectively.

Between the years studied by these scholars, it could be noticed that the incidence of strikes was not a perfect upward sloping trend. There were temporary downward slopes in-between the years. Ubeku (1986) readily found an explanation. He noted that such fluctuations in the number of strikes occurred whenever a new legislation is promulgated to check the activity of organized labour. He cited the case of 1968 when the military government promulgated the first decree that banned strikes in the Nigerian industrial relations.

Ubeku (1986) was quick to point out that although the law and physical threats by law enforcement agents create some restraining influence “on the propensity to strike”, it “did not act as a deterrent”. Workers easily organize themselves after the initial months of shock from the hostility of the law. In fact strike has become a household word in Nigeria. It seems to have become a normal way of life as people hardly get surprised about it these days. To most scholars and well-meaning Nigerians, the strike situation calls for adequate concern.

Writing on the issue of strike, Tokunbo as cited in Damachi (1984) decried the prevailing frequency of the strike situation. He observed that in 1982, there was a total of 340 trade disputes out of which 257(75%) resulted in strike. The scenario was particularly gloomy for the country as he observed. As he noted, 91 trade disputes were declared and 64(70%)of them resulted in strike. Tokunbo in Damachi (1984:2) then summarized his dismay as follows:

In February of 1983, 15 trade disputes occurred and 14 resulted in strike....This is not an encouraging picture. The conclusion that one is led to is multidimensional – that the collective bargaining process is inefficient or has broken down, that the Labour Ministry is inefficient and requires re-organization to meet the pressures and demands of modern industry, and finally that the arbitral machinery needs a shake-up from lethargy and a reordering of its methodology to assure its operation as a part of and within the collective bargaining process.

This fear about the efficiency of the industrial relations machinery was confirmed by Krinsky's (1980) assertion in that regard. Krinsky argued that the breakdown of collective bargaining modalities in the hands of the lawmakers and government officials have been responsible for industrial grievances and strikes. He believes that workers in the public sector are not comfortable breaking the law by embarking on strike action. But they feel compelled to do so in order to change what they perceive as unjust conditions such as deprivation of the right to organize and bargain.

From the foregoing one could easily assert that there is a high propensity for organized labour to grieve in Nigeria. On the basis of this assertion one can equally argue that there is a positive correlation between the propensity of organized labour to grieve and their propensity to strike. This view was modelled after Kassalow's (1969:156) observation on the phenomenon of strike in the US labour relations. In comparing the trends of strike in the US and the situation in Western Europe, he observed that the incidence of strike is higher in the US because of the high propensity of US workers to grieve. He arrived at his conclusion after comparing the strike statistics of the US and those of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, West Germany, etc. He however warned

that comparisons like this should be made with great amount of caution due to the fact that strike statistics for any country or any particular year could be subjected to some special explanation.

While the researcher is conscious of this warning, she is tempted to make a brief remark on both statistics. The annual average of man- days lost for Nigeria between 1960 and 1968 is more than three times that of the US, which were 477 for a ten-year period between 1956 and 1965. Also, it is more than the sum of the US, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, West Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and Great Britain. The same could be said of the period 1968-76 where the figures of man-days lost in Nigeria were even greater than the earlier period.

METHODS

Simply put, this study is essentially a sociological analysis of industrial relations in Nigeria during Babangida's SAP and political transition era. Historical information formed the bulk of data for the study while whatever lapses associated with it was made up for by the additional use of sample survey. Subjects were administered with questionnaires for first-hand information on the problem of social unrest during the introduction of SAP. The study population includes academic staff of universities in Nigeria, students in the universities, and civil/public servants whose unions are under the umbrella of the NLC. A sample of lecturers and students was selected from the University of Calabar while the sample from the other category of workers was selected from workers in Federal parastatals in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State.

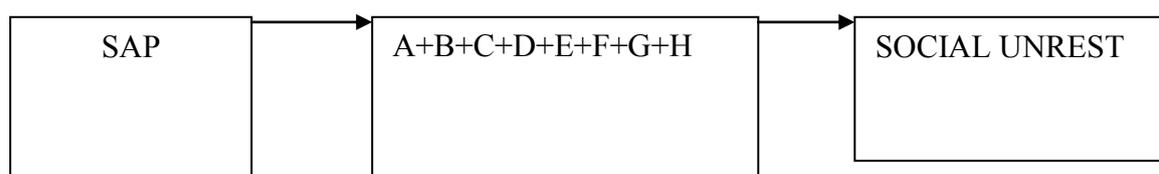
The study utilized many comparable research situations. Apart from collecting historical data, existing data was collected on different regimes and interest groups in Nigeria. Questionnaires were administered and responses obtained from groups in Calabar such as trade union members in the public sector, university students, politicians and those in government. A total of 357 questionnaires were administered on respondents. These formed the bulk of the primary data for the study. All the data put together, the historical data available formed the basis of examination and explanation of the differences and similarities within Nigeria at different points in history.

Many research questions were raised to aid in providing answers to the problems identified for investigation. The following hypotheses will guide the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between economic hardship occasioned by SAP conditionality and interest groups' protests against its' introduction.
2. Interest groups in Nigeria do not perceive Babangida's regime as the most repressive of all the military regimes the country had.

Thus the research questions and hypotheses, together, guide the step-by-step process of data collection for this study. Following the research questions and hypotheses, the ensuing model was constructed to show the relationship existing among the variables under investigation.

1. **Sap Led to Social Unrest:** What factors influenced the unfavourable disposition of organized labour and other interest groups against SAP? Or, why did Nigerians protest against SAP?
 - a. The people encountered harsher conditions of living.
 - b. Government retrenched workers and drastically cut the pay package of those still in its employ.
 - c. Subsidies were removed.
 - d. The high inflationary trend further enhanced the deterioration of the standard of living of the people.
 - e. The unemployment situation in the country worsened.
 - f. SAP package was not in the interest of public sector organized labour.
 - g. Feeling of relative deprivation was intense.
 - h. People were ignorant of the benefits of SAP.
2. **A Schematic representation of the model:**



The above schema is interpreted to mean that SAP generated or accentuated those social conditions (A - H), which in turn, gave rise to social unrest.

3. A Mathematical Model:

The above schematic model can be represented mathematically thus:

$Y = a + x$; $(y = x)$ can be further symbolized as $y = f(x)^1$ which may be interpreted as:

$$Y = a + x$$

Where ‘a’ represents SAP, ‘x’ represents the precipitating (social) factors, and ‘y’ represents social unrest.

In the mathematical model above, the social factors ‘x’ may have been in existence and capable of causing social unrest ‘y’; but the introduction of SAP ‘a’, gave additional impetus to the degree of ‘y’ ordinarily caused by ‘x’. The key word here is degree. Thus, it is this question of ‘degree’ that enabled the researcher to determine SAP induced protests being examined in the present study. In the above relationship, it has been shown that SAP may have only added to the social conditions enumerated above to give rise to social unrest.

There are other possible relationships that could be established between the variables above. For instance, SAP may have a multiplying effect on the social conditions that generate social unrest. This relationship that has a higher degree of impact than the one above can be depicted thus: $y = ax$, in which case ‘y’ may occur as a result of multiplying effect of ‘a’ on ‘x’. Other possible levels of relationship include: $y = x^a$, and $y = a + x + ax + x^a$. In the second example, ‘a’ might have had an exponential multiplying effect on ‘x’ to generate ‘y’ while in the last example, all the above possible situations existing between SAP and social conditions ($a + x$, ax , and x^a) might have functioned together to give rise to ‘y’.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were presented and briefly discussed below.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents’ responses on the question, do you support the introduction of SAP?

Variables	No. of Respondents			Total	Percentage
	Students	Lecturers	Others		
Yes	5	10	15	30	8.40
No	130	77	95	302	84.59
Not sure	5	10	10	25	7.01
Total	140	97	120	357	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2004.

The responses of the respondents on the issue of support for the introduction of SAP in Nigeria as shown in Table 1 above is quite revealing. As shown in the table, a total number of 302 respondents representing 84.59 per cent of the total number of respondents were not in support of the introduction of SAP. A further breakdown of the 302 people that did not support SAP shows that 130 (43.05%) of them were students while 77 (25.50%) and 95 (31.46%) were lecturers and other categories of workers, respectively. The 130 students that are opposed to SAP represent 96.43 per cent of the total number of students in the sample; the 77 lecturers that said no to SAP represent 79.38 per cent of the total lecturers in the sample while the 95 other workers that reject SAP represent 79.17 per cent of the total respondents in that category. Only 30 (8.40%) of the total respondents said they support the introduction of SAP while the remaining 25 (7.01%) respondents were undecided. This finding, to a large extent, supports an earlier study carried out by Ogbuagu (1995) in which he found out that those who did not support the introduction of SAP in Nigeria were more than those who supported it.

Responses to a follow-up question of ‘why did you not support SAP?’ reveal that those who did not support SAP based their reason on a number of factors few of which will be mentioned here. One of these factors is the externality of the reform process against which they preferred an inward-looking approach, which should be locally conceived and nurtured. This, they believe, will be devoid of the adverse effects of the IMF-imposed SAP. During personal interactions with some of the students’ leaders and officers of the NLC in Calabar, they frowned at the IMF-induced reform, which they said had a litany of unpleasant consequences on the general public due largely to the dependent status of our economy on those of the donor countries. As a matter of fact, all the academic staff in the sample mentioned the imposition of the IMF-type of economic reform on the country as their main grievance for not supporting SAP. They opined that there was need to revamp the economy but not at the dictate of the IMF. Nigeria, according to the respondents, is already endowed with abundant riches which, if well managed will alleviate the present hardship facing the majority of the population. This brings in another factor, which is the issue of exploitation and continued impoverishment of the citizenry as we continue to depend on the dictates of the Western super powers. Responses to a related question of ‘why did you protest against SAP’ showed a lot of similarities to the earlier ones. All the 357 respondents selected the options that SAP was a foreign imposition; it is not in the interest of the people of Nigeria, it produces more adverse consequences than benefits, and that it an anti-development policy programme that threw many people into the labour market, among other reasons.

These responses are consistent with the views of most Nigerians who are acquainted with whole antecedents and politics of the SAP and who had the opportunity to contribute to the debate ensuing from the SAP phenomenon. Just as many Nigerians – scholars and non-scholars alike – are criticizing the current policy tagged the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) as a foreign imposition, so it was with SAP. In lurid and comprehensive manner, one Ibrahim Ayagi, a merchant bank operator quoted in African Concord (1990:38) said out his mind about SAP in the following way:

Originally SAP in theory was good. We all agreed with it. That's the one which we had in books. That is exactly what is not being implemented. The one being followed religiously... is full of contradictions. On one hand we say we are being self-reliant but instead of that, we want to import this, we want to import that. We all talk of having less foreign exchange to go round and how to service debt, how to raise more loans, as if these are the issues. But we know that when you are being self-reliant, you don't talk of more loans. You talk about servicing of the loans with what you have. You are not going to be of good behaviour so that other people could offer your more loans. What we see today is a completely different system. It is purely IMF's.

In consonant with the above opinion was Obasanjo's earlier statement quoted in the Newswatch magazine of 1989 and cited in Ogbuagu (1995:130) thus:

The structural adjustment programme, as has been adopted by most African governments, is the brainchild of the World Bank and the IMF and their officials cannot deny selective and discriminate use of data and statistics to advance and support "the success" of the programme of adjustment designed by them to save Africa.

These arguments no doubt have their substance. It could be recalled that while Nigerians rejected the introduction of SAP after several debates, Babangida still went ahead and accepted it at the prompting of the IMF representative in Nigeria. In another development, Obasanjo was quoted in the Newswatch (1990:7) saying:

...the people recommending SAP for you do not recommend it elsewhere... there is a bit of racism in this thing and if we don't see it, then we are stupid... our currency has grossly been undervalued. And the ramification of that is on the low income people... Whoever feeds you can hold you to ransom. They can enslave you.

In response to the question on whether SAP has any adverse effect on the well-being of many Nigerians, all the 357 respondents answered in the affirmative. Reacting to a follow-up question, they listed some problems ranging from retrenchment of workers, high cost of living as a result of removal of subsidies, unemployment, inflation, etc. as SAP induced ugly consequences confronting the citizenry in our society. The opinion of these respondents is supported by the views of many Nigerians about the consequences of SAP. One of such views came from a prominent statesman, a former warlord and leader of the defunct Biafra Republic, Chief Emeka Odimegwu Ojukwu. In his criticism of SAP and what it stands for, Ogbuagu (1995:132) quoted him as saying:

I am not an economist...but one thing I can tell you is that the poor of Nigeria are dying slowly... The proof of the pudding, no matter what you say can be seen in the eyeball of those for whom you make the policy... I repeat, the poor and the disadvantaged of Nigeria are dying slowly.

Following the above issue, respondents' responses on the question of comparison between the standard of living of the people before SAP and under SAP was fascinating. It was almost a unanimous response, with 347 or 97.20 per cent respondents saying that the standard of living was worsened under SAP and better before its introduction while the remaining 10 (2.80%) respondents did not state whether there was any difference between the two periods or not. There was no response to say that the standard of living of the people was better under SAP.

Following the above question on the direct effect of SAP on members of the society was another one on the effect of SAP on the economy of the country. The respondents were required to state whether the nation's economy improved or performed well at all under SAP or not based on its influence on the general well being of the people. Very interesting responses emanated from the respondents.

Probing further on the restiveness during SAP, respondents were asked whether the economic hardship consequent to the introduction of SAP contributed to the protests. A greater number of the respondents – 93 per cent - agreed that SAP protests were mainly provoked by the attendant economic hardship more than any other factor. This hardship, which was widespread, might have been the reason why market women as well as school children participated in the protests.

Table 2 shows respondents’ ranking of various military regimes’ level of authoritarianism and repression of organized interest groups in Nigeria.

Regime	Rank order*						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
General Gowon				4			
General Murtala					5		
General Obasanjo						6	
General Buhari/Idiagbon		2					
President Babangida	1						
General Abacha			3				
General Abubakar							7

Source: Fieldwork, 2004.

*The ranking is done in the descending order with ‘1’ as most, and ‘7’ as least, repressive and authoritarian.

On the question that required the respondents to rank military regimes in the country in terms of degree of repression and authoritarianism in handling industrial relations matters with organized labour and other issues of interest groups’ activities, their responses are presented in Table 2 above. As could be seen from the table, President Babangida was ranked the most authoritarian and repressive military regime the country has ever had followed by the Buhari/Idiagbon regime which it overthrew by a counter coup and succeeded in 1985.

Following the general economic hardship in the country as a result of the austerity measures and the massive corruption in the country under the civilian government of President Shehu Shagari, General Buhari responded to the public outcry and wrested power from Shagari in December 1983 supposedly to save the deplorable situation. General Buhari/Idiagbon regime began by dealing ruthlessly with cases of corruption and misappropriation of public funds and properties. Not being able to strike a favourable deal with the IMF for a loan, the regime went ahead to tackle the economic problem confronting the country by retrenching workers without benefit, and cutting the salaries of those who were retained and repressing opposition with military might.

In 1985, Babangida overthrew the Buhari/Idiagbon government. Babangida claimed that he did so in the interest of the people; to save them from the excesses of his predecessor and foster a better economic status for the nation. Not too long, Babangida found himself engrossed in the same ills for which he persecuted his predecessor thereby reneging on his promised mission of putting a stop to authoritarianism and stamp out corruption. He clamped down on opposition with reckless abandon. He not only adopted the obnoxious decrees of his predecessor such as the infamous Decree No. 2 of 1984, he further promulgated more stringent ones such as the Trade Disputes (Emergency) Decree of 1988, and devised more subtle and nefarious strategies of using them against opposition. The leadership ranks of the NLC as well as the press fell victim of Babangida’s tyranny.

This finding is supported by findings from a related study carried by Ogbuagu. Ogbuagu (1995:138-139) required his subjects to compare the system of governance in Nigeria before and under SAP and also to specifically state whether Buhari’s regime or that of Babangida was more repressive. In the first question, about 57 per cent of his respondents said that the SAP era system of governance under Babangida was more authoritarian. For the second question 62 per cent of the respondents said that Babangida was more repressive while 36 per cent said that Buhari was more repressive. About 2 per cent recorded ‘no’ opinion. Flowing from these responses, Ogbuagu (1995:139) summarized his findings as follows:

One cannot fail to observe the consistency on the part of the respondents with regard to the authoritarian and repressive character of the Babangida government in the SAP period and which intensified as the Nigerian economic health got worse. More interesting was the picking of the Babangida’s regime as more authoritarian than that of Buhari. This is because the Buhari regime was widely seen (especially during the 1983-1985 period and for some years after) as the most authoritarian government the country has had to contain with since its political independence in 1960. When the Babangida regime assumed power in 1985, it popularized itself by claiming that it did so to reverse authoritarianism; and to permit respect for human rights to bloom in the polity. Thus, it could be argued that although Buhari’s regime exhibited a lot of repressive attitude and authoritarianism, that displayed by his successor (Babangida) was unparalleled.

Like the Babangida regime, which it succeeded, Abacha’s government had an uncompromising attitude to industrial relations issues and had no room for opposition. Unlike its predecessor, the Abacha government bordered little about collective bargaining in spite of pressure from trade unions. In fact, his (Abacha’s) was a

case of a mute tyrant who insidiously dealt with disenfranchised interest groups.

Following the Abacha regime in the order of ranking by respondents is Gowon's regime. It was Gowon's government that introduced a radical departure from the legacy of voluntarism and free collective bargaining to that of interventionism in industrial relations. This change came in response to the political upheaval of the time as well as concern for an atmosphere conducive and essential for implementation of government economic policies. Thus, in 1968, Gowon promulgated the Trade Disputes (Emergency Provisions) Decree of 1968 and amended in 1969. In this decree, strike was banned and it became an offence for any interest group to embark upon strike action (Okwara, 1991:63). Although nonconforming trade unions and union leaders were incarcerated, this did not measure up to the tune of such incidence in the Babangida and Abacha eras.

The next in the rank is Gen. Murtala's regime followed by that of Gen. Obasanjo. Gen. Murtala who came into power on July 29, 1975 could not carry out his sanitizing mission of ridding the country of corruption as he was assassinated in a coup on February 13, 1976. Murtala was succeeded by his second in command, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo. When he assumed office, Gen. Obasanjo indicated his interest in continuing with the policies of Gen. Mohammed. He presents his case thus as cited in Ojiako(nd: 47):

I know that he (Mohammed) would have wished that somebody should continue the task of nation building from where he left off. I have worked very closely with him and I have shared his benefits and commitments to the Federal Government's policies and actions.... All policies of Federal Military Government continue as before and all ministries should continue their usual duties.

True to his promise, Obasanjo implemented the master plan of Murtala, including his labour policy in which compulsory check-off was introduced by legislation and trade unions was restructured on industrial lines, among other things. The labour policy of this regime restricted and put to limit the exercise of free collective bargaining and banned those organizations classified as essential services or strategic from embarking on strike action.

The least in the rank, General Abdulsalami Abubakar's regime was a child of circumstance. It came at heels of the death of the acclaimed dictator Gen. Sani Abacha. Gen. Abubakar was the exact opposite of his predecessor and had the reputation of placing a smile on the lips of civil servants with a generous salary increase even though that was shortly overtaken by the galloping inflation in the country. Also, his regime had little or no track record of repression or authoritarianism against workers and their unions or other interest groups until the end of his regime in May 1999 when he willingly handed over power to the present democratically elected government headed by President Olusegun Obasanjo.

There was a question on the justification of Babangida's overly repressive attitude toward interest group protests, especially those of the organized labour. Respondents were required to state whether or not President Babangida's repressive attitude toward organized labour was due to the desire to revamp the economy and sanitize the country's political system. The following responses as presented in Table 6 below were the outcome of the summary of their responses.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the SAP scenario during Babangida's regime and why interest groups in Nigeria were opposed to it. In reaction to mounting opposition against his regime's obnoxious policies, Babangida resorted to, and meted out generous amount of repressive treatment on dissenting voices, while co-opting into his cabinet some of the acclaimed social critics who were championing the cause of oppositions against his SAP regime. The study pointed out that SAP opposition was sustained as a result of what Nigerian workers termed excessive foreign influence on its adoption regardless of its adverse social consequences on the citizenry. In all, interest groups especially those with fixed incomes within Nigeria were worse off.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- Proper sensitization and enlightenment programmes should be carried out before government's introduction of new policies such as SAP to assuage the fear of the general public.
- Implementation of SAP should have a human face. Massive retrenchment of workers, removal of subsidies and privatization of public enterprises without a safety net to cushion their effects on the people will generate discontentment among the populace.
- Government should be prudent in the management of resources at its disposal. There would not have been any need for SAP if the political leaders were prudent in the management of the abundant human and natural resources with which the nation is endowed.
- Political leaders should imbibe the principle of good governance. Cases of mismanagement are rare when there is good governance. Political leaders of Nigeria and their bureaucratic

henchmen should display the spirit of accountability and transparency in their dealings with public property and funds, in accordance with international best practices.

- Trade unions/interest groups should to re-invent themselves in order to stand a chance of future growth. This they could do by engaging in self-help projects that will enhance the living condition of their members and also help shape and reflect a collectivist view of the political economy. Under the prevailing circumstances of globalization, organized labour in the public sector should abide by the advice of Taylor (1997) suggesting that trade unions become “malleable and innovative or they will die”.
- Government and organized labour should resort to roundtable negotiations to resolve conflicting issues and each party should endeavour to honour its part of a collective agreement.
- Taking into cognizance the fragile nature of the International Labour Office’s (ILO) ‘Freedom of Association’ as human rights instrument almost everywhere around the world, it behooves on organized labour to ‘soft ground’ in the area of institutionalized means through which they channel their grievances. This does not imply subjugating the very essence of formation of trade unions, which is the protection of workers’ rights and achievement of better working conditions and improved standard of living to the whims and caprices of the state or the employer. The point being made is that a new strategy, which is built around the very essence which trade unions stand for, is required to deal with the deepening workplace insecurities and unstable labour markets.

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¹ Note that the symbol ‘ ’ means varies with while ‘f’ denotes the varying degrees to which SAP can exacerbate the social conditions that give rise to social unrest.