

UNILAG ASUU Honours Prof Akingbade

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November 26, 2019 was an important day for me. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) Unilag Branch organized a day to appreciate the services of mainly past chairmen and others of the branch.

Mrs. Folashade Sikirat Akingbade, surviving wife of my late comrade in the struggle against military dictatorships (Major-General Muhammadu Buhari and his usurping successor, the Maradona of Nigerian politics: General a.k.a President Ibrahim Babangida), Prof. J. Funsho Akingbade had invited me and Professors Akere, Kukoyi and Okusanya (Akingbade's friends till the end), to join her in receiving a posthumous award in his name.

My invitation did not come from ASUU Unilag Branch. I believe it should have, for I was in the trenches with Prof. Akingbade in the period 1987-1993. I started off as Assistant Secretary and almost immediately became Acting Secretary as Dr. Olu Fadeyebi as Secretary, became MiA and later surfaced in America. He felt hounded by the Buhari/Idiagbon dictatorship. Akingbade and I felt the same way. I remember my writing a Press Release against dictator Buhari's policies, for Akingbade to sign and he told me he would sign if I agree that we would go to jail together. I had no problem in reminding him of my dedication to the struggle for a better Nigeria which started from my student days. Mrs. Akingbade knew of my involvement with her husband as we avoided arrests and sought and collaborated with the vibrant Nigeria Labour Congress of Hassan Sunmonu and co. Adams Oshiomole who today said thieves would be forgiven if they joined the ruling party was also part of this strong counter-weight to military rule. We provided intellectual support and they gave strength in numbers for strikes to change society and not just increase in wages. Late Mahmud Tukur who was, if my memory is correct, very asmahtic provided effective leadership at the national level. I don't remember details now, but he died in strange circumstances and was succeeded by Prof. Jega of INEC fame.

I hasten to state that I initiated most of the caustic and fearless ASUU Unilag branch Press Releases of that period. I remember one in which we warned the nation that Babangida overthrowing Buhari does not and cannot bode well for Nigeria. Prof. Mustapha Danesi, then the Vice-Chairman of ASUU Unilag branch of then and succeeding chairman to Akingbade is still alive. We were more agile on a better and genuinely democratic Nigeria than focus on the restricted better emoluments for our members. We were criticized by our members for that posture on betterment of the whole than parts of it. The succeeding leadership of Mustapha Danesi was better on realizing some increments in negotiations for ASUU.

The highlights of yesterday's event was the title of the Symposium: "Funding Public Education in a Neo-Colony: Imperatives for Nigeria's Development" and the choice of the two main speakers. Veteran ASUU leader, Prof. Omotoye Olorode and Femi Falana (SAN) did justice to the topic.

Falana started by noting that one has to be free to challenge a neo-colony of the West. He reminded that the West, using the World Bank and IMF never left control of Nigeria. For him, they were in the past discrete as Nigerians rallied against these institutions but today they have seats at the CBN and other policy making entities of our governance. He reminisced about how they told us in the past to just focus on education up to secondary school level when we all know that the West, today is not thriving on oil or similar products but knowledge.

Falana pointed out that Pro-Chancellors Wale Babalakin and Dr. Yemi Ogunbiyi are wrong in seeking the commercialization of education at this stage of Nigeria's development and recommended that ASUU does the research on where the funds to manage higher education in Nigeria could be found beyond the the TETFUND cash cow. And on TETFUND, he stressed that ASUU needs to audit which companies are actually paying and how much.

Falana argued that ASUU itself is in delusion when it suggests that 10 or 11 percent goes into education. He claimed that what the President puts forth as national government budget is a microcosm of the reality because this budget does not capture the main revenue earner NNPC, the Central Bank with a trillion-naira budget etc. He found it unconscionable that Nigerians allow this fraud to continue year-in year-out. If the Central Bank has 10% of what's meant for the entire nation and unaccounted for, how can ASUU agree that 10% is going into Education? He stated that what the Nigerian policy makers are putting into education is less than .01% of national budget which is a far cry from the UNESCO recommended 25%. It is best to read his entire paper that he promised to send to me overnight but which I am yet to receive. He showed the corruption in the sales of Government assets, under collection from oil companies that included the recent \$62 billion that the Federal government reduced to much lower from dues from oil companies and even sharp practices in trying to collect by the cabal in leadership. He pointed out how an Indian who naturalized as a Nigerian has been milking expatriate annual fees running into hundreds of millions with pittance going to the Ministry of Interior that needed no middleman to electronically collect such fees. He brought back the issue of \$7 billion that Soludo had reportedly used to bail out banks and asked for repayment with interest. With all these, and the Universities themselves halting the subcontracting their procurement to well-connected illiterates when they claim expertise, he argued that education can be well funded.

I learnt many new words from Prof. Oloyede who largely agreed with Falana. For instance, he identified the Supranational Clergy - a group of individuals who had worked for the IMF and World Bank and well socialized into undermining Nigeria's development. In my days at the UN, in a private meeting, I listened to a British Minister recalling how they foisted one such person on Nigeria and how it is paying off with the negotiations on Nigeria's debt repayment. He suggested that these Supranational Clergy are now the ones pressuring their people to become slaves of the West. He also contributed the noun donatus. People who steal our money and regularly donate pittance.

He traced how schools like Harvard invested a long while ago in places like Africa and reaping returns and wondered where Nigerian Universities are to invest today, whether in India or China to gain returns for internally generated revenue. He asked about the percentage of Nigerians who can afford private universities that are operational today, including faith based ones. He went back into history and pointed out how the earlier experiments at commercialization of agriculture at the University of Ife and how these efforts were "chopped" by Nigeria's past rogue leaders.

Rounding up a rich going down the memory lane, Prof. Olorode called for organized political movements to resist the present rapacious stealing that's making difficult to have qualitative higher education in Nigeria.

I have written too long.

I hastily surmise that ASUU needs to rebuild with other stakeholders for change. ASUU must return to its political past. It cannot afford to go to sleep and leave Nigeria in the hands of the alliance of thieves we call political parties.

Finally, I am glad a patriot like Funsho Akingbade was remembered. He expressed regrets at the end of life. Analysing current Nigeria in one of our many dialogues, he asked me about what we struggled for? Of course, my situation became different as I opted, for 24 years of my life, to be a distant cousin of the Supranational Clergy by seeking peace in many parts of war-torn Africa.