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THE KADUNA STATE LABOUR CRISIS

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In August 1996, when Gen. Sani Abacha, Nigeria's current ruler felt that those 30 military officers he appointed as state administrators at the onset of his regime had licked enough of the honey of political office, he replaced 27 of them and redeployed 3 to other states.

Most political analysts were not surprised when the name of **Lt. Col. Hameed Ali** featured on the list of the 27 new "beloved" ones of General Sani Abacha. This was so because political appointments for military officers have become a way of rewarding loyalists and keeping the restless ones at bay to discourage them from plotting and executing coup d'etats, the infamous major pastime of men and officers of the Nigerian military.

Lt. Col. Hameed Ali was the military officer that served in the Justice Auta-headed Civil Disturbances Tribunal that performed the inglorious task of trying and condemning to death by hanging in 1995, the erudite writer and environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa along with 8 of his Ogoni compatriots. The task performed by Lt. Col. Hameed Ali and the 2 others who served on that panel has gone down in Nigerian history as a monumental travesty of justice. The military must reward its own. Lt. Col. Hameed Ali got an ample reward in his appointment as the military administrator of Kaduna State where, ever since, he has been acting God and riding roughshod over the citizens through his brazen violation of their fundamental human rights, particularly, workers' rights.

Lt. Col. Hameed Ali was appointed the military administrator of Kaduna State in August 1996 and barely 3 months into his tenure, he had through his actions earned himself many nicknames from the people of the state. Understandably, most of these nicknames were uncomplimentary, the most popular of them being *Dankurma* - a deaf son.

On December 9, 1996, citizens and residents of Kaduna State were shocked when they received the news that Lt. Col. Hameed Ali, in response to a labour dispute between his administration and Resident Medical Doctors at the State Ministry of Health, had issued unilateral sack letters to all the 94 doctors in the service of the State Ministry of Health.

This reckless action of the military administrator further worsened the already pitiable state of medical health care available to the citizens in the state. Most of the medical doctors affected had little to lose as they went ahead to set up their own private hospitals while others fell for the mouth-watering offers from Saudi Arabia. At the end of the day, only the innocent citizens suffered.

June 16, marked the commencement of a protracted but avoidable industrial face-off between the Kaduna State government as represented by Lt. Col. Hameed Ali and the workers in the state's civil service over the implementation and payment of 50% arrears of increment in transport and housing allowances approved in 1995 by the immediate past military administrator of the state, Col. Jafaru Isa.

In reaching an agreement with the state government on the payment of the backlog of arrears of the said increase in allowances which was approved by the Federal Military Government in 1993 to "cushion" the effects of the increase in pump prices of petroleum products, the Joint Negotiating Council which represented the workers at the parley agreed that the sum of 31 million Naira being arrears due to the workers from January 1993 to September 1994 be paid to the Kaduna State Education Endowment Fund as the workers' contributions to the fund while the arrears from October 1994 to February 1995 (5 months) be paid to the workers immediately.

Having waited patiently for 2 years without any signals from the state government on its preparedness to honour its own part of the agreement, the workers made several pleas to the military administrator through correspondences emanating from their leadership for a possible renegotiation, if that was what the government wanted but their pleas fell on deaf ears.

When it became abundantly clear that the state government was not ready to dialogue, a trade dispute was declared and following the expiration of the 21 days ultimatum given without any discernible change of attitude from the government, the workers' leadership directed the workers to embark on a full scale strike as from June 16, 1997.

Instead of showing an understanding of the plight of the workers whose worsening socio-economic condition was enough to have extracted a truce and an early resolution of the dispute through dialogue from a responsible government, Lt. Col. Hameed Ali played the unbending military overlord by