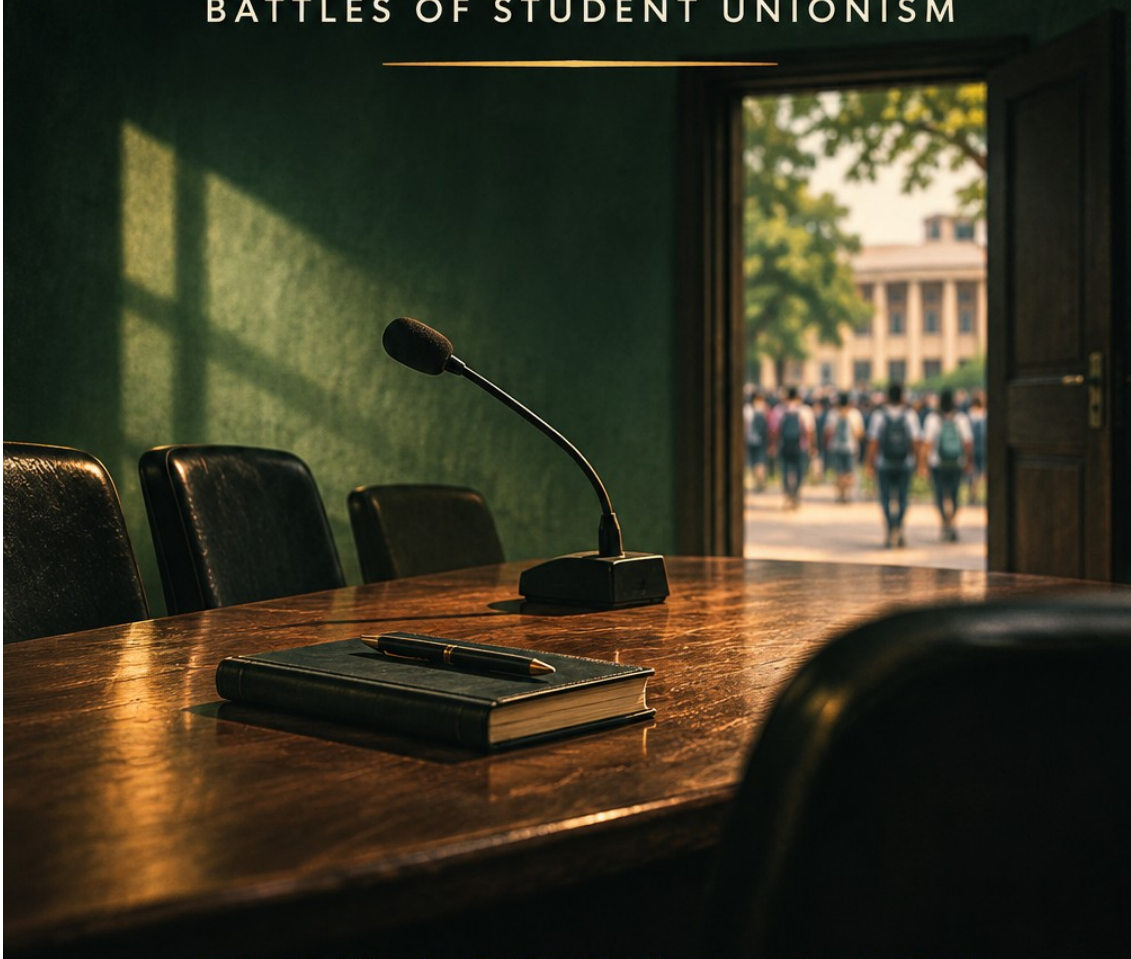
THE STRUGGLE YOU DON'T SEE

POWER, PRESSURE AND THE QUIET BATTLES OF STUDENT UNIONISM



OLUWAGBOGO DADA

AN INDEPENDENT BOOK ON NIGERIAN STUDENT UNIONISM

THE STRUGGLE YOU DON'T SEE

Power, Pressure and the Quiet Battles of Student Unionism

OLUWAGBOGO DADA

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PUBLICATION NOTE

A note to the reader

This book is an independent work about Nigerian student unionism. It does not represent an official position of NANS, NANS Southwest Zone D, OSCOHEALTH or any other institution.

Some situations in the chapters are composite illustrations written to explore familiar leadership dilemmas. They are not eyewitness accounts, allegations or descriptions of private proceedings involving identifiable people. The profiles in Chapter 16 rely on public records and identify gaps where the available record is incomplete.

Historical claims are supported by the source notes at the end of the book. Some sources are institutional records, some are contemporary news reports and some are academic studies. Their different strengths and limitations are acknowledged in the text.

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"Aluta is not the noise of a protest.
It is the pursuit of justice—whether through dialogue, organisation, or peaceful resistance."

— An argument of this book

PROLOGUE

The Struggle Beyond the Crowd

I have heard the word "Comrade" used with affection, with respect and sometimes with a little suspicion. It is a word that can bring people together. It can also make a simple greeting sound like a political statement. But what does it mean when the meeting is over and the people who called you Comrade are waiting for you to do something?

Picture a student sending a message late at night. The water in the hostel has stopped flowing. Someone has been turned away from the clinic. Another student says a new charge has appeared without any proper explanation. By morning, the union is expected to have an answer. Students do not always see the calls, the questions, the checking and the conversations that happen before that answer is given.

What they usually see is the statement. They see the photograph from a meeting. They see the protest, the press conference or the announcement that an agreement has been reached. Sometimes they see the result. Sometimes they see nothing change and begin to wonder whether anybody really listened.

That gap between what the public sees and what actually happens is where this book begins. Student unionism has a public face, but it also has a private workload. There are conversations before decisions, people who help shape a position without holding office, promises that must be followed up and difficult choices that do not fit neatly into a social media caption.

I am not writing this book to settle scores or to present every student leader as either a hero or a villain. The movement is more complicated than that. Some situations in these pages are composite illustrations drawn to explain familiar leadership dilemmas. They are not allegations against identifiable people or claims that a particular private meeting happened exactly as described.

I also write from within the movement. I served as Public Relations Officer of the Students' Union Government at Osun State College of Health Technology, Ilesa, during the 2024/2025 session, and I currently serve as Director of Media of NANS Southwest Zone D. That experience shapes the questions I ask, but this book is written in my independent capacity.

One thing I do not want us to forget is that student power should never be underestimated. The chants we inherit are not just noise. They remind us that students are not spectators in decisions that affect their education, welfare and future. But power must be organised, informed and used with a clear sense of responsibility.

We inherited a tradition of struggle. We did not inherit an instruction to confront everything. There are matters that require consultation, matters that need people to come together, moments when communication must be handled carefully and situations where a firm confrontation becomes necessary. Knowing the difference is part of leadership.

This book will ask uncomfortable questions. What does it mean to be a Comrade? Who does the work when there is no camera? Why do some people matter to an election without ever holding office? What does student unionism take from the person who serves? And when the office is finally handed over, what remains?

I do not expect every reader to agree with every page. I only hope that, by the time you reach the end, you will look at student unionism with a little more understanding and a little less assumption. There is much more to the struggle than the crowd sees.

PART 01

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT UNIONISM

THE STRUGGLE YOU DON'T SEE

CHAPTER 01

"Comrade" or "Come and Rade"

Before we talk about the word as a title, it helps to understand what it actually means. A comrade is a companion, someone who shares a cause, a duty or a difficult journey with other people. The word came into English through French and Spanish, where it was linked to the idea of a room mate or companion. Over time, it became a familiar way for people in political and workers' movements to address one another. [27]

In student unionism, however, the word carries a responsibility. When I call you Comrade, I should be saying that we are connected by more than a name. We may come from different schools, departments, backgrounds or political groups, but we are expected to recognise that the struggle for better education and student welfare is bigger than any one of us.

That is the meaning we should be careful not to lose. A person does not become a good comrade simply because the word comes before their name. It should show in how that person treats others, keeps promises, handles disagreement and behaves when there is nothing to gain. It should also show in whether the person remembers the students whose concerns brought everyone together.

Then there is the familiar campus expression, "Come and Rade". It is a play on the sound of the word Comrade, not the real origin of the word. People use it to describe someone who enters student politics mainly to take advantage of the movement, raid what should be used for students or enjoy the access that comes with an office.

The joke may sound funny, but the warning behind it is serious. Some people come because they genuinely want to serve, while others are attracted by the attention, allowances, influence, contracts or opportunities they believe student politics can bring. Sometimes a person begins with good intentions and later gets carried away by the things that come with power.

We should not assume that everybody who wants an office has come to take from the system. Ambition is not automatically a bad thing, and wanting to grow through service is not a crime. The real question is what a person does after gaining access. Does the office become a way to solve problems, or does it become a personal reward?

A comrade can disagree with you and still be a comrade. A comrade can belong to another camp and still be someone you must respect. We should not confuse friendship with loyalty to a cause, nor should we mistake political

opposition for permanent hatred. People may disagree today and work together tomorrow, but the responsibility to act with fairness should remain.

So, when you hear "Come and Rade", do not use it as a label to insult every person in the movement. Use it as a question for yourself too. Why did I come into student unionism? What am I giving to the movement, and what am I taking away from it?

The title Comrade should mean that we are prepared to stand with one another, especially when the work becomes difficult. It should not be a costume for conventions, a greeting for photographs or a shortcut to respect. If we want people to believe in the word, we must give them reasons to believe in the people who carry it.

Before we discuss what student unionism has become, we should remember the movement we inherited, the people who built it and the reason student power matters in the first place.

CHAPTER 02

The Aluta We Inherited

When students gather, there is usually a moment when one person starts a chant and the rest of the crowd answers. To someone watching from outside, it may look like ordinary singing, but to the people taking part, the words carry a message. They remind us that students are not spectators in the decisions that shape their education, welfare and future.

The organised student movement in Nigeria did not begin with NANS. The National Union of Nigerian Students, NUNS, emerged in 1956 as a national platform for student organisation. In April 1978, the protests remembered as Ali Must Go became one of the defining moments in Nigerian student activism, as students challenged increased education costs under military rule. The response was severe and NUNS was banned. In 1980, the movement regrouped under the name National Association of Nigerian Students, NANS. [1][2]

The story did not end there. Students continued to organise around education costs, poor facilities, military rule, academic freedom and the right to be heard. The 2025 history book, Aluta Continua: The Story of Nigerian Student Movement 1982 to 1992, brings together accounts from people who took part in those years. It reminds us that the movement was built by many generations, through arguments, alliances, sacrifice and the ordinary work of organising. [3]

We may be arguing in a meeting today, challenging one another's positions or even standing on different sides of an election, but there is a shared language that reminds us of the movement we belong to. When one comrade calls “Aluta Continua”, the response comes back, “Victoria Ascerta”. And when the call is “Greatest Nigerian Students!”, the answer comes back, “Great!!!” Those responses are more than familiar sounds. They remind us that disagreement does not have to destroy our sense of belonging. We can question one another, debate the direction of the union and still recognise that we are part of a wider student movement. Unity does not mean silence, and it does not mean pretending that every comrade is right. It means that our differences should not make us forget the common cause that brought us together.

That history helps explain why one of the gyrations we still sing is really about student power:

Awa lo ye
Awa lo ye o

Ohun ta fi n se agbara wa
Awa lo ye oo

The message is not simply that students should be loud or that a crowd should be able to stop everything. It is a reminder that the strength of a student union comes from the students themselves. They are the people whose interests the union is meant to protect, and they are the reason the union has a mandate in the first place.

Another familiar gyration makes that point even more directly:

Ko si lowo VC
Ko si lowo management o
Gbogbo agbara
Agbara gbogbo
Student lo wa lo wa

This is not saying that a Vice Chancellor or university management has no authority within an institution. They have responsibilities and powers under the rules of the school. The chant is reminding us that the union's right to speak for students does not come from management. It comes from the students who choose representatives and expect them to act in their interest.

That is why student power should never be underestimated. A well organised student body can bring a neglected problem into the open, ask difficult questions and make an institution explain a decision. But power must be organised. A crowd without a clear demand can disperse without changing anything, while students who understand the issue, agree on what they want and stay involved can push for a lasting result.

The songs are not a substitute for planning, nor do they give any leader permission to act without consulting the people. They are reminders of the responsibility that comes with collective strength. If the students are the source of the mandate, then the leaders must keep returning to them, listen to them and report back to them.

I respect the generations that came before us, and I believe respect also means learning from them. We should remember the sacrifices, but we should study the preparation, the organising and the thinking behind those struggles. The Aluta we inherited is bigger than a megaphone. It is a responsibility to the students who are here now and the ones who will arrive after us.

CHAPTER 03

Beyond the Protest Ground

Ask some students what a student union should do and you may hear the same answer: fight for us. Ask what fighting means and the answer may quickly become a protest, a shutdown or an ultimatum. That reaction is understandable. Students have watched complaints sit on desks for months. They have seen promises made during meetings and forgotten when the cameras leave.

Still, a union that measures its usefulness only by the number of protests it organises is measuring the wrong thing. A protest can be necessary. It can also be poorly timed, badly explained or disconnected from the people expected to participate. The question should not be whether a union made noise. The question should be whether it understood the problem and chose a response that could improve the situation.

Imagine a hostel where the water supply has failed. Students are angry, and rightly so. The union could announce a demonstration immediately. Before doing that, it should know how long the problem has lasted, whether the whole hostel is affected, what the maintenance unit has said and whether there is an urgent health risk. It should speak to the students living there, not only to the people who sent the first message. If management can arrange an immediate supply and commit to a repair date, the union should be ready to test that promise. If the promise is ignored, the next response may need to be stronger.

This is not an argument for quietness, but for competence. A union should be able to write a useful petition, understand a policy document, organise a congress, keep a record of complaints, negotiate with management, brief the press and mobilise students when the situation demands it. Each skill matters, and none makes the others unnecessary.

Some of the most useful work may never produce a dramatic photograph. A student is helped through a disciplinary process. A scholarship application problem is resolved. A course registration deadline is extended after a careful engagement. A class representative notices that a student with a disability cannot access a lecture venue and insists that the issue is addressed. These things may not trend online, but they matter to the person whose problem has been solved.

There is also a responsibility to know when a matter is bigger than the union. A student leader is not a lawyer, engineer, doctor or every kind of expert at once. Sometimes the best service is to bring the right person into the

conversation, check the relevant rule and avoid promising what the office cannot deliver.

The protest ground is one part of student unionism. It is not the whole campus. A movement should be capable of standing before a crowd, sitting across a negotiation table and returning to the hostel to explain what happens next. If it can do only one of those things, students are not getting the full value of representation.

CHAPTER 04

From Three Cs to Four

For years, student activists have spoken about the Three Cs of student unionism. In the version many comrades sing and practise, they are consultation, consolidation and confrontation. The order matters. First, understand the complaint and listen to the people affected. Then bring the necessary people together and build a common position. If dialogue fails and the issue still demands action, confrontation remains available.

The Three Cs were never an instruction to remain in a permanent state of battle. A leader who skips consultation may fight the wrong battle. A leader who fails to consolidate may discover that the support is not as strong as it first appeared. And a leader who rushes into confrontation may create risks for the very students they promised to protect.

In May 2026, former NANS President Comrade Olushola Oladoja presented an expanded Four Cs approach: consultation, consolidation, communication before confrontation. The new C is communication, and its place in the sequence is important. It reminds leaders that they must keep the people who trusted them with a concern informed, rather than leaving them to depend on rumours. [6]

Communication is not the same as announcing every discussion to the public. Sometimes a negotiation needs room to continue, and some details should remain private to protect a student, a witness or the progress of the matter. But the people who brought the issue to the union should know that it is being handled, what has been agreed, what remains uncertain and when they will hear from their representatives again.

I do not want the fourth C to become another slogan that people repeat without practising. If students attend a consultation, help build a common position and then hear nothing from their leaders, the union has failed to complete the work. Communication should happen while the matter is being handled, not only after a decision has been made.

The Four Cs are not a rigid staircase where one must always finish before the next begins. Communication should continue during consultation and consolidation, while urgent issues may require immediate action. The framework is there to help leaders make better decisions, not to give them an excuse to delay when students need help.

The addition of communication does not mean that every detail must be broadcast to everybody. There is a difference between keeping the people who gave you a mandate informed and exposing sensitive discussions to people

who have no responsibility for the matter. The first is accountability, while the second can damage trust and make a solution harder to reach.

If a future leader can explain what was learnt through consultation, who was brought together through consolidation, what was communicated and why confrontation was or was not necessary, then the Four Cs have become more than words. They have become a practical way of doing the work and accounting for leadership.

PART 02

THE FOUR Cs IN PRACTICE

CONSULTATION, CONSOLIDATION, COMMUNICATION BEFORE CONFRONTATION

THE STRUGGLE YOU DON'T SEE

CHAPTER 05

Consultation: Listening to Those Who Matter Before Taking a Position

A complaint arrives, somebody forwards a screenshot, another person sends a voice note and a third insists that the matter has already been confirmed. Before long, students are asking the union to issue a statement. This is where a representative must learn to slow down enough to check the facts, without becoming slow to act.

Consultation begins with listening, but it cannot end there. You need to know who is affected, what exactly happened, when it happened and what evidence is available. If the issue concerns a new fee, compare the old and new schedules. If it concerns a suspended student, hear the student's account and understand the procedure. If it concerns safety, find out whether anyone is in immediate danger and what help is needed now.

One mistake is to consult only people who already agree with the leadership. That may make a meeting comfortable, but it does not make the decision representative. The student who is angry, the student who is afraid, the student who cannot attend a meeting and the student who thinks the union has misunderstood the issue all have something to contribute.

Consultation also means speaking to people who may disagree with you. Management may have information the union does not have, while a lecturer can explain a rule, a lawyer can identify a procedural problem and a welfare officer can warn that a proposed action could expose a vulnerable student. Listening does not mean surrendering the students' position; it means taking the matter seriously enough to understand it.

A good consultation should leave the leadership with something more useful than a room full of complaints. It should produce a clear account of the problem, the people affected, the possible remedies and the risks attached to each option. It should also make clear what decision belongs to the representatives and what must be taken back to the students.

There is no shame in telling students that a fact is still being checked. There is shame in presenting an assumption as truth because people are waiting for a statement. A careful first update can say that the union has received the complaint, is verifying the details and will report again at a stated time. That is better than releasing a dramatic accusation that later has to be withdrawn.

Consultation is not an excuse to keep meeting forever. When the facts are clear enough, leaders must make a decision. The people who spoke to you deserve to know what you decided and why. Listening creates an obligation to report back. Without that final step, consultation becomes a way of collecting people's time without respecting their contribution.

CHAPTER 06

Consolidation: Bringing Different Interests Together to Reach a Common Position

A union may have a strong complaint and still struggle to move it forward. One campus is ready to act, another wants more information, while a third is worried about the timing because examinations are close. They may all agree that something is wrong, but until they agree on what should happen next, the union's position will remain weak.

That is where consolidation comes in. It is the work of bringing people around a position they understand and are prepared to support. It is not the same as collecting photographs with prominent comrades. A group picture can show who attended a meeting. It cannot show whether everyone agreed, whether the affected students were heard or whether the people in the picture intend to do anything afterwards.

The strongest support often comes from people closest to the problem. If a fee affects students in one faculty more severely than others, their experience must shape the demand. If a hostel is unsafe, the people who live there should help explain what needs to change. A union should not build a public campaign around a problem and then leave the people living with that problem out of the decision.

Consolidation also means building relationships beyond the campus. Alumni, professional groups, civil society organisations and people with technical knowledge may offer useful help. A former student leader may know who to contact, a lawyer may help interpret a regulation and a public figure may draw attention to an issue. Such support can be useful, provided the union remains clear about who it represents and does not hand over its independence.

The question to ask is simple: are people joining because they believe in the demand, or because they expect a private reward? An alliance becomes fragile when the real agreement is hidden. It is better to be honest about what each person is contributing and what the common position actually requires.

There will still be disagreement. Some people will prefer dialogue. Others will believe the time for dialogue has passed. A mature leadership does not treat every disagreement as disloyalty. It gives people room to explain their concerns, identifies what can be agreed and makes a decision through the proper process.

Consolidation is not about making everybody think alike. It is about giving people enough understanding and confidence to move together where their interests meet. If a coalition cannot survive a respectful disagreement, it was probably built on personalities rather than purpose.

CHAPTER 07

Communication: Keeping Those Consulted Informed Without Making Every Discussion Public

A union can lose control of its own story without anybody intending to cause harm. A meeting ends without a clear update, one person tells a friend that management has accepted the demand, another says the union was warned not to speak and before long a screenshot is circulating. By the next morning, students are arguing over an agreement that may not even exist.

Communication is not simply the act of posting. It is the responsibility to make sure that people who need information receive the right information at the right time. This is especially important after consultation. If students have trusted you with their complaints, you owe them an update. They should not be the last people to hear what happened in a meeting held in their name.

But I want to make another point, because this is where student leaders sometimes get communication wrong. Not every conversation belongs on social media. Not every strategy should be announced while it is still being developed. If a union is still trying to build a common position, there may be no benefit in publishing every disagreement. If a sensitive student case is being handled, careless publicity can expose the very person the union is trying to protect.

The first audience is often the people who were consulted. Report back to them. Explain what was agreed, what remains open, what needs to stay confidential and why. Give them a realistic time for the next update. If they have to take another decision, bring that decision back to them. This is how a leadership keeps faith with the people who gave it a mandate.

The wider public may need a shorter message. It can state that an engagement took place, identify the issue being pursued and say when a further update will be provided. There is no need to publish negotiation tactics, private phone numbers, personal records or unconfirmed details simply to prove that the union is active.

That is disciplined communication, not secrecy for its own sake. The difference is accountability. Confidentiality should protect a process or a person, not protect an officeholder from fair questions. When a decision affects students, they deserve enough information to understand it and assess the result. A leader cannot hide a failure behind the phrase internal matter.

A media officer also has a responsibility to tell the truth, even when the truth is not the most attractive version of events. A meeting is not a victory because a photograph was taken. A promise is not an achievement because it was announced. If the union has not secured the remedy, say that progress is incomplete. People can work with an honest update. They cannot make good decisions with a manufactured success.

The best communication is not about making the leadership look busy, it is about keeping students informed. Sometimes that means speaking less publicly and reporting more carefully to the people directly involved, while at other times it means correcting a rumour in public. The skill is knowing which is needed.

CHAPTER 08

Confrontation: Knowing When Dialogue Is No Longer Enough

There are moments when another letter will not help. The union has written, students have explained the problem, meetings have been held and deadlines have passed, yet the same assurance is repeated while nothing changes. At some point, leadership must decide whether continued patience is helping students or simply making neglect easier.

Confrontation has a place in student unionism. The history of the movement makes that clear. There are policies that require public opposition, decisions that must be challenged and circumstances in which peaceful collective pressure is the only way to make an ignored problem impossible to dismiss.

The mistake is to treat confrontation as the default personality of the movement. A union is not more serious because it is angry every morning. It is not more courageous because it rejects every invitation to talk. If a matter can be resolved through a credible agreement, the union should be able to accept that outcome without feeling that it has betrayed Aluta.

Before taking action, leaders should be able to answer a few questions in ordinary language: What exactly are we demanding, who has the authority to grant it, what attempts have already been made, what risks could students face, how will we keep the action peaceful, what would count as a satisfactory response and who will communicate with students while the action is taking place?

Those questions are not designed to weaken a protest. They are there because students are not props. Some have examinations. Some work to pay their fees. Some have health conditions. Some may be vulnerable to disciplinary action. A leader who asks people to take risks should understand those risks and should never pretend that everyone can carry them equally.

There is also the question of when to stop. If management accepts the main demand and provides a written timetable, the union should explain the agreement and monitor it. If the agreement is broken, the next response can be considered. Continuing an action simply because stopping might look like weakness is not a good reason to keep students exposed.

Confrontation is a tool, not an identity. A union must negotiate without shame, resist without recklessness and remain accountable for choices made in students' name.

The Four Cs Gyrations

The Four Cs are not only ideas to discuss in a meeting. They are also carried through the chants that students sing together. These versions place communication before confrontation, and they belong here after the chapter explaining when confrontation may become necessary.

First Gyration

Aluta merin la wa o se
Aluta merin la wa o se
consultation
consolidation
communication
ka to le won le re
aluta merin la wa o se

Second Gyration

ko mon consultation o fe kan lu do
ko mon consolidation o fe kan lu do
ko mon communication before confrontation o fe kan lu do
student struggle le yi

The order in these chants is important. Consultation helps us understand the matter, consolidation brings people together, communication keeps them informed, and confrontation remains an option when the situation truly calls for it.

PART 03

THE POLITICS BEHIND THE PUBLIC

THE STRUGGLE YOU DON'T SEE

CHAPTER 09

Battles Without Headlines

There is a side of student unionism that rarely makes it into a headline. It is the work that begins after the crowd has gone home and continues long after a meeting has ended. It may not look dramatic, but it is often where representation either succeeds or quietly falls apart.

A student reports a problem with registration. Someone has to check the portal, speak to the department and find out whether the issue affects one person or an entire class. A hostel complaint comes in. Someone has to visit, listen to the students who live there and follow up with the right office. A promise is made at a meeting. Someone must remember the date, call again and ask what has happened.

None of these tasks guarantees applause. Sometimes the person doing the follow up is not the president, the spokesperson or the person whose photograph appears online. It may be a class representative, a welfare officer, a volunteer or a comrade who simply knows that leaving the matter unattended will hurt somebody.

This is why I do not think we should judge an administration only by its public moments. A press conference can be useful, but it cannot replace the work of checking whether a student received help. A large meeting can show that people gathered, but it cannot prove that the complaint was resolved. A statement can announce a commitment, but somebody still has to make sure the commitment is honoured.

The work can also be frustrating. Calls go unanswered. The person who promised to help becomes unavailable. A student may become impatient because the union has not announced anything, even though the matter is still being handled. Sometimes the representative has to explain the same thing several times to people who are tired of waiting.

There is a temptation to ignore these small matters and focus on issues that attract attention. But the student who cannot complete registration does not experience the problem as small. The person who needs a safe place to report harassment does not measure the issue by how many people shared the union's post. To that student, the quiet work is the whole point.

There is also a lesson here for people who hold office. Do not build an administration that depends on one visible personality. Share information with the people doing the work. Give them clear responsibilities. Let them report problems without fear of being blamed for bringing bad news. When the work is done, recognise the people who helped make it happen.

Some of the strongest contributions in student unionism will never be celebrated at a convention. They are found in the student who was not abandoned, the complaint that was followed through and the promise that did not disappear after the cameras left.

Those are battles without headlines. They may not make a person famous, but they can make a union worth believing in.

CHAPTER 10

The Road to Leadership

An election does not begin on the day nomination forms are released. By then, people have already formed opinions. They know who has been attending meetings, who has been available when students needed help, who can work with different groups and who appears only when there is an office to contest.

Some candidates discover this too late. They assume that a good poster, a strong slogan and a few influential endorsements will carry them, but students still ask ordinary questions: Who is this person, what have they done, can they be trusted and will they remember us after the election?

The road to leadership is often made of small assignments. A class representative learns how to listen to complaints. A departmental officer learns that one decision can affect students with very different needs. A faculty leader learns how to speak to people who do not share the same opinion. Someone who handles a difficult task well may earn the confidence of people who never appear in public photographs.

There is nothing wrong with ambition. Student movements need people who want to lead and are prepared to work. The question is what the ambition is built around. If the only attraction is the title, the person may be unprepared for the routine work that follows. An office is not a reward for being popular. It is an obligation to people who expect you to be useful.

The campaign itself can reveal a candidate's character. How does the person treat supporters of another candidate, can they disagree without insulting, does the campaign make promises the office can realistically deliver, is it willing to take questions and can it correct a false claim even when the claim benefits its own side?

Another reality is that nobody reaches an election alone. There are people who introduce a candidate to other campuses, people who explain the candidate's record, people who arrange meetings and people who quietly tell others whether the person can be trusted. We will return to those people in Chapter 13. They are often more important than candidates realise.

Winning an election is a beginning, not a certificate of competence. The first test comes when the supporters want appointments, the opponents want reassurance and the students who voted for nobody still expect to be represented. A good leader prepares for that day before the campaign begins.

CHAPTER 11

The Management's Chessboard

A meeting with management can feel like a chess game. People come into the room with different information, different responsibilities and different levels of authority. Some can make a decision, some can only recommend one, and some are there to explain the rules. If a student leader does not understand the position before making a move, the meeting can end with plenty of talk and very little progress.

That is why the title of this chapter is The Management's Chessboard. In chess, you do not move a piece just because you are eager to play. You first look at the board, notice what is happening and think about what your move could lead to. Student representation requires the same patience. Before meeting management, understand the issue, the people involved, the rules and the result students are asking for.

Think of the board as the situation itself. The squares are the rules, policies, deadlines and limits within which the discussion is taking place. The people in the room have different roles, just as chess pieces move in different ways. A Vice Chancellor may have authority over some decisions, while the Dean of Student Affairs, Registrar, Bursar, Hall Warden or Head of Department may be responsible for another part of the matter. Do not assume that the person sitting opposite you can approve everything. Find out who actually has the power to make the decision.

There is one important difference between chess and student unionism. People are not pieces to be used and thrown away. Students, staff and management are human beings with responsibilities and concerns. The tools you bring to the board are your evidence, the students' mandate, the union constitution, the school rules, your negotiating team and the relationships that can help move the issue forward.

Your opening move should be preparation. If students complain that water has stopped flowing in a hostel, do not rush to announce a protest before checking what happened. Visit the affected area, speak to residents, find out when the problem began and check whether earlier complaints were made. A photograph or a written report may help, but the most important thing is to know exactly what you are asking management to do.

A good opening move is clear and specific. Instead of saying, 'Management must solve the water problem', the union can ask for an inspection within two days, a temporary water supply while repairs are carried out and a date for a

progress report. The request gives management something definite to respond to, and it gives students a way to measure whether anything has changed.

You must also know which pieces you have. Your strongest piece may be a clear report from the students, a written rule that supports their position, a united mandate from the union or a recognised procedure for resolving the complaint. Sometimes the most useful person is not the person with the highest title, but the officer who understands the process and can explain what needs to happen next. Build your team around what the issue requires, not around who wants to be seen in the photograph.

In chess, a king is the piece you must protect. In this chapter, the king is the interest of the students. Do not put students at unnecessary risk just to prove that a leader is tough. Do not make a promise you cannot keep, expose a student who came to you for help or use a welfare problem to settle a personal score. A leader who wins an argument but leaves the students worse off has not won the game.

Sometimes management will put the union in check. In chess, check means the king is under threat and the player must respond. In a meeting, this may happen when management says a request cannot be approved, points to a rule the union has not considered or warns that a particular action could lead to disciplinary steps. Do not panic, and do not pretend the warning does not matter. Ask which rule applies, what the next step is and whether there is another lawful way to address the students' concern.

If a threat of suspension or rustication is raised, stay calm and keep a proper record of what was said. If a formal allegation follows, ask for it in writing, read the relevant regulations and seek advice from a trusted person or qualified adviser. Being a student leader does not place anyone above school rules, but a disciplinary process should be clear and fair. Do not allow a threat to silence a legitimate concern, and do not respond in a way that creates a separate problem for the students you represent.

Chess players sometimes make a sacrifice. They give up a piece to improve their position or reach a bigger goal. In negotiation, a leader may agree to adjust the timing, location or method of a solution, especially when the original proposal cannot work. But do not sacrifice the main interest of students just to leave the room with an agreement. A small adjustment can be sensible, while abandoning the reason students came to you is not.

There may also be a stalemate, when neither side can make progress. If management says it cannot approve the proposal and the union refuses to consider any alternative, the discussion may go nowhere. Ask what part can be done immediately, whether another office needs to be involved or whether a mediator can help. If the matter remains unresolved, use the recognised

channels for review, appeal or peaceful collective action. Do not keep attending meetings that produce no next step.

The endgame is where many student leaders lose track. A meeting may sound successful, but what exactly was agreed? Before leaving, confirm the action, the office responsible and the date for completion. Write a short summary, send it to the relevant office and keep a copy. Then report back to the students who raised the issue. If the deadline passes, follow up and refer to the written commitment.

Return to the hostel water example. If management agrees to inspect the hostel and provide temporary water, the union should check whether residents actually receive it. If the repair is completed, confirm the result with the students. If nothing happens, return with the record and ask why. A promise is only the beginning of accountability, not the end of the struggle.

The aim of chess is to reach checkmate, but student unionism should not treat the meeting as a contest to humiliate management. The real checkmate is a fair solution that improves students' lives, protects their rights and leaves a clear record of what was done. If that cannot be achieved in one meeting, a good leader knows the next move.

So, before you enter the management's office, study the board. Know what you are protecting, know the rules, know who can make the decision and know what evidence you are carrying. Do not move out of anger, and do not mistake silence for strategy. The strongest move is often the one that brings students closer to a real solution.

CHAPTER 12

Alliances, Betrayals and the Politics of Survival

A leadership team can look united in public and still struggle to work together. At a programme, everybody sits in the same row and the photographs look good, but once the meeting ends, questions begin: who was consulted, who was left out, who is getting too close to the principal and who is trying to control the next decision?

Not every disagreement is a crisis. People enter student politics with different ideas, experiences and expectations. One officer may want the union to issue a statement immediately, while another wants to verify the facts first; one may think a meeting will help, while another has attended too many meetings that produced nothing. They can disagree and still be working for the same students.

The trouble starts when people stop arguing about the issue and begin fighting over their place in the room. A suggestion is rejected because of who made it. An officer is excluded from information because somebody fears that person may become popular. A small mistake is carried around until it becomes a weapon. People begin to protect their position instead of protecting the work.

Sometimes the division comes from promises made during an election. Supporters expect appointments. People expect access. A candidate may have allowed everyone to believe that they would be part of the administration. Once the election is over, there are fewer positions than expectations. Disappointment is inevitable, but the way it is handled can determine whether the administration gets to work or spends its first months fighting itself.

A leader should not confuse loyalty with agreement. An officer who asks difficult questions may be doing the administration a favour. A person who says yes to everything may be protecting their own access. The important thing is to create a way for disagreement to be heard before it becomes a public quarrel.

There are also people who deliberately sabotage colleagues. They withhold information, spread half stories or work against a decision they have already accepted. That behaviour should be addressed. But a leadership must be careful not to label every critic a saboteur. The word becomes dangerous when it is used to silence people who are simply asking for accountability.

The quiet battles within a union are not always dramatic. Sometimes they are small habits: not returning a call, refusing to share a document, leaving someone out of a meeting or allowing a rumour to grow because it weakens a rival. Over time, these habits can damage an administration more than a public disagreement ever could.

A movement needs people who can work together without pretending to agree on everything. If the only way to maintain unity is to stop people from speaking honestly, that unity is already in trouble.

There is a sentence people repeat whenever political relationships become complicated: there are no permanent friends or enemies in politics, only permanent interests. It is a useful warning against childish expectations. It is also a sentence that can be abused.

The comrade who opposed your candidacy yesterday may support your proposal tomorrow. The person who campaigned beside you may disagree with your decision after you win. A former opponent may become the person who helps you resolve a serious problem. Politics changes because interests, circumstances and priorities change.

That is not automatically betrayal. People are allowed to change their minds. They are allowed to support a different candidate in another election. They are allowed to disagree with a leader they once defended. A student movement that treats every change of position as treachery will become a very small movement.

But there is a difference between changing sides and abusing trust. A person who shares confidential information only to damage a colleague, secretly undermines an agreed decision or makes a promise they never intend to keep has done something different from a person who simply changes their political preference. We should not use the realities of politics to excuse dishonesty.

Betrayal is part of the game in the sense that it can happen. It is not a rule that everyone must practise. If leaders begin to expect betrayal from everybody, they may become suspicious of genuine support. If they trust everybody without asking questions, they may expose the movement to avoidable damage. Political maturity sits somewhere between those extremes.

One practical lesson is to build relationships around clear interests and clear responsibilities. If people are supporting a campaign, be honest about what they are supporting. Do not promise an office that does not belong to you. If a coalition is formed around a student issue, write down the common demand. If an agreement is reached, make sure everybody understands it. A

relationship built only on personal affection may not survive the first serious disagreement.

There is also room for reconciliation. You may not trust someone in every matter and still work with that person on a specific student welfare issue. You can remember a difficult political history without allowing it to decide every future conversation. Yesterday's opponent can become tomorrow's ally, but that does not mean you should abandon your principles at the door.

The real danger is not that political relationships change. They will. The danger is allowing every change of relationship to change the standard by which you judge right and wrong. Interests may shift. Principles should not be for sale to the highest bidder.

CHAPTER 13

Principles vs. Survival

There are moments when the difficult choice is not between two political camps. It is between protecting your comfort and doing what you believe is right. That choice can become very personal when the people asking you to stay quiet are people you respect, people who helped you or people who have influence over your future.

A statement is ready for publication, the wording is strong, the photographs have been selected and the media team is waiting. It says the union has secured a breakthrough, but somebody who attended the meeting reads the draft and realises that it promises more than was actually agreed.

The officer raises a concern, only to hear a familiar response: "Why are you trying to embarrass the leadership? Are you not part of this team? Must every little thing become an argument?" This is how pressure can turn an honest question into a test of loyalty.

This is where loyalty becomes difficult. People who work together need trust. A team cannot function if every internal disagreement is carried to the public. There are decisions an officer may not personally prefer but can still support because they were reached through a fair process. There are also confidential matters that should not be shared simply because somebody is unhappy.

But loyalty cannot require an officer to knowingly mislead students. A press statement that describes an unfinished discussion as a completed victory is not made accurate by the fact that the principal approved it. A false claim does not become true because everybody has agreed to repeat it.

The pressure is not always about a statement. A representative may be warned that raising a complaint will make future meetings difficult. Someone may hint that a student could face victimisation, lose an opportunity or become a problem for the institution. Another person may be told to remember who supported their emergence. These pressures can be quiet, which sometimes makes them harder to challenge.

Imagine being asked to choose between your academic future and a position you believe students deserve to take. It is easy to tell another person to be brave when you will not carry the consequences. That is why leaders should never treat fear as proof of weakness. They should understand the risk, seek advice, keep proper records and consider the safest responsible way to act.

There is a difference between being careful and surrendering your conscience. Carefulness asks how to protect people while addressing a problem. Surrender asks people to pretend the problem does not exist because speaking about it may be inconvenient. A leader must learn that difference.

I think student leaders need to ask themselves a difficult question: am I protecting the purpose of this office, or am I protecting the comfort of the person occupying it? Those two things can be the same, but they are not always the same.

This is particularly important for people who work in media. A media officer is expected to communicate the position of an organisation, but professional responsibility still matters. Verify the facts. Do not turn a rumour into an official statement. Do not publish a personal attack simply because somebody wants a strong headline. If the information is incomplete, say so. If a correction is needed, make it.

The same standard should apply when the person involved is a friend, a principal or somebody who helped you into office. It is easy to demand fairness when the person under scrutiny belongs to another camp. The real test comes when the person is close to you.

Conscience does not mean that every officer should behave as a lone hero. Raise concerns through the proper channels. Ask for the facts. Give colleagues a chance to correct the problem. But if a serious issue remains unresolved, do not pretend that silence is the same as loyalty.

A good colleague will not encourage you to defend every mistake. Sometimes the most useful support is the person who tells you, quietly and honestly, that you are about to get something wrong. Principles are easiest to announce when they cost nothing. They become real when keeping them asks something of us.

CHAPTER 14

The Voices That Can Make or Break a Candidacy

There is a particular kind of person every candidate remembers during an election. It may be the class representative who knows everybody in a department. It may be the student who can bring five campus groups into one conversation. It may be the person who does not hold any office but has earned the trust of people across different faculties. When the candidate needs support, that person suddenly becomes very important.

These people are not always visible. They may not appear on the campaign banner, sit at the high table or be introduced at a convention, yet a candidate may not be able to contest successfully without first seeking their support. They know the mood of the students, remember which promises have been made before and can tell whether a candidate is respected or merely popular on social media.

Some are course representatives, hostel organisers, former executives or students who have built relationships through welfare work, campus associations, religious groups, professional bodies and ordinary friendships. Some are women whose influence is ignored until an election makes their networks impossible to overlook, but their contributions do not become less important because they are not printed beside an official title.

A candidate who approaches these people only to collect votes has misunderstood them. They are not voting machines. They have their own concerns, their own judgement and their own memories. They may ask what the candidate has done, what the candidate intends to change and whether the candidate will still answer their calls after the election.

There is also a danger in the other direction. A candidate may become so dependent on a few influential supporters that the campaign begins to serve those supporters instead of the wider student body. Support is valuable, but it should not become ownership. No person should believe that helping someone win gives them permanent control over the office.

After the election, the relationship must change. The candidate is no longer speaking only to the people who campaigned. The candidate now represents students who supported another person, students who did not vote and students who did not know an election was taking place. Those who helped build the mandate deserve appreciation, but the office belongs to the constituency.

The people who never held office can still shape the movement. They can make a candidate credible, expose an empty campaign, help an administration understand a campus problem or remind a leader that students are becoming dissatisfied. A serious movement should listen to them before an election, during an administration and after the posters have been removed.

If we are going to write the history of student unionism honestly, we must stop treating officeholders as the only people who made things happen. Some of the people who shaped the outcome never needed a title to do it.

CHAPTER 15

The Unseen Price Tag

When people hear the words “price tag”, they may think I am about to discuss campaign money or the cost of contesting an election. That is not what this chapter is about. I want to talk about the personal cost of student unionism, the parts people rarely count because there is no receipt for them.

There are lectures missed because a meeting ran late. There are assignments completed at the last minute because a student leader spent the afternoon trying to resolve a problem that was not even theirs. There are weekends that disappear into conventions, consultations and visits. Sometimes the academic consequences arrive quietly, long after the photographs have been posted.

Relationships can feel the pressure too. Friends may become impatient because every conversation turns into another union matter. Family members may worry when public disagreements become personal. A person who once had time for ordinary things may discover that the phone never really stops ringing.

There is also the cost of being misunderstood. If you negotiate, some people may call you weak. If you protest, others may say you are looking for attention. If you keep quiet while checking the facts, people may assume you have been compromised. A student leader can spend so much time explaining decisions that there is little time left to do the work itself.

The pressure can follow a person beyond the office. A public disagreement may affect friendships. A careless allegation can damage a reputation. A difficult decision may leave someone carrying guilt even when they acted in good faith. Not every burden is visible, and not every person who looks confident is finding the experience easy.

This is not an argument for avoiding service. It is an argument for being honest about what service demands. Institutions should not expect student representatives to abandon their studies. Unions should share responsibilities instead of placing everything on one person. Leaders should learn to rest, ask for help and recognise when a problem requires professional support.

Students also have a role. Demand accountability, but remember that representatives are students too. They should not be excused from their duties, but they should not be treated as people without classes, families, health or a future outside politics.

The unseen price tag is not a badge of honour. Suffering does not automatically make someone a good leader. The point is not to compete over

who sacrificed the most. The point is to build a kind of student unionism where service matters without destroying the people who offer it.

If the movement wants committed leaders, it must also learn to care about the people doing the work. The office will end. The person has to continue living with the choices, the relationships and the future that remain.

PART 04

WHAT REMAINS AFTER OFFICE

THE STRUGGLE YOU DON'T SEE

CHAPTER 16

Comrades and the Footprints They Leave

A movement is remembered through its events, but it is carried by people. Some names remain in the mouths of comrades long after an office has changed hands. Others are remembered only by the people they helped, the students they encouraged or the difficult moment when they chose to stand up for somebody who could not stand alone.

When I speak about footprints, I am not talking about how many photographs a person took, how many conventions they attended or how loudly their name was called. I am talking about what was better because that person served. Did students find it easier to get help? Was the union more organised? Were people treated with dignity? Did the next set of leaders inherit something useful, or did they have to begin again?

This chapter is not an award list, and it is not a claim that every person mentioned here was perfect. These comrades came from different generations and served in different circumstances. Some of their stories are well recorded, while some are only partly available in public records. I will not invent childhood stories, private conversations or achievements that cannot be checked. Where the record is thin, I will say so.

Comrade Moses Oisakede

The name of Comrade Moses Oisakede deserves more than a passing mention in the history of NANS. He was a student of Biochemistry at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, and served as President of the National Association of Nigerian Students during a difficult period for the movement. Reports about his tenure describe a student association facing divisions, while students in different institutions were dealing with poor facilities, harsh decisions and the threat of expulsion for speaking up. [30][31]

On 1 September 1999, Oisakede died in a road accident while travelling to the Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi, to intervene in the case of more than 104 students who had been expelled after protesting poor conditions at their institution. He was going there because those students needed someone to present their case. That journey became the last journey of his life. [30][31]

A personal account by Olamide Olatunji, who travelled with him, recalls that Oisakede was a 28 year old Biochemistry student and that the Makurdi trip fell between his examinations. According to that account, he chose to make the journey because the expelled students could lose their chance to continue

their education if nobody presented their case. It is a fellow traveller's recollection, and it gives us a more human picture of the responsibility he felt. [38]

His work was not limited to making statements or calling students out to protest. Reports about his leadership credit him with establishing the Directorate of Action and Mobilisation within NANS, so that disputes between students and institutional management could receive attention before they became bigger crises. He is also remembered for promoting a leadership approach built around consultation and the willingness to confront injustice when necessary. Some accounts record the Three Cs of his time as consensus, consultation and confrontation. [30]

There is also a human side to his story. Associates described him as accessible, humble and willing to welcome student activists who came to seek help. Twenty five years after his death, former associates and other supporters came together to build and furnish a house for his mother. That act does not erase the loss, but it shows that the relationships he built did not disappear when he left office. [30][31]

The footprint of Moses Oisakede is therefore not only the office he held or the way he died. It is the example of a leader who took the problems of students seriously enough to travel, intervene and build a structure that could respond to disputes. His story should also remind us that no student leader should have to lose their life for doing the work of representation. We must value courage, but we must protect life.

George Akinyemi Iwilade, popularly known as Afrika

At Obafemi Awolowo University, the name Afrika remains part of the history of the Students' Union. His full name was George Akinyemi Iwilade. He was a 21 year old law student and the General Secretary of the Students' Union in 1999. He was part of a student movement that challenged cult intimidation and defended the right of students to live and study in a safer campus environment. [32][33]

The story did not begin on the night he was killed. In the months before July 1999, the Students' Union and other students had already been involved in organised efforts against suspected cult activity. Historical accounts describe a March 1999 incident in which students confronted suspected cult members, recovered weapons and handed suspects to the police. The case did not bring the reassurance students expected, and fear continued to grow on campus. Afrika was one of the visible student leaders in that period. [33]

On 10 July 1999, an attack on students in Awolowo Hall claimed the lives of five students. George Iwilade, known as Afrika, was among them. The other

students remembered in reports of the OAU Five include Eviano Ekeimu, Yemi Ajiteru, Babatunde Oke and Godfrey Ekpede. They must not disappear from the story simply because Afrika became its best known name. [32][34]

The point of remembering Afrika is not to make death sound like the price a student leader must pay. It is to remember what the students were trying to protect: safety, freedom from intimidation and the right to organise without fear. His story asks every generation whether the campus is safer, whether students can speak freely and whether the union still has the courage to defend the people it represents.

A good footprint should protect life, not glorify danger. We should honour those who stood up against violence by building safer unions, keeping accurate records, supporting students who report threats and refusing to turn fear into a normal part of campus life.

Comrade Yemi Adeniran, popularly known as Laidat

Comrade Yemi Adeniran, popularly known as Laidat or Likedat in some reports, was remembered as a former NANS leader whose advice and experience mattered to younger student leaders. Public reports identify him as a former student leader in Oyo State and record that NANS leaders travelled to honour him after his death in a road accident in December 2019. One report also identifies him as the first Chairman of the NANS Joint Consultative Council in Oyo State. [7][35]

The available public record does not tell us enough about his childhood, his first days on campus or the exact steps that brought him into national student politics. I will not fill those gaps with a story that cannot be confirmed. What can be said is that his colleagues remembered him as a person whose guidance was valued. That kind of respect is also a footprint. It means people still found something useful in your experience after your time in office had passed.

His story should encourage the movement to preserve the memories of its former leaders while they are still alive and able to tell them. A few interviews, old photographs, campaign materials and personal accounts from those who worked with him could help future readers understand the full journey, not only the final headlines.

Comrade Asefon Sunday Dayo

Comrade Asefon Sunday Dayo's public journey shows how a student leader can move through different levels of representation. Public accounts identify him as a former President of the Federation of Ekiti State Students' Union in 2010 and a former NANS Zone D Coordinator in 2013. A 2014 report from OAU also records him taking part in an engagement with university

management over issues that included reopening the university, fees, scholarships, work study opportunities and the treatment of students. [8][9]

Those early roles matter because they show the work before the national title. At the state and zonal levels, a leader has to listen to different campuses, bring their complaints together and speak to institutions that may not have the same priorities. The 2014 engagement is a useful example of student representation in practice. The discussion was not only about making noise. It was about specific problems that affected students' ability to register, study and remain in school.

In December 2020, Asefon emerged as NANS President after a difficult convention in Abuja. Reports at the time described disagreements and violence around the process, so the story should not be reduced to a simple victory announcement. His administration is recorded as running from 2020 to 2022. Later appointments have kept him involved in student engagement and youth mobilisation. [10][11][23][36]

The lesson from his journey is that student leadership can open doors to wider public service, but the real question is what a person carries from the movement into those new spaces. Does the person keep listening to students? Do they help younger leaders without trying to control them? Do they use their experience to open doors for others? Those are the questions that will decide the lasting value of the footprint.

Comrade Olushola Oladoja

Comrade Olushola Oladoja's story includes a moment when he contested for the NANS presidency in 2020 and did not emerge as the winner. The convention was marked by tension and conflicting reports, and his name appeared among the leading contenders. Five years later, he returned to the national contest and was elected NANS President in February 2025, polling 300 votes at the convention in Abuja. [11][13]

That journey is worth noting because a setback does not always end a person's contribution. Sometimes it changes the way a person prepares, builds relationships and understands the organisation. The important thing is not simply that someone returned to win, but what they do with the confidence placed in them after that victory.

During his time as NANS President, Oladoja publicly presented the Four Cs as consultation, consolidation, communication before confrontation. The addition of communication is important to this book because it reminds student leaders that the people who brought an issue to them deserve to know what is happening, even when every detail cannot be made public. [6]

His story also leaves questions for the next generation. How do you keep a national association connected to the campuses? How do you explain negotiation to students who believe that only confrontation proves seriousness? How do you make communication useful, rather than another statement that people read and forget? A footprint is not complete when a person wins an election. It is measured by the work that follows.

Comrade Akinteye Babatunde Afeez, popularly known as Babtee

The story of Comrade Akinteye Babatunde Afeez, popularly known as Babtee, is important to the recent history of NANS because it shows a journey through several levels of the association before reaching the national presidency. Public reports identify him as a former Joint Campus Council Chairman in Ondo State, Vice President for External Affairs and Senate President of NANS. These roles placed him in different parts of student representation: grassroots coordination, external engagement and the legislative work of the association. [14][15][16]

His work as Vice President for External Affairs brought him into contact with student issues beyond one campus. In a March 2026 report, Vanguard recorded his account of engaging the Registrar of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board over difficulties faced by Direct Entry candidates at the Ikoyi office in Lagos. He said the engagement helped decongest the centre and secure an extension of the registration deadline for affected candidates. The same report records his involvement in advocacy during the evacuation of Nigerian students affected by the conflict in Sudan, including his presence at the airport to receive returning students. [16]

He also spoke about participating in protests during the prolonged ASUU strike, which disrupted academic activities across the country. Reflecting on his time as NANS Senate President, he said he led a delegation to the headquarters of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission over the alleged arrest of students of the Federal University of Technology Akure, an engagement he believed contributed to their release. He also referred to student-related engagements at the University of Benin and Obafemi Awolowo University, as well as advocacy for clarity on the Federal Government's position on certificates from universities in the Benin Republic and Togo. These details are presented as his account reported by Vanguard, rather than as independent findings about every outcome. [16]

His candidacy also received public backing from student leaders in the Southwest. In March 2026, the chairmen of the NANS Joint Campus Councils across the six Southwest states announced their endorsement of him. Their

statement described his progression through the NANS structure and credited him with interventions that included efforts around the reinstatement of the Students' Union Government at the University of Benin, support for students affected by the Sudan crisis and responses to campus welfare emergencies. Because this was an endorsement statement, it is important to recognise it as the signatories' public account of his record, not an independent investigation of each intervention. [39]

During the campaign, Babtee presented a five-part framework called EPOCH: Empowerment, Progress, Opportunity, Collaboration and Human Capacity Development. He described empowerment in terms of stronger student voices, progress through education funding and improved campus facilities, opportunity through scholarships, mentorship and internships, collaboration with institutions and development partners, and human capacity development through practical skills and leadership programmes. These were the priorities he placed before students during the campaign, and their value will ultimately depend on how far they are put into practice. [16]

At the national convention held at the Old Parade Ground in Abuja in May 2026, Akinteye emerged as NANS National President, polling 349 votes. The current NANS leadership archive lists him as the 2026–2027 National President and identifies Olusegun Agagu University of Science and Technology in Ondo State as his institution. His election was also reported by national newspapers. [17][18][23]

The record of his administration has continued to develop. NANS' published impact page lists initiatives from the first months of the administration, including a national monthly academic essay competition, the launch of the NANS digital platform and Student Hub, advocacy around delayed NELFUND upkeep payments and student refunds, and NANSInnovate, a platform for student entrepreneurs. These are programmes recorded by the association itself, and they provide an early picture of the priorities being pursued. They should not be treated as a final assessment of the administration's performance. [40]

For me, the important question about Babtee's footprint is what these different responsibilities will leave behind. A JCC office should strengthen links between campuses, external affairs should make it easier to take student concerns to the right institutions, the Senate should protect the association's rules, and national leadership should keep the whole structure connected. The title is significant, but the real measure will be whether students experience better representation, clearer communication and practical results. A leader's record should remain open to fair questions, because public service is strengthened by accountability, not weakened by it.

Comrade Adeyemo Josiah Kayode, popularly known as Billioncodes

I have had the privilege of serving under Comrade Adeyemo Josiah Kayode, popularly known as Billioncodes, my principal in NANS Southwest Zone D. As Director of Media, I work within the leadership structure he currently heads, and that gives this part of the book a personal note. I have seen that leadership is not only the public announcement or the photograph after a meeting. There is preparation, coordination, communication and pressure that many people outside the office may never see.

Public reports identify Adeyemo as an Assistant General Secretary of NANS Southwest Zone D in 2024. In 2025, reports described the Billioncodes Initiative supporting final year students at OSCOHEALTH with scholarships, alongside an environmental project. In February 2026, The Sun reported his emergence as Coordinator of NANS Southwest Zone D. These are public milestones in a journey that is still being written. [19][20][21][22][37]

I do not believe any leader should be placed beyond questions simply because someone works with them or respects them. My relationship with my principal is personal and professional, but the standard remains the same: service must be judged by what it does for students. I write about him with respect, and I also believe that every officeholder must remain open to accountability.

Other Comrades Whose Records Are Visible

The history of the student movement is wider than the names already discussed in this chapter. The NANS leadership archive records earlier generations whose work can still be traced through dates, campaigns and public decisions. Comrade Segun Okeowo is remembered for leading the National Union of Nigerian Students during the 1978 Ali Must Go protests. The archive also records the early NANS leadership of Comrades Chris Mammah and Chris Abashi, whose period involved building the new association and resisting cuts to education funding. [23]

Other names carry different parts of that history. The archive records Comrade Lanre Arogundade's work in building links between NANS, the Academic Staff Union of Universities and the Nigeria Labour Congress. It records Comrade Emmanuel Ezeazu's leadership during the aftermath of the 1986 ABU massacre, and Comrade Lukman Salilu Mohammed's place in the 1989 anti-Structural Adjustment Programme protests. These records remind us that student leaders faced different challenges in different periods, and that their contributions should be understood in the context of the time in which they served. [23]

More recent records include Comrade Lucky Emonefe, whose administration is associated in the NANS archive with student representation on the Nigerian Education Loan Fund board, tuition advocacy and efforts to protect the academic calendar. The archive also records Comrade Sunday Asefon's work around ASUU strike negotiations, student mobilisation and emergency support, while the public record of Comrade Olushola Oladoja includes efforts to improve SUG and management relations and expand awareness of NELFUND. Some of these comrades already have space in this chapter, but their records are part of a wider history that deserves to be preserved. [23]

The point is not to rank every former president or to assume that an institutional summary tells the whole story. It is to show that the movement has records worth reading and protecting. Letters, reports, meeting minutes, campaign materials, public statements and accounts from people who were present help future generations understand what was done, what was achieved and what remained unfinished. A movement that keeps its records gives the next generation something stronger than rumours and memories alone.

The people whose names may never appear on a ballot

A chapter about footprints would be incomplete if it only mentioned people who became presidents or coordinators. There are comrades who organise meetings, carry information from one campus to another, visit hostels, calm disagreements, help a student prepare a letter or stay awake to make sure an issue is followed up. Some of them never contest an election, yet candidates know that without their support, the campaign may not move beyond a small circle.

These people deserve more than a thank you after victory. They should be respected while decisions are being made, included when their work affects the outcome and remembered when the story of the administration is told. The movement must not treat grassroots supporters as useful only during elections, then forget them once offices have been shared.

The best footprint is something people can still use after the person who created it has left. It may be a welfare process that works, a proper handover, clear financial records, a safer way to report harassment, a stronger relationship between campuses or a habit of telling students the truth. These things may not carry a leader's name, but they make the union stronger.

No one should leave office believing that the movement belongs to them. A union is not a personal inheritance, and the next administration should not have to destroy everything simply because it wants to show that a new person is in charge. Leave records, explain unfinished work, share contacts, admit

what did not work and make it easier for the next team to continue what is useful.

The people named in this chapter have different stories. They should not be forced into one pattern, and their achievements should not be used to silence questions about their decisions. They are reminders that the movement is built across generations, through sacrifice, service, mistakes, recovery and the willingness to keep contributing.

When your own time comes to leave, I hope people can point to something that became better because you served. Not only a title, a photograph or a speech, but a process that works, a student who was not abandoned, a union that is more prepared and a new comrade who was given room to grow. That is a footprint worth leaving.

CHAPTER 17

The Union We Leave Behind

A union announces that an agreement has been reached, the statement spreads across social media and students congratulate the leadership. The photographs circulate and for a few hours everybody is happy, but the next week arrives and the original problem is still there.

The Four Cs should not be treated as a compulsory route that every issue must travel from beginning to end. Some matters are resolved during consultation itself, because listening, checking the facts and making a clear explanation are enough. Other matters may need consolidation, while some require communication and follow-up before they can be considered settled. Only some situations reach the point where confrontation becomes necessary. A good leader does not force a problem into the next stage simply to prove that the union is active. The purpose is to solve the issue responsibly, not to complete all four stages.

This is where many administrations lose credibility. They treat the announcement as the end of the work. But an agreement is not the same as implementation. A promise made in a meeting is not the same as a service restored, a fee reviewed or a student reinstated. The real test begins after the statement has been published.

Every important agreement should have a clear record: what exactly was promised, who is responsible, what date was given, what evidence will show that the promise has been fulfilled and who will follow up. These are not administrative decorations; they protect both the students and the leaders who negotiated on their behalf.

The media team should also be careful with language. If management agrees to review a matter, say review. Do not announce that the matter has been resolved. If an official promises to present a request to a committee, say that the request will be presented. Do not turn a promise to consider something into a victory that has already happened.

There is dignity in reporting incomplete progress. A union can say that it secured a meeting but has not yet secured the remedy. It can explain that a deadline passed without a response. It can tell students that further engagement is planned. Honest reporting may not produce the same applause as a dramatic victory statement, but it builds a better kind of trust.

A handover should also include unfinished agreements. The next administration needs to know what was promised, what was delivered and what remains outstanding. Without that record, every new set of executives

starts from the beginning and students keep paying for institutional forgetfulness.

A press statement can tell people what the union wants them to know. A record of implementation tells them what actually happened. Student leaders need both, but they should never confuse one for the other.

Every administration eventually leaves. The posters come down. The WhatsApp groups become quieter. The people who once had to be called Comrade President return to ordinary routines. A new set of people takes over the office and begins to discover that the work is not as simple as it looked from outside.

What remains after that transition? It should be more than photographs, plaques and a list of courtesy visits. It should include records of the problems students raised, the decisions taken, the commitments secured and the matters that were not resolved. It should include contact points, handover notes, financial records where relevant and a clear account of responsibilities that are still active.

A union that keeps no records becomes dependent on the memory of individuals. When those individuals leave, important information leaves with them. The next administration may repeat a negotiation that already failed, miss a deadline that had been agreed or make a promise that the previous executives already discovered was outside the union's authority.

The movement also needs to preserve its disagreements. That may sound unusual, but a record of why a decision was made can be more useful than a record of the decision alone. If leaders considered several options and chose one because of a particular risk, the next generation should be able to learn from that reasoning. We should not preserve only the stories that make us look good.

There is a personal legacy too. How did the administration treat people who disagreed? Did it make room for women and students who were often overlooked? Did it protect the privacy of vulnerable students? Did it communicate with the people who had been consulted? Did it leave the office more organised than it found it?

The next generation will face problems we cannot predict. Technology will change. Education policy will change. The cost of studying will change. New forms of student organising will emerge. The tools may be different, but the need for honest representation will remain. Students will still need people who can listen, think, organise and speak with courage.

I would like a future student leader to inherit more than a title and a chant. I would like that person to inherit a functioning archive, a clear constitution,

reliable records and a culture where questions are not treated as insults. I would like students to know where to take a complaint and when to expect an answer.

A union is not successful because one person becomes famous. It is successful when students can still benefit after that person has left. That is the union worth leaving behind.

CHAPTER 18

A Letter to the Next Comrade

Dear Comrade,

If this book has reached you before you contest an election, accept an appointment or take up any responsibility in the student movement, I want you to read this letter slowly. I am not writing to frighten you away from student unionism, and I am not writing as someone who has mastered every part of it. I am writing as someone who has served, watched, learnt and come to understand that the work is often heavier than the title looks.

You may be excited about the office ahead of you. That is natural. You may already be imagining the inauguration, the photographs, the first statement and the people who will begin to call you by your title. Enjoy the moment, but remember that the real work starts after the celebration. The student who cannot register, the person who has a problem in the hostel and the class representative who has been asking for help will not be impressed by your new title for long. They will want to know whether you can help.

Before you begin, understand the office you are seeking. Read the constitution, the student handbook and the rules that guide your union. Know what the office can do, what it cannot do and which decisions belong to another arm of the union or the institution. Do not wait until a crisis before you start asking how the system works. A leader who does not understand the rules can easily be pushed around by people who do.

Do not build your leadership around only the people who praise you. Keep people close who can tell you when you are wrong, and do not punish them for being honest. Some people will support you because they believe in your ideas, while others may support you because they expect something in return. Learn the difference, but do not become suspicious of everybody. Trust should be built with time, conduct and clear understanding.

Remember the people who helped you reach the office. Some may have campaigned for you, some may have introduced you to people, and some may have stood with you when your ambition was still only a conversation. Do not forget them after victory. At the same time, do not allow anybody to own your decisions because they helped you win. Gratitude is important, but the students' interest must remain above personal arrangements.

Consult before you take a position. A message from one person is not always the full story, and the loudest complaint is not always the only complaint. Listen to the people affected, ask questions and check the facts. Speak to those who understand the issue, including people who may disagree with you. It is

better to take a little time to understand a problem than to make a public promise you cannot defend later.

When you have listened, bring people together around a clear position. That is consolidation. Do not allow every disagreement to become a faction, and do not force people to pretend they agree when they do not. Explain the options, identify the common ground and make sure the people you represent understand what the union is asking for.

Then communicate. This is where I want you to be especially careful. The people who trusted you with a complaint deserve to know what is happening. They should not have to hear the outcome from a rumour, a screenshot or somebody who was not part of the discussion. But communication does not mean exposing every private conversation to the public. Tell the people who need to know, explain what can be shared and protect details that could expose a student or damage a genuine negotiation.

Do not force every matter through all four Cs. Some problems are settled once the affected students have been heard and the facts are clear, while others need people to come together or receive a careful update. Move to confrontation only when the issue genuinely requires it, not because you want to prove that you are a strong comrade.

Do not make confrontation your identity. There will be times when you must stand firm, and there will be issues that cannot be solved by another letter or another meeting. When that time comes, know why you are taking that step, what you want to achieve and what risks students may face. A protest is not a performance, and a press statement is not a solution by itself. If you choose confrontation, make sure it is connected to a clear demand and a responsible plan.

You will also meet people who disappoint you. Somebody you trusted may work against you, and somebody who opposed you during an election may later become one of the people who helps solve a problem. In politics, there are no permanent enemies, but do not use that saying to excuse every act of betrayal. People can change their position, alliances can change and yesterday's opponent can become tomorrow's partner. Still, you must have principles that do not change every time the room changes.

Do not allow access to become your reason for serving. The invitations, recognition, allowances and opportunities may come, but they should never become more important than the students who gave you the mandate. Do not use your office to settle personal scores, and do not promise people things that the union cannot deliver. If money is involved, keep proper records. If a decision affects students, explain the reason. If you make a mistake, own it and correct it.

Protect your education and your life outside the union. Attend your classes, prepare for examinations and keep your personal relationships healthy. Your office has an end date, but your life continues after it. Do not allow the pressure of student politics to destroy your health or make you abandon the people who cared for you before you became a comrade. Ask for help when you need it, and rest when you can.

Respect the people who never hold office. The person who mobilises students, shares information, visits hostels, takes minutes or follows up on a complaint may be doing work that keeps the union alive. Do not remember grassroots supporters only when you need votes. Let them speak, give them credit and make sure they are part of the work even after the election is over.

Keep records as you go. Save letters, meeting notes, agreements, financial reports and contact details that the next administration will need. Do not keep everything in your personal phone or in the head of one trusted person. A union that loses its records loses part of its memory. When your time is ending, prepare a proper handover, explain what remains unfinished and give the next team a fair chance to continue the work.

If you win, do not treat those who voted against you as enemies. They are still students, and you are still their representative. If you lose, do not conclude that the movement has no place for you. You can continue to contribute without holding office. Some of the most useful people in student unionism are those who never became presidents, secretaries or coordinators.

I want you to remember that student power should never be underestimated, but student power must also never be abused. The students are not a crowd to be summoned whenever a leader needs attention. They are people with studies, families, fears, hopes and futures. If you call them out, know what you are asking them to stand for, and be ready to stand with them when the cameras are gone.

When your time comes to leave, do not spend your final days trying to control how people will remember you. You cannot control every story that will be told. What you can control is whether you leave the union with useful records, better relationships, clearer processes and work that can continue. Do not make the next administration start from zero just to prove that your own administration was different.

I hope you will be brave enough to speak when students are treated unfairly, patient enough to listen when they are angry, humble enough to apologise when you are wrong and wise enough to know when a conversation should remain private. I hope you will understand that leadership is not about being the most important person in the room. It is about remembering why the room was called in the first place.

One day, the chants will fade, the office will be handed over and the people who once waited outside your door will move on with their lives. When that day comes, I hope you can look back without pretending that you got everything right. I hope you can say that you tried to serve honestly, that you did not forget the people who trusted you and that something useful remained after you left.

That is the kind of footprint I wish for you. Not a perfect record, because no leader has one, but a sincere effort that made life a little better for the people you represented.

Yours in the struggle,
Oluwagbogo Dada

WORDS WE CARRY

A Comrade's Dictionary

Student unionism has its own language. Some expressions come from older liberation movements, some are borrowed from workers' struggles and some have grown through the chants we sing on campus. This short dictionary explains the words in simple language, so that a new student can understand what the comrades are saying and why the words matter.

Aluta

Aluta is commonly used in student unionism to mean struggle. It is not simply noise, protest or disagreement. It refers to the effort to stand against unfair treatment and work for a better condition. A struggle may involve a meeting, a letter, a campaign, a peaceful protest or the quiet follow up that makes sure a promise is kept.

Aluta Continua

This expression means “the struggle continues”. It reminds us that one victory does not end every problem, and one administration cannot finish the work of generations. The phrase comes from the Portuguese expression “A luta continua”, which became known through the liberation struggle in Mozambique and later travelled across other movements. [28]

Victoria Ascerta

This is the form commonly heard in Nigerian student chants, meaning “victory is certain”. The original Portuguese wording is “vitória é certa”. When joined with Aluta Continua, the full message is that the struggle continues and victory is certain. It is a statement of hope and determination, not a promise that every campaign will be easy or that every demand will be granted immediately. [28]

Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win

This is a call to have courage and stand for what matters. But struggle must have a purpose. Winning should mean improving the lives of students, protecting their rights or correcting an unfair situation, not simply defeating another person in an argument.

Amandla! Awethu!

The expression is often misheard or written as “Amala Awetu”, but the widely recognised form is “Amandla! Awethu!” It comes from isiZulu and isiXhosa,

where Amandla means power and Awethu or Ngawethu means it is ours. Together, the call and response means "Power to the people" or "The power is ours". It became a well known rallying cry in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. [29]

Comrade

A comrade is a companion or someone who shares a cause and a responsibility with others. In student unionism, it should describe a person who stands with the movement and respects the people it represents. It is a title, but it should also be a standard of conduct. [27]

Come and Rade

This is a campus play on the sound of Comrade. It is used to question people who join student politics only to take advantage of the system, enjoy access or collect the benefits attached to an office. It is not the real origin of the word Comrade. It is a joke with a warning inside it.

Gyration

A gyration is a chant or song used by students to build energy, unity and a shared message. It can make a crowd feel connected, but its meaning should not end when the singing stops. The words should remind people of the values and responsibilities they are expected to practise.

Consultation

Consultation means listening to the people affected before taking a position. It means asking questions, checking facts and making room for people who may not agree with you.

Consolidation

Consolidation means bringing people together around a common position. It is the work of building understanding and support, rather than assuming that everybody already agrees.

Communication

Communication means keeping the right people informed. In student unionism, it is especially important to report back to the students who brought an issue to the union. It does not mean sharing every private detail with the whole public.

Confrontation

Confrontation means taking a firm stand when a matter cannot be resolved through ordinary engagement. It may involve a formal challenge, a public statement or peaceful collective action. It should be guided by facts, a clear demand and a responsible plan, not anger alone.

Solidarity

Solidarity means standing with people when their problem affects their rights, safety or dignity. It is more than saying "we are together". It means being willing to help, listen and act when another person needs support.

Mandate

A mandate is the authority students give their representatives to speak and act on their behalf. It is not a personal property. A leader must keep returning to the students, listen to them and explain how that mandate is being used.

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Oluwagbogo Timothy Dada is a Nigerian student leader, media practitioner and digital communications professional. He served as Public Relations Officer of the Students' Union Government at Osun State College of Health Technology, Ilesa, during the 2024/2025 session, and currently serves as Director of Media of the National Association of Nigerian Students, Southwest Zone D.

An indigene of Igbajo in Osun State, Dada is interested in the place where student representation, public communication and everyday student life meet. His work and writing look beyond the speeches and public demonstrations to the conversations, decisions, relationships and responsibilities that shape student unionism.

The Struggle You Don't See is an independent work written in his personal capacity. It does not represent an official publication or position of NANS, NANS Southwest Zone D or OSCOHEALTH.

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SOURCE NOTES

Sources, scope and attribution

The sources below support the historical and biographical details used in this edition. Public reporting does not provide a complete personal history for every comrade. Where early life details are missing, the book does not invent them. Some biographical details come from a person's own public account or from an endorsement statement, and the text identifies them as such rather than presenting every claimed outcome as independently verified. The NANS archive is an institutional record, while news reports provide contemporary accounts. Some historical accounts use different wording for the Three Cs, and some reports spell names or nicknames differently. Comparative material is identified as such and should not be mistaken for Nigerian law or a substitute for institutional regulations.

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Editorial statement

This edition has been restructured into eighteen chapters. Composite situations are used to explore familiar student leadership dilemmas and should not be read as allegations against identifiable people. The chapter on the personal cost of service is not a financial chapter. Public biographies rely on cited records, and gaps in the available record are acknowledged rather than filled with invented details.

THE STRUGGLE YOU DON'T SEE

OLUWAGBOGO DADA