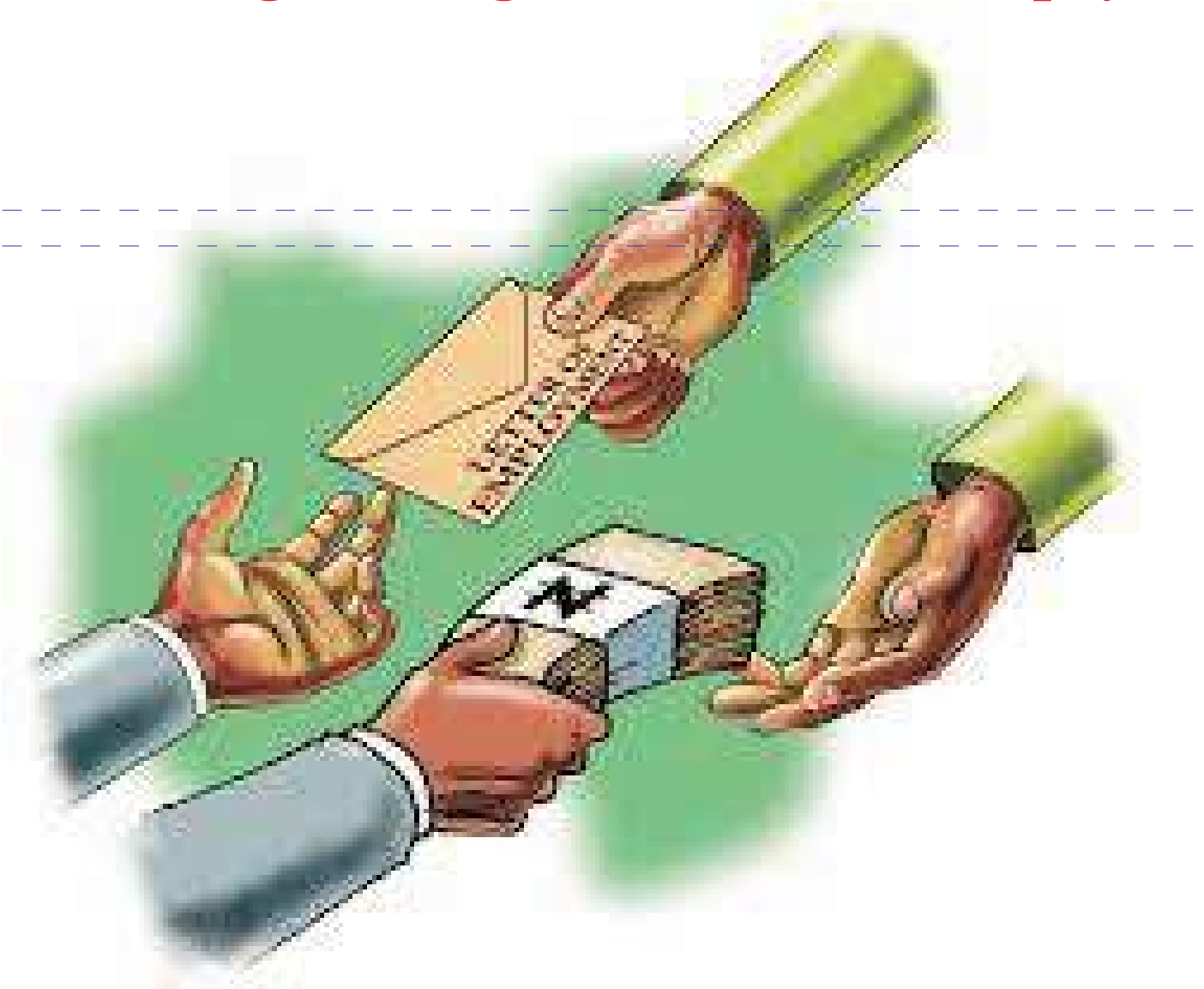


JOB RACKETEERING IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

How long will Nigerians continue to pay?



For years, there have been tales about a job racketeering ring in Nation's Public Service which sells employment slots to job seekers. Not long ago, a former desk officer at the Federal Character Commission (FCC), Haruna Kolo confirmed the development. He told the House of Representatives ad hoc committee that he indeed fronted for the Chairperson of the Commission, Muheeba Dankaka, to sell employment slots to job seekers. Although Dankaka denied receiving any such money, she had earlier accused other commissioners of selling jobs thus confirming that the recruitment process in many of the ministries, department and agencies (MDAs) is highly

susceptible to bribery and corruption. Kolo, who has transferred his services from the commission to the Asset Management Company of Nigeria (AMCON) where he currently works confessed that he used his personal bank account to collect huge sums of money from job applicants and withdrew the same for Dankaka in cash. When the investigating committee wanted more from him, in a follow up session, Kolo failed to honour the invitation. But he has already revealed enough. Indeed, two victims of alleged job racketeering at the FCC, said they paid N1 million and N2 million each for job placement in the commission. "Most public institutions now sell employment positions,

notwithstanding qualification of the applicant and ability of the applicant to perform optimally on the job," noted Oluwole Oke, who pressed for the ongoing investigation in the House. The prevalence of bribery and corruption, particularly in the country's public service, is huge. The House ad-hoc committee has received 39 petitions from the MDAs alone, alleging job racketeering and mismanagement of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS). Only last year, there were series of petitions to the Senate from aggrieved job seekers, alleging that the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) management did not allow them to carry out any documentation despite issuing them letters of employment. One of the petitions, signed by a former deputy governor of Ondo State, Agboola Ajayi, alleged that employments into the interventionist agency were sold for various amounts depending on the financial strength of the applicant's family.

The federal government recruitment and payment of civil servants and public officers are fraught with corruption, as public institutions have since stopped advertising for jobs and vacancies. Some job applicants pay as much as N5 million to be hired. But it is not restricted to federal agencies. In fact, the states and the local councils are even worse off as syndicates impoverish the children of the poor and their parents in exchange for jobs. It is so bad that to secure a teaching job in some states, applicants are made to pay scandalous amounts of money. Many of the job seekers resort to taking loans from friends or financial agencies at exorbitant interest rates.

Various surveys conducted by agencies on recruitment process into the country's public service have revealed that sentiments and other primordial issues like ethnicity, nepotism and favoritism are given more consideration in terms of employment than merit. A report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for instance, observed that 32 per cent Nigerians who secured jobs in the nation's public service in 2019 paid a bribe. Country Representatives, UNODC, Oliver Stolpe, stated the findings were not based on perception but on empirical findings backed by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBC).

The staffing of government agencies with unqualified staff comes at a huge cost to the nation. This is because the wrong people will occupy the available positions, and this will breed incompetence and inefficiency across board. The public service has largely been unable to meet the expectations of citizens both in terms of basic needs as well as institutional transformation. It poses a major risk and eases underperformance as widely observed in today's public service. This contrasts with the efficiency, productivity, and professionalism of the 60's and the 70's. This is a systemic rot that smears the integrity of public service in Nigeria. Such is the level of perfidy that tales now abound about people paying for cabinet positions in the country! It could be recalled that over four years ago the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project, (SERAP) had asked the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to: "jointly carry out a prompt, thorough, transparent and effective

Some Nigerians believe that several investigative hearings by the two chambers of the National Assembly are often instituted to extort agencies of governments and private businesses. Some of the so-called investigative committees, at times, end up not submitting any report. Lawmakers often push for the creation of ad hoc committees despite the existence of standing committees. In the current Assembly, which only took off in June, there are no fewer than 15 ad hoc committees investigating different issues, and most of them are summoning different agencies, sometimes unduly disrupting operations in these organizations and extorting money from their leaderships.

investigation into allegations that principal officers and members of the Nigerian Senate are using their official positions to get job slots from government agencies."

SERAP then urged the anti-corruption agencies to: "probe allegations that some ministries, departments and agencies are selling the employment slots at their disposal, with a single slot being allegedly sold for as much as N1.5 million. We urge you to prosecute anyone suspected to be involved should you consider there is relevant and sufficient admissible evidence, and to make public the outcome of any investigation."

In the petition dated 18 October 2019 and signed by SERAP deputy director Kolawole Oluwadare, the organization said: "This alleged preferential treatment in Nigerians' access to

government jobs is a textbook case of cronyism, patronage and corruption. The public interests are best served when public employees are recruited based on their skills, competence and expertise rather than as a reward for political, social and other similar connections." In the letter sent to the then ICPC chairman Bolaji Owasanoye and the then EFCC Acting Chairman Ibrahim Magu, SERAP said: "Unless the allegations are urgently investigated and suspected perpetrators brought to justice, the effective and efficient performance from the public workforce, competence in government services and functioning of ministries, department and agencies will continue to be negatively impacted." The organization also said: "These allegations show the face of public recruitment in Nigeria in recent decades, which has typically been that of political influence, cronyism, patronage and corruption. The allegations amount to a fundamental breach of Nigerian Constitution 1999 (as amended), the country's anti-corruption legislation and international obligations, particularly article 7 of the UN Convention against Corruption to which Nigeria is a state party." The letter copied to the chairman of the Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption, Itse Sagay, read in part: "SERAP urges you to invite the principal officers and members of the Senate and government agencies allegedly involved for interrogation and questioning, and to prosecute them if your investigation indicates relevant and sufficient admissible evidence. This would show your agencies' willingness to proactively exert your mandates and act as a deterrent against breaches of Nigeria's constitution, anti-corruption legislation and international standards." "Allegations of people being recruited for jobs into government agencies regardless of qualifications or competence, because of political affiliations or connections have damaging effects on the independence, effectiveness and efficiency of these important public institutions. This in turn undermines citizens' access to public goods and services like quality education, healthcare, and clean water." "According to our information, some principal officers and members of the Senate are allegedly using their official positions to get job slots from government agencies, and that some government agencies are selling the employment slots at their disposal, with a single slot being sold for as much as N1.5 million." The agencies allegedly involved include: The Federal Inland Revenue Service, National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency, National Space Research and Development Agency, the National Open University and the Federal Civil Service Commission."

"The leadership of the Senate allegedly received 100 employment slots from FIRS to share among themselves. The former Senate President Ahmad Lawan (Yobe North) allegedly secured 26 job slots from the FIRS." "Senate Committee on Federal Character, Danjuma La'ah, reportedly stated: 'We are aware that some of the agencies are selling the employment slots at their disposal. They are commercializing employment, selling a single slot for as much as N1.5m, when we have children who have graduated from tertiary institutions who could not get any job for many years. Some people are just taking Nigerians for granted. Our

children

Some federal ministries, departments and agencies have continued to engage in backdoor recruitment despite the employment embargo imposed by the Federal Government since 2020, findings by our correspondents have revealed. The Federal Government has, however, threatened to sanction those involved in the illegality, including the Federal Inland Revenue Service, Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation Limited, Central Bank of Nigeria and the Nigeria Customs Service, among other MDAs. Investigations showed that some agencies issued employment letters to jobseekers, which were not accredited by the Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation and the Federal Civil Service Commission, while others simply replaced retired or dead officials with friends and family members. But the replacements were done without the approval of the OHCSF and the Federal Civil Service Commission. The PUNCH had earlier reported how some civil servants, who were engaged in employment racketeering, were caught in the Federal Ministry of Works. It was also reported how the OHCSF uncovered over 1,500 civil servants with fake employment letters in a ministry.

Corroborating this, the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Dr Folasade Yemi-Esan, said her office had detected a total of 1,618 workers whose letters of employment were either fake or illegal in the Federal Civil Service. This is despite the embargo placed on employment by the government. In 2019, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation was reported to have employed many individuals without following the due recruitment process. Many groups, including the Niger Delta Youth Consort of Nigeria, protested against the NNPC for excluding the region and southerners in the secret recruitment. The National Coordinator of the NDYCN, Chuks Onuoha, described the practice as unacceptable, but the then NNPC spokesman, Kenny Obateru, denied the recruitment. According to him, what the NNPC management did was to fill the vacancies with personnel who were already in the system and were qualified rather than recruiting fresh ones from outside the system. But applicants, who got to the final stage of the screening process, accused the oil giant of substituting their names with favoured candidates. "The NNPC replaced most of the Executive Heads positions under the guise of a hurriedly planned scheme codenamed Internal Open Resource where some people, who contracted third party staff members and did not meet the requisite experience and qualifications in the advertised EH vacancies, are being deployed through the backdoor in an unfortunate and disappointing bid to jettison the EH merit list," the President, Transparency in Recruitment at Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Felix Sunday, had lamented then. Similarly, the Federal Inland Revenue Service was enmeshed in a recruitment scandal in 2021 after it emerged that it secretly engaged 2,000 workers, a development that put a strain on its budget.

The Nigerian Civil Service Union, which disclosed this in a petition to the then FIRS Chairman, Muhammad Nami, in June 2021, also revealed that the agency was finding it



difficult to pay salaries at some point after the secret engagement of the staff members within a period of 18 months. It demanded an end to the re-engagement of retired directors and other categories of staff. The then media aide to the FIRS chairman, Tobi Wojuola, refused to respond to the allegations against the service when contacted. Reacting to allegations of illegal recruitment, the former Nigerian Customs Service spokesman, Timi Bomodi, insisted that there had been no backdoor recruitment in the service. He said, "We advertise every recruitment in newspapers; there is no ministry and department of government in Nigeria that is as transparent in its recruitment process as the Nigeria Customs Service. "All the 774 local government areas are represented in our recruitment. Applicants are made to sit aptitude tests and are selected based on their competences. You don't need to know anybody before you can be employed in the service." Also, the Central Bank of Nigeria was accused of recruiting 909 staff members within two years without advertising the vacancies. Although the Federal Character Commission investigated the allegation, nothing has been heard about the case.

As Nigerians began to heave a sigh of relief following the intervention being carried out by 10th Assembly Federal House of Representative the Ad Hoc Committee investigating Federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies on mismanagement of personnel Recruitment, IPPS and Employment Racketeering another twist emerged that some members of the committee under Hon. Yusuf Gadgi, Chairman of Ad Hoc Committee are taking advantage of the probe to extort money from the MDAs. The online medium published a story alleging that some members of the committee requested vice chancellors and heads of tertiary institutions to pay certain amounts to an account as bribes. The story also claimed that the account was dedicated for the purpose of giving a soft landing to any institutions' that

would pay the bribe money into it during the investigation. Members of the committee were also alleged to have engaged in extortion from heads of MDAs, including those of academic institutions.

According to the online report 'Investigation reaching our bureau has revealed that Nigerian Lawmakers probing job racketeering are secretly taking bribes from Heads of MDAs and Federal Institutions they are supposed to probe. These lawmakers, who have been posturing as anti-corruption champions, have ironically been receiving bribes through an account in Providus Bank.

According to a report in PREMIUM TIMES anchored by Bakare Majeed 'In the past couple of weeks, a committee of the House of Representatives charged with investigating job racketeering in government parastatals has been extorting money from heads of federal ministries, departments and agencies, including those of tertiary institutions across the country. The PREMIUM TIMES investigation has found. The committee, known for loudly posturing as an anti-corruption body, has ironically been intimidating heads of agencies into paying huge bribes to avoid being disgraced in public and indicted in a report to be issued after the ongoing hearings to which almost all the heads of the nation's federal institutions have been summoned to appear. According to the report 'The corrupt ad hoc committee of 39 lawmakers was constituted following a motion on 5 July by Oluwole Oke, a Peoples Democratic Party member representing the Obokun/Oriade Federal Constituency of Osun State, who urged the lower legislative chamber to investigate the monumental graft surrounding personnel recruitment in government parastatals. "The process of employment into the civil service has become one that is fraught with endemic corruption," Mr Oke told his colleagues as he read a prepared motion listed on the Order Paper of the day. "Public institutions have since stopped the process of advertising for jobs and vacancies. Even in the few instances where adverts

are published, the slots are already commodified and available for the highest bidders. Most institutions now sell employment notwithstanding the qualification of the applicant and the ability of the applicant to perform optimally on the job," he added.

Mr Oke then requested the House to set up an ad hoc committee to investigate all MDAs and tertiary institutions. The Deputy Speaker, Ben Kalu, who presided over plenary on that date, agreed. He then went ahead to constitute an ad hoc committee with 37 members—one lawmaker per state and the Federal Capital Territory. Deputy Speaker Ben Kalu did not announce a chairperson for the Committee. It was Speaker Tajudeen Abbas who, the following day, appointed Yusuf Gagdi (APC, Plateau) to lead the panel. Mr Gagdi, one of the contenders who stepped down for Mr Abbas during the June speakership tussle, was not on the original list announced by the Deputy Speaker. Mr Oke was also not on the list announced by Mr Kalu. Neither was he mentioned by the speaker as a member of the committee. It remains unclear how he became a very active member of the panel. The report stated that many Nigerians, especially those feeling shortchanged by the routine recruitment misconducts in several Federal Agencies, praised the formation of the committee and had high expectations that the panel would produce shocking revelations and restore sanity to the recruitment processes in the federal service. The highly anticipated inquiry began on 25 July with a classic case involving the Federal Character Commission (FCC), an agency established to ensure every state of the federation is equitably represented in the federal public service, but which soon became notorious for aiding and abetting job racketeering. The dramatic and nauseating FCC case gave the Committee widespread publicity and heightened public interest in the proceedings. Mr Oke was very active and was highly critical of Muheeba Dankaka, the chairperson of the FCC, who sent representatives to the committee with a letter saying she was too ill to personally attend the hearing on the opening day. But shortly before the letter was read, Mr Oke and another lawmaker from Nasarawa, Jonathan Gaza, walked into Hearing Room 034, the venue of the proceeding. Not long after the lawmaker's arrival, Mrs Dankaka's letter was read by Mr Gagdi, who almost agreed with the request to fix another date for her to reappear.

Proving tough, Mr Oke disagreed sharply with his colleagues and insisted that Mrs Dankaka should provide a medical report that she was sick. He described the FCC chairman as having "credibility issues", a charge echoed by Moses Anaugbe, a Federal Commissioner in FCC from Delta State, who accused Mrs Dankaka of lying about her health. Members of the panel talked tough, vowing to deal with erring Agencies and threatening to arrest any invited agency head who failed to appear before the committee. The revelations from the committee dominated news headlines hours later and for the days that followed. The popularity of the committee soared, with many Nigerians considering its members as saviors who came to sanitize the job hiring procedures in the country's public service. According to PREMIUM TIMES 'Our investigation, spanning weeks, has now shown that the initial drama and tough stance of the so-

called anti-corruption committee were orchestrated to gain credibility and intimidate agency heads before launching a well-designed scheme to shake them down through fronts disguised as consultants. While a few agencies with uncompromising leadership were being scapegoated and harassed during the daily hearing as TV cameras rolled, some committee members were detailed to, behind closed doors, negotiate bribes with heads of institutions considered culpable of recruitment irregularities, our findings show. In exchange for the bribes paid, those agency heads were to be exempted from scrutiny and public humiliation. They would also be exempted from indictment in the committee's report. Those who failed to pay were to be subjected to public humiliation and disgrace during sham public hearings flooded by journalists, cameras and microphones. For instance, on Tuesday, August 15, some committee members met with heads of the nation's federally-owned universities – 51 vice-chancellors – and afterwards secretly negotiated two-million-naira bribe from each of them to save themselves from public humiliation and eventual indictment.

During the negotiation with the leadership of the Committee of Vice Chancellors, representatives of the committee demanded three million naira from each institution. The professors protested, saying their institutions were poorly funded and that it would be difficult to raise the bribe money. The committee members then shifted ground, reducing the bribe payment to two million naira each but warning of dire consequences for anyone who failed to pay. The vice-chancellors were then given Account Number 5400495458, domiciled in Providus Bank, to pay into. The lawmakers even instructed the vice-chancellors to "clearly indicate the name of the institution in the payment invoice". The committee members also held separate meetings with rectors of the 35 federally owned polytechnics and provosts of the 27 federally owned colleges of education. Three-million-naira bribe was then demanded from each of them. When contacted, the chairperson of the Committee of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (CVCNU), Lillian Salami, said she was at a meeting and would call our reporter back. The University of Benin vice chancellor has yet to do so as of the time of publishing this report. Subsequent calls to her did not connect as her mobile telephone appeared to be switched off. She also did not reply to a text message sent to her on the matter.

Sagir Abbas, the alternate chairperson of the group and vice-chancellor of Bayero University Kano, did not answer or return calls. He also did not reply to a text message sent to him. According to the PREMIUM TIMES report the officials were given a deadline of Thursday, 24 August, to pay or be ready to incur the wrath of the entire House of Representatives, not only in the job racketeering case but in other matters as well. We were able to determine that several agency heads, panicked by the threats of the lawmakers, have since paid the bribes. 'From the tertiary institutions alone, over N267 million is estimated to have been collected by the panel in illicit payments. And with the scope of the committee now expanded to cover the Federal Government's

almost 1,500 MDAs and Corporations, the committee may be on its way to extorting billions from the nation's federal institutions.'

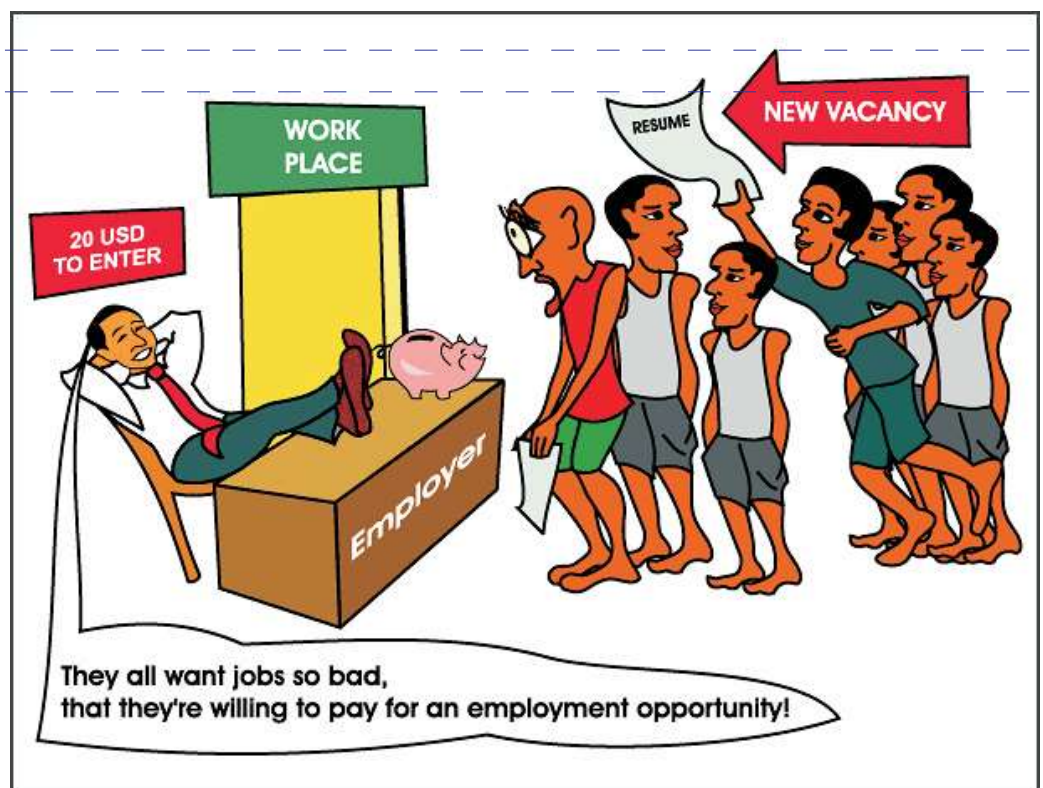
In her response to the allegations the House of Representatives ad hoc committee investigating job racketeering in Ministries, Departments and Agencies has dismissed allegation of extortion of some MDAs by the committee, describing it as baseless. Reacting to the allegation, the committee summoned all Vice-Chancellors of federal universities to appear before it on September 1, 2023, to give documentary evidence on the alleged extortion by a member of the committee. The chairman of the committee, Yusuf Gagdi, issued the summon during the resumed investigative hearing on job racketeering affecting over 400 MDAs in Abuja on Tuesday, August 29, 2023. Gagdi said the author of the online report titled, 'Nigerian lawmakers probing job racketeering are extorting money from agencies', was unfair to tag all the 37 members of the committee as "corrupt". He said the committee would not be deterred by any form of "sponsored blackmail" from carrying out its statutory functions. The lawmaker said though he is the leader of the committee, he was unaware of any member collecting money from MDAs. Gagdi stated that if the author and the Vice-Chancellors have any information on any member, such report should be channeled towards the member rather than blackmailing all the members of the committee. Yusuf Gagdi, rep member Plateau State (Committee chairman, House committee investigating job-racketeering in federal agencies). He said it would be difficult for such

report to blackmail the committee before Nigerians, adding that they have seen how the committee has been attacking the agencies. Gagdi said the author of the story who failed to use the word "alleged", however, went ahead to indict the 37-member committee, adding that such will not happen even in a military regime.

The lawmaker stressed that Nigerians have high hope in the committee, adding that this will be the first in the history of the National Assembly that the country will see mind-blowing recommendations. Gagdi said the recommendations would be aimed and targeted at cleaning up public service, reassuring that the committee will not be deterred. "But don't bring an indicting headline in the name of selling your newspaper or agency. Please I'm saying this – we will move forward, and we will do the needful, we are not going to surrender," Gagdi added. The Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission, ICPC has

been petitioned to probe the allegation that members of the House of Representatives ad-hoc committee investigating alleged job racketeering and mismanagement of the Integrated Personnel Payment Information System (IPPIS) by Federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) have been extorting bribes from universities, polytechnics and other MDAs. The development came as chairman of the Committee of Federal Polytechnics' Rectors, Engr Yahaya Mohammed affirmed his ignorance of the allegation made against members of the House of Representatives.

Meanwhile Rep Yusuf Gagdi, chairman of the Reps committee during a meeting with Vice Chancellors and Rectors interfaced with the committee members disclosed that he had already dragged the ICPC into the issue over the bribe allegations. "I have already written to the ICPC to investigate that account number that was published, the owner of that account and whether there is any transaction by



vice chancellors, rectors of polytechnics and leaders of tertiary institutions in the country." Gagdi also threatened that the committee would take legal action against the online medium over the publication which he said was to "blackmail and discredit" the committee.

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The Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) has commenced investigation into bribery allegations against the House of Representatives Committee on job racketeering and gross mismanagement in government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). ICPC spokesman, Mr Azuka Ogugua, said this in a statement in Abuja. Ogugua said that the ICPC received petitions from an online medium, Premium Times Nigeria; and Yusuf Adamu Gagdi, Chairman of the ad hoc committee, to investigate bribery allegations against the probe panel. The online medium published a story alleging that some members of the committee requested vice chancellors and heads of tertiary institutions to pay certain amounts to an account as bribes. The story also claimed that the account was dedicated for the purpose of giving a soft landing to any institutions' that would pay the bribe money into it during the investigation. Members of the committee were also said to have engaged in extortion from heads of MDAs, including those of academic.

Most Nigerians are often suspicious of Nigerian lawmakers conducting investigative panels due to a long history of using such committees for extortion. A classic example is the fuel subsidy investigative panel in the 7th Assembly led by Farouk Lawan, who is currently serving jail term following his conviction for corruption.

Mr Lawan, a self-proclaimed "Mr Integrity" lived a double life as chairperson of his committee during the probe. In front of cameras and microphones, he spat fire and thumped his chest as he vowed to clean up the extremely dirty Nigeria's oil and gas sector. But behind closed doors, he was stuffing huge kickbacks, in dollars, into his cap and flowing gown. It took a sting operation by security agents to unveil the facade put up by the lawmaker, who received a \$500,000 bribe from billionaire Femi Otedola. In 2012, a House Committee chaired by Herman Hembe from Benue State was also accused by the then CEO of the Security and Exchange Commission, Arunma Oteh, of demanding millions during the probe of the Nigerian capital market. Ms Oteh, during the hearing in 2012, publicly questioned the integrity of Mr Hembe to continue the investigation after allegedly demanding N39 million and N5 million on separate occasions. She also said the lawmaker was sponsored by SEC to attend an investment summit in the Dominican Republic but that he did not attend. He failed to return the estacode paid to him by the commission, Ms Oteh said. "Now I questioned, Hon. Chairman, your credibility in carrying out this public hearing. The reason is that on October 20, the SEC gave you an estacode and a business class ticket to travel to an emerging market conference in the Dominican Republic. Please tell the Nigerian people if you went there, and this was

in November. Please tell Nigerian people, if you did not go, whether you returned the money. "In asking the SEC to contribute N39 million to this public hearing, do you think it has undermined your capacity to conduct this public hearing? I don't think I should be subjected to what you subjected me to because the SEC did not give you N5 million in cash on Tuesday, the 13 of March. It should not be," she said. Mr Hembe, in his response, did not deny the allegations. He only called on anti-graft agencies to investigate the allegation.

In the last Assembly, the probe by the House Committee on NDDC into the activities of the Niger Delta Development Commission turned into a game of accusations and counter accusations. Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, the then Chairman of the Committee, recused himself after the management of the commission accused him of being a beneficiary of some contracts being probed. Mr Olubunmi-Ojo, who is now the Minister of Interior, denied wrongdoing and recused himself from the hearing after the NDDC management staged a walkout. The probe was later derailed after the then Minister of Niger Delta Affairs, Godswill Akpabio, alleged that several lawmakers were also beneficiaries of the contracts in NDDC. The exchange led to the infamous "off your mic" moment in the committee.

Some Nigerians believe that several investigative hearings by the two chambers of the National Assembly are often instituted to extort agencies of governments and private businesses. Some of the so-called investigative committees, at times, end up not submitting any report. Lawmakers often push for the creation of ad hoc committees despite the existence of standing committees. In the current Assembly, which only took off in June, there are no fewer than 15 ad hoc committees investigating different issues, and most of them are summoning different agencies, sometimes unduly disrupting operations in these organizations and extorting money from their leaderships.

Now that the two parties have taken their case to the ICPC it is expected that the truth will be established after a sincere and thorough investigations. There should be no sacred cow, anyone found guilty should be punished and brought to book. Many Nigerians have been wondering that despite all these probes, oversight functions and public hearings conducted by the two arms of the National assembly governance gaps continue to widen as things continues to deteriorate instead of improving. Abandoned projects are littered here and there and one will begin to ask what are the results of all these oversights? Many argue that if their oversight functions are diligently conducted most of these governance loopholes would be blocked. But if our lawmakers opt for backstage settlement instead of ensuring that these oversight functions are properly conducted to ensure that the system works then it becomes a vicious cycle and the nation will be worst for it. The question that really comes to mind is, are our lawmakers working for public interest or personal interest? The outcome of this investigation by the ICPC will tell. The real big question that agitate the minds of young applicants is when will job racketeering stop, how long will helpless Nigerians continue to pay to get job in the civil service of their fatherland. Time will tell.

From vote buying to Job racketeering: A Nation in delusion

BY ZAINAB SULEIMAN OKINO

Nigeria has always been about influence peddling, nepotism and favouritism, with an insignificant mix of tokenism, which the authorities brandish to prove the point that merit matters. However, in the last eight years of the Buhari presidency, even that infinitesimal proportion (of tokenism) was supplanted by the influence of more money to buy jobs. Hence all available jobs at MDAs and even key political appointments were offered and bought at the highest bidders. It was an open secret. It became a topic for discussion at elite gatherings and relaxation spots. It was public knowledge that those close to power were buying big jobs and those in the middle were buying civil service jobs. Now we hear that even ministerial slots are paid for. So, an issue that used to be discussed in hushed voices over the years blew open with reckless abandon. Because it is illegal, illegitimate and morally reprehensible, but quite ubiquitous, it has recently jolted the nation when it became a matter of investigation at the National Assembly.

To show how widespread it was, some greedy unsuspecting individuals fell victims of the appointment sellers' antics, sadly. As a matter of fact, I did experience this brazen antic in 2019 during Buhari's second term in office at a time ministerial positions and other appointments were being considered. Somebody impersonated the former SGF, Boss Mustapha and reached out to me. Typically, one called me and told me to hold on and speak to the SGF. He said they had seen my CV and were convinced that joining the administration would give it added credibility.

Just imagine! A poor journalist like me, who is non-partisan, non-aligned and did not participate in the electioneering campaigns. I knew he was a scammer but played along all the same. Anyway, the back and forth continued until he mentioned money. He started with 5 million Naira and came down to 500,000 Naira to serve as deposit. A whole SGF! When I wasn't forthcoming and didn't show any excitement, he saw through it, got angry over my "unseriousness" and stopped calling. Many, who are not as discerning as I'm and probably have the money might have fallen victim to this money game. Still, the level of desperation arising from unemployment can compel some to pay for jobs. There is virtually no home that does not harbour unemployed graduates who are hopeless, hapless and helpless. For those who can afford it, paying one million or two for jobs could be a permanent solution to their jobless status. Therefore, I totally understand the situations of the young graduates that paid for jobs at the Federal Character Commission (FCC).

The issue has become divisive and controversial between the FCC chairman, Muheeba Dankaka and her former aide Haruna Kolo, and with the victims serving as witnesses. The revelations so far, might just be tips of the iceberg, considering the information many Nigerians have at their disposal. Besides, the concern is how children of the poor are expected to fare in an atmosphere of monetization of politics, appointments, jobs. Yet the people selling jobs today went to school almost free of charge and joined the public service with ease. What a contradiction! I know integrity means nothing to the average Nigerian politician, but the public servants have since joined in this show of shame. From the sad and depressing reality of vote buying and nepotism

came the enraging matter of paying for jobs.

Under Hon. Yusuf Gadgi, Chairman of Ad Hoc Committee Investigating Federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), on Mismanagement of Personnel Recruitment, IPPIS and Employment Racketeering, whose statement prompted this write-up, the lawmaker noted that the job market at MDAs has made it impossible for the children of the poor to get jobs. "The common man is denied opportunity to get employment into MDAs through the use (abuse) of waivers. Should you be granted a waiver to employ, consider the injustice meted out to other states and address them so that there will be a sort of balance in terms of representation in that agency. We'll compel you to advertise those slots so that the son of nobody will have the opportunity to apply. Perhaps, you'll see him with a first class, and you'll see his performance during his interview to be super and then, you'll recruit him in order to have the best in those agencies", he admonished, when the Nigeria Hydrological Services Agency (NIHSA) appeared before his committee. Even without this advice, the public service rule say all such vacancies should be advertised.

Meanwhile, in the ongoing bribery probe, most of the agencies invited by the Gadgi Ad Hoc Committee to appear simply refused to show up. Although the Committee chair condemned the attitude of these agencies, he has no power of enforcement to compel them. "We have made our position very clear, and we have resolved to further communicate through newspaper communications ... for these agencies to make sure they appear before this committee. And we are going to give the agencies the last warning... and so on and so forth. How else do you gradually kill a nation where impunity and mediocrity walk hand in gloves.

The National Assembly can do their probes; they can even issue a warrant of arrest, as they did on middleman Haruna Kolo in the FCC probe. They can take newspaper adverts to compel agencies 'indicted' to appear before it. Anti-graft groups will protest, but in the end, nothing will happen. Even when those agencies show up and defend themselves, and whether they are guilty or not, the question is: who will enforce the resolutions of the probe panels? All the people involved would take a cue from such past efforts that amounted to nothing and move on with their lives as if nothing ever happened. After Gadgi revealed that 35 agencies defied or snubbed his probe committee, all he could muster sheepishly was, "most of these agencies are not respectful of constituted authority. We are supposed to have the presence of 40 agencies but only four are here." The lawmakers are powerless because they too are not clean and lack political legitimacy.

Such malfeasances such as impunity, corruption and now job racketeering have always gone unpunished. Very soon this probe report will begin to gather dust on the shelves and subsequently die a natural death. If things continue like this, where lies the hope for the common man?

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