

# Stranglehold of the IMF: Nigerian Government Using Repressive Tactics to Quell Dissent by Youth and Workers

President of the Labor Congress threatened with arrest over allegations of “terrorism”

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*Over the last ten months the workers and youth of the Federal Republic of Nigeria have organized general strikes and mass demonstrations to express their disagreements over the economic policies of the administration of President Bola Tinubu.*

In response to these mass and industrial actions, the government has intensified its repressive methods aimed at suppressing the mass sentiments of the 230 million citizens.

For several days in early August, the #endbadgovernance campaign called for rallies and marches which demanded that the government abandon its neoliberal policies which have been imposed at the aegis of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Nigeria, despite its vast wealth in petroleum resources, is facing a burgeoning problem of international debt service obligations.

The lifting of subsidies and other measures have triggered hyperinflationary pricing where the national currency, the Niara, has fallen rapidly against the United States dollar. Consequently, the cost of food has risen sharply, which was reflected in the rallies and demonstrations several weeks ago when people carried empty pots as a symbol of hunger.

Rather than hold substantive talks with the youth groupings and mass organizations leading the demonstrations, a heightened mobilization of the security forces used crowd control techniques and live ammunition to drive people off the streets. Statistics from human rights organizations indicate that 22 people died during the demonstrations. See [this](#).

Image: Nigerian Labor Congress leader threatened with arrest Joseph Ajaero (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)



The latest attack is being leveled against the trade union movement through a threat to arrest the President of the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) Joe Ajaero. The labor leader has been an outspoken critic of the economic policies of the Tinubu administration involving the removal of subsidies from fuel, electricity and other consumer goods and services.

In October of 2023, the NLC engaged in a one-day strike demanding the immediate increase of the minimum wage. Although commitments were made to the workers, the rate of wage increases fall far short of the rise in inflation which has grown precipitously since the advent of the Tinubu government during last year.

On August 21, the Nigerian security forces demanded that Ajaero report to the authorities for questioning on suspicions that he is involved in funding so-called “terrorist” activity. Ajaero denied any wrongdoing while the NLC promised to shut down the supply of electricity and communication services nationwide if their leader is detained by the authorities.

[A report published](#) in the Nigerian Daily Post on August 21 says of the current situation:

“Nigerian workers in telecommunications and electricity sectors have threatened to shut down the National grid, and telecom services at midnight Wednesday if the President of the Nigeria Labor Congress, Joe Ajaero, is arrested by the Nigerian Police Force. This was contained in separate notices on Tuesday by the General Secretaries of the National Union of Electricity Employees and the National Union of Postal and Telecommunications Employees, Dominic Igwebike and Mary Nwosu, respectively. This comes after the police in a letter on Monday summoned Ajaero for questioning on Tuesday over an alleged link to terrorism financing and other allegations. The NLC, president in a letter in response to the Police on Tuesday turned down the invitation because it came late. He, however, fixed Wednesday, August 29 to honor the invitation.”

While the #endbadgovernance protests were underway, there were people in the north of the country who flew Russian flags. The purpose of these gestures was to condemn the foreign and domestic policy orientation of the Tinubu administration which is closely allied with the U.S. and other western imperialist states.

Security officials arrested people on charges of treason for flying the Russian flag. In addition, a tailor accused of manufacturing the flags was also detained.

These arbitrary arrests provided a clear indication of the fear embodied within the Nigerian ruling elites. These concerns over the identification with Moscow clearly stems from the developments which have occurred in other West African states in the recent period.

In Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, the military-led administrations have expelled imperialist forces from France. In the case of Niger, the CNSP government which came to power on July 26, 2023, demanded the withdrawal of both French and U.S. soldiers.

All three of these states have formally broken with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), chaired at present by Tinubu. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have since formed their own Alliance of Sahel States (AES) in the aftermath of the signing of the Liptako-Gourma Charter. This agreement was signed after Niger was threatened with a U.S.-French backed invasion by ECOWAS to reinstall the imperialist-backed President Mohamed Bazoum who was overthrown in the July 26 coup.

Similar conditions which prevailed in the Sahel states are also present within Nigeria: an ongoing ineffective counter-insurgency operation against terrorist groupings; the failure of the western-allied administrations to improve the living standards of the majority of people; and the misrepresentation of democratic governance where neoliberal policies and political repression characterize the states. There is widespread dissatisfaction among the population in Nigeria as the overall economic crisis worsens.

### Cryptocurrency Dealer from the U.S. Detained in Nigeria

Another example of the character of the Nigerian legal system is the detention of a U.S. citizen, Tigran Gambaryan, a former Internal Revenue Service (IRS) employee arrested alongside a Kenyan-British citizen for financial crimes. The case has drawn the attention of 12 U.S. Congresspersons who have appealed for the release of Gambaryan.

The charges against Gambaryan are money laundering and tax evasion. This incident illustrates the complicated relationship between the U.S. financial sector and the Nigerian ruling elites. Although the U.S.-based IMF is pressuring the Tinubu administration to implement austerity measures impacting the workers, farmers and youth, the Nigerian police are holding this U.S. citizen for allegations which are being denied by the indicted individual and elements within the U.S. Congress.

Some speculate that Gambaryan is being held in order to extort money from the Bianca cryptocurrency firm he is associated with. The Congresspersons who visited Gambaryan said that his medical condition is deteriorating as he is suffering from pneumonia and Malaria.

[In a June article published](#) by an online journal which follows the national currency noted that:

“Nairametrics reported on February 28th that Nigerian officials had detained two high-ranking executives from Binance, a prominent cryptocurrency exchange. Among those detained were Nadeem Anjarwalla, a 37-year-old British Kenyan serving as the regional manager for Africa, and Tigran Gambaryan, a 39-year-old American responsible for financial crime compliance at Binance. Their visit to Nigeria coincided with the government’s recent crackdown on several cryptocurrency trading platforms. In response to the detention of its executives, Binance decided to cease trading the Nigerian naira against popular cryptocurrencies like bitcoin and tether on its exchange platform.”

This same firm has also had problems with India. Although they did not detain any of their executives, Bianca was hit with a \$2.2 million fine which will allow the company to operate

in the South Asian state.

Cryptocurrencies are by no means free from risk. Millions in the U.S. have lost money to these investment schemes which are heavily promoted over social media platforms.

[Barron's reprinted an article](#) in November 2022 from the French Press Agency (AFP) which says:

“Roughly three-quarters of people who have bought bitcoin have lost money according to a study published Monday as the cryptocurrency sector reels from the collapse of a major exchange that has sapped confidence. Economists at the Bank of International Settlements, an institution widely considered as the central banks of central banks, analyzed data on investors in cryptocurrencies in 95 countries between 2015 and 2022. ‘Overall, back of the envelope calculations suggest that around three-quarters of users have lost money on their bitcoin investments,’ they said in their study.”

Consequently, whether through the more traditional financial and monetary platforms which have ensnared the people of Nigeria and other African states with unpayable debts for decades or the recent investment mechanisms utilizing cryptocurrencies, neither has resulted in social stability and sustainability in the labor market and financial sectors operating in the developing states.

## Potential for a Broad United Front in Nigeria

The imperialist system worldwide is committed to the maintenance of exploitation and oppression of the majority of peoples around the globe. Nigeria has a large well-organized working class operating amid the rising militancy of the youth and students inside the country.

The security apparatus of the Nigerian state is upholding the class interests of the international bourgeoisie and their surrogates within the country. However, the workers and youth far outnumber those who operate as functionaries for the system of neo-colonialism.

These progressive social forces should unite to put forward a program of action designed to transform the economic crisis into opportunities for social transformation. Nigeria must embark upon a path of non-capitalist and anti-imperialist development. Africa as a whole must move towards an existence where the workers and youth realize their rightful dominant social position within society.

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*Featured image: Nigeria mass demonstration (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)*

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