

Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Strike Action in Labour Conflict Management in Nigeria (1999-2011)

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ABSTRACT

The paper argued that though strike comes with so many diseconomies, there are factors that usually compelled the NLC to embark on strikes in Nigeria which ranges from refusal to recognize a union or workers' group as a collective bargaining party; rejection of unions demand and so on. The paper equally contended that prolonged strikes negatively affect the perception of the NLC in industrial conflict management in Nigeria. It also discovered that strikes embarked upon by the NLC have not secured industrial harmony in Nigeria. Rather, strikes bred inferiority complex, cold war and psychological stress in the workplace. The paper observed the achievability of peaceful and harmonious industrial co-existence amongst labour and management through collaboration, accommodation and compromise. Data for the paper was sourced from interview and documented researches. Qualitative and descriptive methods of analysis were employed in analyzing the data generated.

KEYWORDS: *NLC, Strike, Conflict and Conflict Management.*

1. INTRODUCTION.

Labour union(s) and strike actions are older than the country's political independence. For instance in Nigeria, between June and July of 1945, 43,000 workers, most of whom were rendering services vital to the country's economic and administrative life, went on a national strike that lasted more than forty days (PAUL, Agba and Chukwura, 2013:52). Strike is a temporary stoppage of work by a group of employees in order to express a grievance or enforce a demand (Okene, 2008). It involves a complete withdrawal of workers' services, leading to a man-made breakdown of industrial services. It is usually resorted to when other measures to come to agreement over issues in contention fail. Developing nations are witnessing huge increases in the number of industrial actions. Industrial action, in the form of strike has become a usual decimal of labour conflict management in developing countries. This phenomenon formerly seen as European sickness has gradually infiltrated the economies of underdeveloped nations, making lives very difficult for their already traumatized citizens (Egwaikhide and Aniwa, 2005).

Since the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria has faced several strikes or threat of strikes from labour. These posed tough challenges to administrations. Several key unions across the country have continued to mount pressure on the governments, threatening planned strikes and securing settlements that have raised concerns about the future of labour conflict management in Nigeria. Among them were the strikes the three registered trade unions in government owned universities - the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Senior Staff Non-Academic Union (SSANU) and Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU) in 2003 and 2010. The strikes paralysed learning, research and administration in the universities. Writing on the effects of ASUU strikes Abdullahi (2011)

cited Nigeria as possessing the most numerous amounts of Internet users with the redundant undergraduates taking a lion's share of the pie chart as they are usually forced home during strikes. The strikes equally brought a number of pains for workers as some union leaders lost their jobs in the process. Particularly, in 2000 and 2003, government sacked 10 UNILAG and 44 UNILORIN lecturers (Abdullahi, 2011).

Medical doctors have embarked on strikes over improved welfare repeatedly causing people preventable death and unbearable cost in the hands of shylock private practitioners. In addition, strikes have made affiliates of the NLC and TUC in conjunction with their civil society partners; the Joint Action Forum (JAF) and the Civil Society Coalition (LASCO) to stage peaceful/violent protests along major streets chanting anti-labour songs thereby causing serious traffic jam. Consequently, the police in trying to quell demonstrators/protesters through an order the Nigerian Government killed strikers in Edo Airport and arrested/detained scores of others across the country (Oshunkeye, 2003 and Akinwale, 2011).

Despite the above, experiences in developing and developed nations hold that the weapon of strike is often the most effective instrument left in the hands of employees to compel a recalcitrant employer to recognize and bargain faithfully with their unions or representatives, to comply with the terms of a collective agreement or to generally make improvements regarding the terms and conditions of employment of workers (Okene, 2011). It is argued that without strike action (or its potential use), organized labour is powerless to deal with management. In fact, in the absence of such right, collective bargaining is tantamount to “collective begging”.

The need to protect and promote the welfare of workers necessitated the establishment of the International Labour Organization to give backing to unionism the world over. It was against this backdrop that the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) was founded as the umbrella body of the Nigerian workers. Just like labour organizations in other societies, the NLC has had its unfair share in industrial conflicts, ending in strikes of varying magnitude with harrowing consequences, yet workplace justice is not achieved. Constant strikes by the NLC resulting from disagreement with government on labour and national issues (especially deregulation) affects the pace of development of the country as many development projects by government and non-governmental organizations are usually put on hold during such strikes. It affects long term partnership and positive communication between labour, unions and government, and breeds distrust among the parties involved (Aspinall, 2007). However, observers in the nation's economy have warned that Nigeria's chance of catching up with the globalised society is being hampered by the persistent strikes in the country. They argue that the impact of strikes on a third world nation like Nigeria would not only devalue her economic system but also impair her social relationship with other economies. Sequel to the above, these important questions are formulated to guide this study: What factors compelled NLC to embark on strike between 1999 and 2011? How has strike affected the perception of the NLC in Nigeria? To what extent has strike achieved industrial harmony in Nigeria?

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Conflict and industrial conflict

The concept of conflict is multi-dimensional (Adewole and Adebola, 2010). However, Ubeku (1985) defined it as sequence of interaction between groups in society,

between groups and government, and between individuals. Conflict is said to arise in a situation of disagreement between two parties. A situation like this is characterized by the inability of those concerned to iron out their differences (Ige and Aina, 2011).

Fajana (1995) in Adewole and Adebola (2010) viewed industrial conflict as the inability of the employers and employees to reach agreement on any issue connected with the subject of employers-employees' interactions. Adeoti (1980) stated that industrial conflict is expressed in different terms such as strike action, industrial unrest, industrial disharmony, trade dispute, etc. All these are concept which point to the fact that there is unhealthy relationship between key actors in an industrial setting (Ogunbameru and Oribabor, 2000).

Concept of strike

Eberinwa (2012) citing Section 47 of the Nigerian Trade Dispute Act 2010, defined strike action as the cessation of work by a body of persons employed acting in combination. It is a concerted refusal or a refusal under a common understanding of any member of persons employed to continue to work for the employer as a result of a dispute, done as a means of compelling their employer or any person or body of persons representing the employers, to accept or not to accept terms of employment and the physical conditions of work.

In a classic formulation, Hyman (1972) defined strike as a temporary stoppage of work by a group of employees in order to express a grievance or enforce a demand. It is not all work stoppages that amount to strike action in its real sense. Scheuer (2006) explained that strike is temporary; strike is a special type of collective action; it is about employees and lastly, strike is not impulsive.

Factors responsible for rising strike actions in labour conflict management in Nigeria

Strike action has been likened to an evil wind that blows no one any good, including the strikers. It is said that the only man who desires a strike for fun is the man who wants to go to hell for a pastime (Payne, 1935) in Okene (2008).

In particular, Okene (2008) identified some factors giving rise to strikes to include: refusal to recognize a union or workers groups as a collective bargaining party, refusal to accede to unions' demands as well as failure of negotiation, and outright failure to implement collective agreements. Benjamin and Hideaki (2004) added other causes of strike actions when they identified the economic and non-economic factors of strike. The economic factors involve matters relating to compensation like wages, bonus, allowances, and conditions for work, unjust layoffs and retrenchments etc. The non-economic causes of strike may include among others victimization of workers, ill-treatment by staff members, sympathetic strikes, political factors, indiscipline and so on (see also Adewole and Adebola, 2010).

There are lack of transparency and weak institutional capacity needed for reconciling dissenting voices in industrial conflict management in Nigeria. Some of the issues that end up into full blown strike actions could be handled and strikes averted. Other factors include miscommunication, poor dialogue environment and selfish interest of parties on issues under contention (Okene, 2008; Akinwale, 2011).

Effects of strike on Nigerian economy

Scheuer (2012) argued rightly that strikes are not without costs for both parties to the conflict and often for third parties too. Some of these generalized costs are among the reasons legislators restrict the use of strikes (Novitz, 2003). For companies, they lose earnings and possibly market share; employees lose their wages and unions lose money they spend on supporting the striking workers.

The strikes in government owned tertiary institutions paralyze learning, research and administration. Abdullahi (2011) writing on the effects of ASUU strikes cited Nigeria to possess a very high rate of redundant undergraduates, internet fraud and online pornographic viewers as students are forced to stay idle at home. It has increased the number of attendees at night clubs with the risks of killer diseases spread and constant abuse of drugs and alcohol as “idle mind remains the devil’s workshop”. The strikes equally brought a number of pains for workers as some union leaders lost their jobs in the process. Particularly, in 2000 and 2003, government sacked 10 UNILAG and 44 UNILORIN lecturers (Abdullahi, 2011).

The health sector is not left out in the strike menace as medical doctors have embarked on strikes over improved welfare repeatedly within the period causing preventable death and unbearable cost in the hands of shylock private practitioners. Furthermore, the strike declared by the NLC in the tail end of 2011 paralysed economic activities across the country as most critical sectors of the economy such as the banks, power, petroleum, ports were shut down in full compliance with directives of the labour leaders (Anyim, Ikemefuna and Ekwoaba, 2011).

In addition, strikes have led affiliates of the NLC and TUC in conjunction with their civil society partners; the Joint Action Forum (JAF) and the Civil Society Coalition (CSCO) stage peaceful/violent protests along major streets chanting anti-labour songs thereby causing serious traffic jam. The police in trying to quell protesters during strikes on the order of the Nigerian Government killed scores in Benin Airport and arrested others across the country (Oshunkeye, 2003; Akinwale, 2011).

Overview of the NLC and Conflict Management

The fundamental mission of the Congress is to protect, defend and promote the right, privileges and the interest of all trade unions affiliated to the congress, their individual members and the working class generally through the attainment of the following among others: promoting, defending and maintaining the right and interest of labour; assisting in the complete organization of all workers eligible for membership of the organization affiliated to the congress irrespective of creed, state of origin, sex, religion and/or political beliefs and affiliating to or subscribing to, or assisting any other workers’ organization in Africa whose aims and objectives are similar to those of the congress (Onuoha, 2011).

The Trade Dispute Act No. 7 of 1976 is the operative law for settling trade/industrial dispute in Nigeria. The law enjoins employers and workers to voluntary settle disputes. It provides for both parties to appoint a mediator where they cannot amicably settle. If the mediator is unable to resolve the dispute within the stipulated time, either party can report the dispute to the Minister of labour who is enjoined to appoint a Conciliator. If the conciliator is unsuccessful, the Minister is enjoined to refer the dispute to the Industrial Arbitration Panel (IAP). The IAP has tripartite representation (i.e, Government, Employers and Workers). After IAP makes its award, if any party still has

objections, the dispute is then referred to the National Industrial Court, (NIC) whose ruling shall be final and binding (NLC State Level Schools, Module 4).

Despite the above laid down mechanisms and procedure for dispute resolution, Nigeria in recent years has witnessed a plethora of trade disputes rather than peaceful industrial relations (Akume and Abdullahi, 2013). The pattern of industrial relations has been conflictual with disruptive consequences and significant work-hour losses due to work stoppages. In Nigeria, the avalanche of legal processes to industrial dispute resolution as noted above, have hardly been utilized in the first instance. Despite this widening pattern process, trade dispute resolution had on most cases reached the level of arbitration (Onyishi and Asogwa, 2009).

From 1985 to date, the Nigerian governments have adopted different strategies ranging from union recognition, in some instances the posture of union exclusion while at other times; it has been that of union opposition (Bratton, 1999) in relating to union leaders during trade dispute. These strategies albeit have not reduced the growing consistency of disharmony in Nigeria’s Labour Management relations (Egwaikhide and Aniwa, 2005). Whatever the strategy government uses in relating to labour unions, it is of essence to note drawing from past antecedent that the real intention of government in Nigeria is systematically to control Labour unions at all cost. This aim in itself has been a major source of conflict between labour unions and government (Akume and Abdullahi, 2013).

Furthermore, one of the greatest challenges that NLC and government face in making the move from adversarial bargaining is, to ensure that the parties start by putting a problem on the table and by analyzing it before moving on to seek and then evaluate and choose solutions (Brand, 2010). The tradition of starting with demands is so entrenched that, even with training, it is difficult to get the parties to do things differently. This is not only a matter of changing bad habits but also because, even when the representatives of the parties have been trained, they remain answerable to constituencies who expected things to be done in a traditional militant way.

This apparent lack of industrial democracy has encouraged the development of confrontational state-labour relations that usually lead to “the traditional war game of a 7 to 14 day ultimatum followed by strikes” (Yesufu, 2000:511). The NLC has equally used strikes not only as means of pressing labour’s demand in a collective bargaining, but also as a virile political instrument to ensure that governmental policies are in public interest (Ikeanyibe and Onyishi, 2010). Strike within this context becomes one of the ways of expressing dissatisfaction with governance and compelling state authorities to redirect their policies for the wellbeing of the people beyond the ballot box or military intervention. The NLC usually championed these types of strikes which are usually total and comprehensive.

Table1. Strikes declared by the NLC in its conflict management efforts in Nigeria.

KEY EVENTS	TIME/PERIOD	SOME KEY LESSONS
The first formal trade union, the Nigeria Civil Service Union	19 th August, 1912	Strength and solidarity
Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) Strike	June 2, 1945	Effectiveness of purposeful strikes. Importance of alliance in trade unions and political struggles
Iva Valley Massacre (Coal Mines)	November 19,1949	Networking with people and society
Emergence of first Trade Union Center	1942/43	Strength in unity
Ideological differences in trade unions	1948-1988	Multiple labour centers disunite and weakens trade unions. Weak trade union centers become dependent on international funding.
Military intervention in politics and civil war	1966-1970	Trade unions are freer and stronger in

		democratic polity
Apena cemetery declaration on trade union unity and emergence of second NLC	1974-1975	Unity is crucial for the survival and legitimacy of trade unions
Military set up tribunal to probe the four labour centers. Dissolution of labour centers and the 2 nd NLC. Banning of labour leaders and the promulgation of new labour policy (Dawn of New Year)	1975-1976	Military governments are not disposed to independence of trade unions and their rights. Any concession by the government to trade unions is generally aimed at control and taming trade union if not united
Government sanctioned inauguration of the new NLC	1977-78	Could abort/moderate the negative intentions of government
Government recognition of NLC inaugural conference	February 28, 1978	A conscious and well focused trade union movement can subvert government's negative intentions
Workers charter of demands		Union set agenda for alternative development
National strike for legal minimum wage (under a civilian regime)	May 11-12, 1981	Workers and trade unions must fight for the actualization of rights contained in constitutions and the law
Campaign against Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)	1986-1987	Unpopular socio-economic policies can be challenged and may lead to confrontations between trade unions and governments
Second government dissolution of the NLC National Exco and appointment of Sole Administrator	February 29, 1988	Trade unions must learn to resolve internal differences and avoid government exploiting them
Third dissolution of NLC National Exco by the military regime and appointment of Sole Administrators- Ason Bur and Ahmed Gusau	1994-1998	Trade unions and their leaders must be consistent and committed in fighting any course
Dissolution of NUPENG and PENGASSAN leadership by military fiat	1994	Principled struggle by unions can lead to government backlash.
Promulgation of draconian labour decrees aimed at further subversion of trade union rights and division of their ranks.	1996-1998	Labour laws are usually not meant to favour any segment of the labour movement. All must fight against any oppressive and subversive labour law.
Campaign for living wage	2000	Democratic polity allows more space for trade union activities.
Nationwide strikes against increases in fuel prices	June 2000- 2007	Labour must create alliances to successfully address broad based issues.
Review of labour laws and attempt by the Federal Government to prosecute NLC	2003-2005	Unions were not creation of the law but the laws were promulgated to regulate the militancy of workers and guarantee their continued exploitation by employers/capital
Implementation of N18,000 minimum wage.	2011	Labour must create alliances to successfully address broad based issues.

Source: NLC State Level Schools Module 1: 19-20.

From the table, it can be inferred that labour unions in Nigeria have had a tortuous history. Having survived the years of military rule, it is up to labour to stand her ground to refocus the governance in Nigeria under democratic regimes. Even, under a democratic government, without a robust union (s), it is easy for politicians to go despotic and tyrannical. However, contemporary union leaders need to emulate the past heroes of the Nigeria Labour Congress who saw the union through during colonial and military governments.

In reaction to the incessant labour unrest under the auspices of the NLC, which characterized her privatization and related policies, the Obasanjo administration in 2004 hurriedly introduced a bill to the National Assembly to reform Labour laws in Nigeria (Ikeanyibe and Onyishi, 2010). Among the reforms introduced by the Trade Union Act of 2005 are: the abolition of any trade union such as a singular federation of trade unions in the country: prevention of any trade union from embarking on strike action unless upon a resolution approving the strike action passed by at least two-thirds majority of delegates

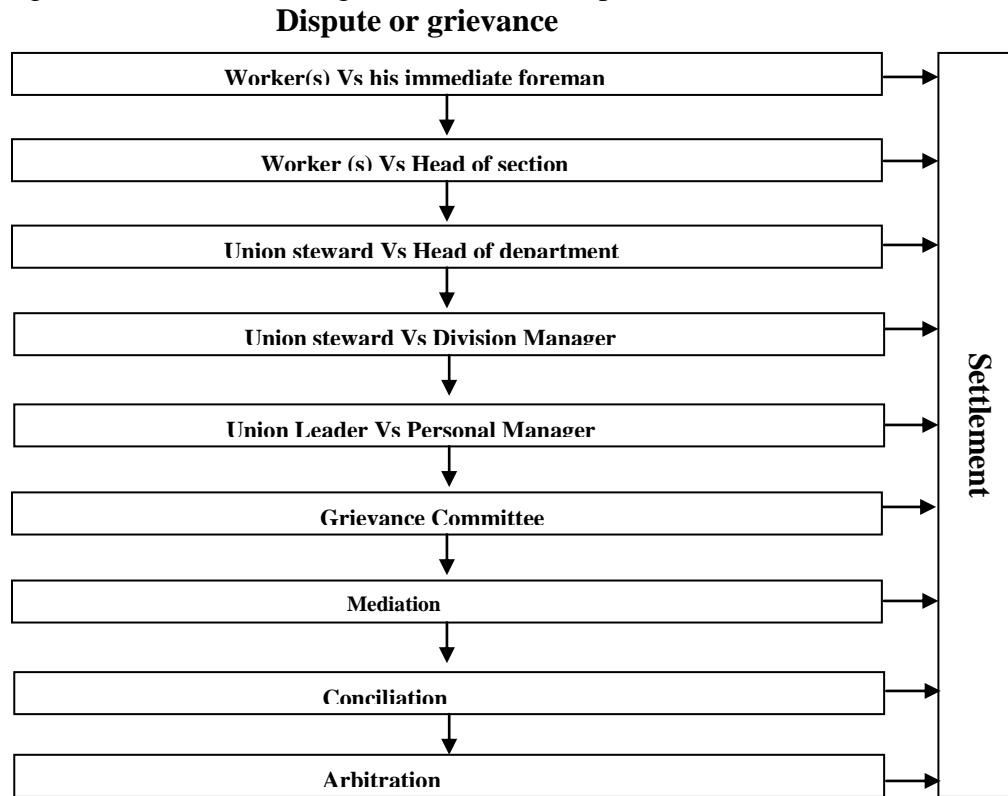
representing all the members of the union or federation of trade union in secret ballot held at a meeting for that purpose; abolition of automatic check – off dues of workers to their trade unions; provision that a worker shall or shall not join a trade union or shall or shall not relinquish membership of a trade union; the provision as unlawful for anyone or more persons acting as trade union or individual employer to subject any other person to any kind of constraint or restriction of his personal freedom in the cause of persuasion; and prohibition of any trade union or registered federation of trade unions or any member thereof from compelling any person who is not a member of its union to join any strike or in any manner whatever, to prevent aircrafts from flying or institutions or premises of any kind for the purpose of giving effect to the strike.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Integrated Conflict Management Model

An integrated conflict management model is developed for settling grievance and disputes to possibly nip any grievance in the bud (Lynch, 2003; Lipsky, 2010; Omisore, 2011).

Fig 3: Integrated Model for Settling Grievance and Disputes.



Source: Omisore (2011:20)

The model shows that conflict in workplace starts at different cadres either among workers themselves, their unions or between workers and the employers. In the same vein solutions to such conflict are different. Some can be settled without strikes or litigations. The nucleus of the model is timely and objective bargaining on both sides. Hence, both the government and labour need to follow this systematic procedure of “Integrated Conflict Management Model” in resolving industrial conflict right from its source to nip strike in

the bud. It therefore means, if the above hierarchical arrangement of negotiation is genuinely applied, most conflicts would be amicably resolved without reaching arbitration stage not to talk of strike. In any case where issue(s) lingers, then the strike option as a last resort may follow.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated to guide the study: 1) There were no factors that compelled NLC to embark on strikes between 1999 and 2011. 2) Strikes embarked upon by the NLC have not significantly affected her credibility in industrial conflict management in Nigeria. 3) The strikes have not achieved significant industrial harmony in Nigeria.

3. METHODOLOGY

Data for the study was generated from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources of data for the study were interviews. Structured interviews were administered to some officials of the Nigeria Labour Congress at the national and state councils as well as government officials in the Ministry of Labour and Productivity as well as members of Civil Society Organizations. The researchers obtained the e-mail addresses and social media accounts (Twitter) of the respondents they could not meet one on one. We then posted his prepared set of structured interview questions for their responses.

Other materials for the study came from secondary sources such as the internets, NLC documents, government documents, academic journals and textbooks. The researcher also applied for relevant documents from the Enugu State Council of the NLC. They released a good number of documents – NLC Modules, conference papers, circulars to mention a few which aided the study.

The population of the study was made up of the 112 members of Central Working Committee of the NLC comprising of the 18 members of its National Administrative Council (NAC) and the presidents and secretaries of the affiliate unions which has the power to declare, suspend or call off their strikes (Nigeria Labour Congress, 2009). It also included the national executives (10) of the Civil Society Coalition (CSCO) which is the umbrella body of the Civil Society Organizations in Nigeria (because of their seemingly neutrality/un-biasedness on national issuances as well as influence). We included the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, the Head of Service of the Federation and the Minister of Labour and Productivity Government and the chairmen and deputies of the Senate and the House of Representatives Committees for Labour Matters for the Government. Therefore, the total population of the study is 129.

A sample size of 10 was drawn using the Yaro Yameni formula from the NLC, government and civil society organizations as shown below. The researcher however, selected four 4 respondents from labour, five (5) from the government and two (2) from the CSOs for interview, respectively.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where n= sample size; N= population of the study; e= margin of error and 1 = constant (while the margin error (e) is taken to be at 5% or 0.05). The calculations are given thus:

$$n = \frac{129}{1 + 129(0.0025)}$$

= 9.7

Owing to the nature of the research and data (qualitative) generated through secondary and primary sources, qualitative and descriptive method of analysis was employed in analyzing the data.

1. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the course of this research, we made the under-listed findings which are discussed hereunder.

1. A number of significant factors compelled the NLC to embark on strikes between 1999 and 2011.

The government representatives interviewed, observed that the government has always employed strategies to avert strike actions but accused the NLC of not being reasonable enough in making demands. They argued that government quickly sets up panels of persons with integrity to negotiate with labour but labour failed to be very objective in bargaining. However, the panelists often stay glued to the narrow interests of the elite class they represented against the masses. They did not seem to be bordered much as negotiations collapsed. Government even rejected further negotiations until labour suspended strikes and went to their duty posts. On the other hand, the NLC respondents accused the government of insensitivity to the plights of their members, unfaithfulness to agreement reached and exploitative salaries and allowances paid to government officials while labour receive peanuts as salaries while using the same market with the politicians. For instance, some agreements reached with NLC affiliates (particularly, ASUU) since 2003 and re-agreed in 2009 are yet to be fully implemented. This remains a time bomb for future strikes. The views of the members of the civil society organization are very similar to that of labour in this instance.

Akume and Abdullah (2013) commenting on the reason for persistent industrial conflicts ending up in strike actions, argued that it is subject to the unprecedented jumbo salaries and allowances being paid to political office holders. They were quick to add government's persistent character of renegeing from implementing signed agreement with its labour unions as another factor which leave NLC with no option but strike action. Mr Yayale Ahmed, former Head of Service of the Federation and Hon Hassan Muhammed Lawal former Minister of Labour and Productivity maintained that workers always make demands even when the resources are conspicuously not there. According to them with the world economy battling recession, it saddens to see labour agitating for upward review of salaries. In this wise, Fajana (1995) in Adeola (2004) believed that the management (government) usually regard the labour unions as cost raising institutions because union demands are regarded by the management as costs that must be avoided.

Okene (2008) observed that a refusal by an employer to recognize and bargain with a union or adhere to the agreement arrived at could lead to strikes by the workers to realise such improvements in working condition. He equally attributed the factor compelling the NLC to embark on strike to the aloof attitude of employers in Nigeria to sincerely negotiate and implement concluded agreements. Because of this circumstance, the labour-management negotiations is achieved through informal means or through political pressure mounted by the unions.

The above positions of the respondents and evidences in the extant literatures point to the fact that the NLC had sufficient factors which compelled it embark on strikes between 1999 and 2011. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis which held that there were no

factor(s) that compelled NLC to embark on strikes between 1999 and 2011. Consequently, the NLC organized and mobilized Nigerian workers on a number of strike actions in pursuit of her demands as in the table below.

Table 2: Summary of Industrial Disputes in Nigeria, 1999-2007.

Items	99	000	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	010	011
Number of disputes.	52	49	51	50	27	36	149	189	250	-	-	-	-
Numbers of disputes resulting in strike.	27	47	37	42	28	26	57	63	79	-	-	-	-
Number of disputes resolved	36	27	49	63	57	32	110	79	212	-	-	-	-
Duration of disputes (days)	28	25	40	52	645	277	675	910	1,24	-	-	-	-
Numbers of workers involved	173,858	544,722	259,290	320,006	249,697	127,377	280,606	280,599	414,543	-	-	-	-
Total man-days lost	3,158,087	8,287,733	4,722,910	5,505,322	5,690,952	2,737,399	4,308,013	7,785,993	13,227,957	495,860	564,607	-	-

Sources: Federal Republic of Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics) (2008:270); Federal Ministry of Employment, Labour and Productivity (Fajana, 2006); Ahiuma-Young (2011)

A casual glance through the table reveals that there has been a steady increase in most of the indices of industrial disputes documented from 1999 to 2007, though there seems to be drops in 2004 and 2006 in some of the indices. The researcher is unable to access data for period 2008 through 2011. In the unfolding scenario, Onyishi and Asogwa, (2010) maintain that the management-labour relation has tended towards a confrontational stance. The facts in the table above are in agreement with the responses of the members of the civil society that the NLC had been militant in its struggle.

2. Strike significantly affected the perception of the NLC in Nigeria between 1999 and 2011.

The use of strike in the management of labour-government interface between 1999 and 2011 affected the perception of the NLC in two ways- negative and positive. Respondents were divided along these schools of thought when asked whether the choice of the strike has affected their perception of the NLC.

Comrade Lawal Dutsinma, National Vice President, NLC and Mr Emmanuel Ezeazu of the ACE believed that strike was the most effective option left for the workers since the government always paid deaf ears to the plights of labour. They agreed that the declaration of strike by the NLC leadership at those various times were timely, hence the support the strikes received from members, and non-members. According to them it showed the leadership of NLC as fearless, courageous and selfless. This in our view has made the government to realize the need to take the NLC positions/issues seriously as they are not easily swayed.

Some evidences in the extant literature support the views of this class of respondents. Denhardt and Denhardt (2009:309) wrote that with strike, labour and management (government) gain a better understanding of each other's strength as conflicts become thus channeled, making the process socially constructive. The absence of strike weakens labour's position at the bargaining table because of their inability to withhold

services. In similar vein, Akkerman and Torenvlied (2010) maintained that strike provides negotiators with information about their relative strengths. Strike equally popularized the NLC leadership especially the time of Comrade Adams Oshiomhole whose finesse bought the NLC large followership. It provided him opportunities to bring robust flair to debate on labour and other relevant socio-political issues. Strikes afforded the NLC opportunity to research and obtain cogent facts and figures which enabled it convince both government and the public on relevant issues (Uranta, 2013). In the event where the NLC prepared for a strike by ensuring that every necessary efforts are made to press home their demand on government: widely educated their members and supporters before embarking on strike with sincerity on the part of leadership, no doubt the outcome of the strike would advance her public image.

Aminu Suleiman, Deputy Chairman House of Representative Committee 2011-2015 on Labour and Productivity holding negative views of strike, maintained that strike by the NLC were avoidable and unnecessary. During some NLC strikes, the leadership applied naked force on members and non members to support their strike because they do not trust the reasonability of the strike and the intentions of their representatives. Brand (2010) observed that few strikes have been preceded by a proper ballot of union members or of all employees in the bargaining unit whom the union represents. This is despite what most unions' Constitutions require. This makes it necessary for strikers to pressure non-striking workers to participate in the strike and often, persuasion turns to intimidation.

Hafner-Burton, Tsutsui and Meyer (2008) observed that an analysis of the outcomes of some strikes reveals that the workers often come off second best. For instance, in response to the increasing strikes the Obasanjo administration suffered, it 'earned' the workers the Trade Union Act of 2005. The Act among others stipulates; abolition of any trade union such NLC as a singular trade union in Nigeria, abolition of automatic check-off dues of workers to their trade unions. This has negatively affected unions' finances as many workers do not pay union membership dues as the right of compulsory check-off dues has been stopped by employers. In addition, some labour members had lost their jobs following their involvement in strike activities which made the recovery of their jobs subject of numerous litigations. The UNIILORIN 45 lecturers' sack saga was a good case study. They have sometimes lost more in lost pay during the strike than they would have gained by accepting the employer's final offer before the strike began and they have seldomly gained more at the end of the strike than they lost during it. Anyim, Chidi and Ogunyomi (2012) argued that strikes to a large extent have a great bearing on the smooth and orderly development of the economy and the maintenance of law and order in the society. It arouses public resentment because they may hurt the public more than the parties involved in the dispute. Owuamanam and Adetayo (2013) captured the views of the Catholic Archbishop of Jos, Ignatius Kaigama who rued the prolonged strike by members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities, saying he had lost sympathy for the lecturers. It is regrettable that the association had failed to yield to pleas from all quarters, including highly revered Nigerians. By this inflexibility, ASUU had shown that it was fighting for other causes other than the future of education in the country.

Even among the unions, when a strike is prolonged, it causes disaffection among members as a faction(s) may question the continuation of the strike and wish to start work. Akkerman and Torenvlied (2010) maintained that during strikes, fault lines arise, not only between management and employees, but also between groups of employees. With these

views of our respondents and collaborations from secondary sources, we reject the null hypothesis disputing the negative effects of strike on the perception of the NLC in labour conflict management in Nigeria especially, between 1999 and 2011.

3. Strikes have not achieved significant industrial harmony in Nigeria.

Strike actions have not achieved an enduring industrial harmony in Nigeria. This finding upholds the null hypothesis, that strikes embarked by NLC between 1999 and 2011 have not achieved industrial harmony in Nigeria. Rather, it has heated up the polity whenever it occurred. The gains from the strike are far below the costs to either of the parties in conflict. Ebegbulem (2010) reported that a three-day warning strike embarked upon by the Nigeria Labour Congress, NLC, turned bloody in Edo State, when a police officer attached to a Judge from a neighboring state, shot at the state Chairman of the National Union of Air Transport Employees, NUATE, Comrade Godwin Ehikioya, when the union leaders tried to enforce the strike directive at the Benin Airport. The appeal of the 45 lecturers who were sacked for taking part in the activities of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on May 15, 2001 lingered to Supreme Court in 2009 without pay ([Http://www.ngrguardiannews.com/breakingnews/articles01](http://www.ngrguardiannews.com/breakingnews/articles01)). The Supreme Court has in a unanimous judgment upheld the appeal of the lecturers for reinstatement but the enforcement of the order is another thing in a country where court orders are easily flouted. Writing on the effect of strike on industrial harmony, Akume and Abdullahi (2013) observed that the consequences of strike action are not only reflective in the man-hour lost but also the psychological effect it has on the ordinary citizens due to withholding of public services. Strike actions have given rise to multiple strikes. When a strike is declared to protest against an observed unfavourable condition of service/policies, the government is forced to enter into agreements which in most cases they flouted, calling for more strikes to force the implementation.

Despite the increasing strike embarked upon by the NLC, industrial harmony is still far from being realized in Nigeria. Strikes are only but one form of industrial conflict, and thus, that there is no strike in a given period does not mean that other forms of conflicts are not occurring within the work setting or shop floor (Anyim, Chidi and Ogunyomi, 2012). In Nigeria, latent forms of conflicts such as pilferage, lateness to work, absenteeism, sick leave abuse, peddling rumour, staff leaving office before closing hour, inciting staff against management policies, etc are still rife.

Where a harmonious relationship exists among parties, both union and management will be opposed to the use of strike except as a last resort. B. Ene of the Save Nigeria Group is of the opinion that with the culture of strike in Nigeria, both the government and NLC do not seem to follow dispute settling mechanisms in the labour matters. They rush into the option of strike to come back later to negotiate. Respondents generally agreed that strike actions do not really achieve industrial harmony rather collective bargaining does. They are in agreement with Adewole and Adebola (2010) who found out that collective bargaining has gained prominent degree of recognition as an effective approach to conflict management and industrial harmony not only in the literature but also in practice.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings of this study, these recommendations are made to improve labour conflict management in Nigeria. The Ministry of Labour and Productivity being the agency of the government charged with the responsibility of labour relations matters should improve alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in view of the drudgery inherent in the statutory dispute settlement procedure to facilitate speedy resolution of disputes. Stakeholder's meeting should be convened at the instance of the Ministry of Labour and Productivity to deliberate on issues before they escalate into full blown crises.

Government should always respect and implement agreements reached with workers' unions to forestall face-off with the unions. However, where the negotiation process fails to resolve the discontent, the process of arbitration must be allowed to take its due course without manipulation by any of the parties involved.

Because labour is a part of a wider working class movement and culture, its strength therefore depends on wider involvement. NLC as a body must cultivate and strengthen relations with the various interests in its wider movement. It can also do so in terms of the relations that are forged within progressive political parties as well as civil society organizations.

In order to prevent the credibility challenge that NLC faces during strike actions, there should be a more disciplined and focused leadership dedicated to its traditional vision of protecting the rights of its members and all working class citizens. There should also be corrupt-free labour unions that pass the moral test and cannot be bought with money. This can be achieved through careful selection of labour leaders who value their integrity.

CONCLUSION

The Nigeria Labour Congress has come a long way in enhancing the economic well-being of its members and Nigerians in general. It has been compelled to go on strike in its labour conflict management between 1999 and 2011 following government insensitivity to the plights of their members, unfaithfulness to agreement reached and exploitative salaries and allowances paid to government officials while labour receive peanuts as salaries while using the same market with the politicians. It has also created credibility problems on both the government (employers) and labour respectively. Hence, it has failed to achieve industrial harmony in the country as issues that compelled the NLC to embark on strikes between 1999 and 2011 are still with our labour management relations even when leadership has changed in government and the NLC. Strike has failed the country in labour conflict management. Therefore, government and the NLC need to cooperate sincerely to achieve industrial harmony in Nigeria.

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