

# An Appraisal of Incessant Strike Actions of Labour in Osun State, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

The use of strike actions as a tool by labour union to express their displeasure and grievances concerning their pay and working conditions has become a norm in our society. The nature of industrial actions differs from one sector to another and from one country to another. These actions occur most frequently in Nigeria, which has led to numerous dreadful consequences on the nation in particular. The paper appraises the trend of strike action in Nigeria with specific emphasis on the nature and dimensions of industrial dispute in Osun State, Nigeria between 1999 and 2017. It is not an overstatement that formidable labour union serves as intermediary between the government and the workers and can equally persuade and direct fellow employees to follow suit whenever there is a strike action. It is recommended that government should carry the labour unions along while making decisions that affect them in order to foster sense of belonging.

**Keywords:** Strike Actions, Labour, Osun State, Nigeria

## I. INTRODUCTION

The use of strike actions as a tool by labour union to express their displeasure and grievances concerning their pay and working conditions has become a norm in our society. Strike is portrayed as a period of time when an organized group of employees of decides to stop working because of a disagreement over pay or working conditions (Hornby, 2001). Also, it is described as an act or approach displaying by a group of organized set of people (such as employees or students) to express their displeasure with a view to achieving the desired goal from those concerned. Strike action is a platform employed by labour union to drive home their demand concerning pay, working conditions and other fringe benefits. The

intensity of strike actions often varies from one sector to another; and from one country to another. The nature of industrial actions differs from one sector to another and from one country to another. These actions occur most frequently in Nigeria, which has led to numerous dreadful consequences on the nation in particular.

According to encyclopaedia, strike action, simply connotes work stoppage necessitated by the refusal of a group of organised employees to resume duty in response to employees' grievances. Similarly, (Hornby, 2001), posits that strike action is akin to period of time when an organised group of employees of a company or organisation decides to stop working due to a disagreement over pay or condition. Thus, we can deduce from above submissions that strike is an action or attitude demonstrated by a group of persons (commonly employees) to register their level of discontentment over a particular phenomenon with a view to attracting positive and desirable feedbacks from those involved. However, it is often misconstrued that industrial conflict also means strike action. According to Otodo, (2017), discussing the various forms industrial conflict may assume, opines that industrial conflict and strike do not mean the same thing as being portrayed by the public and especially the media.

Strike is no doubt a prominent component of industrial conflict. If there is no strike at a point in time in an organisation or an economy, it does not necessarily imply that other forms of industrial conflict are not occurring within the work setting or organisation system. Practical illustrations of such latent forms of conflicts are pilferage; lateness to work, absenteeism, sabotage, poor quality of work, sick leave abuse and restriction of output. Other likely conflicts are loitering from one floor or office to the other, trading within the office,

peddling rumour, staff leaving office before closing hour, inciting staff against management policies, over time ban and so on. Some conflicts may not even be expressed at all; they remain hidden but quite explosive, waiting to be ignited at the slightest further provocation. In fact, strike is renowned, acceptable and known to the Nigerian legal system, but it needs to be judiciously utilised for the furtherance of legitimate union objectives and not for any selfish motive whatsoever. This paper therefore among other things, reviews the anal of history of strike actions in Nigeria with specific focus on Osun State. It also examines the causes and effects of strike action and proffers ways in which strike actions could be properly managed.

## II. HISTORICAL DIMENSION OF STRIKE

The anal of labour union could be traced to organized the railway employees in 1945 which eventually spread to other unions such as the railway, transport, dock and motor services unions in the government civil service. Similarly, various workers under the employment of a number of private firms and institutions later decided to support their counterparts in government and formed a formidable organized union.

The general strike embarked upon by workers in 1945 happens to be the largest workers strike in Africa history as it comprises about 42,000-200,000 workers at that time. Though, the strike was adjudged somewhat successful as greater number of demand of the workers and most importantly agitation for a rise in cost of living allowance was fulfilled in 1946 and at last backdated to 1945. Also, the workers were succeeded in uniting different labour and trade unions and embarked on industrial action for about ten weeks. They were able to withstand, endure and survive colonial intimidation at that time and this singular act earned them worldwide empathy from numerous anti-colonists. It also brought forth the potential of working class and the extent of African consciousness to the world to see. However, the resulting effect was the colonial perception of a link between trade unionism and political expression which was then dominated by nationalist sentiments but it was a time in which repression of militant political expression under the administration of Arthur Richards was the norm.

The strike began after the British colonial acting governor refused to budge in increasing by 50% the wages of skilled Africans in the

government railway service to meet the increased cost of living and a minimum of 60 cents daily for unskilled and temporary employed Africans in the employ of the railway or performing technical service. The government had earlier consented to evaluate wages accordingly during the war period as a result of skyrocketing prices between 1939-1941 and was part of its plan to appease international organizations and United States both groups wary of imperialism. Since 1941 and up to 1945, the cost of living steadily rose over 50%, this was acknowledged by the government who gave increased cost of living allowances to many European workers resident in Nigeria partly as a result of allowing separation allowances, allowances given to officials whose wives were not in Nigeria.

The Trade Union Congress and the African Civil Servants Technical Workers Union then called for a strike action of all railway workers when Arthur Richards refused to increase the COLA, (Cost of Living Allowance) giving reasons as lack of funds and an increase would lead to higher inflation. Following adherence to the call for a strike, within a few days other government workers decided to go on strike.

One regrettable effect of the said strike action is the eventual temporary dismissal of the president of the All Nigeria Trade Union Congress; T.A. Bankole and subsequent replacement with Michael Imoudu of the Railway Workers Union. Moreso, Nnamdi Azikiwe was accused by the then British authorities to have advised workers to embark on strike. The nationalist was threatened and his media outfits, The Comet and West African Pilot were proscribed by the British authorities. Thereafter the strike, some labour leaders arrested were released and Azikiwe's media outlets, The Comet and West African Pilot were equally unbanned.

## III. TYPES OF STRIKE

Several forms of strike have been documented in the literatures (Fashoyin, 1992). The various types of strike are examined one after the other.

- i. **General Strike:** This is a strike that involves virtually members across the unions in a region or an organisation or a country. It is strike that brings on board all the workers in a particular region of an organisation to fight a common front towards actualisation of total workers' welfare. This type of strike is usually poised to create political tension on the ruling government and not the employer. It is also adjudged as an extension of the sympathetic

strike embarked upon on a compassionate ground to express generalised feelings and protest by the workers.

- ii. **Jurisdiction Strike:** It is another form of strike that “occurs when two unions argue about which one has jurisdiction to over a type of work and attempt to exert pressure upon the employer to allocate it to one or the other (Clark, 2012)”. It is indeed a type of strike which is seen as a “fall out” from “the multiplicity of unions in a given profession or discipline. This strike is described as illegal as their employer is caught in the middle between the two warning unions”.
- iii. **Sympathy Strike:** “It is a form of strike that is embarked upon as solidarity for other union. It is described as sympathy strike because other unions who are not party to the original strike consent to strike in sympathy with the original union (Clark, 2012). It is an attempt to exert an indirect pressure upon the employer. This type of strike is common in tertiary institutions in the country like Nigeria where Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU) embarked on solidarity strike because of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and vice versa”.
- iv. **Recognition Strike:** This is a form of strike that is “primarily geared at forcing the employer to recognise and deal with the union. In a country, there are several unions. Some of the unions are more recognised than the others”. The apparent less recognised will result to “embarking on strike as a way of drawing the attention of their employers and the general public to recognise and deal with them”. “The strike actions sometimes embarked upon by the Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU), may be described as recognition strike as this has a way of drawing the attention of the Nigeria government to recognise and deal with them”.

#### IV. CAUSES OF STRIKE

The term ‘strike’, “also known as strike action, occurs when work stops as result of a large percentage of employees refusing to come to work. Strikes often occur because workers feel that they are being treated unfairly and use a strike as a way to seek redress. Many times, the reason workers go on strike has something to do with wages and benefits and their option of going on the strike to shows their disagreement with their employer’s stance. Occasionally, it works and sometimes it doesn’t”. Therefore, according to Otobo, (2000),

some of the factors responsible for the cause of strike actions are:

- i. **Government or institutional failure:** “This arises from poor political direction. Lips service; poor knowledge of the society and complete disrespect for the tenets of good government. Lack of accountability, transparency in government business, unpredictability in government behaviour, absence of rule of law, inefficient and ineffective public administration, bad and inconsistent policies, absence of sound management of natural resources and the likes. On many occasion, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and students have embarked on strike against government failures”.
- ii. **Obnoxious Policies:** A number of policies of government may be unfriendly to labour and thus, workers embark on strike when management makes such loathsome and unacceptable policies that sometimes infringe on their fundamental human rights.
- iii. **Changes in offer of Appointment:** “This occurs when one party attempts to alter the direct compensation package and other conditions of service. This is the most popular cause of strike in Nigeria”. For examples, “earlier, in 1980, a demand by the NLC for a minimum wage was ignored by government, and only 2-day nation-wide strike induced management to negotiate, which ultimately led to enactment of the Minimum Wage Act of 1981 (Fashoyin, 1992)”.
- iv. **Non-implementation of Agreements:** “Workers and employers usually reached agreements after negotiations but in some cases one party may refuse to honor the agreements. For example, Since December 2002 ASSU has been on total strike following Federal Government failure to honor the agreements it reached with ASSU in 2001 over proper funding”.
- v. **Differential Compensation Packages and Conditions of Service:** “Sometimes, different payment scales and other conditions of service are applied to workers in the same organization because of differences in task. But the unfavored group always raise grievance”.
- vi. **Challenge to Union Legitimacy:** This occurs, for instance, when an individual job is terminated unjustly by an employer. This may become a collective grievance if the employees perceive the action as a challenge to union legitimacy. The union sees such illegality inflicted on a single individual member as an injury to all.

**vii. Unnecessary Delay in Payments of Salaries and other Emoluments:** This is indeed a common phenomenon in recent time in Nigerian States. Many States always delay or refuse to pay their workers' salaries and other emoluments as a result of insufficient fund to pay the workers of the concerned states.

## V. ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF STRIKE

“The strike action injures not only the party against whom it is directed but the society as a whole. The larger the number of workers involved the longer the duration of strike and the more essential a commodity or service is the more widespread will be the effects of strike. Industrial strikes entail both economic as well as non-economic costs for the employer”.

The economic losses caused by a strike may be severe and serious. “The financial loss of a project is only one among its various losses. When the production stops and the sales go down, the market is captured by rival concerns and the concern's goodwill may be lost. Besides, additional expenditure incurred in protecting the plant and taking other steps to deal with the effects of strike is costly. A lot of money is wasted in the efforts made by both the labour and management in projecting their respective images. Industrial workers too have to undergo severe hardship due to loss of wages. The union funds get exhausted and it may become difficult for the workers to make their both ends meet. The employer forfeits his profit during the strike period”.

Although strikes are based on genuine grievances, “they have partially paralyzed administration and disturbed the pace of planning and development. India can ill-afford such breaks and situation which retard the plan process and over all development. To weigh up the gains and losses of a strike is like weighing up the gains and losses of any other kind of warfare. On the employers side the immediate losses are idle capital, loss of profits, the delaying of orders and loss of goodwill as well as the possible incurring of insurance or strike breaking expenses while on the workers side there is loss of wages, the contracting of debts and all the personal hardships that may be involved. The strike weapon penalises every one of the workers more than the employer at whom it is aimed”.

Apart from their effects on the particular workers and employer concerned, “strikes have an appreciable effect upon the economy in general. Almost all stoppages appear, irrespective of their

origins, acts of the workers though much against their wishes often cause inconvenience, they may reveal disturbing political aspirations and these considerations are to promote people's judgments of their economic effect”.

### 5.1 Effects and Cost of Strike in Nigeria Education System

The cost-benefit analysis of strike action in Nigeria has shown that its cost always outweighs the benefit (Anyim, Chidi and Ogunyomi, 2012). Thus, labour unrest has found to have negative effects while attempting to achieve the goals of university education in Nigeria. These include:

#### i. Disruption of Academic Calendar

Academic calendar of most Nigerian universities is quite irregular. “Many State and Federal universities have lost one or two academic sessions. Consequently, four-year courses are often extended to five or six years as a result of closure of schools emanated from industrial strike”. Igbaji (2019) lamented that “educational standard is now believed to be questionable. Many an academic calendar in the universities has been disorganized, with some academic sessions outrightly lost. Students' academic performances have comparatively taken a nose dive, while various forms of examination malpractices are said to be on the increase”.

#### ii. Financial Losses

All the stakeholders on university education – Government, parents and students – suffer financial losses as a result of incessant labour unrest. For instance, government is under obligation to pay the salaries of the staff even for the period they were on strike. Parents also will have to keep feeding their children and pay their house rents. Orifowomo (2008) noted that employers, especially in the public sector, seldom invoke the no-work no-pay rule, possibly because the employers themselves are usually at fault by their failure to nip a looming strike in the bud. According to Igbaji (2019), “government suffers from financial losses from closure of schools, while students and their parents suffer unquantifiable losses. They further submitted that the above anomaly have contributed in no small measure to a steady decline in the quality of education as some students resorted to examination malpractice to make up for the lost time during conflicts in schools especially where these have resulted to closures”.

#### iii. Retardation of the Economic

Incessant strike actions are found to result to students' spending longer period in a particular



class, dropout, wastage and brain drain which have advert effect on the growth of the economy. Anyim, Chidi and Ogunyomi (2012) noted that “trade disputes as exemplified by 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. They sometimes arouse public resentment because they may hurt the public more than the parties involved in the dispute”.

**iv. Others include Dropout, Brain Drain and Educational Wastage**

The costs of strikes include “loss of production or output; disruption in essential services (oil, electricity, and banking); capacity under-utilization; scarcity and high costs of essential items; unemployment and manpower contraction amongst others. A strike-prone country is not likely to attract foreign investors as this index has become a very vital consideration for foreign industrialists and multinational corporations. However, it may be instructive to state that whether dispute staged is adjudged to be successful or not, it is obvious that some damage must have been done and parties and the public have to bear the costs”(Anyim, Chidi and Ogunyomi, 2012).

**VI. CONCLUSION**

To a large extent, strike has a large bearing on the smooth and orderly development of the economy and the maintenance of law and order in the society. The labour union serve as intermediary between the government and the workers, persuade and direct fellow employees to follow suit whenever there is strike action, are in the best position to communication resolutions to fellow employees and appeal to government on behalf of the employees for agitations between government, ensuring that employers are meeting their minimum obligations and workers as well. It is recommended that government should carry the labour unions along while making decisions that affect them in order to foster sense of belonging. This will in turn bring high productivity reducing turnover rate and workers insecurity, increasing workers morale by enabling them have a collective voice to address their problems and receive solutions and compensation, improved working condition.

Adequate facilities tailored at enhancing performance should be made available at all levels in the state of Osun to increase dwindle productivity. To ensure this, government could create a government-labour union forum where the workers through their union leaders or

representatives can voice out their demands and also iron out differences before the decisions are made to avoid strike or grievances.

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