

CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF WORKERS STRIKE ON NIGERIA ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

The effects of strike on national development cannot be over-emphasized. Strikes and lockouts are a form of protest by workers against employers for non-satisfactory management or reward. This paper focuses on the causes and economic effects of strike in Nigeria. In carrying out the research, four hypotheses were generated and tested. Questionnaires were administered to 75 (seventy-five) members of academic staff union of universities (ASUU), Non-Academic Staff Union and the general public. Out of the seventy-five questionnaires distributed, 60 copies were retrieved for analysis. The data analyses revealed that economic difficulties, ecological factors, relative deprivation, government policies and decisions and non-implementation of policies are major causes of strikes in Nigeria. The paper therefore recommends amongst others, that there should be improvement in the relationship between workers and management, prompt response to workers demands, regular payment of workers' salary and wages. The paper added that government should set up monetary fiscal policies to reduce the galloping inflation and embezzlement of funds; and professions should be regarded as important and equal by government and employers of labour.

INTRODUCTION

Strike action is a work stoppage caused by the mass refusal of employees to perform work. A strike usually takes place in response to employees grievance. Strikes became important during the industrial

revolution, when mass labour became important in factories and mines. In most countries, they were quickly made illegal, as factory owners had far more political powers than workers. Most western countries partially legalized strike in the late 19th or early 20th centuries.

Strikes are some times used to put pressure on government to change policies, occasionally, strikes destabilizes the rule of a particular political party. A notable example is the cedarisk shipyard strike led by Walesa. This strike was significant in the struggle for political change in Poland, and was an important mobilized effort that contributed to the fall of governments in Stalinist East Europe.

Most strikes are undertaken by labour unions during collective bargaining. Collective bargaining according to Aibieyi (2010), can be defined as the process of negotiation about working conditions and terms of employment between employers and workers. Bargaining, according to Webster's Universal Dictionary, is an agreement laying down the conditions of transaction. The object of collective bargaining is to obtain a contract (an agreement between the union/workers and the government/company) which may include a non-strike clause which prevents strikes, or penalizes the union and or the workers if they walk out while the contract is in force. The strike is typically reserved as a threat of last resort during negotiations between the company/government and the union and workers, which may occur just before, or immediately after, the contract expires.

The following indicators operationalised the government polices/Decisions.

1. Non-payment of salaries and allowance by the government.
2. Government inability to meet up with the workers demands.
3. Government inability to implement a minimum wage.
4. Non-implementation of government circular on salary adjustments on 1983-2001 income policy guidelines and so on.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Causes of Strike:

Conflict is inevitable in any work environment due to inherent differences in goals, needs, desires, responsibilities, perceptions and ideas of the people in organisation. (Koso and Warren, 2000). According to Jehn (1997), a conflict can be regarded as any clash of interest or of goals as conceived by two parties.

Internal conflict results when barriers exist that makes it difficult for individual's drive to materialize into achieving the targeted goals as well as when competing and conflicting goals exist. As a result of this barriers, people tend to react defensively to cope with that frustration and anxiety. Some express their grief by adopting any form of withdrawal behaviour, e.g. higher absenteeism aggression, sabotage, and strike action (Kelly, 2005).

There are several reasons why workers go on strike in Nigeria. This includes – non-payment of salaries and allowances by the government, government inability to meet up with the workers demands; government inability to implement a minimum wage; and non-implementation of government circular on salary adjustments on income policy guidelines and so on.

Government policies and decisions on some important matters regarding workers demands can also trigger strike action by workers. For example, government unresponsiveness to the ASUU, NASU, magistrate, dock workers and teachers demands and the huge salaries and allowances fixed by the National Assembly for themselves alone can lead to strike (Aibieyi, 2010).

Economic effect of workers strike concerns dissatisfaction of workers due to the non-payment and irregular payment of salaries, sometimes for months; increased in the cost of living or very high inflation represented by consumer price indices and the oil glut.

Strike may variously be referred to as sit-down strikes, or work-to-rule, lock out strike and wild cat strike, sickout, sympathy and student strike.

- (a) **Sit-down Strike:** This is a situation whereby workers may occupy the workplace, but refuse either to do their jobs or to leave.
- (b) **Work-to-Rule:** This is a situation whereby workers perform their duties exactly as they are required to but no better e.g workers might follow all safety regulations in such a way that it impedes their productivity or they might refuse to work overtime.
- (c) **Wild Cat Strike:-** This is a process whereby unions or workers embark on a strike without formal authorization.
- (d) **Sympathy Strike:** This referred to as a small scale of a general strike in which one group of workers refuses to cross a picket line established by another as a means of supporting the striking workers. On the other hand, a union or workers embarking on strike in the favour of another union or worker.
- (e) **Hunger Strike:** A hunger is a deliberate refusal to eat. Hunger strikes are often used in prisons as a form of political protest. It tends to worsen the public image of the target.
- (f) A student strike has to do with student (sometimes supported by faculty) not attending schools. In some cases, the strike is intended to draw media attention to the institution so that the grievances that are causing the students to “strike” can be aired before the public, this usually damages the institution’s (or government) public image. In other cases, especially in government supported institutions, the student strike can cause a budgetary imbalance and have actual economic repercussions for the institution.
- (g) **Sickout Strike:** A sickout strike which is mostly experienced by the (uniformed police officers) is a type of strike action in which the strikers call in sick. This is used in cases where laws prohibits certain employees from declaring a strike. Police, fire fighters, and air traffic controllers are among the groups commonly barred from striking. Workers have sometimes circumvented, these restrictions by falsely claiming inability to work due to illness. (Aibieyi, 2010).

EFFECTS OF STRIKE

The term strike and relative deprivation are psychological variables. Their quantification is a bit problematic for most social researchers. This was the admittance of Lerche, Ted Gurr, in their analysis of economic influence on popular disturbances in the developing nations. A long strike would have devastating effect on key sectors of the economy. The last strike that hit oil production and loading was in 1994. But around 40 percent of Nigeria's two million barrels per day output was blocked by ethnic warfare in the Niger Delta. A good case in point is the ecological factors. These variables might not directly give rise to strike but an indent analysis shows they could facilitate them.

Effects of strike are numerous. According to Donel and Leed (1981) strike should not arise since it is undesirable. Strike and lockouts cause interruptions in the continuity of tasks, and normal operations will be disturbed by strike (Okojie, 1981).

Also on negative side, strike can create real injury and loss on management, labour and consumers. People who engage in conflict often experience hostile emotions towards the other party, after the crises have been surmounted. Strike would generally take the shape of absenteeism, bad time keeping, turn-over, low productivity and even industrial accidents can represent conscious or unconscious responses to discontents. All these have numerous effects on Nigeria economy.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There are several causes of strike action and the effects of strike are also enormous. Certain actions set in motion a chain of other action and events. In such a situation attempt should be made to control such resultant actions and events. This would be especially so where such resultant actions and events are unfavourable and destructive to an organization or society.

Strikes and lock-outs are more or less a common features of organization life. They are a form of protest by the workers against employers for non-satisfactory management and reward. However, the consequences of strike could be extremely large. This work tries to focus on the causes and economic effect of strike in Nigeria.

Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented and acrimonious waves of industrial unrest. Virtually all the sectors of the Nigeria economy was affected by “wild cat” strike. In 2006, which lead to loss of several man-hour and days? Incessant strike in Nigeria constitute a clog in the wheel of the nation’s advancement towards economic, social and political emancipation.

There is usually a colossal number of deaths recorded in our Hospitals on account of strike embarked on by the Doctors, Nurses and midwives? What about the dismal falling standard of education in the primary, secondary and higher institutions where by pupils, students stayed back at home for some months or a whole session occasioned by teachers’ incessant strike?

This study is basically concerned with the causes and effects of industrial unrest. At the end of the study, a number of recommendations are proffered that could solve some or all the problems.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are –

1. to find out if economic difficulties are major causes of strike
2. to find out if ecological factors lead to strike
3. to find out if relative deprivation causes strike
4. to examine if government policies/decisions could lead to strike.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following are research questions for this study.

- (a) Are economic difficulties the major causes of strike in Nigeria?
- (b) Do ecological factors contribute to industrial unrest in Nigeria?
- (c) Are incessant strikes in Nigeria the result of relative deprivation?
- (d) Do Government policies/decisions lead to strike in Nigeria?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed for this study was a combination of structured interview and tailored questionnaire. The survey method was

adopted in order to generate the required information which could form the basis for generalization of findings. Seventy –five questionnaires were distributed to elicit relevant information for this study.

The research population of study is made up of the members of Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) workers, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASSU) workers, Teachers and the general public. The populations of the sample are all from Benin City.

SAMPLING SIZE AND TECHNIQUES

During the course of this study, the method adopted in administering the questionnaire is the simple random sampling. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire. Some of which were retrieved on the spot while others were collected at the respondent's convenience. The questions in the questionnaire are clear, and also related to the topic and questions proposed for this work. The decision to use the simple random techniques is to enable us obtain a satisfying result.

Seventy-five (75) questionnaires were made available for this analysis. Though only 60 were retrieved while the rest were either not returned or were wrongly filled. The total populations were broken down as follows NASU workers 25, Teachers 25 and public 25. All questionnaires were administered in Benin City.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

In this paper, a critical effort was made to present an analysis of the data gathered from the various sources for this study with a view to examining them so as either confirm or invalidates them. Related questionnaires were grouped together with headings to form a table for analysis of the responses.

DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

Question No 1

The first question sought to find out if economic difficulties are the major causes of strikes in Nigeria.

Table 1: Economic Difficulties as Major Causes of Strike

Categories of workers	Yes	No	Total
NASU workers	17	3	20
ASUU – Teachers	7	3	10
Public	20	10	30
Total	44	16	60

Source: Field Survey, 2010

The responses of the respondent to the various questions relating to the first question can be seen as shown in table 1. This first table was designed to know whether the economic difficulties are the major causes of strikes in the country. 44 respondents agreed that it has led to the cause of incessant strikes in Nigeria and this represents 76% of the total number of respondents, while 16 respondents disagreed that economic difficulties could lead to strike in Nigeria.

Question No 7

The second question was meant to investigate if ecological factors could cause industrial unrest in Nigeria

Table 2: Ecological Factors Leads to Strike

Categories of workers	Yes	No	Total
NASU workers	13	17	20
ASUU - Teachers	8	2	10
Public	19	11	30
Total	30	20	60

Source: Field Survey, 2010

The responses of the respondent to the various questions relating to the second question can be seen as shown in table 2 above. This table was designed to know whether the ecological factors cause industrial unrest in

this country, 30 respondents agreed that it has led to the cause of incessant strikes in Nigeria and this represents 56% of the total number of respondents.

Question No 3

The third question sought to find out if incessant strikes in Nigeria are the result of relative deprivation

Table 3: Relative Deprivation Causes Strike

Categories of workers	Yes	No	Total
NASU workers	20	10	20
ASUU -Teachers	8	2	10
Public	18	12	30
Total	46	24	60

Source: Field Survey, 2010

The third table was designed to know whether the incessant strikes in Nigeria are the result of relative deprivation. Forty-six (46) respondents agreed that it has led to the cause of incessant strikes in Nigeria and this represents 66% of the total number of respondents.

Question No. 4

The fourth question examined if government policies/decisions are source of wild- cat strike in Nigeria.

Table 4: Government Policies/Decisions on Strike in Nigeria

Categories of workers	Yes	No	Total
NASU workers	22	12	20
ASUU - Teachers	6	4	10
Public	22	8	30
Total	48	22	60

Source: Field Survey, 2010

The responses of the respondents to the various questions related to the fourth question can be seen as shown in table 4. The fourth table was designed to know whether government policies/decisions are constant source of wild-cat strikes in this Nation. Forty-eight (46) of the respondents agreed that it has led to the causes of incessant strikes in Nigeria and this represents 66% of the total number of respondents.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Judging from the statistical analysis, relative deprivation has been responsible for the incessant strikes in Nigeria since 1991 till date. This conclusion agrees with the findings of Lerche, Ted, Gurr. The study reveals that non-implementation of approved salary structures and non-challant attitude of government and management are responsible for NASU, ASUU, Magistrates and Doctors strike in the country.

In table 1, it was indicated that economic difficulties contributes to strike action in the country. To buttress this fact, 44 respondents agreed with this statement while only 16 of them disagreed. On whether ecological factors lead to strike, 30 respondents agreed and 20 of them disagreed as shown in table 2.

In table 4, it was revealed that government policies and decisions lead to strike. Out of 60 respondents who responded, 48 were in affirmative, while 22 disagreed.

The study has proved that there are several reasons why workers go on strike which ranges from non-payment or irregular payment of salaries and allowances by government, government inability to meet up with workers demands. The effect of strike include, amongst others, low productivity, industrial accidents, hostile emotions towards the other party, loss of colossal sum of money and high death rate in hospitals and so on.

It should be noted that discontent is a pre-condition for strike, though had no direct effect on strike. There is said to be one fundamental cause of strike. It is the general feeling among workers that an employer will not recognize their power unless and till they have gone on strike with consequences of economic damage to the employer. Apparently, the issues that cause strike lies on the much more deep-rooted problem of power, a power struggle between the employers and the employees. These problems may be enough to have been settled through normal grievances procedure, but the workers may want to show their power by engaging in a strike. From the other side, the management may not want to be seen to be weak.

CONCLUSION

It is worthy of note that in any given organization, conflicts are inevitable and in all, conflict should not necessarily lead to strikes but due to the inability of the employers to come in a good term with the workers to settle their differences that leads to strikes.

Strikes and lock-outs may compel an organization to re-assess its labour policies, operational methods and management style on the side of workers, it may also take them to re-evaluate their organizational methods as well as learning practical lessons in caution, discretion and perseverance. For the government, strike may generate fresh action and policies. They may reveal government's tactfulness or high-hardedness. They have in fact revealed successive Nigerian military and civilian governments authoritarianism and unwillingness to adhere to the time – honoured industrial relations principle of collective bargaining. Government actually needs to take seriously the issue of consultation and discussion. Also, worker should be taken into confidence.

It is pertinent to note that voluntary negotiation and collective bargaining remains corner stone of industrial democracy and the foundation of industrial peace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that –

1. There should be adequate improvement in the relationship between the workers and management.
2. Prompt response to the workers demands.
3. Workers demands should be reasonable at least to the limit of the resources of government/employers especially with a consideration of the economic situation of the country.
4. Review of the current labour laws as they relate to recognition of trade unions and membership.
5. The system of wages evaluation should be reviewed. Factors like proficiency cost and duration of study should be given adequate attention.
6. Regular payment of workers salaries and wages.
7. Mismanagement of the nation's economy by the government and few privileged Nigerians must be stopped and Nigeria should diversify her economy to reduce her reliance on oil.

8. Government should set up her monetary and fiscal polices to reduce the galloping inflation and embezzlement of funds.
9. Professions should be regarded as important and equal by the government/employers. Discriminatory attitudes of government towards certain professions and departments should be stopped.
10. Government policies must ensure equitable distribution of wealth.
11. There should be a law banning wage increase demands at least for a period of 10 years.
15. The politicization of workers demands should be stopped forthwith.
16. Downward communication implies that government/employers should always keep workers informed about the limit of their resources and this solves the problem of inspirational deprivation.
17. Government should desist from the use of force/threats to settle industrial disputes.
18. To avoid strikes, government should try and abide with the rules and regulations as contained in the civil service commission laws and always involve all stakeholders whenever a reform is made in the civil service.

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