

LABOUR UNREST AND INDUSTRIAL PEACE

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1.1 Introduction

Labour unrest is so closely related to loss of peace because Fayol (1951) argues that unrest (conflict) is central to life, because life without conflict is no life. Therefore labour unrest is not abnormal in any organization (private or public). In the public sector, for instance, workers are always disenchanted with the Government over its handling of workers welfare and the general penury facing the nation.

Michael (1997) views labour unrest as a situation when the economic depression in the country is exposing workers to a high level of economic hardship. He further contends that public sector workers especially, have been faced with economic realities and may have seen unrest as a way of breaking loose from the shackles of economic deprivation.

Ratna (2002) expressing his view on labour unrest in Nigeria states that some Government policies that are unfavourable to the workers tend to generate strike action and protest leading to labour unrest. Therefore, it's important to understand that when Government formulates policies not favourable to labour unions, they adopt some strategies or dimensions leading to labour unrest in the country:

- (a) Labour Unions threaten the Government by issuing ultimatum within which its demand will be met. Failure of the Government to oblige them may elicit strike or demonstration thereby leading to labour unrest.
- (b) Propaganda through the use of mass media and handbills is another dimension of labour unrest; here workers all over the federation are notified of the latest development.
- (c) The use of protests, strikes and demonstrations is another dimension of labour unrest which could be peaceful or violent.

It is one of the major impediments to development in Nigeria .This is due to the fact that no Nation can develop without human resources because they constitute and play very significant role in Nation building and development. The Nigerian case has been so pervasive that labour unrest extends to every situation when the Government takes major public policy decision that seems to affect the labour union and generally the masses without due consultation of labour congress; especially that which affects the social life of their members and welfare packages

of the entire masses, specifically that which affect the socio-economic and political aspects.

Sharma (2007) contends that most labour union and workers are often very restless and confrontational in their approach to issues which affect them as a group such as not fulfilling some of the employment contracts and as such, workers result to anti-government posture which if care is not taken can lead to labour unrest or even tear the state apart. The existing gap here is that Government always perceives the workers as lazy, uncooperative individuals, who always hold secret labour meetings and plan drastic actions against Government and any other organization they consider a threat to their interest while on the other hand workers (labour unions) perceive the Government as exploiting them especially when they make policies concerning labour without labour consultations (Subba, 2008). It is this perceptual basis arising from the Government and the workers that sometimes serve as the “brewing pot” of labour unrest. Hence the Nation tends to lose a great deal of financial and material resources (Shyam, 2010).

1.2 Background of the Study

In Nigeria, labour unions have become very important agents of socio-economic transformation and class struggle which began from the colonial struggle and continued until the post-independence era (Aremu, 1996). In the later period, labour unions played significant role in the struggle against dictatorial military rule in the country. In the same vein under the current civilian dispensation, labour unions is at the forefront of the struggle against unpopular government policies such as deregulation of the oil sector, retrenchment of workers and refusal to honour agreement on wage increase. Nigeria is a third world country that has labour unions spread across the country. The unions are structured into industrial line and as at 1977, about 42 labour unions were recognized by the Government and allowed to contribute enormously to the development of economic, social, cultural and even political systems of the state. The role of these labour unions is usually regarded as people oriented because it tends to oppose Governmental policies and decisions not favourable to the masses through strike actions, protests etc., popularly called labour unrest. However, in a multi ethnic democratic country like Nigeria, there exist different labour unions across the country. Some of these unions are National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG), Nigeria Labour Congress

(NLC), Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), Trade Union Congress (TUC), Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAU) Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUJ), among others.

1.3 Ways of Ending the Cycle of Incessant Strikes and Achieving Peace

Strikes, according to experts, impose costs not only on the affected sector, but on other sectors of the economy and society, including loss of productive output, technological growth and development. For a society that disdains statistics, putting a figure on the economic cost of strikes is difficult, but Babatunde Fashola, the Minister of Power, Works and Housing, provided a clue in August last year when he said that labour unrest by power and gas sectors workers cost government and employers about N7.73 billion between April 2014 and March 2016.

Unfortunately, in Nigeria, we are confronted today with a spill-over of bad governance and financial illiteracy in the public sector. The conflict between government and its workers often revolves around inability to pay salaries and fund institutions as evidenced in many states; and failure by the government to fulfil compensation and funding obligations that it signed.

To achieve peace, government should consider the following:

First, Public finance and governance should be run on rationality. The federal and state governments should stop creating universities and tertiary health institutions they cannot fund. A government that could not meet its obligations to 28 universities 10 years ago has since created about 12 new ones. Kano, Ondo, Ekiti with poor internally generated revenues have three universities each when they could not adequately fund one.

The Federal Government should consider rationalising the mushroom universities which are politically motivated by past administrations through mergers, with some becoming campuses of older universities.

Safety at the workplace is the responsibility of all, the employers of labour should ensure the provision of safety wears and safe work environment as accident in the workplace affects productivity.

Discipline

Industrial peace and harmony play crucial roles in organisational productivity, economic progress and nation building. Improving productivity and work ethics in the public and private sectors could sustain Industrial peace and harmony. It is the collective responsibilities of employers and employees to seek to maintain a peaceful and harmonious relationship for improved productivity so as to sustain business growth and profitability. Workplace conflicts have causative factors, which must be identified and constructively managed. We note that organizations purpose do not get achieved where productivity falls, and workers quests for better working conditions are unattainable where work organizations are unproductive. That employees are organizations most productive assets and must be regarded as partners, managed to understand the aligning nature of personal aspirations with organizational purpose. Employees should demonstrate their partnership with the employers in matters that relate to business sustenance; and the employers should show commitment to the welfare of the employees at all levels. However, where conflicts of interest arise in the course of employers/employees relationship, resolution of such conflicts should be pursued with understanding of effective communication/ feedback between employers and employees. This is imperative as poor communication could be disastrous in business, employment, labour and social relations.

Industrial peace or harmony in a country is an important pre-requisite for its industrial development; it implies the existence of harmonious Industrial relations between the managements and workers. Hence, stable industrial relations are the vital prerequisite for industrial progress. Discipline is very essential for a healthy industrial atmosphere and the achievement of organizational goals. An acceptable performance from subordinates in an organization depends on their willingness to carry out instructions and the orders of their superiors, to abide by the rules of conduct, and maintain satisfactory standards of work.

Until human nature attains greater perfection, the fullest measure of individual freedom of action can be realized only within the frame work of an expressed discipline. In social situations, this take the form of laws, in industries, it is manifested as standards. Fairness in securing conformity in both instances is wholly consistent with our democratic approach. The term discipline can be interpreted variously, which connotes a state of order in an organization. It is sometimes understood as a sort of check or restraint on the liberty of an individual. It is a training which rectifies, modifies, and strengthens or improves individual behaviour. It is adherence to established norms and regulations. It also

corrects improper conduct and this acts as a force leading to the observance of rules and regulations. Thus, it is essentially an attitude of the mind, a product of culture and environment and requires, along with legislative sanction, persuasion on a moral plane.

Formal and informal rules and regulations govern the relationship between a manager and workers. The formal rules and regulations, including work-related behaviour rules, are codified in the company's manual or standing orders. Informal rules on the other hand, are evolved from convention and culture in the organization.

Indiscipline results in chaos, confusion and diffusion of results. It gives rise to strikes, 'go-slows', absenteeism, leading to loss of production, profits and wages. There is no hard and fast rule to deal with indiscipline. Counselling and educating the employee are added means that can be effectively and positively used to check indiscipline. If the management also adopts strategies like job enrichment to develop commitment to work, sets up effective grievance handling machinery, evolves proper induction and training programmes for new entrants and develops a system which provides sufficient scope and opportunity to develop employee potential, it would leave very little room for the growth of grievances which could lead to indiscipline.

Causes of Indiscipline:

When individual goals eclipse organizational goals or when equilibriums between the capacity, the interests and opportunity for an individual is destroyed, the disharmony results in conflict and frustrations. These may be realized by aggressive attitudes towards management. Non-committed workmen invariably develop apathy to work.

Theoretically causes of indiscipline that appeal in the scene of industrial life are:

- a) non placement of right man for the right job in the right time according to individuals qualifications experience and training.
- b) undesirable in-human dealings and behaviour of senior officers towards their subordinates.
- c) biased evaluation of persons by executives and favoritism
- d) lack of upward communication system, which prevents expression of thoughts, feeling and reactions of employees to the competent authority or top management.

- e) lack of commitment to work, to the organization, to the industrial way of life.
- f) Improper supervision and absence of good supervisors for appraisal of subordinates performance critically in correcting their men rather than in uprooting them.
- g) lack of properly drawn rules and regulations which are practicable with code of behaviour.
- h) adoption of divide and rule policy of the management causing destruction of team spirit among the employees.
- i) illiteracy and low intellectual level of workers as well as social background.
- j) workers reactions to rigidity and multiplicity of rules and their proper interpretations.
- k) worker's personal problems like fears, apprehensions, hopes, aspirations, lack of confidence and their adaptability with supervisors and colleagues
- l) intolerable bad working conditions and inborn tendencies to flout rules.
- m) absence of enlightened sympathetic and modern scientific management system,
- n) discrimination based on caste, colour, creed, sex, language, regions and provincialism in matters of selection, transfer, promotion, placement in imposing penalties by the management.
- o) undesirable management practices , policies and activities to control workers, that is employment of spies, undue harassment of workers to create fear, complex and autocratic leadership of the management towards their subordinates.
- p) psychological and social reasons like misunderstanding, rivalry, distrust among worker and supervisors, absence of fellow feelings, apathy on the part of the management.

Approaches to Maintaining Discipline

Indiscipline could be dealt with using formal and informal systems, through which it is corrected. In case informal system is being used, either a transfer, an informal warning, or a non-hierarchical about status demotion is the remedies to correct indiscipline. The informal approach is undesirable and creates bitterness and has adverse effects on employee morale and motivation.

i. **The human relations approach:** it calls for treating an employee as a human being and considers the totality of this personality and behaviour while correcting fault that contribute to indiscipline. His total personality is considered, as is his interaction with his colleagues, his family back ground, etc. and then appropriate punishment for misconduct is awarded.

ii. **The leadership approach:** in this case, every supervisor or manager has to guide, control, train, develop, lead a group and administer the rules for discipline.

The features of code of discipline:

(i) It prohibits strikes and lock outs without proper notice and also prohibits intimidation, victimization, go-slow tactics, violence, coercion or instigation by both parties.

(ii) There shall be no on one-sided action in any matter by either party.

(iii) The existing machinery for the settlement of disputes should be followed and the awards and agreements should be implemented without any delay.

(iv) A common grievance procedure should be provided for after a careful consideration and negotiations for the settlement of disputes.

(v) Both the parties should attempt to avoid any action which may disturb industrial peace in the industry.

(vi) The employers will not increase workloads without prior agreement with the workers.

(vii) The employers will provide full facilities for unfettered growth of trade unions. However unfair labour practices should be discouraged.

(viii) Prompt action should be taken against those officers who instigate the workers for the breach of its discipline.

(ix) The workers will not indulge in any trade union activity during working hours.

(x) The workers will implement their part of awards and settlements promptly and will take action against those office bearers of the union who are responsible for the breach of code.

Core Measures of Discipline

For the maintenance of effective discipline, the contributory causes of indiscipline should be removed and favourable conditions be created. The following measures should be adopted in maintaining the discipline. Condonation of past offenses: The real purpose of disciplinary action is to prevent the recurrence of future offenses of similar nature. As far as the past offenses are concerned, they should be allowed to be condoned after a prescribed time limit. An opportunity should be given to employees, to rectify their faults. The employer should always try to seek cooperation from the employees. Agreement as to Disciplinary Rules: A code of discipline should be prepared and adopted with the approval of employees. Unilateral action should not be taken by the management in framing the rules and regulations for maintaining discipline. A code of discipline duly approved by the representative of the trade unions and by the management can avoid certain unhappy consequences and impose self-discipline.

Careful Discipline of Employee Relations

The discipline of employee relations encompasses a broad range of concepts, transactions, practices, behaviours and objectives arising out of the relationship between an employer organization and its employees, and among the employees themselves. Its foundations, if carefully laid and maintained, will support and guide myriad decisions that human resources management will make in the course of recruiting, screening, hiring, training, compensating, assessing, coaching, counselling, disciplining and terminating employees. For a resource that broadly discusses the practice of employee relations, Employee relations involve the behaviour of two or more individuals, and the effects of the organization's rules and culture, bureaucratic structures, and external influences and pressures. While it is impossible to anticipate each unique combination of factors, human resources professionals who understand the basic concepts will know how to identify needs, spot issues and formulate solutions. Basic employee relations concepts include equal employment opportunity, fairness and consistency in the treatment of employees, effective communications between management and employees, documentation of employment actions, recordkeeping as required by law and practice, complaint resolution processes, managerial and employee training, and "best employment practices." Employee relations also encompasses the organization's overall approach to maintaining a positive, productive and cohesive work environment within the organization's particular business model and corporate culture.. Additionally, employee relations is concerned with anticipating, addressing and diffusing workplace issues that may interfere with the organization's business objectives, and with resolving disputes between and among management and employees. The

organization's employee relations model supports the policies and practices governing workplace rules and conduct, and guides its compliance with the scheme of federal, state and local laws and regulations governing and impacting the employment relationship.

Conclusion

The ultimate success and survival of an organization will invariably be determined by the quality and competence of its human resources. In fact the differences in the lives of economic development of the countries are largely a reflection of differences in the quality for their Human Resources and their involvement in national building. Discipline is essential for the smooth running of any organization, for the maintenance of industrial peace which is the very foundation of industrial democracy, without discipline no enterprise would prosper. No doubt when work culture is good, employees are excellent, and quality is outstanding it attracts more client's, new business, challenging projects and more profits to the organization. As the ultimate success and survival of an organization will invariably be determined by the quality and competence of its human resources, the Code of Discipline definitely improves moral level of employee's and makes them more responsible and increases quality and productivity of work by encouraging more creativity, new innovative techniques and ideas from employees.

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