

MAN AT STAGE CENTRE

Social Sciences for Higher Education

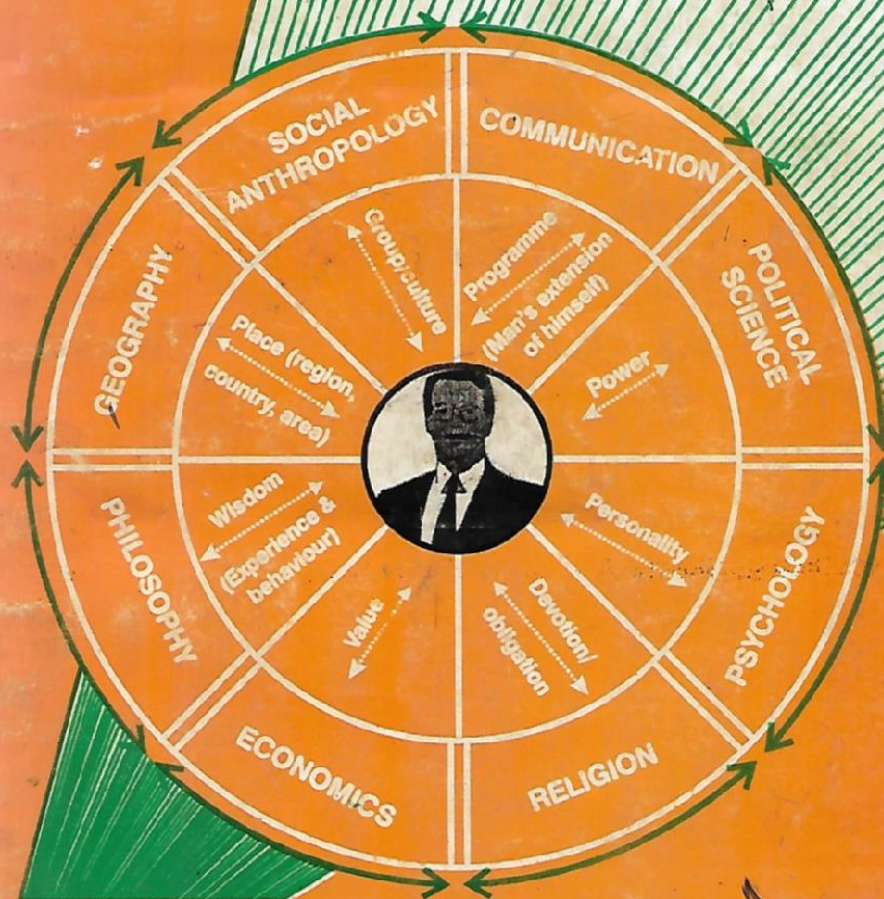


Diagram Showing The Orb of Social Sciences with Man At Centre Stage

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CHAPTER 13

TYPES, CAUSES, EFFECTS OF STRIKES IN NIGERIA

Innocent F.A. Uzoechi

Politics, wealth, education - these constants affect human society. They intertwine in the economy. Life connects all three in labour behaviour. This is how workers act in dealing with employers, the government that policies society for all, and the outer society, often history's laboratory. Labouring people influence events severally, to wit, in production, distribution, transportation, reproduction, exchange, destruction, and so on (Uzoechi, 1985). These activities rarely make the headlines but angry workers on the move - called a strike - create news; make heroes; and attract the big stick. Why is the strike an earth-shaker, if at all?

This and many implied questions will form this paper. It defines *strike*; justifies it; explains causes; traces the effects of indigenous strikes; and concludes after tabling some findings. At any rate, a working thesis is that strikes have impacted on Nigerians from pre-colonial times to post-independence.

Concepts go vague. Yet to conceptualise them is to think. A strike is a labour revolt, a walkaway from a duty post. Either the employers or the employees conduct it. The lock-out, a mild form, prefaces the shutdown of an industry to protest workers' disobedience (Uzoechi, 1985). To physical or mental labourers - the proletariat as well as the *intellectariat* (Uzoechi, 1985 *Neologism*: Gutkind, Cover, Copawn, 1978: 15 ff.), this term means:

A temporary stoppage of work by a group of employees in order to express a grievance, a demand or enforce a demand (Hyman, 1972 Wigham, 1976: 195 ff).

This view stresses various elements such as *temporary stoppage of work, a group, employees, grievance, demand or enforce*. Since the action is temporal, an overtime ban or a go-slow misfits it (Hyman, 1972). Strikers stop work meaning useful activity, but not the employers. The group involved acts together as a self-conscious entity looking out for itself. As employees, still, they are not their own masters so their grievance and demand have to be enforced through a *calculative* or reasoned mass action (Hyman, 1972).

Though Hyman's interpretations above help, they fall short. First, *employees* as well as employers go on *strike* (*Trade Union Amendment Decree No 228: 1978*).

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Though Hyman's interpretations above help, they fall short. First, employees as well as employers go on *strike* (*Trade Union Amendment Decree No 228: 1978*).

Co 3(1)-(9)b). They strike and counter-strike for different reasons. Second, the logic of striking does not suggest that every union member agrees. For it is the *radicals* that march and shout ahead, carrying high labour's angry flag, while the fence-sitters, the conservatives, or the know-nothings play safe (Uzoechi, 1996 *straikology*). Third, the go-slow, rejected by him and Griffin, as scholars of social movements, is adequate labour talk (Ojiyi, 1965; *Oxford African Encyclopaedia*, 1974:488 & 511). It works. Nigerian events Post-World War II confirms this idea. Interestingly, Hyman ignores image-making among young unionizers that attract notice through challenging the old-timers or jettisoning their cautious to timid tactics ((*Financial Times*, 1981: 141-142). Nor can students of strikes forget imitation as a force in public affairs. The demands enforced or grievances urged are in essence, economic; and, therefore, pro-labour as well as welfarist. In society, time and duration belong to strike lore.

Definitions create thought boundaries. They introduce why this study is relevant. Many reasons, of course, lead to others. But first, confusion grows wild in strike studies about what is what (Hyman, 1972: 17ff. Burt, 1979; 463-70; Cohan, 1970: 195-196). Typologizing labour violence is, in fact, slippery. Second, a strike communicates human problems. It is expressive though not symbolic language alone since it is an actuality guaranteed in national law or the wage-contract (*Nigerian Constitution*, 1979: S.36). But the freedom to express oneself lodged in the constitution can begin a night journey through the judicial jungle. Three, job-actions make history, depending on purposes, contents, and successes. Fourth, strike literature is maturing the science of labour behaviour. Fifth, to study is to know; to know is to understand; to understand is to forgive. This is saying that a knowledge of strikes can influence labour-management relations by saving lost man-days. Sixth, sociologizing labour dissidences explains intra-union relations under stress - the stresses created by hunger, threat, or else, anxiety. Who are the joiners? Why should do-nothings still look on? What of the strike-breakers and the indifferent - the one for action, the other for silence? Why should strike-leaders get trapped in violent demonstrations that sell out their struggle wrongly to the law enforcers? Also strikes may endanger the nation when they uproot national institutions to profit the opposition, that is at the expense of the state. Rightly, therefore, do governments monitor strike movements, the better to safeguard national security. Finally, the concepts of *public security* and *national interest* flourish when administrations decide to tear-gas striking groups. Actually, labelling workers *radicals*, *subversives*, *terrorists*, *saboteurs*, becomes an art by which the media prettify the political class to look good as the guardians of peace and order. In brief, strike vocabulary introduces political language, which, to the uninitiated, is, sometimes, an *obscurum per*

obscurius (that is explaining the obscure by means of the more obscure). Since democracy requires both intelligent shouting or speaking and continuing literacy or education, strikeland in Nigeria has no need to be bloody, pessimistic, or unpatriotic.

Justified as such, Nigeria's experiences are explainable through identifying strikes by type. These include traditional, *royal*, economic, legal, illegal, wildcat, general, sympathy, electoral, boycott, go-slow, *ca'canny*, anti-colonial but prenational, sit-in strikes, and so forth.

TYPES OF STRIKES

| TYPE | DIRECT VICTIM | INDIRECT VICTIM | SPONSORS | PROBLEMATICS |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Traditional | Farmer | Labourers | Hired Hands | Justice |
| Royal | District Officer | Community | Warrant Chiefs | Dismissal |
| Economic | Employer | Workers' Family | Workers | Dismissal |
| Constitutional or Legal | Employer | Govt/Society | Workers | Dismissal |
| Illegal | Union | Employer | Factions | Dismissal |
| Wildcat | Union | Employer | Factions | Dismissal |
| Political | Government | Society | Opposition | Crackdown |
| General | Government | Society | Conference | Force |
| Sympathy | Distant Employer | Workers | Unionists | Silence |
| Electoral | Government & Party | Govt./Society | Party/Union | Inquiry |
| Boycott | Employer | Consumers | Workers/Soc | Policing |
| Go-slow | Employer | Employers | Workers | Policing |
| Ca'Canny | Employer | Consumers | Workers | Policing |
| Sit-in | Employer | Employer | Workers | Policing |
| Lie-in | Government | Employer | Workers | Policing |

| | | | | |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Anti-Colonial | Imperialists | Local allies | Nationalists | Force |
| Sex | Husbands | Community | Diviners and Women | Purifying society |
| Student | Government | Other Publics | Unions | Closure |
| Emergency | Federal Govt. | Industry/Soc. | Radical Unions | Take-over |
| Lockout | Employees | Employees | Employer | Negotiation |
| Rent | Landlords | Tenants | Tenants | Eviction |
| Jurisdictional | Rival Unions | Workers | Workers | Choose one Govt recognition |

- * From this *typogram*, strikes are broad despite their various causes. Causation in History and Philosophy is elusive. Many facts feature from c. 1800 to 1997.
- * First, hunger which is History's messenger, always tortured-working people. Economism, or an emphasis on welfare, remained (Ojiyi, 1965: 45ff). Second, official deafness arouses union radicals, especially when, because of miscommunication or bureaucracy's run-around, the truth never reaches the decision-makers in time (COEASU: AICE, Owerri, 1996). Third, administrative failure to honour promises affected the railway unionists in 1945 (Coleman, 1986: 258-259; Ananaba 1969: 26ff) and the Udi coal miners in 1949 (Ojiyi, 1965; Ananaba, 98-119; Mbadiwe; 1991: 58-60). Fourth, inflation, the bogeyman of national economies, has galloped beyond wages so that salaries keep vanishing on pay-day. COLA, cost of living allowance, agitated workers after World War II (Ananaba, 1969:26ff). Fifth, some persons create events at the right times. Mr. Michael Imoudu, Labour Leader *par excellence*, refused to be stopped as he struggled for union welfare. Exile, Jail, Detention - all befriended (Ananaba, 1969:39) him while Empire in Nigeria gasped to its collapse. Sixth, labour radicalism received ideological fuelling. For the socialists in Nigeria confronted their opposite numbers. They wanted magic and change from Independence, given Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's successes in Ghana. There, the Trade Union Congress (TUC), under J.K. Tettegah, re-fired nationalism and improved society (Cohen, 1974:72; Trevor - Clark 1991:422-443). Usually, general strikes fused collective angers against any government renegeing on promises while else watching corruption as well as extravagance with aplomb. Mr. Wahab Goodluck, a powerful leader, voiced despair at workers' penury beside the lords parading overnight and noisy affluence just after Independence.

(*Financial Times*, 139-149; Trevor-Clark, 659).

Today as yesterday, student demonstrations answer strikes. Protesters for improving the work place through sanitation, balanced diet, and school housing see their institutions as contract, that is fee-collecting, employers while, to themselves, they are the employed. Rightly or wrongly, therefore, their strikes target current problems. In a national setting, and as citizens, they question-mark events that tie into the general strike ((NUNS, 1960s -). Whenever key industry workers walk out on their employers, they involve the government *ipso facto* as she is the general peace-keeper that balances all interests, now riveted on the national, which is supreme. Thus emergency strikes threaten serious crises (Burtt: 1979: 298-299; NUPENG: 1997). In another sense, Employers go on self-regarding revolts. They lock their workers out (Ozurumba & Uzoechi, 1990: 45 ff.). Unless, however, the police keep order nearby, such workers tend to move from picket to violent action.

Labour violence, no matter how bloodless, often bashes society at many points. First, strikes pump fears into management-labour relations. These choke productivity. Second, every failed strike, like any winning one, draws the Federal Government nearer into industrial relations. Third, the police as law-and-order nationals intervene in the public interest. Often, in the nature of life, which has no key, they bypass the union issues. Fourth, the Judiciary by its injunctions, administrative inquiries or interpretations, impacts on the working classes. Fifth, poverty, agony's handshake, accompanies most strikes (Ozurumba & Uzoechi, 1990: 45 ff.). Even successful types create a euphoria that produces a dream-life that chains the worker, at all costs, to his industry (Thompson, 1974). For a dismissal spells ruin. Sixth, political strikes people the prisons with victims; expand detention camps; fatten labour-defence lawyers; and de-personalize some leaders as unpersons and disloyals (Ikyur, 1997:3). Seventh, the post-Independence strikes have introduced changes, now protected by law. The Redundancy and Housing legislations advance the citizens' fortunes (*Financial Times*: 146) yet law and its administration may live miles apart. Eight, once again, public policy grabs the driver's seat and its role teaches workers new wisdoms. They are, for an example, not the government. They cannot be that as a unionized group (Ananaba, 1964, 1972). Their needs are legitimate under the law; but co-eval are sacred areas like national security. Ninth, the higher institutions operate in society. Their ivory tower intellectuals require re-schooling for the wider publics. They will return to teach Labour Economics, History, Law, Ergonomics, Industrial Psychology, Mass Movements, and Industrial Relations. Pioneered by Dr. T.M. Yesufu, this last subject is still cultivable

(Yesufu, 1962; Yesufu, 1967). Tenth, unionism in Nigeria has favoured the men. Women remain almost voiceless. Thanks to their sex strikes in precolonial and colonial times, they reached their radical zenith with the Aba Women's Revolt of 1929 that mobilized about two million agitators (Sanday, 1981; Nwabara, 1977: 136-40, 181-200).

Over and above these opinions, some findings need some emphasis. Strikes will last as labour's tool. But they need defusing and clarity in an age of *mad* technology (Bronowski 1965; Bronowski 1972). Union political dissident actions have become dangerous. They bite governments awake and bitter till in the end they attract crackdowns. Still, strikes, now politicised may go out of fashion, in this mode, since only managerial unionism appears relevant. Law, with all its cobwebs actively defends the nation. Unions must show wisdom, respect, conscience, and caution. They are to exude patriotism. For sectional interests, in general, undermine nations. So, the Federal Government, umpiring peace and regulating work, has to lubricate the changeover from strikes to Democracy with social justice.

To conclude, Nigerians have faced strikes upon strikes. They have noted their types, causes, and effects. Knowledge is an urgent necessity. For the freedom of expression in the constitution is the road to Independence and Democracy under the law.

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