

## **Strike Action: The Only Weapon Available to Public Sector Employees in Nigeria in their Agitation for Better Working Conditions**

**Chigozie Bonaventure Uzoh**

**Department of Sociology/Anthropology**

**Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka – Anambra State, Nigeria**

**Email: [bc.uzoh@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:bc.uzoh@unizik.edu.ng)**

### **Abstract**

As distasteful as strike action is, it has obviously become the last resort of public sector employees in Nigeria in their agitation for improved working conditions. Government remains the largest employer of labour in Nigeria, especially in the public sector as well as the umpire in the industrial relations system of the country. Ironically, this same government is the biggest obstacle to the smooth functioning of the industrial relations system. Government hardly embraces dialogue and collective bargaining in dealing with issues pertaining to the welfare and improvement in the conditions of work of public sector employees. Whenever, it deems it fit to negotiate with workers represented by their trade unions, it does not keep to its own side of the agreements reached during such negotiations. Public sector workers in Nigeria and their unions have therefore come to the realization that the only weapon they have in actualizing their demands for better working conditions is strike action. This is because that is the only language government understands and it is only that course of action that elicits positive response from the government. This explains why there is incessant strike actions organized by workers and their unions in the public sector in Nigeria. Based on the foregoing, this paper examines why public-sector employees and unions frequently resort to strike action in pressing their demands from government. The theoretical thrust of the paper is Max Weber's social action theory. The paper contends that unless government begins to apply a more responsible and sincere approach in dealing with her employees and their unions, strike action will remain a frequent occurrence in Nigeria's public sector. It is therefore recommended that government must begin to embrace collective bargaining and dialogue in negotiating the working conditions of her employees and also cultivate the habit of honouring collective agreements reached with workers and their unions.

**Keywords:** Strike Action, Public Sector, Employees, Collective Bargaining, Government, Collective Agreement.

### **Introduction**

Strike action is commonly considered the last weapon in the armory of organized labour for settling industrial disputes. When all other options for amicable settlement of an industrial dispute have been exhausted and negotiations with the employer have failed,

## Uzoh

---

employees led by their Unions resort to strike action. Strike action is presently regarded as a legitimate weapon for employees in projecting their demands (Archie, 2019). If an employer denies or refuses to give his employees some benefits to which they are entitled, the law gives the concerned employees a weapon to force the employer to accede to their demand. The weapon is stoppage of work which is popularly known as strike. Strikes are important not only from the industrial point of view but also from social and economic points of view as well since they make an impact on the society as much as they do on labour and employees (Adavbiele, 2015; Archie, 2019).

The word strike is an artificial character and does not represent any legal definition or description. It is an agreement between persons who are working for a particular employer, not to continue working for him temporarily (Archie, 2019). It is simultaneous cessation of work by workers or employees temporarily in order to express grievance or to enforce a demand concerning changes in work conditions. Strike is therefore a cessation of work by a body of persons employed in any industry acting collectively, or a concerted refusal, or a refusal under common understanding of any number of persons who are or have been so employed to continue to work or accept employment (Anugwom, 2007; Archie, 2019).

It has rightly been said that the interests and rights the workers may seek to promote and protect through strikes are numerous. They may relate to the terms and conditions of employment of the strikers or other workers, or to political and social interests or to showing solidarity of the working class or to any issue which the workers may consider striking for (Anikeze & Ayogu, 2008; Archie, 2019). Historically, strikes have been used for all these purposes and for many more, although the primary purpose behind strikes has been, and still continues to be, to put pressure upon the employer to commit or desist from committing certain actions related to terms of employment (Archie, 2019).

All over the world, strike action has been among the instruments used by employees to win concessions from employers. In most other climes, it is usually employed as a last resort when all other methods used by workers to express grievance had failed (Archie, 2019). In Nigeria however, that is the only potent weapon in the hands workers in their agitation for

---

better working conditions. This is mainly because Government does not listen or negotiate with workers until they embark on strike action. This explains why at every point in Nigeria, it is commonplace to observe unions that are on strike, from the education sector to oil and gas, medical, judiciary and many more, the story is the same. Many people condemn and criticize public sector workers in Nigeria each time they embark on strike without realizing that that is the only potent weapon they have against their employer (Government).

This paper therefore examines how public-sector employees in Nigeria have used strike action to their advantage as that is the only language Government understands. Government never pays attention to the welfare of its employees until they go on strike.

### **Typologies of Strike Action**

Strikes are often classified on some distinct bases such as their purpose, coverage or technique used. In many cases, the forms specified on separate bases overlap, and it becomes difficult to identify the base on which the classification has been made (Archie, 2019). To avoid confusion and ensure easy understanding, it appears desirable to present a brief description of more common forms of strikes highlighting their basic features.

**Economic Strike:** Most of the strikes of workers are for more facilities and increase in wage levels. In economic strike, the workers demand for increase in wages and other allowances. This is one of the most popular forms of strike in Nigeria. It is the typical strike based on the demand for better wages and other working conditions that the employer is unwilling to grant (Clark, 2012; Adavbiele, 2015). Most strikes embarked upon in Nigeria by workers' unions are usually based on economic considerations.

**General Strike:** This means a strike by members of all or most of the unions in a region or an industry. It may be a strike of the workers in a particular region of industry to force demands common to all the workers. It may also be an extension of the strike to express generalized protest by the workers (Archie, 2019). This is when the coverage of the strike is wide and general (Anugwom, 2007).

---

**Stay-in Strike:** In this type of strike, workers do not absent themselves from their place of work when they are on strike. They keep control over production facilities, but do not work. Such a strike is also known as 'pen down', 'tool down', 'sit – down' 'sit – in' strike. This type of strike differs from sit-ins because it does necessarily involve the takeover of the company's assets and its management by the workers. Though, like sit – ins, this form of strike involves workers being present at work but literally not working (Anikeze & Ayogu, 2008).

**Slow Down Strike:** Employees remain on their jobs under this type of strike. They do not stop work but restrict the rate of output in an organized manner. They adopt go-slow tactics to put pressure on the employers. This is also referred to as 'go – slow', 'slow gear strike' or 'lazy strike' because the employees that are on strike are expected to fold their arms and carry out their assigned tasks very slowly as they cut down on the pace of work (Anugwom, 2007).

**Sympathy Strike:** When workers of one unit or industry go on strike in sympathy with workers of another unit or industry who are already on strike, it is called a sympathy strike. The workers of sugar industry may go on strike in sympathy with their fellow workers of the textile industry who may already be on strike (Archie, 2019). In other words, it is a form of strike that is embarked upon in solidarity to another or other unions. Here, strikes merely express both moral and fraternal support aimed at bringing pressure on the employer involved in the trade dispute (Anikeze & Ayogu, 2008).

**Recognition Strike:** This is a form of strike that is primarily geared toward forcing the employer to recognize and deal with a particular union (Clark, 2012). In any country where there are trade unions, some are more recognized than others. This may be on account of the strategic roles they play in the economy of that country. Such roles make those unions very influential. In Nigeria, the Academic Staff of Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Unions in the Oil and Gas Industry are typical examples. The lesser known and less influential Unions will always use strike action as a strategy to draw attention to themselves so that they can be more accepted by employers and the general public. The Strike actions sometimes embarked upon by the Unions of non-teaching staff in Nigerian

---

Universities may be described as recognition strike since they use these strikes to draw the attention of Government to also recognize and deal with them the same way they deal with ASUU (Adavbiele, 2015).

**Jurisdictional Strike:** This type of strike occurs when two unions fight over which one has jurisdiction over a type of work and attempt to exert pressure on the employer to allocate it to one or the other. This form of strike is a fallout from the proliferation of Unions in particular profession as is the case in the health sector in Nigeria or in a particular industry. This type of strike is usually regarded as being illegal since the employer is caught in the middle of a fierce battle between two warring Unions (Clark, 2012; Adavbiele, 2015; Uzoh, 2018).

**Wildcat Strike:** This type of strike is regarded as a quick, sudden and unauthorized type of work stoppage. It is not approved by union leadership. According to Adavbiele (2018), wildcat strike actions are often masterminded by a subgroup of employees who have not achieved satisfaction within the system. Since this type of strike is usually declared without the consent of the union's controlling organ, it is also called 'unofficial strike'. It emanates from quarrels, defective leadership and lack of proper coordination between local and central union machinery and it is an indication of absence of group loyalty or cohesion (Anugwom, 2007).

### **Brief History of Strike Actions in Nigeria's Public Sector**

We know strike actions as events that have been so frequent in Nigeria and also have long history that is rooted in the distant past, precisely during the colonial period. Therefore, it is important to note that strikes in Nigeria are not a modern phenomenon as there have been several key strikes that took place in the past. The general purpose of a strike is to take a stand when all other methods of airing grievances have failed. It is generally seen as the final alternative for workers in getting what they want from their employers (The Black Republic, 2016).

According to Adavbiele (2015), Nigeria has been experiencing strike actions since the 20<sup>th</sup> century and pointed out that Ananaba (1969) documented notable strike actions that took place during the colonial era. Some of those strikes include the following: Aba women's riot

## Uzoh

---

of 1929; Railway workers' strike of 1938; Nigerian union of railway men's strike of 1941; general strike of 1945; Enugu coal miners' strike of 1949; mercantile workers' strike of 1950; and airways workers' union strike of 1959. All these strike actions took place before Nigeria's independence in 1960 and since then, the frequency of strike actions in the public sector especially has assumed a worrying dimension

Two key strike actions from those mentioned above stand out because they played a major role in speeding up the collapse of British colonialism in Nigeria. The first was the general strike of 1945 (The Black Republic, 2016). What started out as a labour kerfuffle by railway employees in June 1945, eventually spread to other unions in the civil service, then private sector workers decided to support their public-sector counterparts. It was Nigeria's first general strike and involved 17 labour unions and up to 200,000 workers. It lasted for 45 days and caused a total shutdown of the economy. This strike, and not the politicians, was the most devastating blow against colonialism in the country (The Black Republic, 2016; Nwanze, 2018).

When World War II ended, inflation increased, but workers' wages remained the same. The colonial government had agreed to review wages at the end of the war because of skyrocketing prices. Between 1941 and 1945, the cost of living rose over 50%, a fact acknowledged by the government who increased allowances given to Europeans. This brought in the racial angle (Nwanze, 2018).

On March 22, 1945 the Joint Executive of Government Technical Workers sent a letter to the colonial regime demanding a new minimum wage of two shillings, sixpence, and a 50 percent increase in the Cost of Living Allowance. The colonial government replied on May 2, and while it agreed that inflation was on the rise, it argued that unless the public is willing to do without, or reduce the consumption of commodities which are scarce, or to substitute other commodities for them, instead of taking the least line of resistance and buying in the black market, no benefit will result from increasing cost of living allowance (The Black Republic, 2016; Nwanze, 2018).

A workers' meeting called to respond deplored the callous attitude of Government to the sufferings of the masses of African Workers and gave a one-month ultimatum emphasizing

## Uzoh

---

that not later than Thursday, June 21, 1945, the workers of Nigeria shall proceed to seek their own remedy with due regard to law and order on the one hand and starvation on the other unless their demands are met. The resolution was signed by J.A. Ojo and Osmond Osadebo of the Civil Service Union; C.O. Odugbesan and A. Oshosanwo of the Union of Railway men; and A. J. Marinho and S. O. Ogunyemi of the Committee of Africans Holding Superior Appointments (Nwanze, 2018).

On June 11 the government sent a letter restating its old position but offering an increase of three pence on COLA for workers in Lagos and 20 percent for workers in the provinces, but this offer was rejected. Prior to sending the letter, on June 2, the colonial government set free Michael Imoudu, of the Railway Workers Union. They hoped to divert attention with Imoudu's release, but it backfired as labour historian, Wogu Ananaba noted that there is little doubt but for Imoudu's activities there might have been no General Strike on 22nd June, 1945 (Nwanze, 2018).

On June 14, the African LOCO Drivers' Union placed their management on strike notice with effect from midnight, June 21. The Railway workers followed with their own notice. On June 16, a meeting reiterated the strike ultimatum while leaving a window open for possible negotiations. There were no further negotiations, because the general strike started on June 22, 1945 (Nwanze, 2018). The strike was successful as most of the workers' demand for an increase in cost of living allowance were met in 1946 and backdated to 1945. In bringing together different trade unions and striking for ten weeks, the workers generated worldwide sympathy. The strike proved that if Nigerians organized well enough and cohesively, they could pose a threat to the status quo (Nwanze).

Seventy-three years have passed since the General Strike of 1945, and sadly, the headlines are pretty much the same. Wages are stagnant, and the cost of living for the average Nigerian has skyrocketed over the last five years or so. Promises have been made by the government and promises have been broken. The tactics that the government will use in the event of a strike will be the same (Nwanze, 2018).

The second important strike that occurred during the colonial period was the Enugu coal miners' strike of 1949. The miners expressed grievance due to the belief that the

---

management was holding up their salaries, a position that was sensationalized by the National Press. As a result, the coal miners embarked on sit – down strike in the mines, refusing to work until their demands were met (The Black Republic, 2016). The Government out of panic started removing the explosives for fear that the miners would use them to press for their demands. The miners on their own part fearing that this action would lead to the closure of the mines, alerted the market women who came with sticks and machetes to prevent any further removal of the explosives. This situation generated tension that led to the police firing at protesters killing 21 and injuring 51 others. The events that occurred at the Enugu Coal Miners' strike led to eruption of anger across cities in Nigeria and also became a very strong weapon in the hands of Zikist Movement against the colonial Government (The Black Republic, 2016).

Strike actions have continued to be frequent in Nigeria's public sector even after the country's independence from colonial rule. In different sectors of the economy, the story has been the same. There has been for instance series of strike actions in the nation's educational sector, especially in tertiary institutions. The Academic staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP), Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) and other unions within the University system such as Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), Non – Academic Staff Union (NASU), and the National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT) have frequently embarked on strike actions to pressure the Government to accede to their demands (Adavbiele, 2015).

The Nigeria health sector has also experienced a lot of strikes lately involving Doctors, Nurses and Allied Healthcare workers and it looks like these strikes are now seen and accepted as normal (Oleribe, Ezieme, Oladipo, Kinola, Udofia and Taylor-Robinson, 2016). In the Oil and Gas sector, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) and National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) frequently use strike actions to fight for improvements in the welfare of their members who are employees of Government as well as other employers of labour in the Oil and Gas Industry. The Judicial Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) and Parliamentary Staff Association of Nigeria (PASAN) frequently use strike actions to fight for the welfare of their members. The



---

incessant strike actions embarked upon by unions in Nigeria's public sector is not surprising because that is their only potent weapon they have against the employers which explains why they quickly resort to it.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical thrust of this paper is Max Weber's social action theory. He conceived of sociology as a comprehensive science of social action. His primary focus was on the subjective meanings that human actors attach to their actions in their mutual orientations within specific socio – historical contexts (Priya, 2019). Action in Max Weber's analysis refers to all human behavior to which an actor attaches subjective meaning. According to him action is social, in so far as by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual, it takes account of the behavior of others and thereby oriented in its course. Max Weber was particularly interested in how social action is often conceptualized by social actors in terms of means -ends chains (Priya, 2019).

Max Weber's social action theory provides a deeper insight into why public-sector employees in Nigeria led by their Unions frequently embark on strike action. When these employees embark on strike, they have a subjective meaning attached to their action which is goal- directed. Public-sector employees in Nigeria do understand that the only weapon they have in their agitations for better working conditions is strike action. Government which is the only employer of labour in the public sector in Nigeria does not pay attention to the demands of workers unless they embark on strike action. This explains why there is incessant strike actions in Nigeria. Government does not care about the welfare of workers, so if they fail to demand for their entitlements which they frequently do through strike action, nothing will happen. It also explains why Government does not always negotiate with workers, engaging in collective bargaining with workers will lead to making commitments and signing of agreements and memoranda. In most cases that Government signed agreements with workers, it did not keep to the agreements and workers will have to embark on another round strike action to remind Government of the agreement it signed with workers previously. Unless Government changes its attitude for the better in dealing with its employees, strike actions will continue to be frequent in Nigeria's public sector.

---

### **Some of the Factors Responsible for Frequent Strike Actions by Employees in the Public Sector in Nigeria**

There are numerous factors within the Nigerian industrial relations system that frequently predispose employees in the public sector in Nigeria led by their unions to embark on strike action. In this paper however, only the major factors are discussed. The first of those factors is Government's overbearing influence in the nation's industrial relations system. The experience of Nigeria has shown that over the years the character of successive governments has become perhaps the most important factor in determining the employment climate in the country through its unilateral actions that have come to bear on employment relations policies (Yesufu, 1984 & Ubeku, 1986 cited in Uzoh, 2015). In Nigeria, the Federal Government appears to play some sort of overriding role in labour relations in the public sector where it remains the only employer of labour. Government unilaterally imposes wage structures in the public sector without due consultations and negotiations with the representatives of labour (trade unions) (Yesufu, 1984; Ubeku, 1986; Adesina, 1995; Kester, 2006 cited in Uzoh, 2015). The overbearing influence of Government in public sector wage determination has been variously blamed by industrial and labour relations scholars for the frequent wage crisis which always leads to labour unrest (Uzoh, 2015). Government has the penchant for taking unilateral decisions on issues pertaining to wages and other employment conditions which it imposes on all concerned without due consultations (Kester, 2006; Uzoh, 2015). These unilaterally decisions of Government do not usually go down well with public sector employees and their unions and in resisting those decisions, they resort to industrial actions.

Another factor that causes frequent strike actions in the public sector in Nigeria is the restricted use of the collective bargaining machinery in determining the working conditions of employees. This is exactly why the Nigeria Labour Congress (2008) cited in Uzoh (2015) stated that the problems of collective bargaining as an instrument for determining employees' wages and other conditions of work in the public sector in Nigeria in terms of its restricted nature and the relatively large number of workers outside its coverage emanate from the developments in the national polity. A large of number of unionized workers particularly in the public sector are not covered by formal and well-

## Uzoh

---

structured bargaining machinery which often lead to ad hoc negotiations occasioned by industrial crisis. Most government parastatals with few exceptions have no collective bargaining machinery, nor do unions negotiate with their managements. Yet, the legislation which established these parastatals empowered their Boards or management to independently review the conditions of service (Nigeria Labour Congress, 2008; 2009 cited in Uzoh, 2015).

Furthermore, rather than allow bilateral negotiations in the determination of wages and working conditions of employees, successive governments in Nigeria prefer the use of Semi-judicial commissions and tribunals, especially for workers in the public service (Adesina, 1995 & Aderogba, 2005 cited in Uzoh, 2015). According to Ubeku (1986), Kester (2006)), and Uzoh (2015), practically every major demand by workers for wage increase or rewards since the Second World War has been determined not through the collective bargaining machinery, but by Special Committees, Commissions or Arbitration. The contention here is that, since trade unions are not consulted or even represented in the Commissions, their views, opinions and interests are not taken care of in the recommendations of these Commissions as is the case in collective bargaining. This situation consistently causes industrial relations crisis which degenerates to strike actions organized by workers and their Unions.

Moreover, Governments' established culture of not honouring collective agreements reached with trade unions is also one of the factors that cause incessant strike actions by employees in the public sector in Nigeria. According to Uzoh (2016), successive Governments in Nigeria have had this penchant for dishonouring collective agreements on wages and other working conditions reached in previous negotiations whenever they deem it fit to dialogue with the trade unions. Perhaps, violation of collective agreements has made strike actions and social chaos inevitable in the public sector in Nigeria. There can be no doubt that the real cause of the frequent strikes in the public sector in Nigeria is related to either wages or non-enforcement of collective agreements reached for the purpose of settling wage-related issues and other conditions of employment (Uzoh, 2016). Government frequently signs agreements with trade unions even when it is well aware that the agreement will not be honoured and Unions are always suspicious of Government

which makes them feel that it does not deserve any benefit of the doubt. The obvious response of Unions and their members to this situation is strike action.

Union proliferation also contributes to the frequent strike actions in the public sector in Nigeria. The fact that most workers, manual or white-collar, experience many common grievances such as job insecurity, lack of autonomy in work and unsatisfactory compensation and conditions of employment all of which ordinarily should provoke a common feeling of opposition and antagonism to capital, the owners of capital and their agents (Adewumi, 1997; Summonu, 1998; Uzoh, 2016). According to Adewumi (2007), the divisive tendencies that are internal to the trade union organization are expressed in their organizational boundaries which shapes the lines of demarcation or jurisdictional scope among different unions. The above captures adequately the situation in Nigeria where trade union proliferation has become a major issue. Each Union tries to make wage demands and improvement in the employment conditions based on the peculiarities of the occupations of its members (Uzoh, 2016). Thus, any concession in wage demands and other conditions of work achieved by a Union for its members makes other Unions to equally make similar demands for its members. This situation encourages labour unrest and inter-union rivalry that also instigates strike actions (Uzoh, 2016).

### **Consequences of the Incessant Strike Actions by Employees in Nigeria's Public Sector**

Consequences of incessant strike actions by public-sector employees in Nigeria led by their unions are discussed in this paper from two stand points, namely; positive consequences and negative consequences. On a positive note, strike action has become the only avenue through which public sector unions in Nigeria, representing their members can pressurize Government to accept their demands and also bring it to the negotiating table. The role of the Nigeria Trade Union Movement in fighting for improvements in the working conditions and general welfare of Nigerian workers and its contributions to national development can never be underestimated (Aremu, 2011; Uzoh, 2013). The Trade Union Movement has gone beyond the traditional mandate of working for the improvement in the welfare of the working class to protecting the general interest of ordinary Nigerians against obnoxious government policies, especially as the political class has reneged in its duty to provide

## Uzoh

---

viable opposition to these policies (Aremu, 2011; Uzoh, 2013). It is necessary here to point out that the Trade Union Movement has mostly used the instrumentality of strike action to put pressure on the Government to give in to its demands.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has made it clear to anyone that cares to listen that whatever achievements ASUU has made as a union have been products of strike actions. For instance, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) formerly known as Education Trust Fund (ETF) is a product of a challenge posed by ASUU to the Federal Government in the 1990s. The Federal Government had challenged ASUU to propose other viable sources of funding that could be used to strengthen tertiary education in Nigeria through interventions and extra budgetary supports. ASUU worked out detailed policy formulation and managerial structure of ETF now (TETFund) which formed part of FGN/ASUU agreement of 1992 after a major strike action by ASUU (ASUU, 2013; Uzoh, 2017).

Although at its initial conception, the ETF intervention was intended to be a special intervention in tertiary education only, the Military Government enlarged its scope to cover all levels of education including, primary, secondary, and higher education. The intervention of the ETF did not make the intended significant changes in the educational system at any level (ASUU, 2013; Uzoh, 2017). In 2011, through pressure from ASUU, the ETF law was repealed, and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund Act was enacted as a transformative intervention agency for rehabilitation, restoration, and consolidation of the tertiary education in Nigeria. TETFund had been making visible impact in supporting tertiary education in terms of sponsoring academic staff in Nigerian Universities for higher degrees, and sponsoring conferences, workshops, and valuable research endeavours (ASUU, 2013; Uzoh, 2017).

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) had also through the instrument of strike action put pressure on the Federal Government to set up the Committee on Needs Assessment of Nigerian Public Universities (CNANU) in 2012. This was part of the FGN/ASUU 2009 agreement geared toward revitalizing public Universities in Nigeria to meet both national and international standards (Implementation Monitoring Committee

## Uzoh

---

(IMC), 2014; Uzoh, 2017). The Committee was saddled with the task of determining the actual status of Nigerian public Universities in terms of infrastructural facilities, services and resources, staffing and enrollment, environment and utilities as well as quality of delivery of teaching and learning; to determine the gap between the existing status, skills, abilities and capacities of the Universities and those that are needed for the Universities to function at optimal level; and to make the right prioritization and therefore optimize resource allocation which could lead to proper deployment of resources to get value for money, save cost while making maximum impact, as well as improve efficiency and institutional effectiveness (IMC, 2014; Uzoh, 2017). The impact of the Needs Assessment Intervention Fund is being felt in various ways including providing learning facilities and conducive learning environment for students as well as staff training and development (Uzoh, 2017).

Furthermore, ASUU has been able to achieve some level of improvement in the emoluments of its members as compared to what it was previously through strike actions. Presently, entitled academic staff are paid a number of allowances which include those of postgraduate supervision; teaching practice/ industrial supervision/field trip allowances; honoraria for external/internal examiners (postgraduate thesis); honoraria for external moderation of undergraduate and postgraduate examination, and postgraduate study grant (Agburu, 2012; Uzoh, 2017). Aside the foregoing, other allowances include those for external assessment of Readers and Professors; call duty/clinical hazard responsibility allowance; excess workload allowance and Earned Academic Allowance (Agburu, 2012; Uzoh, 2017).

Every trade union in the public sector in Nigeria has its own story to tell in terms of what it has been able to achieve through strike actions. Some the achievements of ASUU through strike actions listed above are just few cases in point. Unions in the public sector in Nigeria have come to the realization that if they do not go on strike, Government will never show any commitment to the welfare of workers who are their members. Frequently, we have witnessed strike actions embarked upon by unions in the education sector, oil and gas sector, health sector, the judicial sector, the core civil service and so forth. These strikes are

## Uzoh

---

incessant simply because they are the only weapon these unions have in their agitation for better working conditions for their members.

Strike actions also come with a lot of negative consequences which usually draw the major attention of the public. The incessant stoppage of work owing to industrial conflicts has a lot of socioeconomic effects on the development of Nigeria. No matter the logics behind strike actions, it is obvious that there are attendant socio-economic misfortunes. While to an economist, strike causes economic fracture, which has serious negative economic consequences, to a sociologist, strike causes a dislocation in the sociological importance of work as well as the socialization process (Wokoma, 2011).

Economically, strikes and other forms of industrial conflict and work stoppages obliterate the desired growth and development in the economy. This effect is twofold: while it hinders national productivity, it on the other hand, scares away the needed foreign investment. Human productivity is an important index in calculating national productivity. This is because it is the human element that transforms all other resources toward achieving an increased national productivity. However, trade disputes and conflicts instigate work stoppages, which result in man-days lost (Wokoma, 2011). Thus, when labour productivity depreciates, in form of man-days lost, it automatically results to a reduction and loss in productivity which affects the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as well as the Gross National Product (GNP). Incessant strikes reflect the unhealthy nature and structure of our industrial society. Thus, foreign investors are scared away, and are not encouraged to invest in an environment of unstable industrial peace and harmony, where their return on investment will be distorted because of strikes and work stoppages (Wokoma, 2011).

Sociologically, industrial conflicts, strikes and work stoppages have serious consequences. Work is a necessary social activity which provides a sense of societal belonging, and self-worth to the workers. But they also work because of the other satisfactions it brings such as doing something worthwhile, a sense of achievement, prestige, recognition, the opportunity to use and develop abilities, the scope to exercise power, and companionship". (Wokoma, 2011). Furthermore, unremitting work stoppage, owing to strikes, alienates

## **Uzoh**

---

man from other men in the industrial society. This results to a break down in the socialization function that work serves. Strikes especially frequent and prolonged ones, make the society to have a bad or negative judgment of the parties involved (Wokoma, 2011). For instance, ASUU has numerously been adjudged as a group of greedy, egoistic folks who are only after their selfish interest, owing to their frequent and often protracted strikes. On the other hand, their employers, the government, have been labelled a bunch of insensitive lots. It becomes obvious from the above background and analysis that strikes serve as a constraint towards the social development of Nigeria (Wokoma, 2011).

The negative consequences of strike actions are enormous, especially when these strikes are prolonged. Any time a union in the public sector calls out its members for strike action, it usually has negative impact on the union members themselves, those directly served by the organizations there these employees work and the society at large.

### **Conclusion**

Strike action has become the only weapon available to public sector employees in Nigeria in their agitation for better working conditions. This explains why frequent strike actions are experienced in the public sector in Nigeria. The insensitivity of Government to improvements in the welfare of workers has made it such that unless workers embark on strike action, Government will never pay attention to their grievances. In other words, strike action has obviously taken the place of collective bargaining which is the best approach to addressing workers' grievances. Government as the mediator in the industrial relations system and the largest employer of labour in Nigeria has failed to live up to its responsibilities which explains the frequent industrial unrest in the public sector. Unless Government begins to take dialogue with workers through collective bargaining with workers represented by their unions as the best method to resolve industrial disputes and nip them in the bud, strike actions will continue to be frequent in the public sector in Nigeria. It is also important that whenever Government bargains with trade unions, it honours the agreement reached at the end of such collective bargaining.

### **Recommendations**



## Uzoh

---

Based on the pertinent issues raised in this paper as to strike action being the only weapon available to public sector employees in Nigeria in their agitations for better working conditions, the following recommendations are made;

1. Government should make collective bargaining machinery the only approach for discussing the employment conditions of workers in the public sector in Nigeria.
2. Government Should develop the attitude of honouring collective agreements it willfully signed after collective bargaining with employees represented by their unions.
3. Government should take improvements in the welfare and working conditions of employees in the public sector in Nigeria more seriously.
4. Government should at regular intervals review upward the remunerations of employees in the public sector in Nigeria in line with the extant economic realities.

## References

- Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) (2013), TETFund: An Intervention Agency Basterdized? *National Secretariat*.
- Adavbiele, J. A. (2015), Implications of Incessant Strike Actions on the Implementation of Technical Education Programme in Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice, Vol. 6, No. 8, pp. 134 - 138*
- Aderogba, K. O. (2005), Bargaining Structure in Nigeria: Past, Present and Future. In Omole, I. (eds), *Contemporary Issues in Collective Bargaining in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Cadalad Nig. Ltd
- Adesina, J. (1995), State, Industrial Relations and Accumulation Regimes in Nigeria: Reflections on Issues of Governance. *Ibadan Journal of Social Science, 1(1): 1-26*.
- Adewumi, F. (1997), Responsiveness in Trade Unionism: Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In F. Adewumi (ed), *Trade Unionism in Nigeria: Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Lagos: Fredrich Ebert Foundation.
- Adewumi, F. (2007), Unity and Division: The Dialectics of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement. *African Journal of Business Management, (June), pp. 55-63*.
- Agburu, J. I. (2012), Recent Trends in Wage and Salary Administration in Nigeria: A Synopsis on Theoretical and Empirical Challenges. *International Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences, Vol. 01, No.2, Pp. 257-268*.
- Anikeze, N. H. & Ayogu, A. C. (2008), *Industrial Relations in Nigeria: Principles, Concepts and Applications*. Enugu: Bismark Publications.

---

Anugwom, G. A. (2007), *Industrial Relations System in Nigeria*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Publishers.

Archie, P. (2019), Strike: Meaning, Definition, Types. Online at <https://www.businessmanagementideas.com/human-resources-management/industrial-relations-human-resources-management/strike-meaning/21155>, accessed 05/04/21

Aremu, I. (2011, February), The Nigerian Economy and the Labour Movement. *FRCN Radio Commentary*.

Clark, A. O. (2012), *Business Management*. Suffolk: Arima Publishing.

Implementation Monitoring Committee (2014), Guidelines for Accessing the Needs Assessment Intervention Fund for Nigerian Public Universities. *Federal Ministry of Education, Abuja -Nigeria*.

Nwanze, C. (2018), Can Nigeria Repeat the 1945 General Strike? *The Guardian Online* at <https://guardian.ng/features/can-nigeria-repeat-1945-general-strike/> accessed 10/05/21.

Kester, K. O. (2006), *A Perspective on Wage Determination Bargaining in Nigeria*. Ibadan: John Archers.

Nigeria Labour Congress (2008), Policy on Collective Bargaining. Online at <https://www.nlcng.org/searchdetailsph?id=10>, accessed 21/09/09.

Nigeria Labour Congress (2009), Demand for the Review of Minimum Wage and General Wage Review. Online at <https://www.nlcng.org/minimum%20wage.pdf>, accessed 3/11/09

Oleribe, O. O., Ezieme, I. P., Oladipo, O., Akinola, E. P., Udofia, D., & Taylor-Robinson, S. D. (2016), Industrial Action by Health Workers in Nigeria in 2013 – 2015: An Inquiry into Causes, Consequences and Control of a Cross -Sectional Descriptive Study. *Human Resources for Health*, 14: 46, 1-10

Priya, R. (2019), The Max Weber's Theory of Social Action. *Online at* <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/sociology/the-max-weber's-theory-of-social-action/43752>, accessed 18/04/21

Summonu, H. (1998), Development, Democracy and Trade Unions. In F. Adewumi (ed), *Trade Unions, National Development and Military Rule*. Lagos: Friedrich Ebert Foundation

The Black Republic (2016), A Short History of Strikes in Nigeria. *Online at* <https://medium.com/@TheBlkRepublic/a-short-history-of-strikes-in-Nigeria-52d41c7491e3>, accessed 15/05/21

Ubeku, A. K. (1986), The Role of the State in Industrial Relations. In Damachi and T. Fashoyin (eds), *Contemporary Problems in Nigerian Industrial Relations*. Lagos: Development Press

Uzoh, B. C. & Anigbogu, K. C. (2013), The Challenges and Prospects of Trade Unions in Nigeria. *Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Journal of Sociology, Vol. 5, No. 1, 217-24*.

## Uzoh

---

Uzoh, B. C. (2015), Restricted Collective Bargaining and Wage -Related Industrial Unrest in the Public Service in Nigeria: The Nigerian Case. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Management Studies*, Vol., 2, No. 2, 58-63.

Uzoh, B. C. (2015), The Role of Government in the Industrial Relations System and Wage-Related Industrial Unrest in the Public Service in Nigeria. *International Journal of Current Innovation Research*, Vol., Issue 2, 23-29.

Uzoh, B. C. (2015), The Use of Wage Commissions to Determine Wages of Public Service Employees Wage-Related Industrial Unrest: The Nigerian Experience, *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention*, Vol. 2, Issue 05, 1244-1259.

Uzoh, B. C. (2016), Governments' Penchant for Dishonouring Collective Agreements Reached on Wages and Wage-Related Industrial Unrest in the Public Service in Nigeria. *International Journal of Current Innovation Research*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 297-302.

Uzoh, B. C., Anekwe, S.C., & Anigbogu, K.C. (2016), Trade Union Proliferation and Strike Actions in the Public Service in Nigeria. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(5), 480-489.

Uzoh, B. C. (2017), An Assessment of the Impact of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on Human Resource Development in Nigerian Universities. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 740-747.

Uzoh, B. C. (2018), Trade Union Proliferation and Strike Actions in the Public Service in Nigeria. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8 (5), 480-489

Wokoma, C. U. (2011), The Effects of Industrial Conflicts and Strikes in Nigeria: A Socio-Economic Analysis. *Journal of Development and Management Review (INJODEMAR)* Vol. 6, No. (NA), 32-40.

Yesufu, T. (1984), *Dynamics of Industrial Relations: The Nigerian Experience*. Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press