

THE IMPERATIVES OF SYNERGY IN TRADE UNION DYNAMICS IN NIGERIA: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper examined the imperatives of synergy in trade union dynamics in Nigeria: A qualitative Analysis. It considered the pedigree of Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) as the umbrella body that accommodates the other unions in Nigeria. It also x-rayed the historical backdrop of trade unions congress (TUC) in Nigeria. While the NLC addresses issues of junior workers welfare and improvement of their working conditions. The TUC focuses on the improvement in the working conditions of senior staff of the affiliate trade unions in Nigeria. With disagreements in Nigeria Trade Unions particularly in the Nigeria Labour Congress came the emergence of the united labour congress (ULC). This brought about the fractionalization and dilution in the potency of the Nigerian Labour Congress. The infightings in the NLC have brought about the dilution of the NLC in Nigeria. The potency of trade unions lies in their strength, number, cohesion and unity. It is the findings of this paper that the emergence of the united labour congress has spilled and drastically reduced the dynamo and operational force of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). The concomitant implication of this development has occasioned the drastic reduction in the bargaining power and collective potency and force of the once entitled: awesome and powerful Nigerian Labour Congress. This paper concludes that the altercations that gave birth to the new trade union (ULC) should be examined and there should be a trade-off among the key stakeholders in the trade unions in the junior workers categorization. The paper therefore recommended that concrete steps should be taken to fuse the NLC and ULC in Nigeria. This is imperative as it will culminate into cohesion, strength, force and enhancement in the bargaining power of the unions. This is cardinal as it is in the overall interest of the Nigerian workers in the face of monumental challenges from their divergent employers. It is also recommended that the interests of the key players in the unions should be taken into consideration and assiduous efforts should be made to ensure a trade-off amongst varied stakeholders. This will galvanize the synergy of the NLC and TUC in the continuous pursuit and drive for the enhancement and improvement of working conditions of the workers in Nigeria.

KEY WORDS: Trade union, synergy, dynamics, qualitative Analysis, collective bargaining

Introduction

Trade union is the practice of employees of an organization under the aegis of a union collectively pursuing the improvement of their welfare through their employers. The practice of trade unionism is not circumscribed to Nigeria but it is a global practice that has aided the

improvement in the working conditions of employees. In divergent organizations in Nigeria and around the globe, it is viewed from this perspective that there exist labour institutions such as the international Labour organization (ILO), Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), United Labour congress (ULC), Trade union congress of Nigeria (TUCN) and other affiliate labour bodies. Trade union dynamics is operational both in the private and public sectors of the Nigerian Economy. The strength of trade unions rests on the progression of the numerical strength of its members in their respective organizations and in their various economies. It is the enhanced numerical strength that gives the union leaders the power, strength and industrial vigour to negotiate actively with the employer of its members.

It is therefore expedient that vibrant and dynamic trade unions to should strive assiduously towards the enhancement and progression of their membership always. Besides progression, the integration of its members in the respective house unions is life wire of trade unionism.

Hence, disintegration is to be averted and eschewed at all cost and always. The proliferation of trade unions is sometimes occasioned by altercations within the rank and file of existing trade unions. This is also a product of the dogged pursuit for determined and uncompromising self- aggrandizement quest. This pursuit if not checked can constitute a threat to the subsistence and dynamism of trade unions and their purposes in the Nigerian polity. It is against this backdrop that this study is deemed imperative. Hence, the intellectual inquiry into the imperatives of synergy in trade union dynamics in Nigeria.

A whole gamut of studies in trade union practices abound (Orbaiceta, 2013, Dobrusim, 2012, Bobe, 2011, Albergeucci, Arancibia, Chulman, Dallacia, Giralder, Munoz, 2009, Favreau, 2007, Rebon, 2005) but there is no study to the best of our knowledge on the imperative of synergy in trade union dynamics in Nigeria. This is the gap in literature which this study intends to explore.

The theories that underpin this study are political revolutionary theory of labour movement by Marx and Engles and Webbs Theory of Industrial democracy and Political revolutionary theory of labour movement of Marx. Its short run purpose is to eliminate competition among labour, and the ultimate purpose is to overthrow capitalist businessmen. Trade union is purely a class struggle, and proletariats have nothing to lose but their chains and they a world to win. The Webbs theory of industrial democracy was propounded by Beatrice and Sindy Webb. According to the Webbs, trade unionism is an extension of democracy from political sphere to industrial sphere. Webbs agreed with Karl Marx that trade union is a class struggle and modern capitalist state is a transitional phase which will lead to democratic socialism. He deemed collective bargaining as an imperative to successful trade practice. Marx and Engles theory is a theory based on Adam Smith's theory of labour value as the process which strengthens labour.

Review of Related Literature

The essence of review of related literature is to ascertain what existed in literature and to enable us critically evaluate research in the field. This is essentially imperative as it assists researchers to draw from the past and attempts congruence between the past and present and also establish a divergence between the past and the present in the light of a study.

Trade unions are also termed labour unions. It is an association of workers in a particular trade, industry or company created for the purpose of securing improvements in pay, benefits, working conditions or social and political status through collective bargaining (Fashoyin,1980). Trade unions are organizations whose membership consists of workers and union leaders, united to protect and promote their common interest. The principal purposes of labour unions are to: negotiate wages and working conditions (terms) regulate relations between workers (its members) and the employer, take collective actions to enforce the terms of collective bargaining, raise new demands on behalf of its members and help settle their grievances(Ubeku,1983).

A trade union is a combination of persons, whether temporary or permanent, primarily for the purpose of regulating the relations between workers for imposing restrictive conditions on the conduct of any trade or business and includes the federation of two or more trade unions per section 2 (6), trade union Act, 1926.

“A trade union is an organization of workers, acting collectively, who seek to protect and promote their mutual interest through collective bargaining”.

A trade union organizes the working people and their struggles within industry: organizations and governmental bodies generally strive to attain the aims and purposes of trade unions, in terms of the Nigerian Trade Union Act (Section 1 of the trade union Act, 1973 as amended in 2005). The major aim and purpose of a union is the representation of workers in the regulation of wages and working conditions within an industry.

Trade unions are also concerned about the political life of the country, the economy and the social position of workers in terms of education, health care, welfare, etc. synergizing the communities, students and social movement the trade unions is a major source of the people’s power(Orbaiceta,2010).

Nigerian labour congress (NLC) is an umbrella organization for the trade unions. In Nigeria it was founded in 1978 following the merger of four different organization: Nigeria Trade Union congress (NTUC), Labour Unity Front (LUF), United Labour Congress (ULC) and Nigeria=a Workers Council (NWC). The numerous affiliated unions were restructured into 42 industrial unions. Its founding president was Wahab Goodluck.

Presently, the Nigerian Labour Congress has 29 affiliated unions. The union has about four million members. This has made the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) one of the largest trade union organizations in Nigeria.

With the disagreement in Nigeria Labour Congress NLC, spilled and united labour congress of Nigeria, ULC emerged. While Mr. Ayuba Wabba is leading the Nigeria Labour Congress, Mr. Joe Ajaero is at whims of affairs of united labour congress of Nigeria. The ULC emerged as a trade union in December 17, 2017.The trade union congress was registered as a labour Centre on 8th August 2005, when the then president of the comrade (Dr.) Peace Obiajulu received letter of registration.

Origin and Development of Trade Unionism in Nigeria

The concept of trade union has divergent meanings depending on the varied conceptualization of terms. According to Fajcma(1987), trade unions laws in the UK and Nigeria define trade union as “... any combination whether temporary or permanent the principal objectives of which its constitution are...” The regulation of the relations between workmen

and workmen or between masters and masters or the imposing of restrictive conditions on the conduct of any trade business and also the provision of benefits to members (Uviehary, 2001). Trade unions are the main power resource of working people: "The power in this collectivity of workers can promote the resolution of variety of problems faced by the workforce and which help in nation building" (Okolie, 2010). The role of unions to their members pervades economic, social, welfare, political, psychological benefit and opportunity to participate in managerial functions in industry (Okolie, 2010). Besides the contributions of trade unions on large society (Political and psychological), its prime function is the provision of economic benefits to its members.

The trade unions are statutorily responsible to its members. This is basic and fundamental in their operations in various communities.

Historically, the first trade unions were not formed by a set of disenchanting workers who strive to improve their working conditions. The first trade unions were rather formed to conform to trade union in Sierra Lone (Ubeku, 1983).

The Emergence of Senior Staff and Management Association in Nigeria

Prior to the independence in 1960, most of the senior employees of organizations were aliens and there were a handful of Nigerians that were in this categorization. As a result of the paucity in their number, they were not able to form the trade unions (Yesufu, 1982). Their European counterpart's formed a union known as the Association of European civil servants since 1919 (Egboh 1968). "Association of Nigerian senior staff came to" fore in the civil service in 1960 and in the private sectors in 1971 (Ananaba, 1970).

The development of management unions emerged with the existence of European and the Nigerian Managers and commenced the demand for improvement in salaries and conditions of service as enjoyed by their previous European counterparts (Balogun, 1972). In 1974, the Nigerian Employer Consultative Association (NECA) identified what it considered as "a major concern" by some sectors. This major concern was that there were attempts by some people to bring together under one body separate union of management/union staff and that they NECA. 'had made representation to the federal ministry of labour on this deemed to be undesirable' (NECA Report of year ended 31, December, 1974:8 and 9).

"Unfortunately NECA in the same year 1974, the federal commissioner (now known as minister) for labour confirmed the award of the industrial arbitration tribunal in the trade dispute between the Bascita Allied sugar factory and industrial workers union and the management of Nigerian sugar company limited". (Olusoji, J.G, Oluwakemi, O. and Uche, O. 2012).

Conclusion of the Study

It is therefore concluded that the fractionalization of trade union practices in Nigeria into Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and United Labour Congress (ULC) has unpropitious consequences on the dynamism of trade union practices as well its prime goals of improvement in the working conditions of Nigerian workers. It also gave ample opportunity for employers to individually and collectively undermine the welfare and improvement of the working conditions of workers both in the public sector and private organizations.

The strength and force of the workers is drastically reduced and cannot function dynamically on the employers in order to achieve set goals on behalf of the workers in Nigeria.

This paper concludes that trade union bodies in (Nigeria Labour Congress, NLC and trade union congress, TUC) should synergize and become a potent, virile and indomitable labour force in Nigeria. This interface is imperative because each of them pursue the interest and welfare of defined classes of employees in various industries in Nigeria.

It is the purposed synergy that the trade union in Nigeria can speak with in potent loud and persuasive force in the interest of Nigerian workers

Recommendations of the Study

This paper therefore recommends that the infractions in the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) should be addressed urgently. It is also the recommendations of this paper that there should be fusion of united labour congress (ULC) to the mother trade union (NLC) in order to restore the potency and dynamism of the trade union in Nigeria. This is also expedient so as to avert similar experience in the trade union congress of Nigeria (TUCN). It is also recommended that personal interest in the practice of trade union in Nigeria should be mitigated and the interest and well-being of the Nigerian workers should be deemed supreme.

It is also recommended that there should be the synergisation of the NLC and TUC in trade union practices in order to optimally achieve the set goals of unionization in Nigeria.

This is interfacing that the trade union can attract the attention of employers in the various industries in the various industries in the Nigerian Economy. The concomitant effect is that the trade union will become a powerful tool to influence and alter the adversarial stance of the employers and navigate their opinions favourably towards the Nigerian employees. This synergy will also synchronize the divergent demands of various umbrella trade unions in Nigeria. This will enhance the practices of trade union in the various industries in Nigeria and also contribute in the amelioration of the standards of living of the Nigerian employees.

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