

**ASSESSMENT OF GOVERNANCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISM IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SECTOR**

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**Abstract**

*The concept of conflict is an inseparable part of people's life. Some view conflict as a negative situation which must be avoided and others may perceive it as a phenomenon which necessitated management. Others may see it as an exciting opportunity for personal growth and tried to use it to their best advantage. However, this study seeks to interrogate the argument that crisis management is essentially embedded in humanity. The paper assessed the mechanism in managing conflict in the Nigerian public sector with a view to determining the interface between industrial harmony and political stability as a potential determinant factor in crisis management within the context of the Nigeria's public sector. The study further established that the public sector in every society is not immune against conflict or crisis, and this will naturally arise as long as there is interaction between and among human elements within the sector. The paper relied essentially on secondary source of data. The study concluded that, based on the humanity- linked nature of conflict, and to ensure that right environment is created to enhance good governance, its management in the public sector, particularly in Nigeria, will continue to be an unavoidable responsibility of the government.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, Conflict Management, Crisis, Union, Strike, Industrial Harmony and Organized Labour.

**Introduction**

Conflict resolution is one of the most prevalent issues in every organization. This paper therefore seeks to interrogate the nexus between industrial harmony and political stability as a potential determinant or otherwise, in crisis management, and this will be undertaken within the context of the Nigeria's public sector and its interface with the organized labour. The study will further seeks to provoke insightful discussions around the common place of crisis management mechanisms such as mediation, conciliation and arbitration, otherwise described as alternative disputes resolution (ADR), with a view to determining and attaining more strategic and proactive ways of ensuring harmonious working relationships between the government and its workers. This study is predicated on the fact that crisis management is essentially embedded in humanity. In the opinion of some writers, social groups by their nature and context are in fact characterized by conflicts. This is so because aims, objectives and interests of the social units or individuals that constitute any social groups (including labour unions) differs. Conflict is as old as the family institution and it exist in many spheres of life. It can arise in virtually any social setting, be it between or within individuals, groups, communities, tribes, states, or nations.

At any point in time, and in any situation involving more than one person, conflict can arise. In some instances, the causes of conflict may range from philosophical differences and divergent goals to power imbalances. Therefore an unmanaged or poorly managed conflict has the tendency to generate a breakdown in trust and productivity. By extrapolation, this viewpoint can equally be validated in the context of public sector crisis management in relation to the impact of the organized labour unionism. This is unavoidable given the fact that both the government and the labour organization are structurally antithetical in terms of objectives and functions. However, both will not operate in isolation but will continue to engage and synergies to create and advance industrial harmony which is a sine qua non to stability. Conflict is a process that begins when one party or group perceives that another party or group has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect something that the first party cares about (Thomas, 1992 in Robbins & Judge, 2010).

The paper was divided into six major sections. The first section is devoted to introduction which is closely followed by conceptual review. Section three is devoted to theoretical framework while section four is on methodology; section five is on discussion while section six is based on conclusion and recommendation.

### **Conceptual Review**

As the name suggest, conflict resolution involves the reduction, elimination or termination of all forms and types of conflict. The Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary of current English defines conflict as 'fight', struggle, quarrel, bitter argument, opposition, and differences between employers and workers. Generally, the definition of conflict which some authors prefer to term as dispute varies from person to person. In as much as our definition has implied the disagreement between two actors inherent in the concept conflict, it does not seem to have taken into consideration the total range of behavior and attitudes that seem to propel, guide and dictate the workers relations within the organisations. In the real sense, when people talk about conflict resolution, they tend to use terms like negotiation, bargaining, mediation or arbitration. In essence therefore, conflict according to Flippo occurs when two or more people or groups perceive that they have (1) incompatibility of goals and (2) interdependence of activity. It is essentially the antithesis of organization and extension cooperation. The resolution of conflict is therefore the coming to terms, compromise, agreement and settlement of differences between two actors which may involve a third party.

The public sector as opposed to the private sector involves those areas of labour controlled, owned or partially owned by the government. In Nigeria, these areas are grouped into two major levels which are the government level and the sub-sectorial level. The formal consists of pure civil service and the later, the non-civil service consists of the nationalized industries or public corporation and parastatals such as Water Board, Universities, the Police and armed forces, etc. in this category are also publicly owned or controlled firms in which the State owns or partly owns a number of individual firms such as banks and insurance firms or houses.

Conflict management does not necessarily imply conflict resolution. Conflict management involves designing effective macro-level strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict and enhancing the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organization Rahim, (2000). Rahim (2000) asserted that conflict is not an evil phenomenon, its effect whether constructive or destructive depend on how it's being managed. Functional conflict is said to have occurred when the outcomes lead to improved organizational performances or effectiveness.

In dealing with the public sector as opposed to the private sector, what is construed in the mind is a picture of government owned institutions and establishments. Specifically, by public sector, one is referring to the pure Civil Service on the one hand and corporations and parastatals run by the government on the other. Consequently, the government is the greatest employer of labour both in men and materials. Conflicts often manifest itself in the form of grievances, complaints, discontents, strikes, lock-outs and absenteeism. Whatever forms it takes, it is generally believed that conflict often affects organizational performance. It is further emphasized that conflict is the antithesis of cooperation and organization. Such breakdowns are results of conflicts, disputes, discontent or dissatisfaction that arises out of relationships between individual workers and management, unions and management and the governmental agencies concerned with the work place and the work community.

However, there is a school of thought that believes that there is some good in conflict. Nevertheless, there is always a need for conflict resolution whether conflict is good or bad. The public sector is both government and people oriented. A non-result oriented conflict may be injurious to the public, where as a result oriented conflict would pacify and satisfy the workers and unions. An attempt to maintain industrial and labour management peace is often sought.

### **Crisis Management in the Public-Sector**

As indicated earlier, crisis will naturally exist in every given society where human beings interact. So also will there be conflict or crisis in every sector, unit or platform which consists of human beings interactions. The Nigerian public sector is not immune from this phenomenon. What is important is that steps are taken to address any conflict or crisis-ridden situation. Given the context of this study, it is relevant to highlight the place of government (the State), being the machinery upon which the entire governance responsibility for the country rests.

### **The Role of the State in Public Sector Crisis Management**

According to Badejo, "the state had traditionally played various roles in different countries, most especially in providing the institutional framework for the bilateral relationship between workers/Trade Union and Employers and their representatives to encourage a bipartite relationship", This suggests that the government, whether at the national, provincial, regional or local level, serves to create and regulate the work environment in terms of legislations which prescribe how workers can conduct their affairs in their working relationship with government. Badejo further mentioned that the government's publication of the National Labour Policy in 1975, which contained its direct intervention and the pursuance of guided democracy in labour matters, and this involved limited intervention in certain areas of labour activity in order to guarantee industrial harmony.

Expectedly, the government has not ceased from continuous intervention and interference in virtually every area of industrial relations. In the case of Nigeria, such interference has resulted into disruptive strike actions that have in most cases, caused socio-economic and political paralysis in the country. In such circumstances, governance has ultimately bear the brunt as the country would have been engulfed in disorderliness, thereby manifesting in grave security threats However, scholars like Ubeku, believe that there are reasons for state intervention in trying to regulate activities of organised labour.

According to Ubeku, such reasons include among other things, the overwhelming position of government as an employer of labour, political and economic considerations: historical and international imperatives, etc. In the opinion of Oribabor, whose analysis appears more specific than as highlighted by Ubeku, the State (government) unavoidably intervenes in industrial relations matters as a result of it being a huge employer of labour, hence, employment and manpower development and regulations of wages and salaries are carried out by the government. According to Yesufu the role of government in its dealings with the Nigerian labour movement consists of-leadership role; legislative and regulatory role; investigatory and advisory; education and training; and adjudicatory. On leadership, Yesufu observes that the responsibilities of the state involve economic development and improvement in the standard of living of the people. Consequently, the position of government as the major single largest employer of labour and as guardian of the social conscience, places the state in a peculiar position to provide leadership in industrial relations as in all other fields of economic and social endeavours. Yesufu argues that this role should necessarily be concerned with the manifestation of policies and by setting the examples through the remuneration and compensation policies. From this vantage position, it could be said that the government exists to serve the interests of every citizen of the country, including that of labour.

At the level of legislative and regulatory responsibility, Yesufu reveals that the role of the state is carried out mainly through the enactment and enforcement of labour and industrial relations legislation which ensures minimum basic and acceptable standards of employment, condition of work, welfare and security, and the institutional framework for the conduct of industrial relations. This suggests that the state, given its sovereign status, possesses the mandate to provide the rules and regulations by which citizens and institutions of government can and should conduct their affairs and relationships within defined authority.

At the level of investigatory and advisory responsibility, Yesufu believes that these functions of the state are generally undertaken by the Federal Ministry of Labour. In the case of Nigeria, it is Ministry of Labour and Employment, and the mandate derives from the ministry's role in the enforcement of the various labour laws and policies. Operationally, the ministry is expected to constantly engage in touring employment establishments under its jurisdiction in order to ensure conformity with labour and industrial relations legislation, investigating breaches and grievances, and generally advising employers on improvements in working conditions and on management/employee relations.

On education and training responsibility, Yesufu believes and argues that it is expected of the state to provide the environment which conduces to education and training of its employees on their duties and obligations as public servants. This way, it is believed that a thorough education will help solve most of the industrial relations problems in the developing countries.

On adjudicatory role of government, Yesufu is of the opinion that, in spite of how much enlightened an industrial or employee relations system may be, there are constant labour grievances, misunderstandings and disputes which need to be settled. The state accordingly provides machinery for intervention and settlement in such cases, particularly in regard to collective disputes, through the appointment of conciliators, arbitrators, and the establishment of industrial relation courts. The foregoing, it is evident that the state does have clearly defined role to play to create the environment for a favourable industrial relations, where employees can be assured of their welfare and the promotion of same. Viewed critically, it is the suggestion of this author that this position of the government could not have been avoided. This role cannot be undermined regardless of the nature of government. However, the scenarios under military regimes have proved otherwise, and this much was characteristic of the Nigeria's experience under the military dictatorship. The 1994 experience when the late dictator descended heavily on the labour organisations for daring to intrude into matters considered a 'no go area', and the consequences are better imagined. However, this paper will point out if the status can be rejigged for fairness, and that will be towards the conclusion of the write-up.

### **The nature and character of the organised labour in Nigeria**

Historically, trade unionism is recorded and believed to have begun in Nigeria in 1912, when government employees in the public service (public sector) formed the Nigerian Civil Service Union (NCSU), an organisation of workers to promote the interest and welfare of its members in relation to conditions of service. However, the passing of the Trades Union Ordinance in 1938- by the then colonial government provided the legal basis for the existence of labour organisations in the country. The ordinance stipulated the rights and privileges, and the conditions under which the union could safely operate. It is noteworthy that overtime, since the coming into effect of the ordinance, several labour organisations have sprung up in the country with virtually workers in every government department from national to local covered under one union or the other.

Perhaps, it is worthwhile to clarify from the onset that industrial harmony, in the context of this chapter, refers to the creation and sustenance of a conducive work environment which results from the deliberate efforts by both representatives of employers and employees. This view cannot be predicated on the position of Chidi and Okpala, who are of the opinion that the interactions between the employers and employees in relations to a work environment are based upon the determination of substantive and procedural issues at industrial, organisational and workplace levels. It is also arguable that industrial harmony encompasses industrial relations or employee relations which consist of the relations that exist between individuals or groups of employees and employers who engage themselves in a way to maximize the productive activities.

According to Tar, the Nigeria labour movement is often described as the veteran of democratic struggle in the country. By this description, it is believed that the Nigeria labour movement has come to be regarded as the triggers to the struggles and agitations against government, particularly the military rule which has held sway in the country more than democratic government labours' experience is such that the organised unions had to contend with stiff repression from the state under a military rule, which does not consider human rights violations as an aberration. Tar emphasised that, the history of Trade Union movement in Nigeria and elsewhere is closely knit with the struggles for democratic values such as human rights,

welfare packages, wage, and equal franchise. Tar however acknowledged that, because of its ideological stance as the defender of workers' right, the labour movement is often neglected when it comes to discussion on democratic struggles. This view about the vibrancy and potency of labour unionism in Nigeria and how the it has engaged with the government on issues of workers welfare in relation to the upholding and promotion of human rights is not far-fetched. This is despite the repressive tendencies of the government aimed at silencing the actions (such as demonstrations, protests and ultimately strikes) of the unions which are seen as irritable and capable of making governance impossible. Perhaps, it should be mentioned that the role of labour goes beyond agitations for improved welfare for its members to include intensified advocacy for democracy and its associated values. This view can be predicated on the position of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), as can be seen in its report in 1998. According to the ILO, unions play important role in guiding and upholding democracy and as defenders of social justice, in particular, by encompassing women, minorities, consumer groups, the unemployed and the growing ranks of working poor in the sphere of action Ironically, this position seems to run counter to the interest of government, particularly the military regime, which considers that as a threat. Regardless of how labour movement is viewed, trade unions or labour organisations will continue to be in the forefront of the yearnings for industrial democracy, otherwise, known as workers participation in the management of their enterprise. However, the question to be raised at this point is, to what extent should the state be involved in Industrial Relations or Employee Relations in the context of the Nigerian public sector? According to Badejo, the role ascribed to the state in industrial relations depends on the ideological bent of the state. Badejo observes that in communist countries, no separate role is envisaged for employers and trade unions, but that they operate on the basis of party directive and the state plan. This is in contrast to the capitalist countries, where the approach is to allow employers and unions reasonable latitude to determine their own affairs within the framework established by the state. The developing countries, as a result of their experience have had to intervene in industrial relations in the interest of the whole economy.

However, as the state is the prime mover of the total social systems, there is no argument as to whether it has a role to play or not. The reason for state intervention under could be considered from the following perspectives-socio-economic, historical and international imperative. Against the background of the inevitability of conflict which results from discord occurs when the goals, interest or values of different individuals or groups in at industrial setting are incompatible. It is relevant to identify in a strict sense, the immediate factors that often trigger labour union's resistance that most times turns out disruptive. For the purpose of this study, these factors will be pin-pointed and they include, among others--government refusal or unwillingness to recognise labour or trade unions, public policies which are perceived an citizens, failure of collective bargaining as a result of hard stance positions, and outright repression of dissenting opinions

In Nigeria, these issues have led to several strike actions and protests, and have remitted in government coming to a standstill in a lot of the occasions. For example, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), and the Trade Union Congress (TUC), had declared a strike in 2019, following months of failed discussions with the government on working conditions and minimum wage, The strike adversely affected the administrative and commercial capital of Abuja and Lagos respectively as government complexes were locked, thus crippling public and civil service across Africa's most populous nation. Similar strikes have taken place, particularly during the military rule which does not respect the fundamental human rights of the people and rule of law. While it is acknowledged that this study is not about strikes and protests, it is necessary to point out that they serve as a means by which labour unions cause disruptions in the economy of a country thereby engendering an atmosphere of instability.

### **Mechanisms or Resolving Public Sector Crisis y Government and Labour**

Conflict resolution mechanisms may differ from organisation to organisation but there are established strategies that have been in use. Whether in private or public sector, the following can be said to be the evolving methods of conflict resolution. These strategies include mediation, conciliation and arbitration. These are referred to as alternate disputes resolution (ADR) mechanisms deployed by disputants, and who are willing to abide by settlement terms: Experience has shown that disputing parties use these ADR methods because they are relatively expeditious, private, and generally much less expensive than resorting to the courts.

The use of any of these methods involves some form of bargaining, commonly referred to as collective bargaining Collective Bargaining. As a concept, Rose reports that the term was originated by Webb to describe the process of agreeing terms and conditions of employment when the representatives of employers, and that of the employees. Rose explains that Collective Bargaining could also be defined as a process whereby representatives of employers and employees jointly determine and regulate decisions pertaining to both substantive and procedural matters within the employment relationship.

In the Nigerian public sector, crisis emanating from industrial disputes of serious magnitude has been subjected to the collective bargaining process. For example, crisis triggered by national strikes that had the tendency to constitute security threats to the government, has had to be resolved through a collective bargaining process. The challenge in this is that the place and role of the state, in most cases, tend to vitiate the effectiveness of this process. This aligns with the view of Adebisi, who lamented the highhandedness of the Nigerian government in respect of labour matter for making nonsense of these mechanisms or procedures for dispute settlement. More often than not, the Nigerian government fails to honour its own agreement with labour, setting poor standards for employers in the private sector. Violations of agreements reached through collective bargaining process have occurred more during the military regime(s) in Nigeria. It is on record, and clearly too, that the military has violated more agreement reached out of collective bargaining than constitutional democracy in Nigeria or the world over. In this instance, Adebisi has cited the failure or reluctance of government to honour a number of agreements with the Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU, and the Nigerian Labour Congress, NLC. The current federal government of Nigeria is in the midst of reaching agreement with the organised labour in respect of minimum wage over which there had been disruptive strike actions which had occasioned security nightmares all over the country.

The interesting thing about the adoption of the collective bargaining process as a mechanism for resolving labour issues in Nigeria appears to be the only means possible hitherto. This is not to prejudice the possibility of either improving on the process for more effective operation or exploring additional measures that will complement the process. At this point, and by way of digression, it is necessary to mention that there are conflict resolution mechanisms peculiar to the private sector. This applies to small businesses, where success often depends or rests on the cohesion of a few people, the loss of trust and productivity can be a challenge to the continued existence and growth of the business. For such businesses, it will be helpful to rely on the prescriptions of Dantagny who had identified the following conflict management strategies that can be deployed in addressing conflict relationships. These include accommodating strategy which essentially entails giving the opposing side what it wants. The use of this strategy occurs when one of the parties wishes to keep the peace or perceives the issue as insignificant; the avoidance strategy, which seeks to put off conflict indefinitely. The mechanism hopes the problem resolves itself without a confrontation; the collaboration strategy works by integrating ideas set out by multiple people. This method is deployed to find a creative solution acceptable to everyone; the compromising strategy is used when parties to a conflict may have to give up elements of their position in order to establish an acceptable solution. This strategy applies in conflicts where the parties hold approximately equivalent power; and lastly, the competition strategy operates in a situation where one side to a conflict wins and other loses. This is also referred to as a zero-sum game. In politics, such is described as winner takes all syndrome.

### **The Public Sector**

The public-sector is a combination of two words which can generically be described as comprising the exclusive administrative space where the government serves as the employer. This can either be the Federal; State (provincial or regional) and Local (municipal or county) government level depending on the nomenclatures adopted by each sovereign country. It also comprises of State owned companies and parastatals, so created to carry out assigned responsibilities for purpose of serving the entire citizens of the country by the provision of basic services constitutionally guaranteed.

### **Labour Organization**

Labour organisations represent exclusively, representatives of a defined group of employers which are concerned with the negotiation, administration, interpretation and enforcer written agreements covering joint understanding as to wages/salaries, rates of pay, hours and other conditions of employment.

## **Governance**

Governance has been defined to refer to structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation. Governance also represents the norms, values and rules of the game through which public affairs are managed in a manner that is transparent, participatory, inclusive and responsive. The term governance is therefore, employed to describe some fundamental processes of modern government that are distinct from the way “governments” traditionally operate. It consists of broad political processes where citizen and group participation in government policy and programmes is vital (Ikeanyibe, 2016). Governance reflects a shifting pattern in styles of governing in which the boundaries within and between public and other sectors have become blurred. This according to Ikeanyibe (2016), entails the use of other sectors (profit and non-profit) for the actual rowing of the boat (provision of services) while the government steers (regulates and coordinates). Significantly, the operating mechanism in governance orientation does not rest on the recourse to sanction an authority and suggests that the institutional/constitutional governing perspective is limited and misleading (Ikeanyibe, 2016).

In all, governance entails a devolved mode of service delivery, the unit of analysis of which is a network of nonprofit organisations, private firms and other governmental units or levels (Ewalt, 2001). Essentially, governance involves partnership in carrying out governmental functions. Such partnerships include local residents, community/regional-serving organisations, the public sector and the private sector (Gibson, 2011). In his preface to the World Bank (1994) study on Sub-Saharan Africa, the then President of the Bank, Barber Conable explains good governance as a public service that is efficient, a judicial system that is reliable, and an administration that is accountable to its public. The term was subsequently popularized by international organisations and donors from this period in their bid to chart a developmental path for countries of the sub-Saharan Africa and the countries that emerged following the disintegration of the old Soviet Union in Europe.

Governance is epitomized by predictable, open, and enlightened policy making i.e. transparent processes, a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos, an executive arm of government accountable for its actions, and a strong civil society participating in public affairs, and all behaving properly under the rule of law. Good governance is a useful concept. It calls needed attention to the institutional underpinnings of effective economic and political management.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The author seeks to apply the conflict theory as the theoretical framework, among the other relevant theories, to underpin the study which focuses on highlighting the nexus between industrial harmony and political stability in the context of crisis management in Nigeria's public sector. This is consequent upon the acute relevance of the theory to the focus of the study which has to do with management of crisis and the fact that conflict is recognized and acknowledged as a part of humanity. According to Chidi and Okpala, Conflict theory is synonymous with the pluralist or the pluralistic frame of reference. In their view, the conflict theory sees the organisation as a coalescence of sectional groups with different values, interests and objectives. Thus, employees have different values and aspirations from those of management, and these values and aspirations are always in conflict with those of management. The two scholars contend that Conflict theorists argue that conflict is inevitable, rational, functional and normal situation in organisations, which is resolved through compromise and agreement or collective bargaining. Conflict theorists view trade unions as legitimate challenges to managerial rule or prerogatives and emphasise competition and collaboration. This view recognises trade unions as legitimate representative organisations which enable groups of employees to influence management decisions.

Rose further states that the pluralist perspective would seem to be much more relevant than the unitary perspective in the analysis of industrial relations in many large unionised organisations and congruent with developments in contemporary society. In the opinion of Wokoma, the conflict theory evolved from the works and ideas of Karl Marx, who contended that conflict is inevitable and stems from inequalities of power and economic wealth inherent in a capitalist economy or society. It should be noted that this study is

not intended to view the issues associated with this study from any ideological perspective, but strictly from an academic and analytical prism.

The relevance of this theory derives from the role of theoretical construction in research which, in the view of Badejo, serves to observe, understand, explain, predict and control events or phenomena. For Fajan, theory 'helps in our understanding of events and problems in the practical world'. By application therefore, the fact of the conflict nature of social groups, such as the organised labour being a coalescence of individual group of people, suggest the inevitability of disagreement in the course of interactions that could lead to conflict or crisis from time to time Therefore, the conflict theory would be most appropriate to underpin this study,

### **Methodology**

The study is literature based, and this involves engaging relevant sources from which to draw a basis and strength for its eventual outcomes, particularly from previous related publications and write-ups. This is inevitable since the information to be deployed is essentially from secondary sources, but will be critically examined. This paper proceeds by identifying the relevant theoretical framework for the study. This is followed with a rehash of the nature, evolution and the operations of the organised labour unionism in Nigeria and will attempt to point out its impact on governance dynamics in the country. The paper will provide insights into the character of the private sector where the government dictates the pace, thereby exposing the nature of the relationship that exists between the government and its employees, who are part of the organised labour.

### **Discussion**

#### **Conflict Resolution mechanisms by the Government**

They can be formal or informal arrangements with the intention of resolving the conflict. Conflicts can be resolved in a variety of ways, including Conciliation, arbitration, The National Industrial Court and Board of Inquiry and Investigation.

Conciliation – The law assume that labour and management would have exhausted the voluntary procedures before referring the matter to the Minister of Labour. In referring the matter to the Minister, it also assumed that it has been brought before a mediator. If after fourteen days, the dispute is unsettled, then a written report is to be submitted to the Minister who will appoint a Conciliator. The conciliator is expected to be impartial and to enquire into the causes and the nature of the conflict and by negotiation with the parties to effect a settlement. The terms of settlement approved by the minister would be binding on both parties.

#### **Arbitration**

Failure to resolve a dispute at the conciliation stage automatically calls for arbitration. This is normally handled by a body referred to as the Industrial Arbitration Panel (IAP). It is composed of a chairman, Vice-Chairman and at least ten other members. Agreement or disagreement between the two parties must be reached within forty two days or otherwise as stated by the minister of labour.

#### **The National Industrial Court**

This is the last stage upon which a dispute may be handled. The court consists of a president and four other members. All members are appointed by the Federal Executive Council on the advice of the Advisory Judicial Committee. The court has to, among other things make awards for the purpose of settling trade disputes. All judgments of the court of the court must be submitted in writing and it is empowered to enforce its judgment in any way it deems fit.

#### **Board of Inquiry and Investigation**

This is the least used of the statutory procedures used by government to settle trade disputes. It is not a logical follow up of the IAP and NIC, but it handles disputes not deemed appropriate for the IAP and NIC. The Minister of Labour is empowered by the Trade Disputes Act of 1976 as amended to set up such an inquiry.



### **How effective is the Efforts of Government at Handling Trade Disputes**

The issues of strikes, lockouts and absenteeism emanating from conflict have not been settled for all times despite government involvement. This does not mean the government is ineffective, rather, the methods employed by the government are not being effectively utilized to resolve conflicts. Thus Ubeku (2018) states that on the basis of our experience in Nigeria, statutory prohibition of strikes does not necessarily prevent workers going on strike. The workers are, of course, aware that sanctions in the country's labour law are generally not enforced.

### **Industrial Harmony and Political Stability: Any Nexus?**

To be able to provide a rational and an objective response to this question, it is necessary to aggregate the elements that constitute industrial harmony and political stability by drawing from the insights on the terms as highlighted in the foregoing. As indicated earlier in this study, since the relationship between the government and the labour organisation are structurally antithetical in terms of objectives and functions it is therefore unavoidable that there will always be frictions from time to time as both sides seek to achieve their aims and objectives. But for the sake of peace and stability, it is expected that both sides will continue to engage and synergise to create and advance industrial harmony, a sine qua non to stability, to ultimately provide a conducive environment for governance. Ensuring peace and stability will facilitate the discharge of the world-wide constitutional responsibility to governments in terms of provision of security and welfare for the citizens.

Consequently, the following themes can be identified and posited:

1. That crisis/conflict in human interactions is inevitable; 2. That industrial harmony and political stability are two inseparable phenomena;
3. That the former (industrial harmony) is a sine qua non for the latter political stability;
4. That both conditions can be facilitated by the state (government) and labour organisations,
5. That there exists a link (nexus) between industrial harmony and political stability.

This study is inclined to observe that industrial disputes, if poorly managed or not addressed, will ultimately lead to protests, demonstrations and strikes, Workers, worldwide have always resorted to strike actions when the sides to disputes fail to reach mutual agreement. In the case of the public sector crisis, where the Nigerian industrial relations system today to be replete with cases of violations of negotiated agreements as a result of executive lawlessness, the resort to strike actions by workers, usually organised and called by the organised (central) labour organisation seems to have been institutionalised

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

So far, attempts have been made in this study to reflect and assess the role of government on crisis management in the Nigeria public sector in relation to the link between industrial harmony and political stability. The study sought to determine if there exists a nexus in-between industrial harmony and political stability and proceeded to describe the variables identifiable and as conceived for the study. The study prescribed the applicable theoretical framework deployed to underpin the research, and carried out considerable survey of relevant literature from which information needed to contextualise the focus envisaged. The study found out that, given the humanity-linked nature of conflict, its management in the public sector, particularly in Nigeria will continue to be an unavoidable responsibility of the government. To this end, it was observed that strikes as a dominant manifestation of conflict could be harmful to the economy thus the basis for government intervention. In the final analysis, the paper observed that the government plays a dominant role in conflict resolution, though at times it appears to be in the middle of the road. Consequently, the study concluded that crisis or conflict as a phenomenon will continue to exist in human society but that its management, in terms of resolution mechanisms, can be improved for positive impact. The government is also encouraged as an employer to identify employee's needs and management should be more prominent in the area of collective bargaining in order to forestall or minimize conflict. Government should further ensure that it does not renege on its agreement with the unions and neither should the unions make unreasonable demands from the government. In addition, all stakeholders to the mechanism of collective bargaining process should endeavour to be transparent and committed to terms of agreement to

avoid the tendency for any form of frictions that could spark crisis. Moreover, organised labour unions should evolve, promote and implement sound policy on education and training of their members to imbibe the culture of tolerance and extreme understanding in responding to policy decisions of government, so as to guarantee positive interface.

Finally, it may be suggested that government should not impose rigid and unflinching laws on union activities, but should endeavour to manage conflicts to the benefit of all. Silencing unions is to declare in effect that the workers should continue to suffer in silence.

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