

UNIONISM AND PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This concept paper examined Unionism and productivity in Nigeria Tertiary institutions. The author(s) have attempted to explore an issue, which through could be obvious to some, have significantly failed to capture scholarly attention. The paper explore the linkage between Trade Unions and productivity in higher education in Nigeria. The author observed that where there is agreement the productivity of staff are high; but where there is an infringement of rights, the disputes that result lead to academic disruptions and poor implementations of programmes. It was therefore, recommended that governments in Nigeria should acknowledge the important of collective bargaining as the central principle of industrial relations.

Keywords: Unionism, collective Bargaining, Productivity, Tertiary Institution.

I. INTRODUCTION

The mutual coming together by two or more people to foster and pursue a common goal is as old as the creation. It takes two to tangle. It is not empirically possible for normal person to survive in isolation. Over the years, there have been unions of mutual minds which always bring good changes in social, economic, political and in educational spheres. The constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) outlines certain fundamental rights that all citizens should enjoy. One of these basic rights is the freedom of association and in particular to form or to belong to trade unions.

Unionism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria is dichotomized into student unionism and labour unionism. Unionization by students as an organized social movement is important both for the individual students and society. It is important for the students in the sense that it builds their self – concepts and leadership potentials. To the society, it is known to play important roles in the process of facilitating democratization, engineering freedom of expression and above all, providing the check and balances in the welfare of students on campuses. On the other hands, the union could be irresponsible, aggressive, destructive to institutional authorities. Conversely, labour unions could be pragmatic and heuristic in their approach to taking care of the interests of their members and on the other hands could choose to be self-conceited.

II. DISCUSSION

The Emergence of Unionism in Nigeria

Historically, the concept of trade unionism started early in the industrial revolution, when people left farming as occupation and began to work for employers, often in poor conditions and for low wages. Initially, the employers were hostile to labour unionism. Unions were illegal for many years in most countries. There were severe sanctions for attempting to organize unions (Durosaro and Akinsolu, 2007). In Nigeria, labour unionism has a checkered history of resistance, proliferation, centralization and decentralization (Maduemezi, 2005). The first trade unions of workers in wage employment

was Nigerian Civil Service Union organized in 1912 concerned with the Nigerianization and efficiency in the civil service, which eventually became a pressure group proper in the 1940s. The Railway workers union was formed in 1932 while Nigeria union of Teachers (NUT) entered education industry in 1931. The growth of unionism was further enhanced with the enactment of the Trade union ordinance of 1938 (Efanga, 2007).

In Nigeria, there is a university and college union, recognized at a national level and by individual institutions locally for the purpose of negotiating salaries, and conditions of service. Some powerful staff unions that exist in Nigerian tertiary institutions, according to Okeke (2004) include: The Academic staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Association of Nigeria University Professional Administrators (ANUPA), Polytechnic senior staff association (POSSA), Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) College of Education academic staff Union (COEASU), Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU); and Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU). Also, there is National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) in the universities. These unions are officially recognized by stakeholders in Nigerian education industry and they are involved in collective bargaining to achieve their objectives. Recently, there seems to be some legal constraints to unionism at Nigerian tertiary institutions. With the advent of Trade Union (Amendment) Act 2005, some radical reforms have been introduced to labour unionism. Significantly, the Act seeks to ensure that membership of Trade union is voluntary and not mandatory.

Contribution of Unions To The Management Of Higher Education

The roles of the unions in management of higher education include maintenance of peace and making positive contributions in time of crisis. It is often not realized that the bench mark of unionism involves bargaining, consultation and reconciliation. These are healthy measures aimed at ensuring industrial peace between employees and various layers of authorities in the educational sector. In spite of the power that

unions could wield, their leaders should be careful of the danger of infantile behaviour and actions that are capable of fueling unpleasant outcomes. When members of department for instance find it difficult to relate freely with their head or to one another, productivity and effectiveness which could often be attained through team work failed.

In order to enhance the participation of their members in various aspects of University activities and bring them in line with developments both within and outside, the labour Unions should invest significantly in their education through lectures and symposia.

The Dynamics of Student Unionism

The student Union, student government, student senate or student association as may be sometimes called or addressed is an organization of students for the purpose of serving the collective interest of student with respect to general welfare matters. Student union should be great both in quality assurance and productivity of the education industry. Certain negative tendencies may sometimes arise as a result of student involvement in student unionism, particularly from a particular institution to affecting those nationwide, thereby leading to strike action, which impedes academic behaviour of students. In some situation, involving student unionism, most student leaders give up intellectual pursuits in preference to quick money by engaging in politics, political thugs which adversely affects productivity of such students.

However, it could be recalled that student union Government (SUG) championed the call for “Ali must go”, when diplomatic precaution failed to work. This was a landmark achievement by student unionism in Nigeria. Also, students organized protests against actions of the University authorities meted unjustly against lecturers. Evidence to this abounds in almost all Nigerian Universities. For instance, students (SGU) demonstrated against the unjust victimization of lecturers in University of Ilorin, concerning their participation in ASUU strike (Fashoyin, 2002).

The students union also unmasked lecturers that engaged in the exorbitant price tagged on handouts sold to students. Their protest helped to reduced cost of such handouts in campuses, and have successfully ended their sales in most Nigerian Universities (Harbor – Peters, 2002). Jacks (1975) who was once the President of the student union in Britain believed that the press has a negative perception of students unionism. Reporting his experience as the President of National Union of students of Britain (1971) – 1978) said the attitude of the press to students unionism was not favourable. Udeze (2006) observed that the behaviour of students in our Universities is abysmal. He stated that incessant crises and other vices abound in our Universities, for example, examination malpractices, cultism, raping, participating in political thuggery, and armed robbery. These developments raised a lot of questions about the student union leaders. What is the general perception of stakeholder toward students union leaders?

However, there are some good and successful union leaders with good followership who exhibit a number of

qualities some of which are listed here: (1) Union leaders should be diligent; that is, they should be hardworking because there is dignity in labour or hardwork. This way the trade unionists will encourage other workers to also be hardworking and not be lazy; (2) Union leaders should be knowledgeable; that is, they should not be dullards or ignoramuses who are neither in the know or abreast of contemporary development. Trade union leaders should have in-depth knowledge of trade union administration as well as various labour laws relating to workers’ welfare, registration of trade unions, declaration of trade disputes etc; (3) Trade union leaders should be diplomatic; that is, they must be tactful in dealing with people because human beings are the most complex and difficult to deal with. With diplomacy good union leaders will be able to present unpleasant things or requests in pleasant ways; (4). Trade union leaders must be energetic; that is, they must have vigour, strength or capacity to handle the Herculean tasks involved in trade unionism. Trade union leaders most times work under a lot of pressure; requiring them to do a lot of things within a limited period. So, trade union leadership is not for the physically weak.

Negotiating The Labour Agreement

Collective bargaining, interchangeably called negotiations, is a common feature of everyday life. The position of international labour organization (ILO) is that collective Bargaining is an essential mechanism of industrial democracy. Union and management officials in case of this paper – ASUU and the state, enter collective bargaining with their own ideas of an acceptable settlement, although both parties know the other will not agree entirely with their position. Therefore, both parties usually enter negotiations with a variety of acceptable positions, which gives them some room for maneuvering. In June 2013, lecturers in all public Universities embarked on an indefinite strike over the failure of the federal government to implement the 2009 agreement with their Union. The strike lasted for five months. The main issue in dispute was funding for Universities. The government had agreed to raise the level of public funding for the Universities to a certain agreed level. It failed to do this citing shortfall in projected revenue during the period. Thus, collective bargain could be viewed as a process whereby union and management officials attempt to resolve conflicting interests over various working conditions in a way which will not only sustain but also enrich their continuing relationship. In order to have effective and sustainable collective bargaining the following situations are sine – qua – none: (1) No victimization by management/employer of staff partaking in union activities; (2) Disposition to make concessions by both parties, (management and Union). (3) Willingness to dialog with unions; and (4) Government/management willing to respect and implement agreements reached through negotiation.

Respect is not synonymous with friendship – one can dislike and respect an individual at the same time. Management and labour (union) negotiators seldom socialize with each other; however, they can respect one another for their technical

competence and experience. The issue in collective negotiation of Universities in Nigeria has been the violation of the (ILO) provision that parties to collective negotiation should provide their respective negotiators with the necessary mandate to conduct and conclude negotiations (ASUU, 2009). ASUU repeatedly accuses the federal Government of “a flagrant abuse of the principles of collective bargaining” as experienced in 1996 and 2000 when, after negotiation had been concluded and the Minister of Education had been consulted on the Agreement reached, a new Minister refused to allow the Government’s Negotiating Team to sign the agreement reached.

Education And Productivity In Nigeria

How to improve the productivity of Nigerian employees has been the topic of many seminars, conferences and workshops. It is a recognized fact that education has a symbiotic relationship with economy of the nation. While the education sector produces manpower for the economy, the economy must sustain education and motivate the union members, to be productive. Productivity is said to be the measure of how well resources are brought together in organization and utilized for accomplishing a set of results. Productivity is the measure of how efficiently resources (time, physical resources and money) are combined to create given quantum of commodities. Thus the productivity of an employee is seen as the relationship between units of labour input and units of output. At the university level, evaluation of academic achievement is the rating of possession of paper qualification at first class, second class upper, second class lower, third class or pass degree. The educational implications of this is that for education to be productive, it is not just the number of graduates of the system that matters but how competent the graduates are in meeting the societal needs and aspirations (Fadipe, 2000).

Sofoluwe (2000) discussed the diversity in productivity measurement in the school system and offered three dimensional typologies concepts of static productivity ratios, dynamic productivity indices and surrogate productivity indices. In view of Sofaluwe (2000), static productivity ratios are ratios of aggregated output measures to input at a particular point in time such as 1999 out put/1999 input. The dynamic indices are the comparison of the static productivity ratios of past and current periods as:

Out put 1999/input 1999

Out put 1990/ in put 1990

The surrogate productivity indices employ variables with high correlation to productivity such as profit earned, customer satisfaction and quality of out put over a given time. Based on the rate at which the educational sector in Nigeria turn out graduates yearly it could be inferred that the system is productive. However if examined qualitatively, such a conclusion could be erroneous because they are hardly relevant to socio- economic needs of the nation. For the way forward, the system must remove the various political, ethnic, quota, economic and other social considerations that compromise quality assurance in the system.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In this concept paper, the author has attempted to highlight the challenges pertaining to Unionism and productivity in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The author concludes that, the principal aim of Trade Unions is to promote their members’ interests. To improve the productivity of higher education industry in Nigeria, the unions should devise other strategies devoid of incessant strikes and violence in bargaining for improved welfare package for their members. The role of solid professional union leader in smooth industrial relations is universally recognized.

Having so far seen the challenges that trade union leaders are saddled with, in productivity in Nigerian tertiary institutions, this paper hereby makes the following recommendation. Members of various unions should ensured that they are not engaged in excessive demands, inversion of management rights and other negative actions which are likely to be regarded as racketeering especially if the end result is personal enrichment of individual. Successive governments in Nigeria should acknowledge the important of collective bargaining as the central principle of industrial relations.

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