

# Strike Actions and its Effects on Industrial Relations in Nigeria

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## Abstract

*In recent times, agitations for better working conditions have often resulted in industrial disputes culminating in strikes, work to rule, lock outs and other actions. This is because, workers all over the world desire recognition, better salaries and wages and great improvements in the terms and conditions of work. However, despite efforts made to ensure effective stability in industrial relations at various organisations and institutions in Nigeria, strike still occurs through economic strike and sympathy strike. The study thus examines strike actions and its effects on Industrial Relations in Nigeria using federal medical center (FMC), Keffi as a study. Descriptive research design was adopted, while the data used for the empirical analysis were generated through structured questionnaires and were analyzed using binary logistic regression estimation method. Findings from the study showed that economic strike has a significant effect on industrial relations among FMC staff in Keffi. More so, the study shows that sympathy strike has a significant effect on industrial relations among FMC staff in Keffi. Based on these findings, the study recommends that there is the need for governments, business organizations, and employers of labour, employees, organizations and all stakeholders in industrial relations to embrace collective bargaining as the machinery to resolve industrial disputes. This would promote industrial harmony, enhance employees' performance, increase productivity and improve the living standards of the generality of the people.*

Keywords: Strike, Industrial relations, Industrial Disputes, Sympathy strike and Economic strike

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In every modern economic system, it is inevitable that forces of labour and capital would have dissenting views with each side resorting to measures through which it can press home its demands. In this vein, collective bargaining and strikes are important mechanisms through which the worker can engage the employer in a dialogue to meet its demands. Strikes if unregulated may spiral out of control with attendant consequences for the polity. Employees occupy a very strategic place in an organization because of their centrality to the production process. They contribute a very indefinable role both in the achievement of various organization goals and objectives as well as the government economic programme. However, for employees to perform their crucial role effectively and efficiently there must exist a strong cordial relationship between the employer and employee of such organizations. Although conflict in an organization is inevitable, it must however be noted that friction between employer and the employee must be reduced through a vibrant collective bargaining process to ensure smooth operation in the business of the organization. Conflicts are inevitable in every organization. There will always be conflicts and disagreements between employers and employees, either on wages or on the general condition of service of the workers. Conflict in Nigerian industries has become perennial and disturbing so much that it has hampered the growth of some organizations in Nigeria.

In many organizations in Nigeria today, internal (intrapersonal) and interpersonal conflicts are consuming so much organizational time and attention that organizations are starting to look as though conflict is their primary business (Ojielo, 2012). This development is largely due to the inability of leaders in Nigerian work organizations to view the management of conflict as systematically as they view information, human resources, and financial management systems. Instead, conflict is viewed and handled in piecemeal and is considered as local events. The inability to view and manage workplace conflicts systematically has therefore rendered conflict dysfunctional in some organizations. This is evidenced by the high frequency of strike action, unhealthy rivalry between and among sub-units and individuals within an organization, sabotage at workplace, slow work, labour turnover, absenteeism, lack of productivity, general inefficiency, high rate of industrial accident, low morale, withholding of vital knowledge and a host of others that are being perpetrated by workers in workplaces.

Managing conflict is critical for sustaining organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Growth in multinational companies and international alliances (Kanter & Corn, 1994), as well as increased diversity within a country's workforce (Jackson,

## *Strike Actions and its Effects on Industrial Relations in Nigeria*

Stone), suggest that individuals from diverse backgrounds will be working together in organizations. An increase in diversity is often associated with an increase in conflict (Olakita, 2015). Industrial relations deals with the problems of employment, conditions of work, pay, security of employment and other issues such as labour grievances, trade disputes, and their resolution within the frame work of rules and regulations, mutually to by employer and its employees. In the words of Marshall (1996), Industrial relations, (also known as labour relations) is the interdisciplinary and somewhat diffuse study of the institutions and rule-fixing processes of the labour. It's core subject-matter has always been collective bargaining between trade unions or analogous organisations on the other hand. The term "employee relation" found increasingly in management writing, was once a synonym for industrial relations.

The unpleasant side of industrial relation and on which the public often associate industrial union is strike. The strike shows a breakdown of cordial relationship between the employee represented by the labour union and employer or management. Strike are the most overt and significant aspect of industrial conflict. But they are unfortunately only a part of the phenomenon of conflict. Most strikes involved attempts by either the union or management to change the bargaining power of the other party. When a strike is adequately used for the demand of the employees, it can force employers to concede to the demands of the employees. It can impose exorbitant costs and thereby induce them to reach agreement. A strike may be used to effect a change in the structure of bargaining and to win substantive demand by workers. Industrial relations and collective bargaining can therefore be described as the industrial machinery for determining wages and conditions of employment with a view to improving the quality of work life of the employees. It encourages the power of the union to enter contract with management to determine the terms and conditions of service of its members as well as establish the procedure for handling disputes. The following questions were raised for this paper;

- i. What effect does economic strike has on industrial relations among FMC staff in Keffi?
- ii. What effect does sympathy strike has on industrial relations among FMC staff in Keffi?

In accordance to the research questions raised, the following hypotheses were tested:

**H01:** Economic strike has no significant effect on industrial relations among FMC staff in Keffi

**H02:** Sympathy strike has no significant effect on industrial relations among FMC staff in Keffi

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Conceptual Framework**

#### **2.1.1 Concept of Industrial Relations**

Industrial relation is the process and institution through which employment is managed, such as trade union and employers' associations. Cordova (1980) defines industrial relations as "the process of interest accommodation by which conditions of work are fixed; relations are regulated and power is shared in the field of labour". Akanji (2010), on his part sees industrial relations as "the whole web of human interactions at work which is predicated upon and arises out of the employment contract". Both definitions recognized that industrial relations is concerned with the systems, rules and procedures used by union and employers to determine the reward for effort and other conditions of employment, to protect the interest of the employed and their employers and to regulate the ways in which employers treat their employees. Mgbe (2013) emphasized that the term industrial relations is relevant in and applies to the context within which modern society organizes its various economic and production services.

#### **2.1.2 Concept of Strike action**

"Strike" is defined as the cessation of work by a body of persons employed and acting in combination, or a concerted refusal, or a refusal under a common understanding of any number of persons employed to continue to work for an employer in consequence of a dispute done as a means of compelling their employer or any person or body of persons employed to accept or not to accept terms of employment and physical conditions of work. In this definition, "cessation of work" includes deliberately working at less than usual speed or with less than usual efficiency while "refusal to continue to work" includes a refusal to work at usual speed or with usual efficiency. Strike is a breach of contract by the employee which entitles the employer to dismiss him, provided the employer dismisses all those who are actually on strike at the date of their dismissal and does not offer to re-engage some of them within three months after their dismissal. In this event, the

## *Strike Actions and its Effects on Industrial Relations in Nigeria*

industrial tribunal has no jurisdiction to decide whether or not the dismissals are fair or unfair. This is the “no picking or choosing” rule.

When a union calls out its members on strike, it is in the belief that the strike will exert pressure on the employer (and sometimes indirectly on government) to take a desired action, such as conceding a demand for improvement in terms of employment, or ameliorating an unsatisfactory working conditions. Most strikes involve attempts by the union to change the bargaining position of the management. When properly used, a strike can force management to concede the demand of the union. Apart from the use of the strike by the workers to win substantive demands, a strike may be used to effect a change in the structure of bargaining, such as changing from enterprise bargaining to multi-employers bargaining, or vice versa. In spite of the usefulness of the strike option in union-management relationships, it imposes cost both on the two sides of industry and the economic as a whole the cost of strikes to the union and its members represents loss of income to both, in addition to social costs, represented by the bad image which it imposes on them. On the employer's side, the costs of the strike are in terms of lost output and profit, as well as the social stigma which it imposes. For the economy, loss in productivity, which affects the Gross Domestic Product, constitutes the most significant quantitative cost to society. The significance of this loss in national output in one firm is more worrisome because it often leads to a chain of events in other establishment. For example, a strike of some duration at a cement factory may adversely affect other establishments. Suppliers to the factory would have to curtail or suspend operation.

### **Economic strike**

Economic strike is one of the popular worldwide strikes which workers usually embark upon. In South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana, it is a form of common strike among workers (Adavbiele, 2015; Bendix, 2015; Seniwoliba, 2013). Bendix (2015) is of the view that an economic strike arises due to the refusal or failure by employers to meet the demands of workers related to wages and other economic issues namely: benefits and working conditions. According to Nel *et al.* (2013), an economic strike occurs as a result of the demands that pertain to wages, fringe benefits or any other matter of an economic nature regarding the interest of workers. Workers usually initiate this strike with the view to putting pressure on the employer in order to enforce their economic demands, for instance, an increase in wages, salaries and bonuses. Employees agitate for an increase in their wages and salaries, allowances, bonuses, and other entitlements, like an increase in annual leave, privilege leave and casual leave (Odeku, 2014). Clark (2012) also expresses the similar view that an economic strike is the most common and popular form of strike that workers frequently embark upon worldwide. Economic strike is the most common type of strike that workers in Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa embark upon. The discussion below is centered on sympathy or secondary strike.

### **Sympathy or secondary strike**

Sympathy or secondary strike is another type of strike that workers and their trade unions often embark on in Africa (Clark, 2012). As the name suggests, this type of strike is a solidarity action that is often embarked upon by workers who are not part of the labour dispute. A sympathy strike is normally used by trade unions to express moral and fractional support of other employees who are on strike with the view to putting pressure on the primary employer to address the concerns of the employees. Clark (2012) also argues that this type of strike is embarked upon as a form of solidarity for other unions. It is a deliberate attempt by other unions to put indirect pressure on the employer to meet the demands of his or her employees. Adaviele (2015) also expresses the same view that a sympathetic strike is where workers of one organisation or unit join their colleagues in other organisations who are on strike to compel the primary employer in meeting the demands of his employees. In Nigeria, the 2014 Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASUU) went on sympathy strike in support of a strike action declared by Academic Staff Union of Universities (Adaviele, 2015).

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

Researchers (Arputharaj & Gayatri, 2014; Awe & Ayeni, 2012; Selala, 2014) have found that one effect of strike action is that it leads to poor employment relationships, especially between the employers and employees. Arputharaj and Gayatri (2014) found that when employees and their unions embark on strike action there is the possibility of unhealthy relationships in the organisation. According to Arputharaj and Gayatri (2014), each time employees embark on a strike action the trust in the organisation is said to be broken and this eventually affects the employment relations. A similar study conducted by Awe and Ayeni (2012) on the effect of conflict on employment relations in Nigeria has discovered that strikes

## *Strike Actions and its Effects on Industrial Relations in Nigeria*

have negative implications for employment relations in an organisation. According to the authors, action can bring about a division between the parties in the workplace which can have lasting effects on the kind of relationship that exists between them. Awe and Ayeni (2012) contend that due to strike action, parties might view each other as enemies and this may have a major implication on the employment relations that exist within the working environment. Selala (2014) also found that strike action can impact negatively on the employment relationship. According to Selala (2014), during strike action there is hostility between employees and the employer because the employer may perceive the employees as opposing his authority. Findings by Awe and Ayeni (2012) and Selala (2014) affirm the previous assertion made by Arputharaj and Gayatri (2010) that strike action may contribute to unhealthy relationship among the parties. The following discussion focuses on how strike action may lead to employee dismissal. Olusegun Ajayi (2014) found that strike action by the Academic Staff Unions of Universities in Nigeria created conflict between the management of the universities and trade unions and this impacted negatively on the working relationships among the parties.

Ayeni and Kolawole (2014) explored continual conflicts and strikes within selected organisations in the Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study found that there is a direct link between strike and conflict. Ayeni and Kolawole (2014), further discovered that strike action can increase the possibility of conflict in the organisation if there is no proper dialogue between the trade union members and the employer. Similarly, Ayeni and Kolawole (2014) explored the incessant conflicts and strikes and their effects on the achievement of goals of business education in the tertiary institution in the Ekiti State. Their findings revealed that incessant strikes accounted for the massive student failure rates in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Asaolu (2010) argues that learning is one of the core activities of university education. Asaolu (2010) believes that effective learning in school occurs when the stakeholders adequately perform their roles. Also, effective learning is achieved when students are emotionally and psychologically stable. Contrary to this, when there is strike action, effective learning among students is disrupted. According to Asaolu (2010), disruption arises when academic activities are substantially impeded due to strike action by university employees. Olukunle (2011) in his study discovered that effective learning in schools is disrupted when there is strike or industrial action. Olukunle (2011) agrees with Asaolu (2010) that effective learning occurs when learners are emotionally and psychologically stable. Therefore, disruption in effective learning may occur when the staff of the university decides to embark on strike action.

### **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

The study will be based on the following theories as closely examined below:

#### **2.3.1 Unitary Theory**

The unitary frame of reference is credited to Alan Fox who proposed in 1966. The unitary perspective views the organisation as pointing towards a single or unified authority and loyalty structure. Emphasis under the unitary perspective is placed on common values, interest and objectives. Unitarism in essence implies the absence of factionalism within the enterprise (Fajana, 2000). A core assumption of unitary approach is that management and staff, and all members of the organization share the same objectives, interests and purposes; thus working together, hand-in-hand, towards the shared mutual goals. Furthermore, unitary theory has a paternalistic approach where it demands loyalty of all employees. Trade unions are deemed as unnecessary and conflict is perceived as disruptive. The theory is applicable to study as from the employee point of view the theory means that: Working practices should be flexible. Individuals should be business process improvement oriented, multi-skilled and ready to tackle with efficiency whatever tasks are required. It also means that if a union is recognized, its role is that of a further means of communication between groups of staff and the company. The theory as well emphasizes on good relationships and sound terms and conditions of employment.

According to Rose (2008), under the unitary perspective, trade unions are regarded as an intrusion into the organisation from outside, competing with management for the loyalty of employees. The theory also ensures employee participation in workplace decisions is enabled. This helps in empowering individuals in their roles and emphasizes team work, innovation, creativity, discretion in problem-solving, quality and improvement group's etc. Finally, the theory ensures that employees should feel that the skills and expertise of managers supports their endeavors. The theory is applicable to study as from the employer point of view, unitary theory means that: Staffing policies should try to unify effort, inspire and motivate employees. The organization's wider objectives should be properly communicated and discussed with staff. Reward systems should be so designed as to foster to secure loyalty and commitment. Line managers should take ownership of their

team/staffing responsibilities. Staff-management conflicts - from the perspective of the unitary framework - are seen as arising from lack of information, inadequate presentation of management's policies. The personal objectives of every individual employed in the business should be discussed with them and integrated with the organization's needs.

### 2.3.2 Conflict theory

Conflict theory is synonymous with the pluralist or the pluralistic frame of reference which is also credited to Alan Fox who proposed it in 1966. Conflict theory views the organisation as combination 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. Conflict theorists argue that conflict is inevitable, rational, functional and normal situation in organizations, which is resolved through compromise and agreement or collective bargaining. Conflict theorists view trade unions as legitimate challenges to managerial rule or prerogatives and emphasize competition and collaboration. This view recognizes trade unions as legitimate representative organizations which enable groups of employees to influence management decisions (Rose, 2008). 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 unionized organizations and congruent with developments in contemporary society. The study applies Conflict theory as it engages managers or state functionaries to be tolerant of unions or labour based political organisations and realizes that from the point of view of the trade unions, legitimacy of their rule is not automatic but rather the management control function should be shared with labour.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive research design because of the nature of the variables that were at hand, to produce data required for quantitative analysis and to allow simultaneous description of views, perceptions and beliefs at any single point in time (White, 2000). The population of the study covers selected staff of FMC, Keffi, which is about 786 as indicated. The sampling methodology for the survey is simple random sampling. In a simple random sample, every FMC staff has an equal probability of being chosen.

**Table 1: Selected Staff Categories**

S/N	Staff Categories	Population
1	Admin staff	274
2	Medical Staff	384
3	Accounts/Bursary	128
	<b>Total</b>	<b>786</b>

Source: Field survey, 2018

Thus, the sample size was estimated from the Smith (1984) sample size formula given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{3 + Ne^2}$$

Margin error = 5%

Where;

N = population size  
 3 = is constant  
 e = is Margin of error (5%)

$$n = \frac{786}{3 + 786(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{786}{3 + 786(0.0025)}$$

## Strike Actions and its Effects on Industrial Relations in Nigeria

$$n = \frac{786}{4.965}$$

$$n = 158$$

The instrument employed for this study was a structured questionnaire. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the researcher to the selected FMC staff in Keffi. The questionnaires were closed ended questions and were designed to keep the questionnaire to a reasonable length and this encouraged response and validity in terms of the responsiveness of return. It also minimizes the risk of misinterpretation unlike the open-ended questions. Lastly, it permitted easier tabulation and interpretation by the researcher. Reliability test was conducted to examine the extent to which the measurement instruments will produce consistent scores when the same groups of individuals are repeatedly measured under the same conditions (Amin, 2015). The study administered one kind of questionnaire to selected staff of FMC and using Cronbach reliability test, Alpha values of 0.7531 (as shown in Table 2) were gotten indicating that the tool was suitable for analysis.

**Table 2: Result of Reliability Test**

Variable	Alpha
Economic Strike	0.7125
Sympathy strike	0.7874
Industrial relations	0.7724
Test to scale	0.7531

*Field Survey, 2018*

The data was analysed using the binary logistic regression method. The binary logistic regression was used to establish the relationship that exists between dependent and independent variables. Also, postulated hypotheses were tested using the value of binary logistic regression estimation technique. Minitab statistical package was used to present the data in the form of tables.

The model below is specified to tests the two hypotheses as follows:

$$L_{INR} = \ln\left(\frac{P_i}{1-P_i}\right) + \beta_0 + \beta_1 EC + \mu_i$$

$$L_{INR} = \ln\left(\frac{P_i}{1-P_i}\right) + \beta_0 + \beta_2 SS + \mu_i$$

$P_i$ , the probability of event occurring

$(1 - P_i)$ , the probability of event not occurring

Where;

EC = Economic strike

SS = Sympathy strike

INR = Industrial relations

$\beta_0$  to  $\beta_2$  = The parameter estimates of economic strike and sympathy strike

$\mu_i$  = Error term

The justification for the use of the binary logistic regression estimation method is because, it's simple to compute with less errors and it helps to illustrate the directional outcome and strength of the variable. It further shows a precise quantitative measurement of the degree of relationships between dependent and independent variables. As a rule of thumb, the usefulness of regression is further to assess the level, nature, and significance of the relationships among the variables, as well as to test the existence of robustness among the variables.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the formulated null hypothesis for the study was tested. In testing the hypothesis which partly satisfies the objective of this study, the study adopts 5% level of significance and a critical t-value of 1.96. Conclusion would however be taken based on the probability values (PV). If the PV is less than 5% or 0.05 (that is  $PV < 0.05$ ), it implies that the variable in question is statistically significant at 5% level; otherwise, it is not significant at that level.

##### Hypothesis One

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Economic strike has no significant effect on industrial relations among FMC staff in Keffi

**Table 3: Regression Model Result**

Dependent Variable: Industrial relations			
Method: Least Squares			
Variable	Coefficient	t-value	Prob.(p)
Constant	0.87111	0.32176	0.1179
Economic strike	0.12451	2.45460	0.0012
R-squared	0.7415		
Adjusted R-squared	0.6952		
F-statistic	4.25524		
Prob(F-statistic)	0.00124		
Durbin Watson	1.67		

*Source: Authors Computation Using Minitab (2018)*

##### Test of Hypotheses One:

The estimates from the regression result in Table 3 revealed that the calculated t-value for the Economic strike is 2.45 and the critical value is 1.96 at 95% confidence level. This implies that t-calculated is greater than t-critical (that is  $2.45 > 1.96$ ) or  $p < 0.05$ , that is  $0.0012 < 0.05$ . Since  $p < 0.05$ , we reject the null hypothesis (H<sub>01</sub>) and accept the alternative hypothesis and conclude that economic strike has a significant effect on industrial relations among FMC staff in Keffi

##### Hypothesis Two

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Sympathy strike has no significant effect on industrial relations among FMC staff in Keffi

**Table 4: Regression Model Result**

Dependent Variable: Industrial relations			
Method: Least Squares			
Variable	Coefficient	t-value	Prob.(p)
Constant	1.12792	5.00011	0.7479
Sympathy strike	0.64819	2.21452	0.0121
R-squared	0.64111		
Adjusted R-squared	0.51244		
F-statistic	7.25411		
Prob(F-statistic)	0.00111		
Durbin Watson	2.012		

*Source: Authors Computation Using Minitab (2018)*

##### Test of Hypotheses Two:

From regression result in Table 4, the calculated t-value for the relationship between sympathy strike and industrial relation is 2.21 and the p-value computed is 0.012 at 95% confidence levels. Since the p-value is less than 0.05 used as the level of

significance, we reject the null hypothesis (H02) and conclude that there is a significant relationship between strike and industrial relations among FMC staff in Keffi.

Table 5: Regression Model Result

Dependent Variable: Arbitration			
Method: Least Squares			
Variable	Coefficient	t-value	Prob.(p)
C	2.33091	11.0367	0.0000
Collective bargaining	0.16114	2.55519	0.0113
R-squared	0.62808		
Adjusted R-squared	0.52378		
F-statistic	6.52900		
Prob(F-statistic)	0.01127		
Durbin Watson	1.78		

Source: Authors Computation Using Minitab (2018)

Findings from the study showed that economic strike has a significant effect on industrial relations among FMC staff Keffi. This agrees with Olusegun Ajayi (2014) who found that strike action by the Academic Staff Union of Universities Nigeria created conflict between the management of the universities and trade unions and this impacted on the work relationships among the parties. This shows that strike had been causing conflict or rivalry among trade union members Nigeria because they no longer trusted each other. More so, the study shows that sympathy strike has a significant effect on industrial relations among FMC staff in Keffi. This is inline with Ayeni and Kolawole (2014) who found that there is direct link between strike and conflict. They discovered that strike action can increase the possibility of conflict in the organisation if there is no proper dialogue between the trade union members and the employer.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Workers all over the world desire recognition, better salaries and wages and great improvements in the terms and condition of work. Workers have formed associations for the purpose of realizing this main objective. By forming associations and bonding together, workers have a more effective basis to realize improvements in working conditions. Both Nigeria Labour law and International law recognize the right of workers to bargain collectively for the protection of the legitimate interests of workers. Indeed, that the ILO has declared its support for collective bargaining as a means through which the protection of the economic and social interests of workers can be achieved.

But strike and strife are indeed ill winds which blow neither the employers nor workers any good. Strikes disrupt not only the business of the employers and cause the workers loss of wages but also invariably disorganises the economy of the state and social order in some cases.

In the view of the researcher, the only way to achieve industrial peace in Nigeria is for the employers to always promptly review, negotiate and implement collective agreements entered with workers concerning improvements in wages and general working conditions. Other specific recommendations are:

- i. Governments, business organizations, employers of labour, employees, organizations and all stakeholders in industrial relations should endeavour to embrace collective bargaining as the machinery to resolve strike actions so as to promote industrial harmony, enhance employees' performance, increase productivity and improve the living standards of the generality of the people.
- ii. It should be noted that the most important step in the collective bargaining procedure is for the employer or the employers' association to recognise the trade union as a bargaining agent for the employees within the bargaining unit, in relation to terms and conditions of employment.

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## *Strike Actions and its Effects on Industrial Relations in Nigeria*

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*Strike Actions and its Effects on Industrial Relations in Nigeria*

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