

Strategies For Conflict Management In The Nigerian niversities: A Study Of Asuu/Government Conflict

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Abstract: *With the formation of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in 1978, the relationship between the academics and the Federal government became more acrimonious and antagonistic. The Union, on several occasions, protested strongly against certain government policies and measures that tend to erode the University autonomy and academics freedom. The academics also protested vehemently against such issues as under funding of the Universities; poor working conditions under which the Universities operate; poor conditions of service; and the manner by which University vice chancellors were appointed. The federal government on the other hand considered such criticisms very uncharitable and as an act of confrontation. Hence, under such strained relations, the slightest incidence of misunderstanding ignites tensions on both sides leading to emergence of industrial conflict. The paper seeks to examine strategies for effective conflict management in the Nigerian Universities. It uses documented sources on ASUU/Government conflict, ASUU press release and communiqués, Federal government white paper and Bulletins. The study found that lack of awareness on the side of the public on agreements reached by the parties and lack of sincerity were some of the problems militating against resolution of conflicts between the two parties. The paper recommends among others that agreement reached by both parties should be based on sincerity so as to honour it and that since education is a public issue, all agreements reached by the parties should be communicated to the public through the mass media to prevent future denial by any of the parties.*

Keywords: *Strategies, Conflict, Management, Nigerian Universities, Asuu, Government.*

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I. Introduction

There is a need to understand the nature of industrial conflicts within Nigerian tertiary institutions particularly as it affects those who are perceived to be intellectuals (Academic unions) on one hand and seasoned professionals (Management/Government) on the other hand. On different occasions, the academics protested against the harsh treatment meted out to some of their colleagues in various Universities by the Federal government. For instance, in 1982, the government ordered the dismissal of six professors from the University of Lagos. In 1987 also, the government dismissed Dr. Festus Iyayi, the then national president of ASUU from the services of University of Benin on charges which many of his colleagues believed had to do with his active role as ASUU president than on the alleged breach of the code of conduct for public officers (Obasi, 1991)

Again, in 1988, two Ahmadu Bello University lecturers (namely, Patrick Wilmot and Mrs. Creachin Adelugba) were deported for reasons, many academics believed had to do with their radical type of scholarship than on charges framed against them by the Federal government. During the same period, many A.B.U radical lecturers working on contract basis were asked to go at the expiration of their contracts. In 2003, 49 academics were dismissed from the service of University of Ilorin on charges that has to do with active unionism (ASUU 2003)

In 2009 industrial dispute between the ASUU and the Federal government was hinged on the following reasons (ASUU 2009)

- i. Erosion of University autonomy and Academic freedom
- ii. Poor condition of service and remuneration structure
- iii. Under funding of the Universities
- iv. Poor physical structures and conditions of work within the University system

- v. Victimization of some union members by the Federal government in collaboration with the University Management
- vi. Delay in signing and implementation of the agreement reached between the Federal government and the Academic Staff Unions of Universities since 2001

Scholars such as Bilton (2008) contend that it could be very misleading to uncritically accept (on a face value) some of the reasons advanced by the academic staff unions for embarking on industrial action. He argued that industrial conflict are invariably more complex than they appear on the surface and have a wide range of causes, with not all the participants sharing the same motives for action. This shows that the causes of industrial conflict as sometimes perceived by people are seldom the actual reasons. This reveals that the stated reasons for industrial conflict may be a mere surface manifestation of deeper and more fundamental causes. Put specifically, it could be true that the reasons given by ASUU for embarking on industrial action were more of symptoms than causes. The bone of contention in this respect is the extent to which these conflicts affect the harmonious relationship between ASUU and the Federal Government. The paper is an attempt to discuss the causes of ASUU/Government conflict and strategies for effective management of conflict in the Nigerian Universities.

II. The Industrial Conflict

Industrial conflict as perceived by the Liberal Conflict School is a legitimate phenomenon. It recognizes the varying interest of capital and labour. Waterman (1990) remarked that this school sees industrial conflict as a phenomenon existing between two mutually competitive but mutuality dependant parties with the state, acting as a mediator and representative of the society as a whole. He argued that industrial conflict or strike should be treated as a social problem to be diagnosed and removed by the application of different combination of persuasion, concessions, returns or legal force. The liberal conflict school accepts the capitalist order as given and does not question its legitimacy. It does not see conflict as fundamentally rooted in the capitalist system, but it rather explains it as normal product of industrial organization, devoid of class antagonism and struggle.

The Bargaining Model propounded by Kaufman (1990) demonstrates the crucial role of limited information as the major cause of industrial conflict or strike. In the same vein, Thabo (1997) attributes the causes of industrial conflict to imperfect information. The central argument of this school of thought is that to minimize industrial conflict, free flow of information should be assured among stakeholders.

Knowles (1992) Classical study on the other hand, is an attempt to provide a comprehensive explanation of industrial conflict. In examining the causes of industrial conflict in the spheres of union and management, he recognized that strike may be generated by the worker's reaction not only to his conditions to work, but also, to the social order in general. Yet like other liberal conflict scholars, he did not see industrial conflict as a form of class struggle. He opines that strikes or industrial conflict in Britain were mostly spontaneous, lacking any attempt to fulfill some conscious economic or political grand strategy.

Based on the above assertion, he further identified the causes of industrial conflict in terms of its immediate and remote (underlying) character. The immediate causes of industrial conflict are seen as multiple, various, and limitless in number. They reflect on such issues as basic questions of wages, working conditions, as well as frictional and solidarity causes. On the other hand the underlying causes are ones that are not explicit and whose operation has to be inferred. Such causes can be grouped in to three general headings namely: bad social conditions, fatigue and frustrations in the industrial work and the inferiority of workers position (Knowles, 1992).The relevance of Knowles(1992) work lies in its effort to distinguish the underlying causes of industrial conflict from their immediate and superficial causes.

Another noteworthy work on industrial conflict and strike was carried out by Onyuru (1994). In his study, he argued that industrial conflict has been going out of style or withering away. His assertion corroborates the works of Arthur and Hartman (1960) where they opined that the technological innovations have removed the complexities in our societies thereby making strikes to be ineffective. Strikes have been withering away because; its causes have been diminishing over years.

Hibbs (2000) criticizes the liberal school and contended that it is erroneous to attribute the cause of industrial conflict to faulty communication or bad human relations, lack of integration of workers or technological factors. Dismissing these causes of conflict, he argued that work relations within capitalism are an inevitable source of dispute and it is within this frame work that the causes and roots of industrial conflict should be explained.

Onyeoru (1994) has identified three primary reasons why strike activity has been going out of style. First, he explained that employers have developed more sophisticated policies and more effective organizations. Secondly; the state or the government has become more prominent as an employer of labour, economic planner, provider of benefits and supervisor of industrial relations. Thirdly, the labour movement has been forsaking the

use of strike in favor of broad political endeavors. Onyeoru (1994) argued that the increasing affluence and economic planning of industrial societies had, to a larger extent, given some level of satisfaction to worker's wants and has relieved them of the economic insecurities associated with pre-Keynesians era. He also believed that the embourgeoisement of the working class was helping to reduce industrial conflict activity, and a decline on economic in-quality was producing workers middle- class more and who resist any extended interruption of income. In the process, class antagonism and spontaneous inclinations towards industrial conflict have declined. Although, this analysis failed in its attempt to disprove the Marxian thesis that a class struggle could bring a revolution, it nevertheless contributed to our understanding of how revolutionary zeal of exploited workers can be attenuated through the process of embourgeoisement.

This argument therefore explained the importance of economic conditions of workers as a major factor in the occurrence of industrial conflict and strikes. The issue of economic cycle, as a factor in the occurrence of industrial conflict was underscored by Ochoche (2002) who identified the state of labour market (especially, the amount of employment available) as the principal economic factor affecting a union behavior to strike. In his view, industrial conflict occurs during period of rising employment to enable unions secure wage increases and other benefits. But in periods of falling employment rate, especially with the current harsh realities facing most economies, there will be a sharp drop in industrial conflict since workers will be afraid to embark on strike, because the bargaining power of the employer is higher. However, it can be argued that political events, government policies and the climate of public opinion have important influence on the timing of strikes and will therefore account on many deviations from the normal cyclical pattern. Most industrial disputes are caused by social, psychological and economic forces which are non-cyclical in nature. It was maintained that grievance can be stored up for long periods and then, most likely boil over into strikes when business conditions promises that strikes may be successful. This justifies the specific contribution of Ochoche (2002) to the study of industrial conflict because he identified the conditions under which strikes or industrial conflict can successfully takes place.

The issue whether economic factor alone or political factors play a decisive role in determining the occurrence of industrial conflict has become a lively debate on industrial conflict studies. Studies by Madubuike (2000), Garba (2001), Gilin (2004) gave primacy to economic factors as determinants of industrial conflict. As Oyebade (2004:70) observed, most of these studies indicate that industrial conflict varies positively with economic prosperity.

Other studies such as Frank and Tilly (1994:66) have assigned more primacy to political and other factors from their findings. To them, workers engage in industrial conflict or go on strike only when there is organizational capacity for such action. This depends on the mobilization of the unions. Based on this view, strikes are in the short run, effort to bring pressure on the employers and governments, but in the long run, they serve as a mechanism through which unions struggle for membership in a nation's polity. Based on this, they believed that political and organizational factors are decisive predictors of strike actions.

Dalton (2000) has however, presented an alternative conceptual framework to the debate on the economic versus political organizational model of strike. According to the regression results of his study, the determinants of strikes or industrial conflict in western states shows that both the economic factor of unemployment and inflation, as well as the various non-economic factors, are significant in explaining variation in strikes activity. He then concluded that the decision to engage on strikes is conditioned on the total environment in which industrial relations takes place. Such significant environmental variables are the institution structure of bargaining, the organizational security, power resources and ideological positions held by each of the bargaining parties as well as the economic climate in which the bargaining takes place.

The absence of collective bargaining and the rising expectations has been identified by Blum (1972:68-72) as other factors that cause industrial conflict and strike. Commenting on the crisis of rising expectations, he contends that:

“Conflict is not always a by-product of the Marxian expectations that as things get worse and worse, the depressed and disadvantaged become more embittered until eventually, they revolt. If the history of western civilization has any lesson, it is somewhat the reverse of the Marxian nightmare or correlation between depression, despair and eventual revolution. On the contrary, when people who feel they are at the bottom or near the bottom of social hierarchy begin to improve their lot, and move up the ladder of the society, they then become more discontented and make more demands upon the society. This is the reason why strike is occurring in most countries”

The class conflict perspective sees capital and labour as mutually antagonistic phenomenon. Hence, strike is seen as evidence of rising class consciousness and conflict (Waterman 1998). This school of thought is a product of the Marxist theory of the state and it contends that the relations of production in a capitalist society are necessarily antagonistic or conflictual. Thus, the conflictual relation is derived from the exploitative and oppressive character of such relations. It further contends that the two principal classes in a capitalist society namely, the bourgeoisies (the oppressive class) and the proletariat (the exploited class) have diametrically

opposed and irreconcilable fundamental interest. As a result, class conflict (struggle) becomes inevitable. This inevitability arises from the inherent contradiction between the economic situation and political status of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Volkow, 1999). This basic extradition of capitalism as observed by Ryndina and Chomez (2000) stems from the antithesis of social character of labour to private form of appropriation.

In other words, the private capitalist appropriation retards the progress of productive forces, and the drive to minimize profit derives from the basic law of capitalism, a law that induces capitalists to produce the greatest possible amount of surplus value through intensifying the exploitation of labour. The class conflict school, therefore, locates industrial conflict within the fundamental structure of the capitalist relations of productions (Hibbs, 2000). Accordingly, it was argued that strike is a vital weapon of working class in pursuing its industrial objectives, and as such it is an inescapable demonstration of antagonism to capitalist.

ASUU/Government Conflict

For the purpose of understanding industrial conflict between academic staff union of universities (ASUU) and the federal government, it is pertinent for the paper to analyze the character of ASUU as a union and why conflict become intractable between the union and the federal government.

The intellectuals constitute an important social category within the petty bourgeoisie and as Obasi (1991) rightly noted, the petty – bourgeoisie has a dual character. On one hand, it adjoins to the working class and plays active role in the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. And on the other hand, some of its members align with the bourgeoisie class.

With respect to ASUU, most of its members shared the ideology of the ruling class (bourgeoisie class). The leadership of ASUU on the other hand, projected a working class ideology that challenged the legitimacy of the bourgeoisie class. However, commenting on the class character of ASUU, its leadership declared that:

“In terms of all the criteria used for demarcating between workers and managers/employers (i.e conditions of work, degree of authority and control exercised over other employees, ownership rights etc.) the members of our union are workers....As a union of workers, our destiny is indissolubly tied to that of the other section of the working people whether organized under NLC or not ---

This remains the responsibility of this union to struggle side by side with other sections of wage and salaried employees irrespective of industry, occupation, profession or category for the upliftment of the conditions of labour.” (ASUU, 1987: 43-44)

Obasi (1991) noted that Nigerian academics, though not members of the working class (proletariat) are becoming similar to them since the pressures from the Nigerian socio-economic life have increasingly reduced the differences in the material and political interest between them and the proletariat. However, a significant number or section of the academics has now been catapulted into sudden riches in different ways such as acquisition of big contracts and political appointments.

Although, the rank and file has been ambivalent about the socio-economic and political issues (a characteristics of petty –bourgeoisie class) the leadership on the other hand usually responded on the side of the working class. It also committed itself to the liberation of Nigerian’s resource from the stranglehold of imperialism and its local agents in and outside the government (Olorode, 1997).

It is this liberation mission of ASUU leadership that earned it the number one enemy of the ruling class. It, for instance, on several occasions called on the Nigerian workers and the oppressed people to struggle for the constant deepening of democratic content and patriotic consciousness of the society, so that a system can be created that ensure just and equitable distribution of power and resources: for according to it, such struggle is between Democracy and Oppression, between true Independence and Neo- Colonial Slavery (ASUU 1984: 22-23). It further argued that:

“No ex-colonial capitalist country has attained economic independence without first undergoing a thorough anti-imperialist and democratic revolution. Nigerians cannot and will not be an exception to this rule” (ASUU 1984a: 22).

This virulent anti-capitalist ideological struggle was later backed by several calls by ASUU leadership, labour and other progressive forces to intensity their struggle to overthrow the prevailing anti-democratic capitalist order and in its place, install a democratic system in which elected representatives of mass organizations such as peasants, workers etc. shall determine the economic and political policies in the country (ASUU, 1986 & 1987).

From the above radical statement by ASUU leadership, one is not in doubt about the ambivalent class character of ASUU. Even though, members of ASUU belonged to the petty –bourgeoisie class, with bulk of its members sharing the ideology of the ruling class regardless of their progressive improvement, the leadership of ASUU on the other hand, promoted a working class interest. This radical role ran counter to the interests advanced by government. And it is within this fundamental ideology difference between the government and ASUU leadership that the next section will discuss the causes of conflict between the two parties.

Causes of the Conflict between ASUU and the Federal Government of Nigeria

According to Rudy (2000) academics go on strike for certain reasons. First, there is an increasing demand for economic returns. It is not, he argues, that academics are so exploited, but the fact that other professions are improving their economic positions faster than that of academics.

Secondly, there is the growing claim of legitimacy of self assertion for just claims that have been denied. Rudy (2000) has also identified three types of strikes by the academics, these are:

- a) The economic strike which concerns on the issue of wages and working conditions.
- b) Academic interest strike which tries to advance the ideals of professionalism such as academic freedom, shared government and university autonomy.
- c) Political interest strike which aims of protesting against a political decision or a policy.

Some scholars have argued that the unionization of academics is an attempt to secure more effective guarantee status and privileges (Otoha 1987).

But in their study of Israel faculty unions and the strike weapon, Harrison and Tabory (1980) found out that environmental pressures as well as ideological factors are important determinants of union behavior towards strikes. The union uses the strike weapon to pursue their economic interest in a labour relations environment that is characterized by intense competition by various unions for their share of national budget.

A structural explanation to militancy among academics has been offered by Mathew (1996). According to him the pre-eminent role assigned to external supervisory agencies and University presidents or vice chancellors is an important factor accounting for militancy among academics. Another factor is the removal of decision making powers from Universities in critical matters of budget, programs approval (among others) to a more distant agency. Hence frustration and unease among academics stimulated a search for ways to counteract this distance decision-making. He however contends that structural changes were not sufficient to explain the sudden explosion of demands by academics. The feelings, desires and frustrations of individual academics are important predictors. Hence enlarge expectation and relative deprivation set the stage for academic militancy.

The 1992 agreement between ASUU and the federal government of Nigerian was seen as a landmark document. The signing of the agreement between the federal government of Nigerian and the academic staff of Nigerian universities (ASNU) took place on Thursday, 3rd September 1992. The agreement was described by the union as a “jewel of inestimable value” to the University community and to the nation at large. According to the union:

“The agreement halted the brain drain from the universities, at least temporarily. It raised the quality of teaching and research in the universities, at least for a while. It kept the mobile police and soldiers out of campuses because of student demonstrations and protests against poor conditions of hostel. It reduced drastically, in number and frequency the number of strikes between 1992 and 1995” (ASUU 1996:43).

Given its envisaged significance for the recovery of the University system that was neck deep in crisis by the 1990’s, the 1992 agreement was to become a reference point in the ASUU struggles of the 1990’s and 2000’s.

The agreement entitled “*Agreement between the federal government of Nigeria and the academic staff of Nigerian Universities*” was negotiated in three phases. The first phase began on 31 March 1992, and terminated in a deadlock in July 1992. The second phase began on August 20, 1992 and ended in an agreement on the 3rd of September 1992 while the third agreement was signed in 2003. The first agreement was signed on behalf of the federal government of Nigerian by Owelle Gilbert P.O Chikelu, the Honorable Minister of Establishment and Management Services, and on behalf of the Academic Staff of Nigerian Universities by the then President of ASUU, Dr Attahiru M. Jega (Now a professor and the current Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC).

The then President of Nigeria Ibrahim B. Babangida also endorsed it on behalf of the Federal government while ASUU’s National Executive Council (NEC) did the same on behalf of the union. Thus, the agreement became a valid contract within the meaning of the trade dispute Act of 1976 and cap 437 of the laws of the federation of Nigeria, 1990. The signing of the document by the two parties marked the end of the prolonged negotiations between the two parties, which was aimed at fortifying the university system (Obasi 1991). Shortly after the signing of the document, it become evident that the federal government was bent on violating some aspects of the agreement (ASUU, 1996).

The first attack was launched on chapter six of the agreement. The university academic (staff) salary scale was first surreptitiously, then, openly and more brazenly merged with the Elongated University Salary Scale (EUSS). Secondly, the agreement was declared by the then Secretary of Education and subsequently, the Minister of Education, as a “*mere gentle men’s agreement*” –a contract of “*imperfect obligation*” which would be implemented “*only so long as the overriding public interest or other compelling circumstances do not make it impracticable or inexpedient to do so*”. The third assault on the agreement was in 1994. The areas attacked this time were on chapters four which deals with funding of universities and chapter five concerning university autonomy and academic freedom. (ASUU 1996)

These issues came not as a surprise to instigate a major conflict which ensued between ASUU and the Federal government which led to the long strike of 1992, 1996, and 2003 and subsequently in 2009. Onyeonuru (2001) opined that the dominant authoritarian tendency of the federal government in industrial relations led to the violations of the agreement by the federal government, which precipitated further strikes.

The root cause of industrial conflict within the Nigerian university system can be linked to the violations of agreement between the two contending parties (federal government and ASUU) on issues dominantly relating to funding, condition of service and university autonomy and academic freedom.

Other issues which led to ASUU/Government conflicts were discussed in a number of instances such as:

- i) The report of the presidential committee on salary and conditions of service. (Cookey Commission, 1981).
- ii) The Udoji Public Service Review Committee of 1974
- iii) The Presidential Committee on the Settlement of ASUU/Government Conflict (2006)
- iv) The Presidential Committee on the Resolution of ASUU/Government conflict in 2009.

All these commissions and committees identified the gradual and progressive erosion of University autonomy and academic freedom by the Federal government and its agencies as other major causes of the conflict. Furthermore, all these commissions and committees observed that the absence of collective bargaining machinery for resolving conflict was a serious gap in labour management relations in the Universities. It also found the poor level of funding of Universities and the ban on academics from participation in politics, as other causes of ASUU/ Government conflict.

ASUU's identification of the causes of the conflict is also similar to that of the commissions and committees.. In its memorandum after negotiation with the Presidential Committee in 2009, it identified the followings as the major causes of its conflicts with the government:

- (a) Poor state of the universities
- (b) Erosion of University autonomy and academic freedom
- (c) Poor conditions of service in the universities
- (d) In-adequate funding of universities
- (e) The inability of the federal government to sign an agreement it reached with ASUU in 2003.

These causes were also re-iterated in the previous commissions and committee set up by the government. For example, the Akanbi panel in 1986 in one of its publications titled "*ASUU and the 1980 Education Crisis in Nigeria of 1987*" recognized the above factors as the major reasons for embarking on various strike actions by ASUU. (Obasi 1991)

Obasi (1991) in the same manner identified the issue of university autonomy, academic freedom, better conditions of service and inadequate funding of universities, as major areas of negotiation between ASUU and the government. He also identified the issue of retrenchment as one of the sources of conflict. Nwala (1998: 10-13) also opined that the crisis of autonomy derives from the fact that the government is the one that established the universities, draws up the laws governing them, and also funds them. Consequently, he argues that the government that established and funds universities would invariably undermine their autonomy and academic freedom. Citing certain cases of clear violation of academic freedom and political interference by the governments, Nwala (1998:13) asserts that:

.... These and many more episodes have systematically eroded the status integrity and effectiveness of the university system, demoralized and antagonized the academics and fuelled tension within the system. ASUU was the only platform from which collective resistance could be mounted.

Nwala (1998:14-19) also identified other causes of conflict as:

- a) Government neglect of the universities particularly in the area of funding.
- b) Poor conditions of service in the universities
- c) Difference in political and social perspectives
- d) Internal governance and management of the universities.

He equally argued that the greatest divide separating President Babangida's regime and ASUU, was the issue of ideology for Nigeria. According to him, while the regime pursues a capitalist path to development, ASUU on the other hand advocates for socialist and ant-imperialist path. ASUU's strong criticism of the regimes development model which in its view unleashes poverty, crime, corruption, unemployment, inflation, hunger and disease as well as constituting a threat to social and industrial peace. These have exacerbated its conflict with the government (Nwala, 1998:16-17).

Based on the aforementioned views, the major causes of government/ASUU conflict could be said to hinge on the following factors:

- a) Government insensitivity towards the improvement of conditions of service of the academics, even though, recent activities (e.g. With the approval of arrears of monetization in 2009 and subsequent increment of salaries of all federal workers with effect from July, 2010 and the erosion of university autonomy and academic freedom even though, in 2009, the federal government has approved the clause for University autonomy but the issue remained contentious and a subject of debate up till now) has indicated the readiness of the government in addressing this problem.
- b) Under funding of the universities. The argument was that the budget allocations to education over the years were less than the UN recommendation and some African countries.

These factors clearly explain the sudden explosion of industrial conflict between ASUU and the Federal Government. The feelings, desires and frustrations of the academics are important predictors of industrial conflict coupled with an enlarged expectations and relative deprivation. This according to Obasi, (1991) has set a stage for academics to become militant.

2. Strategies for effective management of conflict in the Nigerian Universities

It is a known fact that it is unrealistic and in fact impossible to completely eliminate conflict within universities; especially since conflict have both positive and negative dimensions. The real management challenge, therefore, is to find some methods of managing them from becoming debilitating, while still, retaining the full positive potentials of competition, creativity, growth and improved job satisfaction and morale. (Tajudeen, 2004). The emergence of unionism and the use of the strike weapon by professional groups have been viewed as indications of the erosion of professional orientation. Some studies point to the negative association between professionalism and unionization among academics (Harrison 1994). Many studies such as Straus (1980) and Ladd (1992) have argued that professionalism is incompatible with militant unionism. Lipset (1998) has, for example, offered the following reason as to why the two are incompatible. According to him, strikes threaten the commitment and realization of the “*academic*” ideals of professionalism in such areas as the service ideal, the moral basis of academics and professional claims. On the other hand, studies by Crowin (1999) and Peterson (2000) hold the view that there is positive association between professionalism and militant unionism. For instance, they argued that professionally oriented teachers engage more frequently in militant action than their less oriented counter part.

Regardless of the merits and demerits of this debate, many academic unions now exist. They also embark on strikes occasionally to back up their demands. The literature on conflicts suggested a number of conditions that promote effective conflict management. These conditions as suggested by Putin and Poole (1997) include a focus on the problem rather than personal or emotional issues, consideration of a wide range of alternative solutions, a cooperative climate, an organized and orderly process and avoidance of artificial conflict-reducing devices such as voting, or relying on leader to make final decision. Thus, conflict management according Temidere (2000) does not connote a rigid approach, which suits all situations, rather, it involves a series of concerted efforts to prevent and or arrest a seemingly serious crisis.

Scholars have suggested different procedures for managing conflicts in Nigeria universities. According to Alabi (2000) they should include the followings:

- Clarification of Goals and Objectives: The clarification and continued refinement of goals and objectives, role definitions and performance standards help to avoid misunderstanding and conflicts.
- He also opined that information is needed to avoid blocking of communication flow that may lead to difference in perception. Hence, effective Management of Information (M.I.S) is essential to provide requisite information which minimizes delays and ensure maximum utilization of resources.

Most of Nigerian universities lack effective computerized management information system for capturing, processing, storing, retrieving and disseminating relevant information (Mullins 1999). This information is a necessary for all Nigerian universities, if valid, reliable and timely information is to be provided for all groups within the system. This is with a view to ensuring effective decisions are made based on the information about the universities which is given to the users and received by the universities from the outside world.

Mullins (1999) opined that for effectiveness to be achieved, legitimate avenues for the expression of views and of seeking redress must be known by all and kept open at all times. Institutionalized mechanisms for expression of dissents or discontent within the university campuses should include unionism and representation of staff and students interest in committee. This mechanism will yield better results than the current practice of

proscribing unions, Closure of universities and drafting armed policemen to the campuses, all of which escalate conflict into violence.

- Focusing attention on super-ordinate goals that are shared by parties in conflicts may also help defuse hostility and lead to more cooperative behavior there by providing valid information and an avenue for expression of views.
- Providing Autonomy and Academic Freedom: In this respect, Alabi (2000) stressed that, even though, it is not practically possible to leave the universities completely on their own without any guidance about the philosophy, goals and directives of University education, however, the co-ordination through the National Universities Commission (NUC) should be without undue interference. To ensure autonomy and academic freedom, the constitution of the universities should ensure that the academic body is fully responsible for the followings:

- i. The admission, teaching and examination of students;
- ii. The appointment, promotion and tenure of staff
- iii. The internal budgetary allocation and control
- iv. The responsibility for choosing or electing their managers or VC's from within the system, hence no external impostors.

Sanda (1991) suggested leaderships and administrative expertise as a strategy for managing conflict in the Nigerian University system. He argued strongly that a more participatory and supportive style of leadership and management behavior is likely to assist in conflict management. For example, showing an attitude of respect and trust, encouraging personnel, self development, and creating a working environment in which staff can work cooperatively together. The university manager or the Vice Chancellor (VC) must be experienced in crisis management. The VC must have the necessary administrative and organizational capacities to enable the University attain its goals. He must ensure effective coordination of the various conflicting interest of people, complex processes and structures which are internal. Moreover, the resources from both internal and external environments must be successfully harnessed, prudently used and rationally distributed. Idowu (1995) asserts that Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities are supposedly experienced administrators who had held many administrative posts within the university system; however, the need for specialized training in conflict management for VC is imperative in view of the increasing conflict potentials within the system.

The new democratization process of electing Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments and Units is a welcome development (Ejigwu, 2004), unlike the previous method of selecting the most senior members in these units, the democratic process would ensure cooperation and better performance, there by minimizing conflict situations among the people. In addition, the university council, senate and people should ensure the maintenance of academic freedom and its preservation from external authorities (Sanda, 1991).

He as well recommended co-operation between universities and the state. Sanda (1991) opined that there is a need for better understanding between the university system as a whole and the government. The decision makers and other advisers according to him need to be better informed on how the universities operate, while the university community needs to acquaint itself with the ways of the government generally, invariably, the universities will neither develop attitudes of hostility or servility towards the government nor, shall the government become intolerant of the universities.

Based on the above considerations, it can be construed that conflict potentials in the universities are varied. Hence, the need for the group within the system to recognize these potential and deliberately make concerted efforts to curtail the negative consequences of conflict. This curtailment could be achieved through meaningful interactions and effective communication; resourcefulness and resource management as well as cooperation between the Universities and the state. Nevertheless, most of these measures have been taken by both parties and still the negative conflicts persist.

III. Conclusions

It is apparent that an effective management of conflict in the university system is yet to be attained because of the recurring nature of the conflict. The academics' role as a social critic often brings them into confrontation with the government especially when such role challenges and threatens the social order from which the government draws its legitimacy. Strike seems to be the only effective weapon of the union to force government to implement collective agreements while lock-out and denial of salary are the popular weapons of the government to suppress union demands. These industrial actions temporarily stop the conflict in the short-run.

In addition to the application of suggestions and recommendations as provided in the review to reduce conflict tendencies between ASUU, University Management and the Government, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Preventive measures should be adopted: Specifically, mutual consultation between the parties on issues that are likely to cause conflict should be encouraged. This can be done twice a year and on emergency episode.
- ii. Collective agreements reached by both parties should be based on God fearing and sincerity. This is a fundamental element of any agreement reached by two parties. Hence it allows the parties to be sincere in their commitment to the agreement.
- iii. Community leaders such as religious and traditional leaders should be part of the collective bargaining process (as observers) between ASUU, University Management and the Government. This will boost the parties commitment to the agreements reached.
- iv. Since education is a public concern, all the agreements reached by the parties should be communicated to the public through the mass media. This measure will discourage any of the parties to use propaganda as a tactics to deny any of the items in the agreement.

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