
Industrial Democracy and Work Place Slavery: An Analysis of Public and Private Organisations in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper is a critical analysis of the practice of industrial democracy and its impact on work place slavery in Nigeria. It is an exploratory study which examines the concept of industrial democracy and its models of application in Nigeria. It is routed in human relations model to examine the humaneness of organizational condition of Nigerian workers. Information were generated from secondary sources only and rationalization. The paper concluded that industrial democracy is not practiced in Nigeria as was modeled in Germany, and that workers' conditions were inhuman, amounting to slavery. It was recommended that laws should be put in place to guide and direct the practice of industrial democracy in Nigeria, as well as election of workers in trade union floors to representative positions in organisations' committees and boards.

Keywords: Industrial Democracy, Slavery, Workplace and Organisations, Exploitation.

INTRODUCTION

Work is very essential to human survival. Human beings either work individually to survive or strive to locate themselves in work organisation of one type or another, in order to earn wages as a means of survival. It is on this background that workplace becomes man's alternative home, which he has to abide by the rules, conditions and norms prevailing therein in order to be accepted. Today's workplaces are industrial organisations of varying types, sizes and complexities.

Slavery is seen as a mode of production whereby individuals are forcefully acquired or bought as commodities to be used in production process, as a factor of production, without or with inadequate compensation. Modern slave systems, according to Scott and Marshall (2004), existed in the plantations and mines through codified legal systems with their inherent mechanism of enforcement. Slavery involves rules and regulations that do not permit the slave to exercise his or her own will and deny personal liberty and freedom. Most organisations today inhibit employees' freedom, resulting in a work condition likened to slavery, which is termed "workplace slavery". This paper looks at the possibility of workers being free in the work place, their liberty to exercise their will being enhanced. That is, the introduction of democratic principles in work places.

Industrial democracy refers to an arrangement or the process which enables workers to be involved in workplace decisions, sharing in responsibility and having control to certain degree of authority in matters affecting them (Poole, 1982). This process entails opening of workplaces for the practice of democratic principles. The primary aim of this paper is to ascertain if there exists any relationship between industrial democracy and workplace slavery, especially in complex organisations in Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Workers in Nigeria are disenchanted by poor working condition, lack of conducive work environment, poor remuneration, dehumanizing treatment by employers and their representatives in diverse workplaces. Nwabufo (2013) described Nigerian workplaces as concentration camps and that “working condition in Nigeria is below the crust of salubrious standards”. Nwabufo (2013) further stated that if the workplace slavery in Nigeria is studied and analysed, the published figures of 670,000 to 740,000 Nigerians living in modern slavery would have quadrupled.

One major reason noted by Nwabufo (2013) which compelled people to remain in workplace slavery is the rising unemployment coupled with the fear of poverty and starvation. Consequently, Nigerians are willing to submit themselves to work under any condition in order to have a means of livelihood, as represented by the dictum “I work or I die”. This scenario brings to mind the need for remedy to prevent increasing workplace slavery in Nigeria. It is in this light that this paper examines Industrial Democracy as the Possible Remedy to Workplace Slavery which is a way of perpetuating slavery in modern times.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Industrial Democracy

Industrial democracy according to Poole (1982) “is an arrangement which involves workers making decisions, sharing responsibility and authority in workplace”. Industrial democracy is different from representative democracy, union democracy or participating management (Poole, 1982). Industrial democracy requires workplaces being run directly by

the people who work in them instead of state or distinct private ownership and control.

The essence of industrial democracy is to have a peaceful and harmonious workplace, which will foster increase in performance and productivity of workers. It is different from participatory management which entails involvement of workers in making decision or representative democracy which involves putting workers' representatives in committees and other decision making structures or units of an organisation. Representative democracy is subsumed in general or broad industrial democracy. Union democracy on the other hand requires workers electing their leaders for themselves, rather than management of organisations imposing leaders on the workers in their associations.

Industrial democracy goes with freedom of the workers to express their views about every aspect of work and leadership process in the organisation. It provides workers a say in their welfare, to demand that organisation provide safe work environment, incentives and remuneration in line with work performance. Industrial democracy also requires obedience to labour law and international labour agreement enforcement. In organisation where industrial democracy is practiced, workers are free to object against unfavourable employment conditions, without victimization, as such is within the protection of their fundamental rights. Both workers and management abide by rules of the workplace under industrial democracy, not workers alone.

Forms of Industrial Democracy

There are many types of industrial democracy identified such as codetermination, minority board participation, financial participation, works council and quality circle (Open textbook, 2015). **Codetermination** which was introduced in Germany in 1951 requires that all classes of workers should be raised to

supervisory boards of a corporation. It was enforced through legislation. **Minority Board Participation**, also a German model, specified that firms with 500-2000 employees should give one-third Board representation to employees. **Work Councils** is a British model which stipulates the creation of body (Work Council) to handle management labour relations at plant, industry and national level, which consists of labour representatives elected by employees and management/state or owners' representatives, which handles all labour-management issues. **Quality Circle** is the act of organizing workers in small groups to foster productivity and quality standard as agreed by them. **Financial participation** is a profit-sharing approach in terms of employees sharing in ownership through buyout, which increases sense of responsibility, commitment, team spirit and result in increased performance and productivity.

Workplace Slavery

Workplace slavery is a form of modern slavery. It is a situation where employees are shackled to their jobs with little freedom to control their day-to-day work or their career and such workers feel like slaves (Katcher, 2018). When employees are controlled by their employers, they are like slaves who have no control over themselves and are dominated by someone else. This condition of slavery put employees in perpetual anxiety (Katcher, 2018). To solve the problem of anxiety and stress on the employee, management should provide freedom, employees should demand their freedom, employees should continuously seek personal independence and focus on amassing accomplishments (Katcher, 2018). Can this be achieved in Nigerian organisations, where workers are extremely dominated by employers and are dying daily of work-related anxiety?

Tuen (2017) noted that there are over 25 million workplace slaves worldwide, that modern slavery is a violation

of human rights, which promoted the United Kingdom to introduce its Modern Slavery Act in 2015, with the aim of tackling slavery in workplaces and protecting employees from being victims. Considering this realization in Britain, is there such realization in Nigeria, in line with the practice of industrial democracy in its various forms?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This paper anchored on Human Relations Approach to Trade Unionism which maintains that human resources (employees) are living beings and desire freedom of speech, thought, expression and movement. When employers treat their workers as inanimate things and encroached on their rights and expectations, tension, anxiety are built, which results in conflict, which is occasioned by workers' reaction in forms of strikes, protests, resistance to pressure and building mechanism of trade union organisations to protect themselves. Drawn from the pioneering work of Elton Mayor, Davies (1962) stated that human relations involves "the integration of people into a work situation that motivates them to work together productively, cooperatively, with economic and psychological satisfaction". It is on this link to workplace freedom and motivation that this approach is considered appropriate in explaining industrial democracy and workplace slavery.

This is an exploratory analysis. The research relies on secondary data and rationalization of the researchers.

SITUATION IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN ORGANISATIONS

Workplaces in Nigeria reflect the elements of slavery, where workers are not free and cannot exercise a will of their own. Considering their various dimensions and types of industrial

democracy which is the expected remedy of workplace slavery. In this analysis, participatory democracy, representative democracy, union democracy are seen by the researchers as types of industrial democracy, as opposed to the position of Poole (1982). This is because codetermination, minority board, participation work councils and quality circles are not commonly practiced in contemporary private and public organisations in Nigeria.

Establishment of Legal Framework: In Nigerian organisations, the participation of workers in corporate governance through joint decision making mechanism is very limited, except on industrial relation issues of collective bargaining. The primary reason for this situation is the absence of law entrenching workers participation in decision making as applicable in Germany where industrial democratic models emerge (Iornem, 2016). Until laws are enacted by the legislature in Nigeria and assented to by the executive arm of government, making provision for workers to participate actively in organizational decisions, industrial democracy will not have its right of place in Nigeria to liberate workers from slave-like bondage in Nigerian industrial organisations.

Freedom in Election of Union Leaders: One of the major elements of industrial democracy is union democracy, which entails workers selecting their leaders freely, without imposition by the state, management of organisations or owner of enterprises. In Nigeria, labour unionism is still evolving. Many organisations in Nigeria especially in the private sector are not unionized. For example, private universities in Nigeria do not allow their employees to belong to unions. Trade unions like Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU), Nigerian Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT) and Senior Staff

Association of Nigerian Universities do not exist in private universities. In this situation, employees of private universities in Nigeria lack avenue of expressing their views; where union does not exist, union democracy cannot exist. Freedom of workers to associate with one another is curtailed, causing workers to exist like slaves without voice to speak or will to exercise.

Representation in Board: Board representative positions for workers and employees of organisation are another way of ensuring industrial democracy through workers' participation in broad decision making process. But in Nigeria where most of the organisations are government agencies and departments without boards, such avenues are not available. In few public sector organisations with Board of Management or Governing Council, election of workers representative in such Boards or councils are not carried out by the workers in the floor of their trade unions. For instance, election of workers into Governing Council of Federal and State universities in Nigeria are conducted by management, and nomination process are censored, thus undemocratic. This automatically provides leeway for such "management directed elected" representative to serve as agent of management, rather than representative of the workers. In this situation, workers collide with management to perpetuate the exploitation of fellow workers, aggravating the condition of workplace slavery in Nigeria.

Appointment of Workers into Committees: This process of appointment of workers to represent unions in management committees automatically negates the tenet of democracy. Though the appointees are able to contribute in decisions, but their inputs are in line with management expectations, not workers' satisfaction. Also, where such people are picked by management, they cannot be called "representative" as they

were not elected to represent workers in such committees. In this regard, democratic process of election is undermined, causing organizational decisions and policies to be management friendly, as against employees friendly.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The practice of industrial democracy in Nigeria work organisations are fraught with diversities of anomalies which are undemocratic, exploitative, dehumanizing and relegate employees to the status of slaves in different organisations in which they find themselves, whether public or private. This is revealed by Nigeria being one of the countries with the least minimum wage (Grimshaw and Rubbery, 2010). Poverty index of workers occasioned by low wage also presents Nigerian workers as work slaves. In conclusion, absence of practice of true industrial democracy in Nigeria fosters work slavery.

It is recommended that government should put in place legislative mechanism and establish legal framework for the practice of industrial democracy in Nigeria. The Nigerian labour Law should make it mandatory for trade unions to elect representative democratically as an integral component of industrial democracy in Nigerian industrial relations system.

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