

LABOUR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS: A SYNOPSIS

A PAPER PRESENTED BY COMRADE HYGINUS CHIKA ONUGBU(JP , ACTI,FCA) STATE CHAIRMAN TRADE UNION CONGRESS OF NIGERIA(TUC) RIVERS STATE COUNCIL AT PROTEA HOTEL,EVO ROAD, GRA,PORT-HARCOURT ON OCTOBER 14TH 2010 DURING THE PRESENTATION OF THE 3RD EDITION OF "WORKERS' MIRROR" A QUATERLY MAGAZINE PUBLISHED BY THE SENIOR STAFF ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNICATION,TRANSPORT AND CORPORATIONS(SSACTAC) NPA BRANCH, ONNE

Protocols!

"Toyota's labour-management relations are based on mutual trust between labour and management. Following a labour dispute in 1950, mutual trust between labour and management was adopted as the foundation of labour-management relations in the joint labour and management declaration concluded in 1962. Since then, repeated discussions have led to deeper understanding and trust between labour and management."¹

I want to thank Comrade Inyang and the entire leadership and members of the Senior Staff Association of Communication, Transport and Corporations (SSACTAC) NPA Branch Onne Port Complex for the publication of the "Workers Mirror". I also bring you solidarity greetings from the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) Rivers State Council. Let me also inform us that I am glad to be here today not just because SSACTAC is one of the enviable affiliates of TUC but also because of your giant strides in labour-management relations!

You may wish to note that labour - management relations, for the purpose of our discussion, refers to the bipartite relationship between employers(in your case NPA) and unions (in your case SSACTAC and MWUN) within an industry or organizations in the production process. The main aim of management (representatives of the owners) is to increase returns on investment (profit) through the maximization of productivity and the minimization of costs. However the aim of workers is the maximization of welfare and wages (costs) to enable them take care of their personal needs and where possible wants.

It is therefore not difficult to see the conflicting interest of management and labour. While the interest of labour is usually income and welfare maximization for the workers, that of management is profit maximization (Revenue maximization and Cost minimisation). This position cannot but generate conflict which may be in the form of strikes, lock-in, go slow and so on embarked on by the workers ; and salary stoppage, lock-out, retrenchment etc as punitive measures by management.

One thing that is clear in this relationship (and often overlooked when relationship get soured) is that both labour and management get their returns from the organization and so should protect the organization. This is because without the organization, there would be no management , no workers and therefore no labour(Union). Another is that if both parties(i.e. labour and management) focus on

¹ Toyota Labour-management Relations policy .see :http://www.toyota.co.jp/en/environmental_rep/03/jyugyoin.html

increasing the cake(value added) to be shared rather than concentrating only on how to get more from the existing cake, then each party will have more to take home. This means that both parties have areas of mutually beneficial common interest. Emphasis should therefore be placed more on those areas of common interest rather than the areas of conflicting interest. Emphasizing the areas of common interest however requires building an atmosphere of mutual trust, open communication, dialogue, cooperative behaviours and partnership in good times, in bad times and all the time. Moreover there is ample evidence from empirical studies that participative and co-operative labour-management relations improves productivity, increases product and service quality and reduces absenteeism and industrial accidents.

The lessons and implications of sound and harmonious labour-management relation practices based on empirical evidence are very clear – organisations and governments (without exception) cannot succeed in the areas of quality, efficiency and productivity without winning the 'hearts and minds' of their workers. Organisations and governments (without exception) cannot win the hearts and minds of their workers if they are at war with their workers or the union(s) that represent them. Labour Unions also have a role in their representation of employee interests' .They (labour Unions) should contribute constructively to improved quality and productivity as these are demanded by an ever increasingly competitive economic environment. In this way they will also be contributing to the traditional objectives of trade unions - employment security, quality of working life and wage increases. These should be the foundation of labour-management relation in any organisation in today's dynamic society.

The paradox however is why despite all the empirical evidence in support of sound and harmonious labour-management relation practices, such practices are not more widespread.

Permit me to also draw our attention to another determinant of labour-management relations which is often over looked- good governance and credible election. To this end, let me use this opportunity to remind us that without credible elections and good governance, Labour-Management Relations in Nigeria will continue to have more than proportionate challenges when compared with what obtains in other countries. This is because Labour-management relations does not exist in a vacuum and is in fact regulated by the laws made by the government and the general disposition of government towards enthroneing an atmosphere of industrial peace and harmony. Moreover empirical evidence has shown that when those in government are truly elected by the people (rather than imposed on the people)they will embark on people oriented projects , review the laws that affect workers including those that will impact on labour-management relations , as well put in place policies that will tackle poverty and unemployment and ensure that in line with Section 17 (3) (b and c) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria the conditions of work are just and humane.

Consequently, and in line with TUC's determination to ensure good governance and credible elections, I want to beg all of us to participate in the forth coming voters registration exercise and be genuinely part of the struggle for credible elections in Nigeria .

Let me also request that we work tirelessly to ensure that people who are elected to hold public offices at all levels in this country are those who will serve the people and who will be accountable to the people. Let me assure you that TUC will give you all the support we can.

In conclusion, let me request that we commit to promoting good labour-management relations practices in our various places of work as well as contribute our quota towards ensuring that the 2010 elections are credible. To this end, let me give us a few list of what we can do to promote sound labour-management relations in our work places:

1. Both parties (Management and Labour) should respect and implement signed collective agreements and any understanding reached with each other
2. They should focus on building and maintaining mutual trust and salubrious relationship in all their dealings with each other.
3. Management should engage the union early enough in all issues that may likely affect the workers. The Unions should also engage their members early enough to obtain their mandate, buy-in and understanding.
4. Both parties (especially management) should establish and maintain a culture of regular engagement ,consultations and dialogue
5. Management should ensure that the conditions of work are just, fair ,humane and decent
6. Management should respect the rights of workers; and Workers and labour unions should take note of the prerogatives of the employers .Employers should however be humane in how they use their prerogatives
7. Both parties should not compromise on the Health, Safety and Security of workers.
8. Both parties should respect the extant labour laws and the international labour standards as a minimum.
9. Communicate! Communicate!! Communicate!!!
10. Both parties should be transparent in all their dealings with each other; avoid hidden agenda and work with integrity.
11. Be a patriotic citizen of our dear country

Thank you for your attention and may God bless us.

Comrade Hyginus Chika Onuegbu JP, ACTI, FCA²

² Comrade Hyginus Chika Onuegbu is the Rivers State Chairman of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC). He is also a member of the International Labour and Employment Relations Association(ILERA) with headquarters in Geneva, a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), an Associate of the Chartered Institute of Taxation of Nigeria(CITN) and holds an M.Sc Economics Degree from the University of Calabar . He was appointed a Justice of the Peace (JP) by the Rivers State Government in September 2010.He can be reached at the Rivers State Secretariat of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (MBM Plaza, 48 Old Aba Road, By Shell I.A. Maingate, Rumuobiakani, PHC or [08037404222](tel:08037404222)/riverstuc@yahoo.com/chikaonuegbu@yahoo.com. For more information on TUC Nigeria, please visit our website www.tucnigeria.org