

# The Impact of Industrial Actions on Government Policies and Working Conditions in Contemporary Nigeria: Focusing on Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC).

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90400085>

Received: 09 March 2025; Accepted: 24 March 2025; Published: 29 April 2025

## ABSTRACT

The non-harmonious relationship between the Nigerian Labour Union (NLC) and the Nigerian government has been characterized by recurring strikes and protests, particularly in response to unfavorable labor practices and socio-economic policies. These actions are critical in addressing systemic inequalities and injustices faced by the Nigerian workforce. However, the persistent nature of these industrial actions raises important questions about their overall impact on government policies and working conditions, as well as the effectiveness of the NLC in influencing meaningful reforms. Thus, this paper examined the impact of industrial actions led by the NLC on government policies and working conditions in contemporary Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study draws on scholarly articles and publications to provide a comprehensive analysis. Using Karl Marx's Conflict Theory as its theoretical framework, the study explores key aspects including the history and role of the NLC, the evolution of Nigerian governmental policies, and the sources and impact of post-independence policies. The study highlights the effectiveness of NLC industrial actions as a tool for policy reform, particularly in improving working conditions, while also addressing the challenges faced by the NLC in contemporary times. Recommendations for strengthening the NLC's influence on policy-making and enhancing labor rights are provided. The study underscores the significance of organized labor in shaping governmental policies and ensuring fair working conditions in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Nigeria Labour Congress, government, government policies, industrial actions, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Industrial actions, commonly referred to as strikes, are crucial mechanisms through which labour unions advocate for the rights and welfare of workers. In Nigeria, the NLC plays a pivotal role in organizing and leading industrial actions to challenge unfavorable government policies and improve working conditions. As an umbrella organization for trade unions, the NLC seeks to protect workers' interests, particularly in response to harsh economic reforms, deteriorating working conditions, and inadequate labor policies. This article examines the influence of industrial actions on government policies and the working conditions of Nigerian workers, with a specific focus on the NLC in contemporary Nigeria while recommending a way forward.

### Nigerian Labour Congress: Brief History and Role

The NLC was established in 1978 as the sole national federation of trade unions in Nigeria, merging four previously existing labor centers: the Nigeria Trade Union Congress (NTUC), Labour Unity Front (LUF), United Labour Congress (ULC), and Nigeria Workers Council (NWC). This unification ended longstanding rivalry and restructured over 1,000 unions into 42 industrial unions (NLC, 2024). The NLC has experienced significant challenges, including two dissolutions of its national organs by military regimes. The first occurred in 1988 under General Ibrahim Babangida, due to the NLC's opposition to the Structural Adjustment Programme. The second was in 1994 under General Sani Abacha, when the NLC advocated for democracy. During both dissolutions, administrators were appointed to manage the NLC and the two key oil unions (NUPENG and PENGASSAN), and they reportedly mismanaged union funds. Under military rule, the NLC also faced repression, including the detention of leaders, disruption of union activities, and restrictive legislation.

With General Abacha's death, the unions regained control of the NLC, leading to a National Delegates Conference in 1999, which was headed by Comrade Adams Oshiomhole until 2007. From 2007 to 2011, Abdulwahed Ibrahim Omar served as NLC president. In March 2011, the NLC held its 10th National Delegates' Conference under the theme "Building A New Nigeria: The Role of the Working Class Towards National Transformation," successfully electing new National Administrative Council officers. Since then, the NLC plays a significant role as a federation of autonomous industrial unions with recognized powers to bargain with the government on behalf of the Nigerian workers, masses and other unions (NLC, 2024)

The NLC is a federation of autonomous industrial unions with recognized powers to bargain with the government on behalf of the Nigerian workers, masses and other unions (NLC, 2024). It helps influence the polity of the nation for the betterment of economic, political, social and the overall well being of the unionist and the masses at large (Bamidele, et al., 2019). Bamidele et al., further explained that the history of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) can be traced back to the long-standing aspiration of individuals, groups, and communities who share common spaces, whether in work or daily life. These people have historically come together to collectively assert their identity and safeguard their interests, driven by an instinctual need to do so.

The NLC is the foremost labor union in Nigeria, representing a wide range of workers across different sectors. Since its establishment in 1978, it has consistently positioned itself as a defender of workers' rights, often challenging policies that affect labor conditions. The Congress serves as an intermediary between the Nigerian government and the workforce, negotiating labor agreements, organizing strikes, and advocating for better wages, working environments, and employment security. With Its mission and objective statement "to promote rights at work and encourage decent employment opportunities for all Nigerian workers", its influence on industrial actions and government policies is pivotal in Nigeria's labour landscape.

### **Nigeria Governmental Policies: History**

Governmental policies in Nigeria are shaped by a range of factors including its historical context, political evolution, socio-economic needs, and international influence. These policies, often formalized through acts, decrees, and regulations, aim to address the various challenges faced by the country, from economic development and public service delivery to security, social welfare, and environmental sustainability (Ewetan, 2020; Ogujiuba, 2021). The history of Nigeria's governmental policies is deeply rooted in the colonial era, with the British government exercising control over the country from 1900 to 1960. This period saw the introduction of several policies aimed at extracting resources, establishing administrative control, and maintaining law and order. Notable policies during this period included those governing taxation, education, agriculture, and public infrastructure development (Falola & Heaton, 2008). For instance, the introduction of the *Native Revenue Ordinance of 1917* laid the foundation for taxation policies, which would later evolve into more complex fiscal structures. *The Education Ordinance of 1882*, though rudimentary, marked the beginning of formal education policies, which saw significant changes post-independence as the country sought to expand access to education for its growing population (Ogbonnaya, 2021).

After gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria adopted its own policies aimed at fostering national unity, economic growth, and development. However, the country's political instability, characterized by frequent military coups and regime changes between 1966 and 1999, significantly affected policy consistency and effectiveness. During this period, Nigeria saw an influx of military decrees and authoritarian policies, many of which were geared towards maintaining law and order, such as the *Decree No. 4 of 1984* that curtailed press freedom, and the *Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of 1986*, which introduced economic reforms under the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida (Ibhawoh, 1999).

### **Labour Union: Source of Nigeria's Governmental Policies**

Labour unions have played a crucial role in shaping governmental policies in Nigeria, particularly in matters related to workers' rights, wages, and social security (Edet et al., 2024). Their advocacy efforts have led to significant policy changes, ensuring better working conditions and financial security for employees across various sectors. One of the most notable contributions of labour unions is their role in wage regulation. The

Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) have consistently pushed for fair wages, leading to the enactment and periodic review of the National Minimum Wage Act (Nweze, 2024). These unions engage in negotiations with the government to ensure that wages are adjusted to reflect economic realities, thereby protecting workers from the adverse effects of inflation and economic downturns. The most recent effort of the NLC in influencing wage of workers is the various strike action that called the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu government to increase the minimum wage from 30,000 naira to 494,000 Naira. Although after much bargaining, the minimum wage was fixed as 70,000 Naira.

Beyond wage advocacy, labour unions have also influenced pension reforms, ensuring that workers receive adequate financial security after retirement. The Pension Reform Act of 2004, which introduced the Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS), was shaped by discussions between labour unions and the government to address the inefficiencies of the old pension system. Labour unions continue to advocate for improved retirement benefits, pushing for amendments that enhance workers' financial stability after leaving active service. In addition, they have been at the forefront of ensuring job security by opposing arbitrary layoffs and advocating for policies that protect workers from unfair termination. Their efforts have contributed to the enforcement of the Labour Act, which outlines workers' rights and the conditions under which employment contracts can be terminated (Obiekwe & Obibhunun, 2019).

The Trade Unions Act provide a legal framework that protects union members from victimization when they engage in legitimate industrial actions. Labour unions have historically used strikes as a tool for negotiating better policies, with many of these actions leading to major governmental policy shifts. For example, the nationwide strike against fuel subsidy removal in 2012 forced the government to introduce palliative measures such as the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) to cushion the economic impact on workers. Similarly, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has used prolonged industrial actions to influence policies on university funding and lecturers' welfare, leading to improved budget allocations for education and better working conditions for university staff. Thus, labour unions have remained a formidable force in Nigeria's policymaking process, ensuring that workers' interests are represented in governance. Through advocacy, negotiations, and industrial actions, they have influenced policies that affect their members directly or indirectly. Other sources of Nigerian governmental policies include:

**Constitution:** The Nigerian Constitution serves as the supreme legal document that defines the framework of governance and the rights and duties of the state and its citizens. The current *1999 Constitution*, which replaced earlier versions, is a key source of policies relating to governance, civil rights, and public administration (Onwudiwe & Berwind-Dart, 2010). It outlines the powers of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches and provides guidelines for policy formulation and implementation.

**Executive Orders and Decrees:** In the post-colonial period, particularly during the military regimes, executive decrees became significant sources of governmental policies. These decrees, often unilaterally made by the ruling military leaders, shaped key aspects of governance. *The Economic Stabilization (Temporary Provisions) Act of 1982*, for instance, was a critical policy designed to address fiscal crises during the oil boom, while the *Land Use Act of 1978* redefined land ownership in Nigeria.

**Legislation:** The Nigerian National Assembly (comprising the Senate and the House of Representatives) is responsible for passing laws that guide the formulation of governmental policies. These laws, often debated and enacted through the legislative process, address diverse sectors such as health, education, and the economy. For example, the *Petroleum Industry Act of 2021* is a landmark legislation that reformed the oil and gas sector by creating a more transparent and accountable governance framework.

**Economic Plans and Development Agendas:** Successive Nigerian governments have developed economic plans that serve as blueprints for national development. *The First National Development Plan (1962-1968)*, introduced shortly after independence, focused on infrastructure development and modernization of agriculture. Subsequent plans, such as the *Second National Development Plan (1970-1974)* and the *Third National Development Plan (1975-1980)*, aimed at diversifying the economy and addressing regional imbalances (Ajakaiye & Fakiyesi, 2009).

**International Influences and Agreements:** Nigeria's governmental policies are also influenced by international organizations, donor agencies, and multilateral agreements. The country's engagement with bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank has led to the adoption of policies such as the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in the 1980s, which aimed at liberalizing the economy by reducing government control over key industries.

**Judicial Interpretations:** Nigeria's judiciary plays a vital role in interpreting the Constitution and legislation, thus shaping governmental policies. Judicial decisions, especially from the Supreme Court, have had profound impacts on areas such as electoral reforms, human rights, and resource control. The landmark case of **Attorney-General of the Federation v. Attorney-General of Abia State (2002)**, for instance, redefined the sharing of revenues from natural resources between the federal and state governments.

**Public Opinion and Civil Society:** Over time, civil society organizations, the media, and public opinion have become more influential in shaping governmental policies in Nigeria. Advocacy by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and public protests have led to significant policy changes, particularly in areas such as corruption, human rights, and electoral reforms. The **#EndSARS movement** of 2020, for example, influenced the government to disband the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and reform policing in Nigeria (Anugwom, 2021).

### Key Governmental Policies in Post-Independence Nigeria

**The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), 1986:** This policy, introduced under General Babangida, was designed to tackle economic instability by reducing government expenditure, liberalizing trade, and encouraging privatization. SAP had far-reaching impacts on Nigeria's economy but also led to widespread criticism due to the austerity measures that resulted in increased poverty and unemployment (Obadan, 2020).

**Vision 20:2020 and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS):** In the 2000s, Nigeria developed comprehensive policy frameworks aimed at positioning the country among the top 20 economies by 2020. Although Vision 20:2020 did not achieve its goals, it led to several reforms in sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure (Edo, 2019).

**Petroleum Industry Act, 2021:** The Petroleum Industry Act is a major policy aimed at reforming Nigeria's oil and gas sector, which is a cornerstone of the national economy. It provides a regulatory framework for oil exploration, production, and revenue-sharing, addressing long-standing issues of transparency and community development in oil-producing regions (Usman, 2022).

**National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), 2005:** The NHIS was established to ensure universal access to healthcare in Nigeria. Despite facing challenges in implementation, the policy marked a significant shift towards healthcare reforms aimed at reducing out-of-pocket spending and improving health outcomes (Okafor, 2019).

**Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), 2017-2020:** Faced with economic recession, the government of President Muhammadu Buhari introduced the ERGP, which sought to diversify the economy, restore growth, and build a globally competitive economy. The policy emphasized key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and energy (Usman, 2022).

Nigeria's governmental policies have evolved significantly, shaped by the country's colonial past, military rule, democratic transitions, and global economic trends. While some policies have yielded positive results in areas such as infrastructure development and economic reforms, others have been criticized for their implementation gaps and lack of sustainability. As Nigeria continues to address challenges related to governance, poverty, and social justice, the formulation and execution of well-informed and people-centered policies will remain crucial to achieving long-term development.

### What makes a policy good or bad

Government policies play a crucial role in shaping the economic, social, and political landscape of a nation. The



success or failure of these policies can have profound impacts on the population, and their effectiveness is often subject to debate. Whether a government policy is deemed good or bad depends on various factors, including its formulation, implementation, and the socio-political context in which it operates. A good policy is typically characterized by effectiveness, efficiency, equity, and sustainability. Kraft (2020) emphasizes that effective policies are those that achieve their intended goals using evidence-based decision-making. Kraft further argues that well-structured policies should promote social welfare while minimizing negative externalities. Additionally, policies that are transparent and inclusive tend to be more successful, as they consider diverse perspectives and ensure broad public support (Kraft, 2020).

On the other hand, bad policies often stem from poor planning, inadequate resources, and political interference. Lipsky (2010) highlights the role of street-level bureaucrats in shaping policy outcomes, noting that poorly designed policies can be difficult to implement due to a lack of clear guidelines or resources. When frontline workers, such as police officers, teachers, or social workers, face excessive workloads and limited discretion, the intended outcomes of a policy may not materialize as planned. This can result in disparities in service delivery and policy inefficiencies (Lipsky, 2010).

Moreover, the socio-political context in which a policy is implemented significantly influences its effectiveness. Policies that fail to consider cultural, economic, and institutional factors may face resistance or unintended consequences. Kraft and Furlong (2021) argue that policies influenced by short-term political gains rather than long-term societal benefits often lead to inefficiencies and public dissatisfaction. Thus, good policymaking requires comprehensive planning, stakeholder engagement, and continuous evaluation to adapt to changing circumstances. Holistically, a policy is considered good when it achieves its objectives, promotes social equity, and contributes to sustainable development. Conversely, a policy is bad if it exacerbates inequality, hinders economic growth, or is poorly implemented (International Monetary Fund IMF, 1999).

A good government policy typically addresses the needs of the populace, ensuring that resources are distributed equitably and efficiently. According to Evans (2020), policies that promote social welfare, such as universal healthcare or education, are often deemed beneficial because they provide citizens with equal opportunities. Such policies reduce income inequality and improve the overall quality of life. For example, Sweden's welfare system is widely regarded as a success because it provides comprehensive healthcare, education, and unemployment benefits, contributing to a high standard of living and low poverty rates (Thakur et al., 2003).

Furthermore, the success of a government policy depends on how well it aligns with the country's long-term goals. According to Rodrik (2020), policies that prioritize education, infrastructure, and technological innovation are more likely to lead to sustainable development. For instance, South Korea's focus on education and technological innovation in the 1960s led to rapid industrialization and economic growth, turning the country into one of the world's largest economies within a few decades (Kim & Nelson, 2020).

However, policies can also be harmful if they are poorly designed or implemented. For instance, austerity measures imposed by governments during economic downturns have been criticized for disproportionately affecting low-income households while failing to address the root causes of economic crises (Stiglitz, 2019). In Greece, the austerity policies introduced during the European debt crisis led to significant cuts in public spending, resulting in a severe decline in living standards and increased poverty (Zachariadis, 2020). The Greek case illustrates that government policies can exacerbate existing inequalities if they are not carefully considered and implemented.

Additionally, government policies can fail due to corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, or a lack of political will. When policies are created with the intention of benefiting certain interest groups rather than the population at large, they can contribute to corruption and inequality (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). For example, in Nigeria, government policies aimed at poverty alleviation have often been undermined by corruption and mismanagement, leading to poor outcomes for the targeted populations (Osaghae, 2020). Policies such as National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of 1976, The Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P) of 2012, Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) of 1999 and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) of 2004. These policies and programs

were criticized to be riddled with corruption, nepotism, embezzlement and other ill practices.

A critical aspect of policymaking is its impact on labour movements and employees' rights. When government policies fail to protect workers' welfare, they often lead to industrial actions spearheaded by organized labour bodies. Lipsky (2010) highlights that policies affecting workers' rights are not only shaped by legislative frameworks but also by how street-level bureaucrats enforce them. In Nigeria, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) have played vital roles in challenging policies that negatively affect workers, such as poor wage policies, and employment protection laws (Okoli & Akbefe, 2021). For instance, the removal of fuel subsidies without adequate social protection measures led to widespread protests and strikes, emphasizing how poorly planned economic policies can trigger labour unrest

It is worth noting that failure, inadequate implementation of policies, bad policies and other factors relating to policy formulation has led to industrial actions from organized body with the Nigerian Labour Congress spearheading it.

### **Theoretical Framework: Karl Marx Conflict Theory and its Applications to Industrial Relation/Actions**

Conflict Theory was primarily developed by Karl Marx in the mid-19th century, particularly through his works such as "The Communist Manifesto" (1848) and "Das Kapital" (1867). The theory was built on various premises. The major assumption of conflict theory is that society is structured around the competition for limited resources, leading to conflicts between different social classes, particularly the bourgeoisie (capitalist class) and the proletariat (working class). The theory also emphasized that social order is maintained through coercion and power, rather than consensus. Those in power create and enforce rules that serve their interests, often at the expense of marginalized groups. Marx further argued that the history of society is the history of class struggles, where the oppressed (working class) resist exploitation and seek to change their conditions.

Conflict is viewed as a necessary force for social change in conflict theory. Thus, industrial actions, protests, and revolutions are seen as legitimate responses to social injustices. In relation to the present study, the NLC's industrial actions (e.g., strikes and protests) represent the working class's response to perceived exploitation and unfavorable working conditions imposed by the government and employers. These actions highlight the inherent conflict between labor and capital, illustrating the struggle for better wages, job security, and improved conditions. Marx conflict theory also underscores the power dynamics at play, where government policies often favor the elite, leading to increased disparities in wealth and conditions for workers. The NLC's push for policy changes can be seen as an effort to rebalance this power dynamic and advocate for the interests of the labor force.

According to Marx Conflict Theory, significant social changes often arise from conflict. By implication, NLC's actions can influence governmental decisions, forcing policymakers to address the concerns of workers and tangible changes made in policy and working conditions. Furthermore, on the historical context of labor movements in Nigeria, conflict theory sees a continuous struggle for workers' rights and social justice. The NLC serves as a representation of this ongoing class struggle, making the theory relevant for understanding contemporary issues in Nigerian labor relations.

### **NLC Industrial Actions as a Tool for Policy Reform**

Industrial actions in Nigeria including some led by the NLC and other labour unions, have historically been a powerful tool for advocating policy reforms. Strikes provide workers with the opportunity to voice their grievances and challenge policies that are detrimental to their welfare. One of the most significant impacts of these strikes is their ability to force the government to reconsider or modify policies that directly affect the labor force. For instance, the NLC has often organized strikes in response to government decisions such as fuel subsidy removal, increases in fuel prices, and non-implementation of minimum wage adjustments (Oghojafor et al., 2014).

In 2020, the NLC called for a nationwide strike to protest the increase in fuel prices and electricity tariffs, measures introduced by the government as part of its economic reforms (Ahiuma-Young & Agbakwuru, 2020). The industrial action led to widespread disruptions across various sectors, forcing the government to engage in

dialogue with labor unions. Although the strike was suspended following negotiations, it highlighted the NLC's role in influencing government decisions and bringing labor-related issues to the forefront of national discourse.

The NLC's industrial actions have led to notable changes in government policies, especially in areas related to labor and economic reform. One of the most prominent examples is the introduction of a national minimum wage. Following extensive strikes and negotiations spearheaded by the NLC, the Nigerian government increased the national minimum wage in 2019 from ₦18,000 to ₦30,000, a long-standing demand of labor unions. In more recent times, NLC action have also led to the increase of the national minimum wage from ₦30,000-₦70,000 which is a notable impact on financial policy of the government (Lawal, 2024). From all indication, it can be said that the NLC has been instrumental in compelling the government to reconsider subsidy policies as NLC's strikes and negotiations over fuel price hikes have often led to compromises, where the government introduces palliative measures or suspends controversial policies temporarily.

### **NLC Impact on Working Conditions**

The NLC's industrial actions also significantly impact the working conditions of Nigerian laborers. Workers in Nigeria, particularly those in the public sector, often face unfavorable conditions, including poor wages, delayed salary payments, inadequate safety measures, and lack of social security. Industrial actions by the NLC seek to address these issues by forcing the government and private employers to improve workplace conditions and honor labor agreements.

The prevalence of industrial actions in Nigeria has been notable. For instance, in 2007, the National Bureau of Statistics recorded 79 work stoppages, resulting in 3,415 man-days lost. While more recent comprehensive data is limited, the trend of frequent strikes has persisted, reflecting ongoing labor disputes (Bamidele, 2020).

For instance, the frequent strikes by health workers and teachers, under the leadership of the NLC, have led to negotiations with the government to improve the working conditions in hospitals and educational institutions (Tubonemi et al., 2020). Although the effects of these strikes are often gradual, they have helped raise awareness of the challenges faced by workers in these sectors, leading to incremental improvements.

However, the effectiveness of industrial actions in improving working conditions is not always guaranteed. The persistent use of strikes as a bargaining tool has also created an unstable labor environment, where industrial harmony is frequently disrupted. This has, in some cases, worsened the working conditions of workers, particularly when strikes lead to salary deductions, job losses, or delays in addressing the grievances that led to the industrial action in the first place.

### **Challenges Faced by the NLC in Contemporary Nigeria**

Despite its historical importance and active role in advocating for workers' rights, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) faces significant challenges in contemporary Nigeria. Prolonged strikes, while meant to pressure the government or employers into making favorable changes, often do not yield immediate results. Workers who participate in these strikes frequently endure economic hardships due to lost wages or delayed compensations, further exacerbating their financial difficulties (Nkwoane, 2018). Moreover, in some cases, the desired outcomes, such as policy reforms or improved working conditions, are either slow to materialize or are entirely absent, leading to frustration among workers and the public. The NLC's inability to secure timely outcomes reduces the confidence people have in its effectiveness, making it difficult to sustain long-term support for industrial actions.

A perceived affiliation with political interests is another challenge confronting the NLC. Over the years, allegations of political manipulation and alignments with certain political parties or government factions have occasionally clouded the NLC's image as an independent organization (Okocha, 2024). For example, when union leaders are perceived to be too close to government officials or political parties, it undermines their credibility and neutrality, which in turn weakens the unity within the labor movement. This issue of internal divisions and political compromise also makes it more difficult for the NLC to rally workers for collective action, as some members may doubt the sincerity of their leaders' intentions.

Furthermore, government interference through legal and administrative means poses another significant challenge for the NLC. In particular, the Trade Disputes Act and other labor laws provide the government with substantial powers to intervene in strikes and industrial actions (Bokolo et al., 2020). The government's ability to declare strikes illegal under certain conditions has been used as a tool to suppress labor activism. For example, in recent years, the government has increasingly relied on legal actions to prevent strikes from taking place or to end them prematurely, thus curtailing the NLC's ability to mobilize workers effectively. The threat of penalties and legal repercussions also forces unions to reconsider or delay actions, reducing the impact of their protests and diminishing their bargaining power.

The issue of corruption and compromise within the NLC has also come under scrutiny. There seem to have been accusations of financial mismanagement and bribery among some union leaders, which further weakens the organization's credibility. Reports suggest that some NLC officials have allegedly accepted bribes or compromised on key demands during negotiations with government or employers, prioritizing personal gains over the interests of workers (Ani, 2016). This corruption further erodes trust among rank-and-file members and the public, making it harder for the NLC to mobilize broad-based support for its initiatives.

In summary, the NLC faces a myriad of challenges in contemporary Nigeria, from declining public confidence and skepticism about industrial actions to political affiliations, government interference, and allegations of corruption. These issues have collectively weakened the effectiveness and influence of the NLC, making it difficult for the organization to achieve its objectives in advocating for workers' rights.

### **Recommendations: The way forward**

To enhance the NLC impact on government policies and working conditions, it is crucial to adopt feasible strategies that have been successful in other countries while addressing the unique challenges of the Nigerian labor environment. The following are strategies that could be implemented to overcome the identified challenges:

#### **Strategic Alliances and Coalition Building**

One of the key strategies is forming alliances with civil society organizations, professional bodies, and international labor organizations. In countries like South Africa and Brazil, labor unions have successfully collaborated with non-labor entities to amplify their voices. For example, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) works closely with civil society to ensure that labor issues are not isolated from broader social justice movements (Barchiesi, 2019). By aligning with multiple sectors, the NLC could galvanize wider support, thus creating more pressure on the government and increasing the chances of achieving positive outcomes.

#### **Adoption of Negotiation and Mediation Mechanisms**

Rather than relying heavily on strikes, the NLC should adopt more proactive negotiation and mediation mechanisms, which have worked effectively in Scandinavian countries. In Norway for instance, the labor movement emphasizes the importance of social dialogue with the government, prioritizing discussions and compromise over industrial action (Alsos et al., 2019). Such negotiations allow for more peaceful and sustained progress in labor policies without the economic and social costs associated with prolonged strikes. The NLC could implement these strategies through formalized negotiation frameworks, where labor disputes are resolved through transparent dialogue before reaching industrial action.

#### **Enhancing Internal Transparency and Accountability**

To rebuild trust among workers and the public, the NLC must address internal corruption by improving transparency and accountability within its leadership. In some developed countries, unions use digital platforms to disclose financial statements and details of negotiations, ensuring that members are well-informed about the activities of their leaders. Such measures can help the NLC restore its credibility, encourage participation, and reinforce the belief that the union's actions genuinely reflect workers' interests.



## **Leveraging Public Relations and Media Engagement**

A key challenge for the NLC has been public fatigue and skepticism toward strikes in recent times. To address this, the NLC could develop a more robust media and public relations strategy that explains the rationale behind industrial actions and the benefits for all workers. In France, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) has successfully used media campaigns to build public support for strikes by framing them as collective struggles for workers' rights and social justice (Giraud, 2020). By effectively communicating the purpose and potential gains of industrial actions, the NLC can generate more public empathy and support, reducing skepticism.

## **Policy Advocacy and Legal Reforms**

To mitigate the effect of government interference, the NLC must advocate for reforms in labor laws that curtail its capacity to organize strikes. Successful policy advocacy in countries like India has demonstrated that unions can push for legal reforms that expand workers' rights to strike and protest. The Indian trade unions' efforts led to the amendment of several labor laws, ensuring greater legal protection for workers involved in industrial actions. Similarly, the NLC can focus on engaging lawmakers and policymakers to amend Nigeria's Trade Disputes Act, which currently allows the government to declare strikes illegal under certain conditions.

## **Economic Alternatives during Strikes**

To address the economic hardship that workers face during prolonged strikes, the NLC could create a strike fund or savings scheme for workers, similar to the models adopted by labor unions in the United States. The United Auto Workers (UAW) union, for example, maintains a strike fund that supports workers during long industrial actions (Gibney, 2022). By providing financial support to workers during strikes, the NLC can reduce the economic strain and sustain worker morale during industrial actions, which would allow for more prolonged and effective actions.

## **Capacity Building for Leaders and Members**

Lastly, the NLC could invest in the capacity building of its leaders and members to improve the effectiveness of its actions. Training in negotiation tactics, media engagement, and legal rights can empower union leaders to navigate industrial actions more strategically. Countries like Germany and the United Kingdom have successfully implemented leadership training programs for union officials, which have contributed to more strategic decision-making and effective labor actions (Jäger, 2022). By adopting similar capacity-building measures, the NLC can strengthen its leadership and negotiation capabilities.

In conclusion, the NLC can improve its positive impact by adopting a multifaceted approach that includes building alliances, enhancing negotiation strategies, ensuring transparency, advocating for legal reforms, and providing economic alternatives during strikes. Implementing these strategies can revitalize the NLC's role as an effective advocate for workers' rights and create a more conducive environment for achieving policy reforms and better working conditions in Nigeria.

## **CONCLUSION**

Industrial actions led by the Nigerian Labour Congress have played a pivotal role in shaping government policies and improving working conditions in Nigeria. While the NLC has achieved notable successes in advocating for workers' rights, the challenges it faces highlight the complex relationship between labor unions, government policies, and the broader economy. Strikes remain a powerful tool for change, but their long-term effectiveness depends on the ability of labor unions to maintain public support, ensure unity among workers, and navigate the evolving legal and political landscape. As Nigeria continues to experience economic and social challenges, the role of industrial actions and the NLC will remain critical in advocating for fair labor practices and better working conditions.

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