

## COVID-19 and the Changing Face of Work/Industrial Relations in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Industries are usually places of production and of manufacturing. They are places where goods are produced and services rendered. These are made possible by the presence of and /or interaction of persons referred to as actors or participants. In industries therefore, there are two key actors; the employee and the employer having the State as an umpire. These actors in the course of material production engage in interaction. It is this work relation/interaction in conjuncture with the environment that translates into tangential goods and services for societal consumption. In Nigeria, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic saw the alteration of the existing work relations in the country whereby the work relations assumed a new form and nature. It ushered in a spatial as against a physical work space, personalized as against collectivized (group) work process, authoritarian as against democratized work relations etc. The altered work relations off-course has implications on work relations in the industries (workers/management) as well as the country in general. The attendant implications include, job rationalization, spiritless trade unionism, labour exploitation, income/revenue reduction/decline etc. From a sociological perspective and in the attempt to situate the study within a given theoretical perspective the paper adopted the theoretical biasness of the Marxian conflict theory in the exposition of the study problem. The paper therefore suggests that there should be legislation by government regulating work relations in the country in terms of slashing of salary and arbitrary laying-off of workers in the name of right-sizing.

### **Background to the Study**

Industry has to do with those economic activities that translate to the production of goods and services. Industries are therefore centers of economic activities. It is the nerve center of any nation in that it sustains and determines the developmental rate of any country Nigeria inclusive. It is on this note that Jean Fourrastie posits that a country's economy consists of three sectors which are the primary, secondary and the tertiary sectors (Ogunbameru, 2005). The primary sector has to do with activity concerned with commodity production which is farming. The secondary sector has to do with manufacturing and food processing while the tertiary sector is centered on services rendering. She however noted that for any nation to be industrialized, the secondary sector which deals with manufacturing and processing must of necessity be expanded beyond that of mere food production which is farming (Ekpenyong, 1998). This assertion goes to show that the industrial growth of a country is an indicator of how developed and advanced that country is in that it is the driving force in terms of the socio-economic and political development of that country. That explains why countries take serious the issues that have to do with the production of goods and services (industry). Attentions are most usually paid on them in terms of policy framework, interaction patterns etc. This is done in order to ensure a smooth and conducive productive environment devoid of encumbrances for the thriving of the industries noting that activities within and extant of the industry can impede on its production ability and general functionality.

Based on the above, it is therefore revealing that in industry, consists of actors or participants who are engrossed with the daily production of goods and services but of whose interaction or production relation can either enhance or impede on the ability of the industry to actualise its noble objective(s). This then explains the attention giving to the nature/mode of interaction or production relations existing in an industry order than just the economic activity itself. As earlier pointed out, in industries there are those that are engaged in the economic activity of the industry. These are the workers and their employer/s (actors or participants). These actors in the course of production interact between and among themselves. It is this interaction process that results in the actual production of goods and services which are consumables in the society. It is of essence to state that this interaction process in the industry by the participants can either be positive or negative; positive in terms of smooth and cordial relationship and negative in terms of conflicting and antagonistic working relationship. However, every organisation strives to maintain a cordial and harmonious working relationship between and among the interacting actors in the industry (Ofili and Raimi; 2020). While it is imperative for a harmonious working relationship between the participants in an industry, it is worth noting that certain factors/forces come to play to either enhance or negate this process. These factors could emanate either from within the industry and/or outside the industry. Those influencing factors emanating from within the industry/organisation can be listed as; the salary structure, work organisation/coordination, managerial style, grievance procedure amongst others while the external/outside influencers as in the Nigerian case are, government eco-political policies (labour laws, fuel subsidy, COVID-19 restrictions, host community interference, global influence etc.

It is imperative to state that to understand the nature of the relationship that exist among and between the productions actors in the country, these overarching forces should of necessity be put into consideration. The question worth considering then is what has been the nature/mode of the work relations (industrial relations) hitherto existent in the country? Going forward, what form and manner has that working relationship assume in the face of the emergence of the global COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria? How has the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic affected and/or influenced the nature and mode of work relations (industrial relations) in the country? These are questions begging for answers and so constitute the central focus of this study.

It is obvious that work relations in the country have witnessed a transformation in the current dispensation of the pandemic. The way and manner work relations are being carried out in the country have witnessed a change from what was hitherto the usual practice and this has great implications on industrial relation in the country. These implications are of concern and/or interest to this study in that it influences the socio-economic and political life of not just the industrial actors but also the members of the larger society of which the industry in question derive its existence. In a nutshell, of interest to this study is the determination of the influence of the emergence and existence of COVID-19 pandemic and its transformational role (either positive or negative) on the form and nature of the work relations (industrial relations) in the country.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

**COVID-19 Pandemic:** The acronym COVID-19 is a derivative word. The co stands for corona, the vi for virus and the d for disease and the 19 for the year the disease was first discovered. The word COVID-19 therefore stands for corona virus disease. The disease was first discovered in the city of Wuhan in China. The disease is most associated with pneumonia and with respiratory cases (Eyisi and Ofili, 2021). The disease if not early dictated, isolated and treated can lead to the demise of the affected individual. More importantly, the virus is an infectious disease that can be passed on from one infected individual to another. The virus has the capacity to reside on the surface of an object or body part of humans such as the palm. That explains why the WHO (World health organisation) demanded as part of the preventive measure to the contraction of the virus, the adequate and regular washing of hands by individuals most especially when in/ after contact with other persons. Other preventive measure as demanded by the world health organisation is the non insertion of the hand/finger in any openings in the human body such as the nose, eyes and mouth etc. The organisation equally demanded the covering of the face by the wearing of the face mask which has being designed in various forms and shapes. The rationale behind the wearing of the face mask is to prevent individuals from easily inserting their fingers which is a major abode and infection means into either the nose, eyes or mouth. Essentially too is to prevent the virus from being passed on to another person through sneezing and/or coughing since the virus is transmittable and contagious.

Due to the infectious and contagious nature of the disease and the need to avert a drastic and devastating spread and effect, there was therefore a necessitation of the introduction

of the policy on Lockdown. This policy was embraced and implemented by virtually all countries in the world. The policy places a restriction order on the free movement of humans and of commodities. This restriction order involved both intra-borders; inter border and trans-border movement of both human and vehicular traffic. The essence of the movement restriction order/policy is to limit the virus/disease within the infected region thereby preventing it from spreading to other regions be it within the city/town, country or outside the country. By this restriction order the virus is supposedly curtailed within the infected region thereby preventing a wide spread.

This restriction policy or order while affecting the fundamental right of the people in terms of free movement as contained in the constitution and in the United Nations charter on Human rights equally do have implications on the various aspects of individual lives and that of the country (Soludo, 2020). On the part of the individual(s), the COVID-19 pandemic brought about health challenging conditions on the people. Arising from the movement restriction policy of the pandemic, individuals most especially the sick could not easily access health care services in that the law enforcement agents were there to enforce the order. In Nigeria that brought about the vagrant abuse and intimidation of commuters and sometimes resulting to physical assault, mal-handling of the concerned persons and even to death. Report has it that the security agents in the guise of protecting or enforcing the lock-down killed more Nigerians than the corona virus itself (Kabir, 2020). To this end, it was recorded that about 18 persons were extra-judicially killed by the security operatives while enforcing the lock-down in some states in the country (Kabir, 2020). The restriction order not minding the health challenges the people were passing through empowered the security agents in the guise of protecting or enforcing the order to incivility and randomness. More so, the pandemic with its restrictions order brought about individualism and social exclusion of individuals all in the attempt to stay safe from the disease (Oyetimi, 2020; Bauman, 2003). This stay safe attitude negates the cultural values and orientation of the Africans that tend to portray communalism and the spirit of brotherhood as against that of individualism (Giddens and Sutton, 2013). So it is that in Nigeria under the pandemic and the restriction orders resulting in the closure of markets and business activities, economic survival for the average and so called common man was tough and difficult. Essentially too, the restriction order in conjuncture with the lock-down generated a replica effect of commodity scarcity with its resultant outcome of commodity price hike with its deafening economic hardship on the already bartered citizenry (NBS, 2020; Abati, 2020; Adegboyega, 2020). The imposed social exclusion and individuality had an adverse implication on the socio-economy and psychology of the people thereby leading to the lost of dignity and self-will to the point of fatalistic behavioural tendencies (Ajunwolo, 2020; Oyetimi, 2020).

In Nigeria, the attempt to remedy this situation led to the introduction of what is referred to as palliative measures. However the introduction of the palliatives by the government had little impact on the life survivability of the people due to the reckless and insincere distribution strategy adopted by the implementers of the programme/policy. Due to the near failure of the palliative measure of the government at various level of governance

which was introduced to cushion the economic hardship occasioned by the lock-down, the remedial option left for the people was the recourse to resource collectivity and communality (Morgan, 1999). That served as coping mechanism for the people during that hope challenging period.

It should equally be noted that the pandemic with its accompanying lock-down exposed a lot of subterfuge, abnormalities and irregularities on the part of the government. The pandemic helped to reveal the realities in Nigeria as relating to the conditions of her economy, educational system and health care system and essentially too her work-relations/industrial relations approach/strategy (Eyisi and Ofili, 2020). The latter however will be given a more detailed consideration being our major area of interest or focus. Be that as it may, a consideration of the health situation of the country in the face of the pandemic revealed a regrettable state of affairs. While the entire world was advancing medical strategies on how to combat the pandemic thereby protecting her citizenry, the Nigerian government was busy battling with the health care practitioners over issues of salary and allowances payment that saw the doors of the government owned hospitals been shut down and patience unattended to. The pitiable side of the situation is the unanticipated and unwarranted death of some sick individuals (Akinwotu and Burke: 2020; Kola: 2020) who would have being treated and so not die if the hospitals were functionally opened. That exposes the palpable and starkly health care situation in the country whereby the countries all over the world were battling on how to combat the pandemic, in Nigeria the situation is how to prevent industrial action by the health care practitioners/providers. Consequent on this the citizenry most especially the average and the so called down trodden in the country take a solace in the near affordable and available but not too reliable traditional health care system. What a calamitous and piteous situation?

The educational system itself was not left out in the devastating effect of the corona virus pandemic. In the world over, the effect was felt and Nigeria was no exception. Schools arising from the curtailment policy of lockdown were equally shut down whereby pupils and students alike were asked to stay at home thereby preventing them from attending school/classes. This equally affected the school/academic calendar of the educational system resulting in the truncation and altering of the school curriculum and calendar. Students were made to stay at home without attending school due to the pandemic and consequential lockdown occasioned by the infectious and contagious pandemic. Though the youths (majorly students) were assumed to be less amenable and susceptible to the disease, they were however, to be on the safer side equally lockdown. The introduction of the e-learning programme by the education ministry could not address the learning challenges occasioned by the movement restriction/lockdown. The e-learning programme was fraught with so many challenges such as irregular power supply, lack of data arising from financial incapacity on the part of students/parents, low computer/e-learning knowledge, inadequate e-learning equipment etc. These challenges rendered the effective implementation of the programe near difficult and seemingly impossible.

The industrial sector was not equally left out in the devastating impact of the corona virus pandemic. The industrial sector was hard hit by the pandemic. The effect on the industrial sector is still lingering and yet to be overcome if actually it will ever be. The face of work/industrial relations in the aftermath of the pandemic in the country has witnessed a transformation and a lingering consequence on the individual worker(s), employer and the economy at large. This will be giving further attention in the subsequent section.

In all, it should be noted that the Corona-virus has come to stay and will it ever be eradicated from our existential life noting that a new variant (Delta variant) which is acclaimed to be even more deadly and devastating has emerged? Will the knowledge so far acquired in tackling the disease (isolation, quarantine, case tracing and containment) with its associated hand washing, wearing of face mask, lockdown and work restriction be the magic band?

**Work/Industrial relations:** The term industrial relations have being variously defined. Irrespective of the varied definitions by varied scholars, there is a melting point. Being cognizance of this and for clarity and easy comprehension the associated terms (industrial relations) will be dissected and separately explained. We start by reducing the word industrial to industry. Industry is a place of manufacture. It is a place where goods most especially are produced. It is a place where productive activity takes it. It is in industries that raw materials with the efforts of man's mental and physical capabilities are turned into consumable goods and services (Ofili and Bieh, 2019). Industry has being defined by Britannica to mean a group of productive enterprise or organisation that is involved in the production of goods and services and/or sources of income. Without industries goods and services cannot be produced or rendered and so explains its essence in the society. Nations all over the world strive as much as possible to improve on their productive capacity by improving and/or increasing their industrial base. It is the nature of the industrial base that determines the nature and level of the economic activities in the country. The nature and level of the economic activity in turn determines the nature and level of development of the country. The nature and level of economic development of a country consequently determines/influences the level of the existential well-being of the people in terms of per capital income and the general standard of living. This explains the essence and attention usually paid to industrial growth and advancement by governments all over the world.

In organizational study, industries are generally grouped into either, primary industry, secondary industry and tertiary industry. The Primary sector has to do with extraction and agriculture. It is the primary sector in that it is the base of production being the supplier of raw materials for every industrial/productive activity. The Secondary sector is that industrial sector saddled with the responsibility of manufacturing. It is that sector that has to do with the actual production of goods. It is the sector that transforms the primary industrial sector (raw material/agricultural produce) into tangential and concretised goods (manufactured products) for consumption by the industrial man in an

industrial world. The other by general classification is the tertiary sector. This sector has to do with services provision. Essentially too, industries can be classified or grouped base on the product or function they perform. With product criteria as the classification mode, certain industries can be identified such as; cement industry, petroleum and gas industry, entertainment industry, construction industry, steel industry etc. Irrespective of the mode of classification, the central operational focus of all industries is the production of goods and services geared at profit maximization. Consequently, industries exist to maximize profit. However, to actualize this, they inadvertently engage in the production of goods and services.

It is in the course of the production of goods and services that they (managers of industries) enter into a production relationship which Karl Marx called an existing relation of production (Harvey, 1983). The existing relations of production can either be cordial or antagonistic in nature. The relationship is cordial in that there is a peaceful atmosphere in the work environment while on the other hand, antagonistic where the working environment is characterized by rancho, acrimony and pervasive pressures and tension negating functional/production efficiency. The nature of the relationship existing between and among the production participants/actors invariably determines the nature and level of harmony and stability of the organisation/industry.

In industry two main actors interact in the course of material production. These are the employer (management) and the workers (labour/union) (Ofili and Bieh, 2019). In industrial relations, the interests of both participants are usually dialectically opposed to each other. While the employer aims at profit maximization the workers on the other hand aim at wages/salary optimisation (wage increase). These interests are at parallel to each other and so remain the source of conflict in industries/organizations (Iheriohanma,2002). While it is noted that both parties strive to maximize their respective interest in the course of production relations, it is equally important to note that the relationship is that of a 'zero sum game' where the winner takes it all (Ogunbameru, 2005). However, in the existing production relations in industries the workers are usually disadvantaged in the power game with the employer. This disadvantageous position of the workers is occasioned by the instrumentality of the hire and fire capability of the employer against the workers. This disadvantaged and skewed power game exposes the workers to exploitation, manipulations and intended vagaries and antics of the employer. In the attempt to equalize and/or balance the power game, there is recourse to collectivized efforts and energy by the workers culminating and manifesting in workers unionization. Workers therefore collectivise their efforts and energy in organizations/industries in order to balance the power game that is naturally skewed against them by the fact of their non-ownership of the means of production other than their labour power (Sayers, 2017). The extent to which this collectivized efforts and energy by the workers (labour union) has being able to balance the power game between her and the employer in the industry has remained a subject of discuss among scholars of industrial relations and organizational management. In spite of the above, it is incontrovertible that workers surrender their individual wills to an agreed body known

as labour union with the intent of deriving some level of advantage in their power game relationship with the employer (management). The union(s) now representing the workers interacts or relates with the employer (management) on issues of mutual interest to both parties.

Arising from the supposedly 'balance' power game by both parties in the industry/organisation, the interests of labour (workers) are now championed and negotiated upon rather than being imposed on them by the employer. The atmosphere of negotiation creates a feeling of achievement and stakeholder-ship on the workers. This off course has an implication on labour-management relationship and cooperation.

**Theoretical framework:** In the discus of the correlate between COVID-19 pandemic and the work relations in the country, the Marxian conflict theory will be adopted to that effect. The theory tenaciously upholds the primacy of the economy and its associated division of the society into two polar classes of the haves and the have not of the means of production. The haves are the owners of the means of production referred to as the Bourgeois(employer) while the have-not of the means of production are referred to as the Proletariats (employees/workers). The interest of both parties in the work place are usually opposed and in conflict to each other (Medoye, 2020). There is usually a dialectical antagonistic relationship between the two actors in the work relation arising from the exploitative nature of their relationship which is skewed in favour of the employers (the capitalist) as against the employees - the Proletariats (Sayers, 2017; Harvey, 1983). This exploitative relationship will become so pervasive that it will culminate in class conflict whereby the workers will engage in class action for the overthrow of the capitalist paving way for the eventual entrenchment of the leadership by the proletariat (dictatorship of the Proletariats) cum an egalitarian society.

The theory is relevant in that it reveals to us the nature of the relationship existent in industrial work-place which is that of exploitation and marginalization which here is revealed by the reduction in workers' salaries/wages occasioned by the outcomes of the pandemic.

The theory is equally relevant for the study in that it gives insight on how exploitation of the workers by the employers are been engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic in that with the pandemic, a favourable condition for the further exploitation and marginalization of the workers by the employer in the guise of right-sizing etc is provided and perpetuated.

More so, with the theory it is evident that the driving force of the work relations in industries is the economy rooted in the drive for materialism both on the part of the workers and the employers superintended by the state. Hence it is made clear that as long as this materialistic drive persists, so shall the exploitation of the workers by their employers persists thereby making conflict in industrial work-place inevitable as buttressed by the incessant industrial conflicts masquerading as strike in the country



such as the ongoing (2021) strike embarked upon by the Nigeria Medical Association (NMA) in demand for the payment of their COVID-19 health allowance which for the same reason of materialistic drive the Government (employer) is refusing to uphold thereby making the industrial battle line drawn. Others include the strikes (2019, 2020 etc.) by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and her recent treat to commence same if they reached negotiated agreement by both (ASUU and Government) is not implemented. It is these afore stated that endears the theory as a relevant perspective for the exposition of the topic under discuss.

**Implications of COVID-19 on the Work Relations in Nigeria:** It was observed in the previous section that the emergence/outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has great implications on all sectors of the national life having the work relations in the country not left out. The nature, form and mode of industrial/work relations in the country have had an adverse blow from the outbreak of the pandemic. Since the emergence of the pandemic, the nature and mode of work relations in the country have not remained the same and may not moving forward, remain the same as the disease has introduced a new way of life for the people and the work relations. While in the health sector, the disease with the associated pandemic unleashed an unprecedented havoc that has rattled the health brick of the country and that of the world. The world seemed to have being caught napping by the disease as it releases its fangs of death and comatose incarceration on the people. The country and the world at large felt belittled by the off-sough of the pandemic. It should be noted that while the country's health challenge was been inundated by the pandemic, so also was the country's industrial sector with its associated work relations. In the early days of industrialization with its attendant wage labour, the erudite scholar Karl Marx saw an exploited and marginalized worker arising from the pervasiveness of capital exhibited in its primitiveness in expropriation and accumulation as seen replicated in the COVID-19 pandemic periods. The COVID-19 pandemic sought of provided an incentive for the alteration of the hither-to existing work relations order in the country. The pandemic served as a spring board for the changed face of industrial relations practice and the entrenchment of a new-normal in the country. This changed face and the attendant new-normal has implications on industrial relations (work) practice in the country. These, the study will here attempt an X-ray and exposition.

First, as observed earlier, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a restructuring of the work process and relationship in industries in the country thereby resulting in the rationalization of labour. Due to the devastating economic/financial blow of the pandemic on industries, managers of industries in the country were left with no other option than to adopt copying mechanisms for their survival and one of such coping strategies was the adoption of work rationalization whereby industries engaged in 'right-sizing' of the workforce in the bid to minimize operating cost. This work rationalization resulting in what the managers of industry termed 'right-sizing' (just to justify their economic interest) consequently brought about work reduction as seen in the sack of workers in the manufacturing and banking sectors or their being placed in work redundancy (Rilwan; 2020). This reduction arising from the rationalization brought about

job loss on the part of the employees thereby increasing the number of prospective job seekers in the labour market. This rationalisation process was witnessed in most industries operating in the country as a result of the operational capacity which was below capacity.

The labour rationalization arising from the COVID-19 pandemic saw a new era in work relations in that it exposed employees to undue exploitation and marginalization whereby less number of persons were made to do the same amount of work which supposedly would have been done by more number of persons. This was most noticeable in the Aviation sector (Rilman, 2020), banking sector and the media industry. In this circumstance, the case of Access and First Banks readily come to mind. These banks among others had to reduce their work force and there after subjected the remaining workers to still perform those jobs which their sacked colleagues would have done. Less number of workers were now made to do the work that were done by their colleagues who by virtue of the rationalization exercise were dropped from the organisation either by right-sizing or by redundancy consequently engendering stress and fatigue on the affected workers. This amounts to labour exploitation and marginalization rationalized by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many organizations/industries took advantage of the COVID-19 physical distancing policy to reduce their workforce and the gains derived from that reduction necessitated its perpetuation even with the decline in the pandemic incidences and easing out of the lock-down policy. That was a great disservice to the affected workers be they the sacked or retained but over-burden workers.

The other implication of the covid-19 pandemic on the work relations in the country is that of reduction in the salaries/wages of workers in the country. The COVID-19 necessitated the rationalization policy were by organisations were no longer operating at full capacity arising from the lock-down and physical distancing policy of the government. Due to the inability of organisations to operate at full capacity, their profit margins were therefore affected as witnessed in the Aviation industry where it was estimated that about 3.5 million passengers resulting to about \$760 million in revenue were lost during the pandemic period (Rilman, 2020), consequently affecting their ability to optimally adhere to their contractual obligation to their workers in terms of salary/wage payment. Most organisations in the attempt to avoid a lay-off/sack of their workers resorted to reduction of the salary accruing to them. In some organizations such as the First Bank, Access Bank and some others, the salaries of the workers were slashed by 50%. This was also the case of Arik airline where about 90% of its workers were sent on compulsory leave without pay and the company further implemented an 80% salary cut (Rilwan 2020). The interesting or worrisome aspect of this is that it was a decision collectively agreed by the management and the workers through their representative - trade union. The workers were left with no option other than to accept the reduced salaries/wage instead of being laid off and hence thrown into the already battered and over congested labour market.

It should however be noted that this reduction in salaries/wages of the workers tend to have great implications on the affected workers as it negatively affected their purchasing power in the society. With the reduced salary, it became difficult for the workers to cope with the already spiraling hike in price of commodities in the market thereby making life most unbearable for the average worker. This off-course has implication on the morale of the affected worker. It should be noted that the reduction in salary equally had health implication on the workers. With less money at their disposal and with the pandemic threat, the incidences of susceptibility and amenability to opportunistic infections and diseases became unquantifiable. This had an aftermath implication on work relations and productivity.

The other implication of the labour rationalization which is a fall out of the pandemic outbreak was a reduction in the check-off dues accruing to the workers union. The rationalization exercise saw a reduction in the labour force by management which consequentially saw a decline in the amount of money entering the union's purse due to the reduced number of workers in the organisation. The implication of this on work relations is the occurrence of a financially weakened and fractured trade union that is unable to financially check-mate the excesses of the management as relating to workers work conditions. This financial incapacitation emanating from the decline in the check-off dues by the workers tended to weaken the ability of the in-house trade union to champion the cause of its members as was evident in the seemingly inability of the unions to enforce the implementation of the agreed minimum wage in the country. The COVID-19 pandemic saw weakened trade union dynamism in the country. This off-course has implication as already stated on work relations in the country which one is labour exposure to exploitation, intimidation and marginalization by the management as was evident in the undue labour (workers) sack, over-usage and reduced wage/salary etc.

### **Summary/Conclusion**

The study was set out to identify and establish the nature and form assumed by work/industrial relations as a consequence of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. What were the implications of the pandemic on the work relations in the country? In addressing this, the historical exposition was triggered whereby the epistemological diagnosis of the COVID-19 and industrial relations practice in the country were espoused.

It was noted that in industries, two main actors or participants are engaged in constant interaction with the State acting as an unbiased umpire. This interaction between the contending participants it was observed could assume either form of conflict or harmony but most often time, conflict. Due to the nature of the relationship existing between and among these actors and taking cognizance of the zero-sum nature of the power game, that necessitates the coming together of workers under an umbrella known as Trade Union thereby resulting in the atmosphere of collective bargaining by both whereby industrial peace devoid of bitterness and rancor is maintained. However, cases abound where industrial peace became elusive resulting in what is referred to as industrial conflict. Importantly too, both actors in the industry interacted on a face-face bases and so likewise was the work process.

These features or work relations however had a dramatic over turn with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country and in the work life of the industrial actors. First consequential outcome of the outbreak of the pandemic was the disruption on the work relations arising from the social/physical distancing policy which tended to place a restriction on the number of persons (employees) expected/allowed to work at a given time and space. In addition to the social/physical distancing, was the lock-down policy which was aimed at curtailing the spread of the pandemic but consequentially resulting in the shutdown of work/industrial places, lost of optimal production capacity by industries and the attendant job lost either through outright sack or redundancy by the workers white-washed in the management antics of 'right-sizing' (Rilwan, 2020). The reduced workforce occasioned by the job lost brought about an over-use, stress and pressure on the remaining workforce (workers). This amounts to workers exploitation and marginalization which as a result of the precarious situation challenging the workers trade union, it was seemingly near impossible for the unions to protect the rights of its members due to its financial incapacitations emanating from the reduction in the workers check-off dues and numerical strength. These culminated in the emergence of a weak workers' trade union that lacked dynamism but rather is amenable to the dictates, whines and caprices of the management.

In conclusion therefore, it will be stated that the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has great implication on the work relations in the country in that it ushered in a workforce that were spatially separated from each other thereby diminishing the spirit of face to face contact and also that of team work. More so, it saw a fractured worker and a weakened and financially incapacitated trade union devoid of vibrancy and dynamism.

**Way forward:** Being aware that the change in work relations in the country is as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which is a health related disease, first way forward is to address or tackle the disease either by elimination or by prevention. On that note, it is most appropriate that the health care institutions in the country are strengthened through adequate funding, equipment/infrastructure and man-power.

More so, there should be legislation by government regulating work relations in the country in terms of arbitrary laying-off of workers in the name of right-sizing.

Essentially too, the collective bargaining mechanism between the workers (unions) and management (employers) should equally be strengthened by government through legislation. Here workers and their employers should be made to obey/comply with the agreements mutually entered for industrial peace.

Finally, resulting from the under capacity utilization by industries arising from the pandemic and its fall-out, the government should assist failing industries with some economic stimulant packages such as tax relief, financial support, currency exchange rate subsidy most especially for manufacturers. These policies will cushion the effect of the pandemic on work processes thereby reducing their operational cost and increasing their operational capacity with the attendant derived benefits among others.

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