

Full Length Research Paper

Trade Unionism: Protection of worker's rights in Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), Port Harcourt (Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company)

Chukwunyenye Iheanacho Okereke

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. E-mail: chuokereke@yahoo.com.
Tel: 234-803-7026-486.

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The focus of this study was on trade unionism in the protection of workers' rights, using Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), Port Harcourt (Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company) as a reference. A partly-coded questionnaire was administered on a randomly selected 384 PHCN workers whose selection was without consideration of place of residence, ethno/tribal and religious background. There is a general awareness (99.5%) of existence of workers' union; a quarter (20%) of the workers is unsatisfied with the quality of welfare facilities in PHCN. The unions are not effective (statistic below 73.16 on a general mean of the mean) in protecting PHCN workers against discriminatory management practices and against unwholesome company policy, due greatly to insufficient fund, corruption and ineffective union leadership. Infringement on workers' rights is perceived (statistic greater than 76.35 mean of the mean) to retard efficiency in workers' job performance and to result to friction between union and management. In recommendation, union leadership should embrace best practices in collective bargaining. Also, character and possession of leadership qualities should be considered in the appointment of union leaders.

Key words:Electricity company, leadership, Nigeria, trade union, welfare, workers' rights.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary industrial setting, the conflicting interests of employers and employees are domesticated under "organized conflict". The interest of the employer (profit maximization) theoretically sustained through strong management philosophy is opposed to that of the employees (improvement in conditions of service) emphasized through Union power. The simultaneity in the expression of these economically rational, but antagonistic interests within an organization unarguably wrecks organizational stability and development as meaningful communication between management and employees could be frustrated through the existence of such inevitable characteristics that include disloyalty, disaffection, low morale and poor motivation for increased capacity utilization of resources.

According to the Nigeria Trade Unions Decree, No. 31 of 1973 a Trade Union is a combination of workers or employees for the purpose of determining the terms and conditions of employment of workers (Yesufu, 1984).

Splendidly, trade unions originated and are formed to protect the individual worker against the rapacity and recklessness of employers and management and even the State (Marx and Engels, 1977), as in periodic retrenchment, lay-offs, rationalization, and lack of health safety environment (HSE) strategy facilities among others. Evidently, 150 workers in the TEXACO Nigeria Plc were laid-off via directive from TEXACO's America major shareholder Tex Pet of New York (The Daily Times, Thursday February 6, 1997). The Lagos State Government threatened to terminate the appointment of 47,000 workers in the State Civil Service if they embarked on individual action to agitate for the payment of N7,500 minimum wages (Nigerian Tribune, Wednesday 21 June, 2000). Similarly, 31 workers of the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), Osogbo office in Nigeria, had sack letters a few hours after they received their promotion letters (Nigerian Tribune, Friday 15 September, 2000). The foregoing unarguably

demonstrates job insecurity in Nigeria.

Broadly speaking, a union negotiates with an employer over wages, working hours and other terms and conditions of employment. Unions deploy their strength to advocate for social policies and legislation that would be favourable to their members or to workers in general. In the absence of trade union, workers naturally become easy victims of oppression and exploitation. When the workers have no group (unions) to speak or protect them, they suffer injustices without explainable reasons. They could be plundered to work under excruciating condition of service without commensurate remunerations; might not have access to fair hearing with the management on issues concerning them. The importance of trade union could be appreciated in a situation where there is no "organized conflict", a recognized body that represents the interest of the employees and a body that represents the interest of the employers. This is aptly demonstrated in the case of domestic workers. According to www.ncade.org.uk/archives, domestic workers in the United Kingdom are now so deprived of their rights that they are in a situation of virtual slavery, involving the withholding of wage for long periods; a 16 to 20 hours working day, seven day weeks and no holidays; with no access to medical and health services or compensation for injuries. Women regularly experience sexual harassment and abuse that includes actual, threatened or attempted rape.

Workers rights are identified in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) to include freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of forced or compulsory labour; the abolition of child labour and; the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. Explicitly, discrimination in employment and occupation have been observed in several instances where non-parametric factors as sex, social origin (family background, ethnic nationality etc), religion, disability, nepotism and the popular 'godfatherism' (familiarity between the job seeker and officer(s) responsible for employment) are used alongside with those specified in the policies and practices related to recruitment, selection and placement; wages administration; promotion and training; lay-offs and termination of employment.

Providing for workers' right is an integral aspect of welfare (Cowling and Mailer, 1992), which is a corporate attitude or commitment reflected in the expressed care for employees. It has been observed that some employers give glibbal emphasis on labour laws, particularly as related to health and safety at workplace. There is apparent negligence of the Nigeria Labour Act 1987 (Section 47) in most circumstances. The law states inter alia:

"Where in any factor workers are employed in any

process involving excessive exposure to wet, injuries or offensive substance, suitable protective clothing and appliance including where necessary, suitable gloves, footwear, goggles and lead covering shall be provided and maintained from the use of such workers".

In negligence of the Nigeria Labour Act 1987 (Section 47) stated previously, an employee of Flour Mill Nigeria Plc died while bagging fertilizer under a poor working condition, characterized by crowded room without ventilation; without protective equipment such as nose guards, helmets, hand gloves, boots, overall etc. (www.socialistnigeria.org/campaigns/290305.html). The corollary is that workers of Flour Mills Nigeria Plc that agitated for improved working condition and compensation for the deceased employee were victimized by the management (Osakwe, 2005). This has capacity to make the workers apprehensive over their job security, health and safety among others, which might altogether retard morale and productivity.

Coincidentally, health-safety and environment (HSE) strategies are largely neglected in Nigeria. As typified in the Rivers State Environmental Protection Agency (RSEPA) workers who were hitherto not provided with the appropriate clothing. They performed duties, especially removing wastes of all kinds with their bare hands, not protected by gloves. The right of employees to health and safety at work is one of the basic principles of the labour code (<http://ec.eurpoa.eu/youreurope/business/doingbusiness-responsibly/keepi>), such that when the health and safety of employees are not assured they apparently become instruments of production. This could adversely affect morale, which Mitchell (1978) says is job satisfaction (an attitude dealing with one's overall feeling toward his or her job). Besides, it might retard efficiency in job performance, in support to Cowling and Mailer (1992) emphasis that the employees have right to be managed fairly. There are no pretences that several instances of industrial conflict arise from management's indifference to the working conditions of the employees (unions).

In Nigeria, employees of the Port Harcourt City Local Government Area sealed off the council's premises in protest over unpaid salaries (The Punch Newspaper, Monday September 2, 2002). There was non-payment of salaries of civil servants in Edo State for the months of November and December 2002, while pension arrears varied from 4 to 6 months (The Punch Newspaper, Monday January 6, 2003). Similarly, the Abia State government owed workers three (3) months salary (The Punch Newspaper, Monday January 10, 2003). Also, workers of the Ministry of Environmental Sanitation Yenagoa prevented people from entry into the ministry in protest over non-payment of their 3 months salaries and the description of more than 1,000 of them as ghost workers, by which their names were removed from the

payroll (The Nation's Newspaper, Wednesday 20 January, 2010).

Globally, there are reports on abuse of workers' rights, which International Labour Organization (ILO) (1998) describes as basic human values that are vital to social and economic lives. The dimension of the abuse is relative to place and organization. Locomant (2002) had indicated that the Nigerian Labour Congress reports the use of tear gas and real bullets by the Police to disperse workers who were protesting against wage reductions in Bornu State, Nigeria. (www.tradeunionwordachiever.org). Similarly, Warren and Monks (2000) and <http://www.charter88.com/.pubs/violations/monks> found that 90 women food-workers in Britain were sacked when they refused to accept a cut in their over-time pay rate and that employers deny their workforce a say over their conditions of employment. Also, workers at Mexico Maquildoras have been subjected to forced pregnancy testing and other instances that encroached into their privacy or fired for protesting against abuses (<http://www.commondreams.org>). Ferriss (2003) found that in a textile factory in Southern Mexico, junior employees were compelled to sew thousands of Jeans a day for a remuneration of about \$1 per hour; sometimes ordered to sew from 8am on Friday till 4am on Saturdays (<http://www.commondreams.org>). In some instances, as indicated by Morian (2004), a worker might end up working unpaid overtime long hours with no breaks under a horrible working condition (<http://aztec.collegepublisher.com/news>). Succinctly Compa (2000) and www.hew.org/editorials/2000/lance.1030.hrm) reported that each year thousands of United States workers, both educated and less educated are fired and millions are excluded from labour laws meant to protect workers' organizing and bargaining rights.

Although trade unions can generate a tremendous commitment and loyalty where workers are enthusiastic about improving their conditions or about defending them (Australian National University 2002; <http://www.aud.edu.au>), Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), (2003) found that many trade union officials enjoy flamboyant lifestyles (that include wages much higher than that of the workers they represent); which alienate them from realities or issues that daily confront the rank and file. In this circumstance, it is obvious that the union officials do not understand the peculiar problems of the rank and file and might not present them adequately to the management.

This study appreciates extensive studies on workers' rights, but observes little research effort on trade union protection of workers' rights, with no documented evidence on findings that emphasized the power industry. It is therefore, to extend frontiers in knowledge on this theme that this study focused on trade unionism and protection of workers' rights in Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) in Port Harcourt.

Specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- (1) To find out the existence of trade unionism at PHCN, Port Harcourt
- (2) To investigate into the extent to which workers' rights are protected at PHCN, Port Harcourt
- (3) To explore into the impediments of effective protection of workers' rights at PHCN, Port Harcourt
- (4) To examine the perceived consequences of violation of workers' rights at PHCN, Port Harcourt.

METHODS

Study area

This study was conducted in Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company, which is a re-brand for Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) Port Harcourt. The PHCN at inception was known as Electricity Corporation of Nigeria (ECN) until 1972 when it was renamed National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), following the merger of ECN and Niger Delta Authority (NDA) (Ogbonna, 2011) through an asset requiem to Decree 24 of 1972. An assent on March 11, 2005 of the Electric Power Sector Reform (EPSR) Bill established the PHCN Plc and transferred all NEPA functions, assets, liabilities and employees to PHCN on terms not less favourable than those enjoyed immediately prior to the transfer. The Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company has headquarter at 60 ordinance road, Trans Amadi Layout in Port Harcourt. It has business centres, each of which has service centres, in four (4) out of the 36 states in Nigeria. These States are Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom and Cross River.

Brief overview of trade unionism in PHCN

Trade unionism is traceable to 1760 industrial revolution in Britain. Sunmonu (1997) had argued that though several associations for individuals in various craft (barbers, tailors, shoemakers, printers, cordwainers etc) flourished in small units in towns, the use of water power and later steam power by factories gave fillip to the emergence of trade unionism.

The organized trade union movement in Nigeria is traceable to 1917 when civil servants under colonial administration organized themselves into workers' representatives that eventually became known as the Nigerian Civil Service Union. This Union became a pivot with which workers in other sectors agitated for formation of their trade unions before and after independence in 1960. By 1975, there was over 1000 trade unions in Nigeria most of which were polarized into ideological divide that created problems for the country. Consequently in 1976 a commission of Inquiry was established to enquire into the activities of the trade unions, with an administrator appointed over the unions with a task to develop a structure for the proper administration of the unions. With this, the unions were restructured into 42 industrial unions in 1977 and a labour office established. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) was formed and inaugurated in February 1978. The 42 industrial unions became affiliates of the NLC, with a legal backing of trade union (Amendment) Decree 22 of 1978. In 1931, the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) and the Nigerian Railway Workers' Unions were formed. At present (that is, in 2011) it has been observed that there are only 29 affiliated industrial unions in Nigeria all of which

(are under the Nigerian Confederation of Labour.

NEPA, which is presently PHCN according to recent reports (www.investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/private/snapshot.asp?) produces and distributes power through its subsidiaries. The company's subsidiaries include Generation Companies (GENCO), TRANSYCO and Distribution Companies (DISCO). It offers services including construction and engineering of power generating units; maintenance and servicing of power grids; dams operations and water management for power generation; flood control and navigations; resettlement and communications; maintenance scheduling; security and post-contingency analysis.

In Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company, it has been observed that Trade unionism arose from an understanding amongst employees that there is strength in unity and in population. It started as electrical workers' union (EWU) and eventually metamorphosed to electrical workers' union of Nigeria (ELECTRUN), with the clerical workers organized under a separate body known as clerical and allied workers' union (CAWU). At present, there are two notable trade unions in the company. These are (a) the national union of electricity employees (NUEE), to which every staff (both junior and staff belong), (b) the senior staff association of electricity and allied companies, which is specifically for the senior staff.

Population

The target population is 1,573, which was the total population of staff at the Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company as at June, 2011 when this study was conducted. It consists of both senior and junior staff of both genders.

Sample and sampling technique

A sampling frame containing list of all employees in the Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company was with the Assistant General Manager, Personnel of PHCN. From the list, a statistical 25% of the target population was determined and randomly selected through simple random sampling. In all, 393 employees were selected without recourse to their ethno/tribal and religious background and without consideration for their place of residence.

Research instrument

A semi-structured questionnaire was used to obtain information from 393 employees of Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company on trade unionism and protection of workers' rights'. Other information sought included demographic antecedents of the respondents. The instrument was pre-tested before the fieldwork on a randomly selected 25 employees. This was to ascertain the explanatory potentials of the questionnaire, especially in respect of its reliability. This enhanced clarification of possible ambiguities the respondents might have and ensured that they understood the questions. All necessary corrections were effected in the process before administration to the population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response rate to the questionnaire was 98 percent as some of the self-completed copies of the instrument were either not returned or were abused. Eventually, valid copies of the questionnaire were 384.

Socio-economic characteristics

Table 1 shows that out of the total population of employees respondents in Port Harcourt 28.9 percent are aged 21 to 30 years, 39.1% are aged 31 to 40 years, 23.4% are aged 41 to 50 years while 8.6% are aged 51 years and above. Sixty eight (68%) of the respondents are males, while 32% are females. A preponderant (68%) of them are married (living with spouse), 31.2% are in single marital status, while 0.8% are divorced. Almost two-third (64.1%) of the workers has at least a post-secondary education (comprising 15.6%, Post-Secondary Diploma; 41.7% First Degree and Higher National Diploma; and 6.8% Masters Degree or PhD). The respondents are Christians, with majority (41.7%) as protestants (in Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches), followed by Catholics (26.0%) and those in Celestial, Aladura and similar groups (21.9%) and lastly by Eckankar and similar groups (10.4%).

Existence of trade union(s) in PHCN, Port Harcourt

Statistics in Table 2 reveal that almost all (99.5%) of the workers have heard about a group (union) that represents employees. The major source of information about existence of the union is through Union members, followed by co-staff. Data show that substantial proportion (91.9%) of the employees indicated that there are more than one trade union in Port Harcourt notably national union of electricity employees (NUEE) and senior staff association (SSA), while 8.1% said that only one union exists in PHCN, the national union of electricity employees (NUEE).

Protection of workers' rights in the Power Holding Company of Nigeria, Port Harcourt

In Table 3a, 97.7% of the total population of PHCN, Port Harcourt workers affirmed that workers' rights are protected in Power Holding Company of Nigeria, albeit only 80% indicated same in Port Harcourt District. Workers' right is conceptualized to include provision of canteen, pension funds and leave grants, loans on hardship cases, long service grants, assistance to workers transferred to another area and sports facilities. A statistical 20% of the workers said the provision of these issues which are perceived and traditionally described as workers' rights is unsatisfactory.

The predominant impediment to effective protection of workers' rights identified by the workers was insufficient fund, followed by corruption and ineffective union leadership. The least impediment mentioned by the workers was insubordination. Although data in Table 3(a) reveal that almost three-fifth (74.0%) of the workers

Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of PHCN, Port Harcourt respondents N = 384.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (in years)		
21 to 30	111	28.9
31 to 40	150	39.1
41 to 50	90	23.4
51 +	33	8.6
Sex		
Male	261	68.0
Female	123	32.0
Marital status		
Single	120	31.2
Married (living with spouse)	261	68.0
Divorced	3	0.8
Current educational status		
Primary	30	7.8
Secondary/commercial/technical	108	28.1
Post-secondary diploma	60	15.6
Degree (for example HND, B.Sc. BA etc)	160	41.7
Masters' Degree/Ph.D	26	6.8
Religion		
Christianity	(384)	100
*Catholic	100	26.0
*Protestant	160	41.7
*Celestial, Aladura and similar groups	84	21.9
*Eckankar and similar groups	40	10.4

Table 2. Existence of Trade Union(s) in Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), Port Harcourt.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ever heard about a group that represents employees' interest (N = 384)		
Yes	382	99.5
No	2	0.5
Number of union (s) in PHCN Port Harcourt (N = 382)		
Just 1	31	8.1
More than 1	351	91.9

affirmed that their wages are paid regularly, the 26% that indicated on the contrary is quite heuristic. Nevertheless, analysis of respondents' perception (Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagreed) on the effectiveness of workers' union in the performance of certain duties in Table 3b reveals that the Unions ensure regular payment of workers' wages and other financial entitlements; fights against lack or inadequate safety facilities at PHCN and agitates for adequate provision of

medical care for workers. The duties not effectively performed by the Union are protection of workers against discriminatory management practices and protection against unwholesome company policy.

Discriminatory management practices have been observed to relate to actions and inactions of the management against a worker or workers on issues of recruitment, selection and placement; wages administration, promotion and training, termination of

Table 3a. Protection of workers' rights in PHCN, Port Harcourt.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you think that workers' right are protected in PHCN (N = 384)		
Yes	375	97.7
No	9	2.3
Do you think that workers' rights are protected in PHCN, Port Harcourt? (N = 375)		
Yes	300	80.0
No	75	20.0
Are your wages paid regularly in PHCN, Port Harcourt (N = 384)		
Yes	285	74.0
No	99	26.0

Table 3b. Analysis of respondents' perception on the effectiveness of PHCN, Port Harcourt Workers' Union in the performance of certain duties.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance	N
Regular payment of workers' wages and other financial entitlement	75.6*	110.3	12160.8	384
Protects workers against discriminatory practices	63.6	79.1	6238.8	384
Fights against lack or inadequate safety facilities	85.8*	61.8	3823.2	384
Ensures protection against unwholesome company policy	63.4	61.7	3812.3	384
Fights for adequate provision of medical care for workers	77.4*	72.2	5217.3	384
Overall effectiveness	127	385.1	31252.4	384

* indicates that the respondents perception is above average since they have mean scores greater than the expected value of 73.16 on a general mean of the mean.

employment among others. On the other hand, unwholesome company policy is an action plan of an enterprise (whether developed unilaterally by the management or in unison with union representatives) with target on increasing productivity and or enhancing quality service delivery, which may coincidentally have a backwash-effect on personal needs and comfort of the workers. Trist and Bamford (1951) illustrated this unwholesome company policy in the Longwall Cycle method of coal-getting with its associated low productivity by workers. The unwholesome company policy has also been identified by Hines (2006) in a framework for product development.

Perceived consequences of violation of workers' rights at PHCN, Port Harcourt

Table 4a shows that the significant test for the perceived consequences using chi-square (X^2) test (1.1902 E – 162) for independent taking p – value at 0.05 shows that it is significant, which means the opinion of the respondents (workers) is important to the violation of workers' rights. Analysis of respondents' opinion on extent of agreement on certain perceived consequences of violation of workers' rights at PHCN, Port Harcourt in

Table 4b shows that the major consequences are reduction in workers' efficiency in role performance and conflict between union and management. Other perceived consequences that include decrease in morale of workers and labour turnover are least considered.

Discussion of findings

Data reveal a general awareness (99.5%) of the existence of a group (union) amongst the PHCN, Port Harcourt workers, out of whom a preponderant 91.9% said there is more than one union in their Port Harcourt District. Yesufu (1984) cited that a trade union is a combination of workers for the purpose of determining the terms and conditions of their employment. In as much as this could be a justification for the consciousness of existence of such a union in PHCN, Port Harcourt the inexactitude on number of unions is PHCN, Port Harcourt is worrisome. Data show that 8.1 percent of the respondents indicated existence of only one union (national union of electricity employees (NUEE)), as against 91.9% that pointed at the existence of two unions—national union of electricity employee (NUEE) and senior staff association (SSA). The NUEE

Table 4a. Extent of agreement on certain items as consequences of violation of workers' rights.

Item	Strongly agreed	Agreed	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagreed
Reduces efficiency in workers' performance	294 (212.24)	87 (106.50)	0 (39.58)	6 (26.05)	3(6.13)
Decreases workers's morale	303 (200.81)	60 (106.50)	3 (36.97)	3 (24.65)	0(5.80)
Leads to conflict between union and management	174 (212.24)	183 (106.50)	21 (39.08)	6 (26.05)	6(6.13)
Results to labour turnover	60 (205.71)	87 (106.50)	129 (37.87)	87(25.25)	15(5.94)

Figures in parenthesis are the expected values while the others are observed values.

Table 4b. Analysis of respondents' perception on consequences of violation of workers' rights in PHCN, Port Harcourt.

Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance	N
Reduces efficiency in workers' role performance	78.00*	126.12	15907.50	384
Low morale	73.80	130.57	17048.70	384
Conflict between union and management	78.00*	92.00	8464.50	384
Labour turnover	75.60	41.91	1756.80	384

* indicates that respondents' perception is above average since they have mean scores greater than the mean of the mean value of 76.35.

embraces all workers (Junior and Senior) and has become formidable to speak courageously for the workers than the SSA that merely serves the interest of the senior staff alone.

Data show that 20% of the workers pointed that workers' rights in aspects of welfare are not satisfactorily provided at PHCN, Port Harcourt. This welfare is contextualized to include provision of canteen, pension funds and leave grants, loans on hardship cases, long service grants, assistance to transferred staff and sport facilities. Cowling and Mailer (1992) had argued that welfare is a corporate attitude or commitment reflected in the expressed care for employees at all levels. Explicitly Coventry and Barker (1988) explain that staff welfare includes providing social club and sports facilities, supervising staff and

works canteen, running sick clubs and savings schemes, dealing with superannuation, pension funds and leave grants, making loans on hardship case among others. The inability to provide for the staff welfare apparently has implications on motivation for increased productivity and morale among others.

The major impediment to effective protection of workers' rights in respect of welfare identified by workers at PHCN, Port Harcourt was insufficient fund, corruption and ineffective union leadership. In support, AMWU (2003) underscores flamboyant lifestyles of some union leaders that could mask their understanding of the plight of the workers they represent. It has been observed that some union leaders compromise standards and best practices during negotiation with management in

lieu of capricious ends (mostly, monetary benefits). Put differently, the union leaders having mortgaged their conscience during negotiations and collective bargaining lack *locus standi* to forcibly agitate for improved living and working conditions of their colleagues.

Data reveal that 26 percent of the PHCN, Port Harcourt workers said their wages were not regularly paid. This fact, together with the unsatisfactory provisions for staff welfare pointed above in this discussion corroborate Morian (2004) findings that a worker might end up working unpaid long hours under a horrible working condition. Correspondingly, www.ncade.org.uk/archives reports that domestic workers in the United Kingdom are now so deprived of their rights that they are in a situation

of virtual slavery involving the withholding of their wages for long period. The harrowing experiences such situation exposes the workers is better imagined. Obviously, it has capacity to reduce morale in job performance, to retard commitment to excellence in service and to increase sharp practices as in criminality. The tendency to criminality has not received research attention. It suffices, however, that several cases of lost electricity meter, illegal and non-accounted extortions of money from electricity consumers (in exchange for postponement of electricity disconnection, due to non-payment of electricity bills) by PHCN workers are sharp criminal practices that might not be easily extricated from a poor welfare facility. However, the 74% of the workers who affirmed regular payment of their wages poses a riddle.

Recently, there are grapevines on government intention to privatize PHCN very soon. For this, the PHCN workers were apprehensive over this study, which they misconstrued to be master-minded by government. In effect, there was an unexpected balatedness in retrieval of the research instrument (Questionnaire) until the researcher convinced some of the union leaders through an official letter from the University that the exercise was basically academic. The researcher intends to argue a possible interference of an element of bias, arising from some union leaders attempt to persuade the workers to defend the unions.

Data on analysis of respondents' perception show that the PHCN, Port Harcourt unions are not effective in protecting workers against discriminatory management practices and against unwholesome company policy. This contrasts with the aim for the formation of the union, which Marx and Engels (1977) argue to be protection of individual workers against the rapacity and recklessness of employer/management and even the State as in periodic retrenchment, lay-offs, rationalization, lack of health safety environment strategy facility among others.

Data reveal that the major consequences of violation of workers' right at PHCN, Port Harcourt are reduction in workers' efficiency in role performance and conflict between union and management. Several scholars (Owusu-Acheaw, 2010; Osterman, 2010; Singh, 2009; Cowling and Mailer, 1992; Coventry and Barker, 1988) have found an inverse relationship between lack or inadequate staff welfare and productivity. Also, it has been observed that inability to provide staff welfare has been a source of friction between union and management in many organizations.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the following conclusions were made: the employees of Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) Port Harcourt District are mostly Christians and are aware of workers' union, for which a

considerable proportion of them said are more than one (notably national union of electricity employees (NUEE) and senior staff association (SSA)). Workers' rights in respect of welfare are confirmed to be provided in the District by a preponderant percentage (80%) of the employees, as against 20% that indicated that the welfare facilities are unsatisfactory. The components of staff welfare include provision of canteen, pension funds and leave grants, loans or hardship cases, long service grants, assistance to workers transferred to another area and sports facilities. The employees perceived that infringement of workers' rights could result to reduction in workers' efficiency at job performance and friction between union and management. However, the unions do not effectively protect the employees against discriminatory management practices and against unwholesome company policy, due to constraints in finance, corruption and ineffective leadership.

In recommendation, the Union leadership should embrace best practices in industrial relations, especially as related to effective collective bargaining for a better representation of the interest of Union members (the employees). Character and possession of leadership qualities should be carefully considered in the appointment of persons to union leadership.

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