

# **UNIONS WITHOUT UNIONISM, GOVERNMENTS WITHOUT GOVERNANCE:**

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF  
PROFESSOR FUNMINIYI OLADELE ADEWUMI



*Edited By*

**Owei LAKEMFA & Ahmed Aminu YUSUF**

**UNIONS WITHOUT UNIONISM, GOVERNMENTS  
WITHOUT GOVERNANCE:**

**Essays in honour of Professor Funminiyi Oladele ADEWUMI**

**Edited by**

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## **DEDICATION**

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***WE*** dedicate this Book to

**Professor Funminiyi Oladele ADEWUMI**

**who devoted his life to honest intellectualism, a better society based on social  
justice, and to the emancipation of the poor,  
the disinherited and the defenceless**

**and**

**to all those who share these ideals and stand up to be counted  
in this noble struggle for the liberation of humanity  
from want, hunger and poverty.**

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## DEDICATION

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# FOREWORD

**By Femi FALANA**

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This book in honour, memory and celebration of Professor Funminiyi Oladele ADEWUMI, a long standing friend, comrade and political associate, is a worthy contribution to the body of knowledge. Adewumi was a committed and dedicated intellectual, who devoted his life to the study of the working class, the political education of union leaders and activists, and was an active participant in the struggles of workers for improved working and living conditions, national development, the enthronement of social justice and the emancipation of the poor. A cursory look at his curriculum vitae confirms this position.<sup>1</sup>

Nigerian workers have a rich tradition of struggle and culture of resistance. Workers formed trade unions against the wishes of the British colonial masters, resisted various attempts by colonial and military autocrats to tame them and their unions, organised General Strikes during the colonial and post-colonial periods, and compelled governments and employers to grant them concessions. Central to the successes of all these is the commitment, dedication and sacrifice of labour leaders like Michael Imoudu, Wahab Goodluck, E.U. Bassey, Hassan Sunmonu and Ali Chiroma. Most of these labour leaders were the constant target of State Security forces. They, amongst others, saw union struggles as organically linked to their lives, made immense personal sacrifices to improve the conditions of workers and develop the nation, disagreed with one another on ideological issues, but were united on any matter that will improve the lives of rank and file workers and their families.

Since 1988, especially following the inauguration of civilian administration on May 29, 1999, the struggles of the working class are increasingly and progressively being subverted from within by union leaders, leading to, what Adewumi described as, “Unions without Unionism.” This development occurs against the background of neo-liberal policies and programmes, which have greatly devalued the living conditions of the working class, pauperised the vast majority of Nigerians, further underdeveloped the country, and led to serious insecurity and violence, including terrorism. The contributors in this book address these unfortunate and avoidable developments in Nigeria.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Appendix for Funmi Adewumi’s curriculum vitae

The authors call for a return to the tradition of grass rooted unionism, informed by the philosophy and values of working class struggles, fed and nourished by the rank and file workers and led by committed and dedicated leaders - the types of Imoudu, Goodluck, Sunmonu and Chiroma. The logic that flows from the various papers is that working class and trade union struggle should not be allowed to drift into the “protest industry” sector, where union leaders are the directors and major shareholders, while the rank and file workers are reduced to mere objects to enrich union leaders.

The authors equally believe that, if the working class struggles are to be victorious and sustained, they must be organically linked with the struggle for good governance, national development, and respect for human rights, democracy and social justice. Thus, the message is that there should be a confluence between trade unionism and social unionism. This book is recommended to all.

## PREFACE

### Owei LAKEMFA & Ahmed Aminu YUSUF

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The motto of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) is: “Labour Creates Wealth”. This is an enunciation of Friedrich Engels’ theory, in which he argues that:

... Labour is the source of all wealth...next to nature, which supplies it with the material it converts to wealth. [Labour] is the prime basic condition for all human existence that, in a sense, we have to say that labour created man himself.”<sup>2</sup>

Humanity, in order to develop and separate itself from other animals, had to produce tools to cultivate the land, plant and harvest, and when human beings transitioned from a vegetable, to meat diet, produced other tools for hunting, fishing and defending themselves. Human beings also had to build shelter and domesticate animals. Additionally, they had to harness fire to cook meals, a process which Engels pointed out “shortened the digestive process, as it provided the mouth with food already, as it were, half digested.”<sup>3</sup>

All these stages of human development, including tools production, agriculture, hunting, fishing, and animal domestication, harnessing fire and cooking are products of labour. Through labour, which is the process of adding value to natural material, wealth is created. In capitalist economy, this value addition to either natural material or capital, is what is called profit. Eventually in human development, there developed a large mass of people who sold their mental and physical labour in exchange for wages, and another mass who bought this labour in order to make profit and build private wealth. The former are called *workers or the proletariat*, and they constitute the *poor working class*. The latter, who accumulate wealth or profit, are called the *ruling class (the capitalists)*. This unnatural division of humanity into classes also defines the social division of humanity into the “*haves*” and the “*have-nots*.” Therefore, to understand humanity, the evolution of man, society, social formations, classes, political economy, globalisation and the future of society, there is the need to understand the role of labour in the

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick Engels, “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man” in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, Volume Three. Progress Publishers. Moscow. 1977, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 71

development of humanity, labour relations and the dynamics of labour. It is to this noble pursuit and the emancipation of the working class that Funminiyi Olaitunnu ADEWUMI dedicated his scholarship, intellect and life.

Funmi Adewumi, in dedicating his life to the struggles of the working class, first and foremost, believed in and dedicated his life to speaking and fighting for the truth. And it was this, irrespective of who would be affected, that primarily and basically propelled his intellectual vocation and his political activism, as a student, academic, labour unionist and socialist. Funmi did not, however, speak, write and fight for the truth for the sake of the truth. He dedicated himself to the truth principally and basically to improve the lives, interests and wellbeing of the working people, and by extension, the development of Nigeria and oppressed humanity. This, indeed, is what made Funmi *a committed and dedicated intellectual; a rare type of intellectual*, who, in the words of Paul A. Baran, is:

... in essence a *social critic*, a person whose concern is to identify, to analyze, and in this way to help overcome the obstacles barring the way to the attainment of a better, more humane, and more rational social order. As such he becomes the conscience of society and the spokesman of such progressive forces as it contains in any given period of history. And as such he is inevitably considered a “troublemaker” and a “nuisance” by the ruling class seeking to preserve the *status quo*, as well as by the intellect workers in its service who accuse the intellectual of being utopian or metaphysical at best, subversive or seditious at worst.<sup>4</sup>

Funmi Adewumi made a conscious choice for the emancipation of the poor, the have-nots; for the liberation of the mass of the Nigerian people, and humanity from the shackles of the capitalist system. He came to the realisation that it is possible to have *unions without unionism*, and that just because a union says it is a union, does not make it a union, nor does it mean it is a union.<sup>5</sup> This is more so if a union lacks the essential ingredients of unionism, commitment to its members, the consciousness of the working class and does not defend, service and advance the interests of the workers it portends to protect.<sup>6</sup> He spoke openly and critically against unions

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<sup>4</sup> Paul A. Baran, “The Commitment of the Intellectual”, *Monthly Review*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1961, p. 507.

<sup>5</sup> See, Funminiyi Olaitunnu Adewumi, “Unions without Unionism: Towards Trade Union Relevance in Nigeria’s Industrial Relations System and Polity”. This was Professor Funmi Adewumi’s Inaugural Lecture at Crawford University, Faith City, Igbesa, Ogun State, Nigeria, on Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2009. It is reproduced herewith as Chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

without unionism in different fora, putting friendship aside and despite the opposition of the trade union leadership.<sup>7</sup>

Some of the essays in this collection, extend this Adewumi's thesis to government; that it is possible to have *government without governance*; that a government is not a government just because it proclaims it is a government. That a government that cannot protect lives, which is the most basic and most fundamental of all human rights, cannot lay claim to being a government. In this case, it is just a group of persons holding the leverage of state power and dispensing favour to themselves and their cronies, leaving the people to their own devices. The position of Adewumi and his comrades, friends and colleagues is that a government that does not provide the basic needs of its citizenry, including security, clean and drinkable water, food, shelter, education and healthcare, has lost its legitimacy.

This book is the outcome of a "National Symposium" in his honour, under the theme "Democratic Space, Labour and the Socio-Economic Liberation of Nigeria," organised by his comrades, friends and associates immediately the news of his death became well known. The symposium, which held on 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2017 at the ETF Building, Hall A, College of Humanities, Osun State University (OSU), Ikire Campus, was hosted by the Provost of the Ikire Campus of OSU, Professor Abayomi K. Folorunso, chaired by the National Chairperson of the Joint Action Front (JAF), Dr. Dipo Fashina and sponsored by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Nigeria. This book is the outcome of some of the papers presented at the symposium.

Professor Funmi Adewumi, in his thoughts and deeds, was an intellectual of the universe, not just because he taught in various countries and crisscrossed the universe seeking and spreading knowledge, but because his worldview, learning, research and work had universal origins and applications. The essays that follow do justice to these, and his inaugural lecture, which is reproduced here in order to allow Professor Funmi Adewumi, so to say, speak from the grave, is an eloquent testimony to who he was and his principles. In honouring Professor Funmi Adewumi; therefore, we honour ourselves, and here, lay his basic thoughts and those of the people around him, before humanity and history.

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<sup>7</sup> See, Chapters 8, "Neo-Liberalism and the Growing Incidence of Precarious Work: Challenges for Trade Unions", Chapter 15, "The Politician is the People's Problem: An Assessment of The Intellectual Legacy of Professor Funmi Adewumi" and Chapter 16, "The Centrality of Class Struggle Unionism to the Future of Nigeria" of this publication by Ismail BELLO, Femi ABORISADE and Abiodun AREMU respectively.

We express our sincere appreciations to: all those who participated in the organisation of the “National Symposium” in honour of Funmi; the contributors; the children of Late Professor Funmi Adewumi - Taiwo Adewumi and Kehinde Adewumi - for providing relevant documents and photos of their father; and Mr Ulrich Thum, Resident Representative of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Nigeria and Mrs Remi Ihejirika, Project Manager, FES Nigeria, for their financial support in the organisation of the National Symposium and the publication of this book.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

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APC - All Progressive Peoples' Congress

ARLAC - African Regional Labour Administration Centre

AUT - Association of University Teachers

ASUU - Academic Staff Union of Universities

CBN - Central Bank of Nigeria

CDHR - Committee for the Defence of Human Rights

CDS - Centre for Democratic Studies

CIA - Central Intelligence Agency

CLO - Civil Liberty Organisation

CODESRIA - Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa

COLA - Cost Of Living Allowance

CSOs - Civil Society Organisations

CSPN - Civil Society - Labour Prodemocracy Network

DFID - Department for International Development

DISCOs [Electricity] Distribution Companies

ECA - Economic Commission for Africa

ERGP - Economic Recovery & Growth Plan

FES -Freidrich-Ebert-Stiftung

FESSAN - Federation of Senior Staff Associations of Nigeria

FGN - Federal Government of Nigeria

FMG - Federal Military Government

FRN - Federal Republic of Nigeria.

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GENCOs - [Electricity] Generation Companies

GNPP - Great Nigeria Peoples Party (a breakaway from the NPP during its formative stage)

HNLSS - Harmonised Nigeria Living Standard Survey

ILO - International Labour Organisation

IMF - International Monetary Fund

INEC - Independent National Electoral Commission

IWW - Industrial Workers of the World

LASCO - Labour and Civil Society Coalition

LP - Labour Party

LUP - Labour Unity Front

MAMSER - [Directorate of] Mass Mobilisation for Self-Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery

MNCs - Multinational Corporations

MHWUN - Medical & Health Workers Union

MSMEs - Medium Small and Micro Enterprises

NANS - National Association of Nigerian Students

NASU – Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities

NBS - National Bureau of Statistics

NCNC - National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons

NCP - National Conscience Party

NCSU - Nigeria Civil Service Union

NEC - National Executive Council (meeting)

NECA - Nigerian Employers' Consultative Association

NEPA - National Electric Power Authority

NEEDS - National Economic Empowerment & Development Strategies

NDC - National Delegates' Conference

NILS - Nigeria Institute for Labour Studies (renamed Michael Imoudu National Institute for Labour Studies)

NITEL - Nigeria Telecommunication Company

NLAC - National Labour Advisory Council

NLC - Nigeria Labour Congress

NLP - Nigeria Labour Party

NNDP - Nigerian National Democratic Party

NNPC - Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation

NPN - National Party of Nigeria (a new improved pan-Nigerian version of the Northern Peoples Congress)

NPP - Nigerian People's Party (not unlike the NCNC)

NRP - National Republican Party

NUBIFIE - National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Employees

NUEE - National Union of Electricity Employees

NUNS - National Union of Nigerian Students

NUPENG - Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers

NUPTE - National Union of Post and Telecommunication Employees

NUS - Nigerian University System

NUT - Nigerian Union of Teachers

NUTGTW - National Union of Textile, Garment and Tailoring Workers

NWC - National Working Committee (meeting)

NYC - Nigeria Youth Congress

NYSC - National Youth Service Corp

OAATU - Organisation of African Trade Union Unity

OECD - Organisation for the Economic Co-operation and Development

OPEC - Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries

PDP - Peoples' Democratic Party

PENGASSAN - Petroleum & Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria

PHCN - Power Holding Company of Nigeria

PLP - People's Liberation Party

PPP – Public Private Partnership

PRP - Peoples Redemption Party (a rebirth of Northern Elements Progressive Union)

PWD - Public Works Department

PSD - Party for Social Democracy

SAP - Structural Adjustment Programme

SDP - Social Democratic Party

SESCAN - Senior Staff Consultative Association of Nigeria

SMEs - Small & Medium Enterprises

SMEDA - Small & Medium Enterprises Development Agency

SNCSU - Southern Nigeria Civil Service Union

SSAUITHRAI - Senior Staff Association of Universities, Teaching Hospitals, Research & Associated Institutions

SSS - State Security Services

SWAFP - Socialist Workers and Farmers Party

SWL - Socialist Workers League

SWP - Socialist Workers Party

SWPP - Socialist Working People's Party

FOBTOB - Food, Beverage & Tobacco Senior Staff Association of Nigeria

TNCs - Transnational Corporations

TSS - Teachers' Salary Scale

TUC - Trade Union Congress of Nigeria

TUCN - Trade Union Congress of Nigeria

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNILORIN – University of Ilorin

UPN - Unity Party of Nigeria (a reincarnation of the Action Group)

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNRISD - United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

USA (or US) - United States of America

WCTUSAN - Working Class and Trade Union Studies Association of Nigeria

WFTU - World Federation of Trade Unions

WHO - World Health Organisation

WPP - Working People's Party

WTO - World Trade Organisation

**FUNMI ADEWUMI: IN THE RACE OF TIME\***

**Owei LAKEMFA\*\***

---

I was a second year student of the University of Ife (now OAU), when I met Funminiye Oladele Adewumi in 1979. We were both nineteen, but he was already in the third year studying History Education. At that age, we were part of a tribe of youths who had consciously decided to either change our country from its under-developed and dependent political economy or dedicate our lives fighting to do so.

In my mind's eye, I can see some of our friends and I, 'yapping' Adewumi for still flying his shirt at nineteen. On such occasions, he would flash his boyish smile, shrug his shoulders and walk away. In all these years even in the thick heat of arguments and debates, I never saw the easy-going Funmi, lose his temper. He was quite brilliant; nine years after he left high school, he had bagged a doctorate from the prestigious University of Ibadan, the country's premier university. He never departed from our teenage vows to transform our country, serve it with all our strength and spread the Pan Africanist message, popularised by such giants as Marcus Garvey and Kwame Nkrumah. As part of this drive; Funmi, in a missionary-style, became like a butterfly, pollinating young minds with ideologically-driven knowledge and seeking to make them first class brains in the global market of ideas. His brilliance enabled him to do this across a number of tertiary institutions like the Colleges of Education in Iwo and Ikere-Ekiti.

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\* Owei LAKEMFA, a journalist, trade unionist and Human Rights activist, has for over two decades run two columns on Nigerian and international affairs in the *Vanguard* Newspapers. He was Acting General Secretary of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) between 2011 -2012; Acting Secretary General of the Organisation of Trade Unions in West Africa (OTUWA) from 2011 – 2012; Vice President of the International Trade Union Confederation-Africa from 2011 – 2012; and Secretary General of the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) from 2012 - 2015. His books include *Weaving into History* (1998) and *Parliament of The Streets* (2015). He was Member, Civil Disturbances Tribunal in Lagos State (2000) and Board Member, Pension Commission, PENCOM (2011-2012).

\*\* This article was first published in the *Vanguard* (Newspapers) of June 19, 2017. The seventh paragraph has, however, been added to let Funmi speak for himself.

He taught in the Universities of Lagos, Ibadan, Osun State, Elizade and Crawford. Continentally, he was in 1988, Director, African Regional Labour Administration Centre, Harare and Visiting Professor, Department of Management Sciences, University of Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia from 2013. Beyond our immediate politics, since he specialised in Industrial Relations and I, for a long time, was a Labour Correspondent and later, trade unionist, we collaborated and worked on a number of projects.

I readily recall when as the Project Manager of the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (FES), he commissioned me in 1997 to conduct a refresher course for Labour Correspondents in the country. It was at the height of the Abacha regime's repression, when such an innocuous gathering was regarded as treasonable. I went to the Oyo venue of the course, and sure enough, secret agents detected us and I was arrested and taken to the Police Area Command; but released and told to disband the gathering and leave town. Of course, I did not do so; but unfortunately, the State Security Services (SSS) tracked me down and I was taken to its Ibadan Offices. In vain, the security services had tried to intimidate Adewumi. At a point, they invaded the FES offices. When he persisted and organised a seminar for labour leaders at the University of Lagos, the regime sent armed thugs to disrupt the seminar, injuring some participants.

When he was in the University of Namibia, I moved to Accra, Ghana, as the Secretary General of the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), and Adewumi made stops to visit me in Accra. During one of his stops, I told him I was thinking of establishing a university for African trade unions, using the expansive and well-situated land of OATUU and its 112-room hostel. He advised that we started with running certificate courses, then diploma before upgrading the proposed institution to a university college, then a full-fledged university. I took the proposal to the OATUU Executive, which approved the proposed Kwame Nkrumah Labour College, Accra. Adewumi, without charging the OATUU a dime, not only made a plan on the establishment of the proposed university, but also developed comprehensive certificate and diploma programmes. He travelled to Ghana at his personal expense to present the proposals to the OATUU Secretariat. To him, bearing the entire cost of the proposals was his contribution to the African working class. As the new century dawned, Adewumi thought trade unions needed to be prepared for the future.

As FES Project Manager, he organised a seminar on "Trade Unionism in Nigeria: Challenges for the 21st Century". He presented his views about the future in his paper at the seminar: "for trade unions to play an assertive role in industrial relations, active membership

involvement must be secured. A realisation by managements that union members enjoy massive support of their members may go a long way in forcing them to concede to legitimate demands made by the unions. That would also assist in reducing the capacity of the employers to undermine the union.” Given the rampage of market forces and the campaign, internationally, to submerge unions in the workplace in the name of ‘freedom’, he admonished: “It is important for the unions to resist the attempt by employers and government to impose a collaborative and supportive role on them, within the industrial relations system. Such moves are not in tune with the ideals of trade unionism. The union is the organisation the workers can call their own. They should not allow anybody or group of persons to hijack it. They owe themselves that duty.”

This committed scholar and activist spoke of his involvement and dictation to workers’ and students’ struggles during his Inaugural Lecture delivered at Crawford University, titled “Unions without Unionism” thus:

As a Part 1 student at the University of Ife, Ile-Ife (1977/78) I got involved in prosecuting the Ali-must go struggle in 1978, thus marking the beginning of my involvement in political activism. I got elected into the Students’ Representative Council during the 1978/79 academic session and by the time I was in 300 Level; I became Chairman of the Students’ Union Electoral Commission. The Central Executive Council that was elected that year remains one of the most dynamic in the history of students’ unionism in the university.

The Executive Council was headed by Mr. Wole Olaoye as President (Current National President of the Alumni Association) also included Mr. Femi Falana (the same fiery Lagos lawyer) as Public Relations Officer. The significance of this for my academic career was the fact that the team was instrumental in striking “a Students’-Workers’ Alliance” with the Comrade Hassan Sunmonu led Nigeria Labour Congress during the 1979/80 session.

It was through that initiative that my own engagement with the Trade Union Movement in Nigeria began. By the time I was in final year I had decided against doing post-graduate studies in the field of curriculum studies in favour of Industrial Relations which is one of the specialisation areas in the Department of Adult Education at the University of Ibadan. That decision was based on my desire to pursue a course of study that would make me socially relevant and useful to the struggles of the Nigerian people. If not for the imposition of a Sole Administrator on the National Union of Hotels and Personal Services Workers, I was to take up appointment as its Education Officer after the completion of my Master’s programme.

I have been involved directly in executive capacities with trade unions up to the level of becoming the National Internal Auditor of ASUU, 1994-1996. My working experience at the National Institute (now Michael Imoudu) for Labour

Studies, Ilorin and the African Regional Labour Administration Centre, Harare brought me in close contact with the three social partners in industry (workers', employers' and government's representatives), both at the national and pan-African levels. For almost 2 ½ years my work at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Lagos was mainly with trade unions supporting their education programmes... the sum of all these, is that apart from my academic study of trade unions as industrial relations institution, I have been involved as an observer, a participant and now a participant-observer."

I had been in regular touch with him as he kept me posted on his moves. He made no complaints of ill health. However, on Tuesday, June 13, 2017, I got a message; this indomitable fighter of the peoples cause, this gentleman with an iron will, this intellectual of the masses, this selfless patriot and Pan Africanist had done his duty, and passed on into eternity. All he had complained of was headache, he slept and slipped away within hours. The pains of losing Adewumi are compounded by the tears I am still shedding for another comrade, Abubakar Momoh, Professor of Political Science who without warning stopped breathing exactly two weeks before. He had even made some posts on the internet hours before he departed. The Funmi Adewumi generation had worked on various campuses to groom youths who will fight for a new, non-exploitative Nigeria. Momoh was one of the most advanced and articulate cadres who emerged from those efforts.

I was delighted to watch him develop from his student days, to being one of the most gifted intellectuals of our age. In turn, he also groomed some younger ones. But the tribe of the young activists has greatly diminished, while fine ones of the older generation are fast depleting. When we have highly developed minds like Professors Adewumi and Momoh, who have transformed themselves into knowledge factories; churning out ideas and graduates, suddenly departing without giving us a fighting chance to save their lives, a conscious nation ought to go into mourning. A serious country ought to ask why, and find answers to stem the tide.

**UNIONS WITHOUT UNIONISM: TOWARDS TRADE UNION  
RELEVANCE IN NIGERIA'S INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS SYSTEM AND  
POLITY**

**Professor Funminiyi Oladele ADEWUMI\***

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In spite of sustained hostility from employers, state repression, passive membership and indifference of the consuming public, trade unions remain an enduring institution in the employment. Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Ag. Registrar, Dean, College of Natural and Applied Sciences, Dean of Students' Affairs and Comrades:

I have learnt that it is part of the tradition of inaugural lectures for the lecturer to say something that is unique about the lecture. It is in light of this that I give God the glory for giving me the singular honour to give the first inaugural lecture in Crawford University, and fourth in the field of Industrial Relations in Nigeria.

I also thank God that I am delivering this inaugural fairly soon after my appointment as a Professor. In doing this, I am adopting an eclectic approach. It is a combination of that tradition which views an inaugural lecture as marking the "beginning of a profoundly deep and mature scholarship and productivity" as well as another tradition which expects the lecturer to devote attention to "the systematic exposition of selected issues on which the expertise and the discipline of the lecturers can shed some light"<sup>8</sup>

As a Part 1 student at the University of Ife, Ile-Ife (1977/78), I got involved in prosecuting the Ali-must go struggle in 1978, thus marking the beginning of my involvement in political activism. I got elected into the Students' Representative Council during the 1978/79

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\* This was the Inaugural Lecture delivered by Professor Funminiyi Ola Adewumi at Crawford University, Faith City, Igbesa, Ogun State, Nigeria, on Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2009. He was then Professor of Industrial Relations & Dean of College of Business & Social Sciences, Department of Industrial Relations & Personnel Management, College of Business & Social Sciences. Apart from the change in the referencing style and the correction of few typographical errors, the originality of the paper has been preserved here.

<sup>8</sup> J. A. Akinpelu, Relevance in Education, An Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University of Ibadan on 19 April 1983, University Press, Ibadan, 1987, pp. 1-2.

academic session and by the time I was in 300 Level; I became Chairman of the Students' Union Electoral Commission. The Central Executive Council that was elected that year remains one of the most dynamic in the history of students' unionism in the university.

The Executive Council which was headed by Mr. Wole Olaoye as President (Current National President of the Alumni Association) also included Mr. Femi Falana (the same fiery Lagos lawyer) as Public Relations Officer. The significance of this for my academic career was the fact that the team was instrumental in striking "*a students'-workers' alliance*" with the Comrade Hassan Sunmonu led Nigeria Labour Congress during the 1979/80 session.

It was through that initiative that my own engagement with the trade union movement in Nigeria began. By the time I was in final year, I had decided against doing post-graduate studies in the field of curriculum studies in favour of Industrial Relations which is one of the specialisation areas in the Department of Adult Education at the University of Ibadan. That decision was based on my desire to pursue a course of study that would make me socially relevant and useful to the struggles of the Nigerian people. If not for the imposition of a Sole Administrator on the National Union of Hotels and Personal Services Workers, I was to take up appointment as its Education Officer after the completion of my Master's programme.

I have been involved directly in executive capacities with trade unions up to the level of becoming the National Internal Auditor of ASUU, 1994-1996. My working experience at the National Institute (now Michael Imoudu) for Labour Studies, Ilorin and the African regional Labour Administration Centre, Harare brought me in close contact with the three social partners in industry (workers', employers' and government's representatives), both at the national and pan- African levels. For almost 2½ years my work at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Lagos was mainly with trade unions supporting their education programmes. Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, the sum of all these is that apart from my academic study of trade unions as industrial relations institutions, I have been involved as an observer, a participant and now a participant-observer. Consequently, my presentation today is based largely on my involvement with, and reflections on, the trade union movement in Nigeria. I do this with the commitment of a member who is convinced that the movement, just like Nigeria itself, is performing below its potentials.

This much is admitted by Mulvey, as he submits that: "the most pervasive institution in the labour market of most industrial countries is the trade union movement. The government, structure and organisation of trade unions are central to the industrial relations or 'institutional'

approach to the study of the labour market.”<sup>9</sup> From a modest beginning as trade clubs where members’ welfare was discussed over drinks, unions today have gained recognition such that they are represented on governmental bodies at the national level and inter-governmental bodies such as the ILO at the international level.

Trade unions developed in response to challenges thrown up by the new organisation of work and production built around the factory system that emerged as the new centres of economic activities, after the industrial revolution in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. They emerged without the prompting of governments and employers and also without any legal backing as independent organisations of workers. In actual fact, in England where they first emerged, for a very long time, they were regarded as acting in restraint of trade and it was not until 1824 that this legal encumbrance was removed. The trend was the same in other countries during the early phase of the development of trade unions.

Confronted by the resolve of workers to organise themselves in trade unions, the capitalist state and employers were forced to come to terms with the new reality. However, the state moved in through the instrumentality of the law to bring the activities of trade unions under close scrutiny and ultimately constrain their activities. In the words of Salamon, “trade unions have also been faced by both management and government strategies anxious to constrain, rather than support, trade unionism and to protect managerial prerogative, capitalism and the existing social order”<sup>10</sup> (this means that ultimately the trade unions must take their struggles beyond the workplace, if they are to achieve tangible results).

The persistence and vehemence with which state authorities and private employers have been striving to subvert the trade unions and convert them into instruments of control over their members is a tacit admission of the inherent strength and potentialities of free and independent trade unions in the contestation for power not only within the workplace, but in the larger society itself. This is a fact that seems lost on trade union leaders and members themselves in present times.

Like its counterparts in different parts of the world, the Nigerian trade union movement has a glorious past, a past characterised by robust struggles and principled opposition to state

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<sup>9</sup> C. Mulvey, *The Economic Analysis of Trade Unions*, Martin Robertson & Co. Ltd, Oxford, 1978, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> M. Salamon, *Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Pearson Educational Ltd., Edinburgh, Essex, England, 2000, p. 94.

policies that were inimical to the interests of the working people. It is also a past that was characterised by conscious efforts at mobilising the rank-and-file members as a bulwark against state repression. The past equally witnessed the building of alliances between the trade union movement and various elements and organisations within the larger labour movement. All these constituted the pillars of strength of the trade union movement.<sup>11</sup>

The travails of the Nigerian trade union movement in the past two decades or so have rubbished the giant strides made by the unions. A combination of internal and external (economic and political) factors is responsible for this. For quite some time both insiders and outside commentators have been questioning the ability of the unions to live up to the expectations of their members.<sup>12</sup> Of course, it is important to note right away that the problem or challenge of relevance is not peculiar to Nigeria. Some commentators in Europe have, in fact, predicted the irrelevance of unions in the future.<sup>13</sup>

The ascendancy of neo-liberalism as the framework for macro-economic development since the 1980s has dealt a devastating blow on the unions both in terms of membership strength and ability to gain concessions for members. On the political side, the increasing hostility of the state towards the unions as well as the successful co-optation (by the state) and apparent surrender of labour leadership have made the plight of the trade union movement unenviable.

It is against the above background that I am examining the state of the Nigerian trade union movement. It appears that the unions are fast losing their essence (if it is not lost already), which is the unionism in them and as such there is an urgent need to re-invent trade unionism in

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<sup>11</sup> F. Adewumi, (ed.), *Trade Unionism in Nigeria: Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Lagos, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> F. Adewumi, "Responsiveness in Trade Unionism. The Challenge of Trade Union Leadership in Nigeria", *Nigerian Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vols. 7 & 8, Dec. 2000.

<sup>13</sup> See, A. Flanders, "What are Trade Unions For?" in W. E. J. McCarthy (ed.), *Unions. Selected Readings*, Penguin Education, Middlesex, England, 1972; M. Schneider, *A Brief History of the German Trade Unions*, Dietz Nachf GmbH, Bonn, 1991; O. Hammarstrom, "Local and Global. Trade Unions in the Future" in Challenge of Trade Union Leadership in Nigeria", *Nigerian Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vols. 7 & 8, Dec. 2000. *Trade Unionism in the Future, IIRA Proceedings*, Vol. 2. 1992; and G. Ben-Israel & H. Fisher, "Trade Union in the Future. Organisational Strategies in a Changing Environment" in *ibid*.

order to make the trade unions relevant, not only within the industrial relations system but the Nigerian polity itself.

## **Introduction**

In spite of sustained hostility from employers, state repression, passive membership and indifference of the consuming public, trade unions remain an enduring institution in the employment relationship. This much is admitted by Mulvey, as he submits that “the most pervasive institution in the labour market of most industrial countries is the trade union movement. The government, structure and organisation of trade unions are central to the industrial relations or ‘institutional’ approach to the study of the labour market.”<sup>14</sup> From a modest beginning as trade clubs where members’ welfare was discussed over drinks, unions today have gained recognition such that they are represented on governmental bodies at the national level and inter-governmental bodies such as the ILO at the international level.

Trade unions developed in response to challenges thrown up by the new organisation of work and production built around the factory system that emerged as the new centres of economic activities after the industrial revolution in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. They emerged without the prompting of governments and employers and also without any legal backing as independent organisations of workers. In actual fact, in England where they first emerged, for a very long time, they were regarded as acting in restraint of trade and it was not until 1824 that this legal encumbrance was removed. The trend was the same in other countries during the early phase of the development of trade unions.

Confronted by the resolve of workers to organise themselves in trade unions, the capitalist state and employers were forced to come to terms with the new reality. However, the state moved in through the instrumentality of the law to bring the activities of trade unions under close scrutiny and ultimately constrain their activities. In the words of Salamon “trade unions have also been faced by both management and government strategies anxious to constrain, rather than support, trade unionism and to protect managerial prerogative, capitalism and the existing social order”<sup>15</sup> (this means that ultimately the trade unions must take their struggles beyond the workplace, if they are to achieve tangible results).

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<sup>14</sup> Mulvey, *The Economic Analysis of Trade Unions*, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> M. Salamon, *Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice*, p. 94.

The persistence and vehemence with which state authorities and private employers have been striving to subvert the trade unions and convert them into instruments of control over their members is a tacit admission of the inherent strength and potentialities of free and independent trade unions in the contestation for power not only within the workplace, but in the larger society itself. This is a fact that seems lost on trade union leaders and members themselves in present times.

Like its counterparts in different parts of the world, the Nigerian trade union movement has a glorious past, a past characterised by robust struggles and principled opposition to state policies that were inimical to the interests of the working people. It is also a past that was characterised by conscious efforts at mobilising the rank-and-file members as a bulwark against state repression. The past equally witnessed the building of alliances between the trade union movement and various elements and organisations within the larger labour movement. All these constituted the pillars of strength of the trade union movement.<sup>16</sup>

The travails of the Nigerian trade union movement in the past two decades or so have rubbished the giant strides made by the unions. A combination of internal and external (economic and political) factors is responsible for this. For quite some time both insiders and outside commentators have been questioning the ability of the unions to live up to the expectations of their members.<sup>17</sup> Of course, it is important to note right away that the problem or challenge of relevance is not peculiar to Nigeria. Some commentators in Europe have, in fact, predicted the irrelevance of unions in the future.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> F. Adewumi, (ed.), *Trade Unionism in Nigeria: Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*; and F. Adewumi, "The State and Industrial Relations in Nigeria. A Study in Labour Control Strategies," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 2, Nos. 1 & 2 1995. Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria.

<sup>17</sup> F. Adewumi, "Responsiveness in Trade Unionism. The Challenge of Trade Union Leadership in Nigeria."

<sup>18</sup> See, A. Flanders, "What are Trade Unions For?" in W. E. J. McCarthy (ed.), *Unions. Selected Readings*, Penguin Education, Middlesex, England, 1972; M. Schneider, *A Brief History of the German Trade Unions*, Dietz Nachf GmbH, Bonn, 1991; O. Hammarstrom, "Local and Global. Trade Unions in the Future" in Challenge of Trade Union Leadership in Nigeria", *Nigerian Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vols. 7 & 8, Dec. 2000. *Trade Unionism in the Future, IIRA Proceedings*, Vol. 2. 1992; and G. Ben-Israel & H. Fisher, "Trade Union in the Future. Organisational Strategies in a Changing Environment" in *ibid*.

state towards the unions as well as the successful co-optation (by the state) and apparent surrender of labour leadership have made the plight of the trade union movement unenviable.

It is against the above background that I am examining the state of the Nigerian trade union movement. It appears that the unions are fast losing their essence (if it is not lost already), which is the unionism in them and as such there is an urgent need to re-invent trade unionism in order to make the trade unions relevant, not only within the industrial relations system but the Nigerian polity itself.

### **The Trade Union Phenomenon**

From the plethora of definitions available and the circumstances of emergence, for the purpose of this presentation, we take *a trade union as an organisational platform for people in paid employment for the protection and advancement of their common interests both within and outside the employment nexus.*

Just like the industrial revolution that precipitated its emergence, the origin and development of trade unions were quite phenomenal. The industrial revolution is generally regarded as being responsible for the fundamental transformation of the human society, from the medieval to the modern. This is to the extent that the developments that came with it, especially industrialisation, are regarded as the catalysts that led to the emergence of our present civilisation and modernisation. The factories, which emerged as centres of production, ensured that activities associated with production and distribution of goods and services were moved outside the boundaries of the home and family systems.

The factory system created totally different environments and conditions of work. It was (and still remains) a system that was based on high level of technology, growing specialisation of economic roles and of units of economic activity. For example, production, distribution and exchange became separate and distinct activities.<sup>19</sup> According to Schneider, “the industrial mode of production transformed working life. The operatives “served” the machines, whose operating speed and “capabilities” determined the course and duration of the work process. Division of labour and the fragmentation of production to the point of routine monotony; filth, noise, stench and health hazards; the separation of workplace and home; subjection to the dictates of the

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<sup>19</sup> T. J. Watson, Tony, *Sociology, Work and Industry*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London & New York, 1987.

“millowner” in all matters of time and work.”<sup>20</sup> This was the reality that the new industrial recruits had to contend with.

Most of the industrial recruits were peasants from the rural areas and artisans who were displaced from the old guild system. They were forced by circumstance to seek employment in the unfamiliar urban terrain. They found the urban factory environment rather uncomfortable. The early stage of industrialism was characterised by the tyranny of both machines and the rising industrial class and this was unbearable to the workers. They realised early enough their disadvantaged position, especially given the enormous strength of the employers. The emergent class of workers were, by and large, defenceless against what Schneider (1991) describes as “the disastrous social phenomena that accompanied the rise of capitalism”.<sup>21</sup>

There was also the sense of job insecurity, which came with industrial work, since workers were at the mercy of the factory owners. The independence enjoyed by the craftsmen of old by which they could pack their tools and move on to another town in search of a livelihood (tramping) was no longer there. In addition, they no longer owned the tools of their employment; neither could they boast of any special skills they could sell to the general public (no thanks to the process of division of labour). To crown it all is the exploitative character of industrial capitalism, which was a function of the profit motive of the factory owners.

The fact of their common predicament and individual vulnerability made it imperative for the new factory recruits to think of presenting a common front against their common ‘enemy’, the employer. Schneider puts the situation that encouraged the emergence of trade unions thus:

Capitalism’s profit-mindedness created or exacerbated social evils on a scale not seen before. It thus gave rise to a clash of interests between capital and labour, between the employer as the owner of the means of production and the wage-earner who owned neither the machines and tools nor the raw materials, still less the finished products made by him. There were soon growing numbers (of workers) who were bitterly aware of their economic and social situation and saw the employers as their adversaries.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Schneider, *A Brief History of the German Trade Unions*, p. 19

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18

The move by those early recruits into the factory system was to challenge the unpleasant and debilitating conditions of work in the new centres of production. It was essentially a resolve to resist what amounted to slavery, oppression and dehumanisation in the world of work.

The earliest origins of trade unions have been traced to local trade clubs and ‘friendly societies’ of craftsmen, which had become prominent in England by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>23</sup> These clubs met in public houses (pubs) and addressed issues of workers’ welfare and mutual benefits. Initially, membership was drawn from artisans, “the skilled handicraftsmen whose methods of work and condition, had been left substantially unaffected by the industrial revolution; the compositors, coopers, carpenters and joiners, cabinetmakers, shipwrights, papermakers and so forth.”<sup>24</sup> According to Hutt, by 1792 membership of these clubs had spread among new factory workers, the Lancashire cotton spinners

In the United States of America (USA), according to Rees, trade unions are as old as the republic itself. In his words, “before 1800, organizations of printers and shoemakers existed in Philadelphia and New York while printers organised a strike action in Philadelphia in 1786.”<sup>25</sup> In Germany by the third and fourth decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, association of workers had started emerging.<sup>26</sup>

While we are not going to be delayed by the details of the growth of trade unions across countries, it suffices to say that the formation and growth of unions met with employers’ hostility and state repression. For instance, in 1799-1800 the Combinations Acts were hurriedly enacted in England, which among other things “gave the masters unlimited power to reduce wages and make conditions more severe. They (the Acts) established the new industry on a basis of...serf labour and low wages”<sup>27</sup> Significantly, the Acts also compelled defendants to give evidence against themselves!!!<sup>28</sup> In a similar vein, in 1806, a court in Philadelphia, USA declared a strike action by cordwainers (shoemakers) for higher piece rates to be “a criminal conspiracy at common law” while in the years that follow, strikers were convicted on similar charges across many eastern states in the U.S.A.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mulvey, *The Economic Analysis of Trade Unions*; and A. Hutt, *British Trade Unionism. A Short History*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1975.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> A. Rees, *The Economics of Trade Unions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962

<sup>26</sup> See, Schneider, *A Brief History of the German Trade Unions*, for details

<sup>27</sup> Hutt, *British Trade Unionism. A Short History*, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> See, *ibid.*, for details.

<sup>29</sup> Rees, *The Economics of Trade Unions*, p. 4.

In spite of the repression, including using troops to put down strikes, while union leaders paid with their lives, workers remained undaunted in their resolve to confront their situation. In England, for example, while the reign of terror lasted:

A wider unity, a more universal solidarity, began to supplant the parochial vision of the local trade club. Driven underground, the unions perforce became conspiratorial bodies binding their members by oath, employing initiation ceremonies and the whole ritual of the secret society. But these illegal unions, with a whole fifth column of police spies despatched from the home office to bring them to destruction carried out the first in the series of widespread strikes or “turnouts” as they were then generally called in the new industries; outstanding among these strikes were those of the Scottish weavers (1812), the Lancashire spinners (1818), the miners on the North-East coast (1810), in Scotland (1818) and South Wales (1816).<sup>30</sup>

The above underscores one point, that is, right from inception trade unions were not just interested in defending their members, but were equally interested in defying the unjust social order. The unions addressed the problems faced at work, which included fair wages, working hours (as far back as the 1830s both in England and the USA workers were pressing for an 8-hour and 10-hour working day respectively),<sup>31</sup> job insecurity, injustice, dependence and the inhuman conditions under which work was carried out. It is also important to note that it was not just economism for the emergent organisations of workers; they also addressed broader issues of election of candidates representing workingmen and free public education as early as the 1820s in the USA.

It is enough to acknowledge here that over the years, as a result of workers’ struggles, pressures and campaigns (including the emergence of the ILO in 1919), nationally and internationally, governments and employers became less repressive and more tolerant of trade unions and unionism.

In the case of Nigeria, the impetus for the growth of trade unions has been traced to the Euro-African trade beginning from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Overtime this trade introduced the money economy, which gradually replaced the system of barter, and almost simultaneously marked the beginning of paid labour. Increased accessibility of the hinterland witnessed the intensification of

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<sup>30</sup> Hutt, *British Trade Unionism. A Short History*, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*; and Rees, *The Economics of Trade Unions*.

trade, particularly along the Niger and Benue routes, where permanent trading posts have been set up mostly for trade in palm oil. Apart from the increased demand for employable labour, which the trade generated, the gradual presence of the colonial administration and the emergence of other commercial concerns dictated the need for more infrastructures, hence the construction of more road, bridges, rail lines, ports and military bases. All these increased the pool of employed labour as well as took their toll on the Nigerian worker.<sup>32</sup>

While the first trade union was formed in 1912 ( the Southern Nigeria Civil Service Union), the earliest indication that Nigerian workers were ready for collective action was the strike action by artisan workmen in the Public Works Department (P.W.D.) in 1897. It was a three-day strike to protest the arbitrary change in their hours of work. The action was strongly countered by the then colonial governor, who threatened to deal with the striking workers if they continued with their action. The workers were undaunted and the governor agreed to negotiate.<sup>33</sup> This singular act strongly gives the lie to the argument that trade unionism in Nigeria was superimposed by the British colonial administration on an indifferent workforce.

It is important to note that the trend in the emergence of trade unions in Nigeria was different from what obtained in Britain and elsewhere in Europe and the USA. While the formation of trade unions was associated with manual workers and artisans of the new factory system (that sprang up in the wake of the industrial revolution) in Britain, it was clerical workers employed by the colonial administration and the trading companies that were in the vanguard in Nigeria. The point is that capitalist employment relations either in the metropolis or in the dependencies always dictate the need for workers to act in defence of their collective interests. It could, therefore, be argued that trade unionism in Nigeria was a direct response to the deprivations engendered by, and the inadequacies of, colonial imperialism. These in turn dictated the emphasis of unions on both economic and political issues.<sup>34</sup>

The history of the trade union movement in Nigeria has been well documented. Its travails and triumphs as well as the potentials and shortcomings have been highlighted by such

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<sup>32</sup> For more, see, W. Ananaba, *The Trade Union Movement in Nigeria*, Ethiope Publishing Corporation, Benin-City, 1969.

<sup>33</sup> T. Fashoyin, *Industrial Relations in Nigeria*, Longman Group, Ikeja & London, 1980.

<sup>34</sup> F. Adewumi, "Responsiveness in Trade Unionism. The Challenge of Trade Union Leadership in Nigeria," *Nigerian Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vols. 7 & 8, Dec. 2000

writers as Ananaba,<sup>35</sup> Cohen,<sup>36</sup> Offiong,<sup>37</sup> Otobo<sup>38</sup> and Aborisade,<sup>39</sup> among others. Available records indicate that the first trade union to emerge was the Southern Nigerian Civil Service Union, inaugurated on the 19<sup>th</sup> August 1912, and metamorphosed into the Nigerian Civil Service Union (N.C.S.U.) in 1914, after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates. Sooner than later, the union started agitating over some issues such as conditions of service and war bonus in the period between 1916 and 1919 as well as general wage increase. Racial discrimination between African and European civil servants equally engaged the attention of the union.

Active trade unionism in Nigeria can be said to have begun in the early 1930s, a period which witnessed persistent workers agitation and restiveness, spearheaded by the more radical railway workers who severed their membership of NCSU and formed the Railway Workers Union (R.W.U) in 1931 under the leadership of Michael Imoudu. The major arguments against the NCSU were that it was too soft-spoken and unresponsive to the economic hardship of the time.

Up till this point in time, the attitude of the colonial government to the fledging unions was rather lukewarm. However, in 1938, the Trade Union Ordinance, which gave legal backing to trade unions and made for compulsory registration of unions in the country, was enacted. The fact that a trade union was formed 12 years before any legal enactment is an indication that workers do not need the backing of the law to protect and advance their interests, a fact that appears lost to many trade union leaders in Nigeria today. The law became operational in 1939. The law made it unlawful for any union to engage in collective bargaining or embark on industrial action without registration under its provisions.

As it was in Europe and America, the legislation was to enable the colonial government to monitor and contain the activities and agitations of workers. This position was evident in the advice of Lord Passfield (Sydney Webb) in 1930 to the colonial government:

*I regard the formation of such associations in the dependencies as the legitimate consequence of social and industrial progress, but I recognise that there is a danger that, without sympathetic supervision and guidance, organisation of labourers, without experience of combination for any social or economic progress, may fall under the domination of disaffected persons, by which their*

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<sup>35</sup> Ananaba, *The Trade Union Movement in Nigeria*.

<sup>36</sup> R. Cohen, *Labour and Politics in Nigeria*, African Publishing Company Ltd., New York, 1974

<sup>37</sup> D. A. Offiong, *Organised Labour and Political Development in Nigeria*, Centaur Press, Calabar, 1983.

<sup>38</sup> D. Otobo, *Foreign Interests and Nigerian Trade Unions*, Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Limited, Ibadan, 1986.

<sup>39</sup> F. Aborisade, *Nigeria Labour Movement in Perspective*, The Effective Company, Lagos, 1992.

*activities may be diverted to improper and mischievous ends* (my emphasis). I accordingly feel that it is the duty of colonial government to take such steps as may be possible to smoothen the passage of such organisations, as they emerge into constitutional channels. As a step in this direction, it is in my opinion desirable that legislations in the lines of sections 2 & 3 of the Trade Union Act of 1871 should be enacted in all dependencies where it does not already exist, declaring that trade unions are not criminal or unlawful for civil purpose, and also providing for the compulsory registration of the trade unions.<sup>40</sup>

In 1940, the Railway Workers Union under the leadership of Michael Imoudu became the first union to be registered under the ordinance. However, the rather infamous government order – the General Defence Regulations of 1942 which outlawed strikes and lockouts complicated the relationship between the colonial government and the unions. According to Fashoyin, workers considered this as an affront and an attempt to suppress their new and fragile organisations. In a quick and timely collaboration with nationalists, who were becoming more interested in the activities of workers, the first central union was formed – the Trade Union Congress (of Nigeria) TUCN). Thus, what was intended as an instrument to intimidate workers turned out to be the very instrument that fueled the momentum of trade unionism.<sup>41</sup>

The period following the Second World War witnessed fewer objections from employers, both public and private, as the organisation and activities of central labour unions gradually took the centre stage in the history of trade unionism, just as the nationalist movement was making serious waves in the political arena of Nigeria. Apart from the Trade Union Ordinance, which gave legal backing to trade unionism, the example of the Railway workers' union was one of the factors responsible for the upsurge in the number of unions. The concessions gained by the railway workers were pointers to other workers that similar possibilities could come to them. Added to the fact that any five workers could combine to form a trade union, many unions emerged leading to what has been described as the proliferation of unions, with many of them having less than 250 members.<sup>42</sup>

This situation seriously militated against the healthy advancement of the interests of the working masses and this was, by no means, helped by the divisive strategies and acrimonious rivalry among the existing central labour organisations. It was within this setting that the

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Offiong, *Organised Labour and Political Development in Nigeria*, p. 58.

<sup>41</sup> Fashoyin, *Industrial Relations in Nigeria*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Nigerian State got an excuse to promulgate the Trade Union (Central Labour Organisations) Decree No. 44 of 1976. Among other things, the Decree cancelled the registration of the existing four trade union federations and placed an embargo on the registration of new trade unions. More importantly, an Administrator of Trade Unions was appointed, who was mandated, among other things to take all necessary steps to effect the formation of a single central labour organisation to which all trade unions in Nigeria must be affiliated, and to restructure the existing numerous house unions into fewer, stronger and (potentially more effective industrial unions).

This exercise culminated in the promulgation of the Trade Unions (Amendment) Decree No. 22 of 1978, which provided statutory recognition for 70 unions including 42 industrial unions, which emerged out of the restructuring exercise. This same restructuring exercise led to the emergence of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) as the only central trade union body in Nigeria (until 2005) to which all the industrial unions, as defined by the enabling law, are affiliated. Further restructuring has led to emergence of the present 29 industrial unions.

The glorious dawn of the Nigerian trade union movement could be said to have come with its principled and frontal involvement in the independence struggle, an involvement that was informed by the hope that independent nationhood would right most, if not all, of the wrongs of colonial rule and assure workers of better working and living conditions. The hope was later dashed by the actions of the emergent indigenous ruling class. It is equally instructive to note that the gains made by Nigerian workers was in spite of the intense rivalry and polarisation among the various labour leaders<sup>43</sup> and the multiplicity of labour centres in the country. The 1964 general strike was about the only major national action undertaken by the trade unions in the immediate post-independence period. The strike, which lasted for 13 days, represented the first major challenge posed by labour to the neo-colonial state. As it has become customary, the strike action centred round the demand for a general wage review, which should reflect the cost of living index. It was not until 1981 that another general strike was witnessed, and predictably, centred on the demand for a national minimum wage.

Apart from general action, individual unions have engaged in actions to join issues with their employers on the welfare and general wellbeing of workers. Although official statistical data may not be too reliable, the available ones on the state of industrial relations are an indication that workers have not accepted their fate with passivity. The political crisis that

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<sup>43</sup> Otobo, *Foreign Interests and Nigerian Trade Unions*,

engulfed Nigeria between 1964 and 1970 might have restricted workers' action in the period, especially in view of the sentiments pushed by officials of state that everyone should rally around the efforts to "Keep Nigeria One".

The period immediately after the restructuring exercise which saw the emergence of the present Nigeria Labour Congress (N.L.C.) up till 1988 would appear to be the golden era of the trade union movement in post-independent Nigeria. Although there were few dissenting voices as well as the division into "progressive" and "democrats" camps, there was coherence and purposefulness in the activities of the Nigeria Labour Congress culminating in the launching of the 'Workers Charter of Demands' in 1981. The trade union movement responded appropriately to developments within the country, while workers had something to look up to. However, beginning with the contrived stalemate at the 'Delegates' Conference' in Benin in February, 1988, the sun began to set for the trade union movement in Nigeria. There were certain developments within the polity and the economy as well as the trade unions themselves that put into jeopardy the capacity of the unions to fulfil the aspirations, and live up to the expectations of their members.<sup>44</sup>

### **Why Trade Unions? (The Essence of Trade Unionism)**

At this juncture, it is necessary to ask two interrelated questions; why trade unions and what makes a trade union? That is, its distinguishing characteristics.

It is apparent that unions arose largely on account of the inherent strength of the collectivity as opposed to the weakness, if not vulnerability, of the individual worker vis-à-vis the employer. Consequently, trade unionism would appear to follow the logic that irrespective of their placing within the work hierarchy, the lack of ownership of the means of production puts all employees at a disadvantage within the employment relationship.

In capitalist employment relations, the employer enjoys a lot of power, which is reinforced by a number of legal instruments limiting the control, which the individual employee can exercise within the work situation. Since workers constitute the largest single force in industry, it is when they come together that they can conveniently challenge the dominance of capital (Hyman, 1975). Through such a challenge, workers would be promoting their own

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<sup>44</sup> See, Adewumi, "Responsiveness in Trade Unionism. The Challenge of Trade Union Leadership in Nigeria", for details.

interests, which are basically economic. In this regard, issues such as wages, overtime rates, hours of work, holiday and sundry conditions of work attract the attention of unions.

*The fact that workers have to struggle over these issues is a reflection of the inherent contradictions within capitalist industry and society at large. These contradictions are the products of the antagonistic interests of labour and capital as epitomised in the continuous accumulation on the part of the employers at the expense of the worker. It is in the context of this accumulation that the interests of workers are subordinated to those of capital. Herein lies the necessity for a united front on the part of workers, if they are to improve their lot. The beauty of trade unionism is that “one man can be ignored, but the entire workforce cannot be ignored.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, trade unionism can be regarded as an investment in the collective strength of workers within the employment relationship.*

It follows, therefore, that the major justification for the existence of trade unions is to champion the cause(s) of workers (however defined) and to varying degrees; this is what unions all over the world have been doing. Essentially, trade unions developed as countervailing powers to the awesome powers of capital within the employment relationship and the support, which they enjoy from the state. It is important to come to terms with the idea of countervailing power in order to appreciate the oppositional stance of trade unions. Harold Laski captured the odds against workers thus, “both the law and administration of capitalist society are directed essentially to the support of the employers ...the scales are weighted against the interests of the workers.”<sup>46</sup> Unions thus emerged to challenge the unilateral control of the labour process by the employer, thereby getting involved in the contestation for power in the workplace. Since power relations at work mirror and reflect power relations within the larger society, trade unionism also entails the contestation for power within the polity.

The second related question to answer here is, what makes a union? In other words, what distinguishes a trade union from other organisations? According to Salamon, three elements are crucial in doing this. These are (i) the nature of their membership (those who rely on the sale of their labour to provide their livelihood); (ii) their purpose (to protect and represent employees, provide them with collective power and support, and regulate their terms of employment); and (iii) the means they employ to achieve their purpose (emphasis on direct negotiations with their

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<sup>45</sup> K. Whitehead, *Industrial Relations*, Hodder and Stoughton London, 1977.

<sup>46</sup> Otobo, *Foreign Interests and Nigerian Trade Unions*, p. 15.

employer).<sup>47</sup> Salamon argues further that it is the combination of membership, purpose and means which determines the character, or *unionateness* of the organisation and its members.<sup>48</sup>

Farnham and Pimlott (1995) had earlier adopted the concept of unionateness in analysing trade union behaviour. In their words, “the concept of unionateness is a useful tool for analysing trade union behaviour and it suggests that unions have a number of characteristics which vary according to their policies and activities as organisations. Unionateness is used as a measure of the commitment of a body to the general principles and ideology of trade unionism”<sup>49</sup> With specific reference to Britain, they identify seven elements of unionateness. These are: (i) Whether a given body declares itself a trade union; (ii) Whether it is a registered trade union; (iii) Whether it is affiliated to the Trade Union Congress (TUC); (iv) Whether it is affiliated to the Labour Party; (v) Whether it is independent of employers for purposes of negotiation; (vi) Whether it regards collective bargaining and the protection of the interests of members as employees as a major function; and (vii) Whether it is prepared to be militant, using all forms of industrial actions which may be effective. The last three of these elements, undoubtedly, have universal applicability.

The concept of unionism adopted in this presentation is distilled from a combination of the three elements identified by Salamon and the last three of the seven listed by Farnham and Pimlott. *Along with the ideology, philosophy and principles propelling trade union activities, belief in the collective strength (mitigating the vulnerability of the individual worker), ability and readiness to organise, solidarity (an injury to one as an injury to all), membership involvement (consultation and internal democracy) and militancy constitute unionism, that is, the soul/content of the trade union organisation.* This is about distinguishing between the organisational platform (the container or briefcase) and the content of the organisation. *Any workers’ organisation that does not exhibit these elements or most of them is a union without unionism.* The moment a trade union cannot: (i) maximise the wages and employment of its members; (ii) protect and support the individual with the collective strength; (iii) establish a joint rule making system to prevent arbitrary management action; (iv) express the aspirations and ideology of the membership; (v) offer a range of benefits and services to individual members; and (vi) offer an avenue for self-fulfillment by providing a mechanism outside the confines of their jobs and

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<sup>47</sup> Salamon, *Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> D. Farnham & J. Pimlott, *Understanding Industrial Relations*, Cassell Educational Limited, London, 1995, P. 105.

participate in decision making process,<sup>50</sup> then the union would appear to have lost its essence. We shall come to these later. For now I leave you to reflect on the extent to which Nigerian trade unions have measured up to these demands.

... We shall now examine the interface between trade unionism and industrial relations practice in Nigeria, since the second plank of this presentation is about trade union relevance within the industrial relations system.

## **Trade Unionism and Industrial Relations**

Industrial relations is an aspect of the complex of work relations and of social relations of production which capitalism represents.<sup>51</sup> As such, in understanding industrial relations, it is important to appreciate the central role of capital. This is because “the basic character of capitalism exerts a pervasive influence on this nature of industrial relations, most crucially through the way in which it shapes the structure, actions and objectives of trade unionism.”<sup>52</sup> Even liberal writers do not disagree fundamentally with this approach. Johnston, for example, argues that the work community (factory and office) as well as the wider community constitute the social context of industrial relations.<sup>53</sup> What then is the character of this larger society?

The major characteristic features of capitalism have been summarised by Hyman as: (i) the ownership and/or control of the means of production by a small minority (ii) the domination of profit as the fundamental determinant of economic activity; and (iii) the obligation on most of society to sell their productive abilities on the market as a commodity.<sup>54</sup> Against this background, two major classes are located within capitalist industrial relations. This is also a reflection of what obtains in the larger society. These classes are the class made up of those who do not own property but possess only their labour power which they sell in return for a wage or salary and the class of property owners, that is, those who own property (owners of the means of production, distribution and exchange).

The relationship to the means of production determines what obtains in any industrial relations system. In the words of Allen, “authority is derived from the ownership of the means

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<sup>50</sup> Adapted from Salamon, *Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice*.

<sup>51</sup> R. Hyman, *Industrial Relations. A Marxist Introduction*, Macmillan Press, London, 1975, pp. 96-97.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>53</sup> T. L. Johnston, *Introduction to Industrial Relations*, Macdonald and Evans Ltd, London, 1981.

<sup>54</sup> Hyman, *Industrial Relations. A Marxist Introduction*.

of production and does not exist in its own right and this is in spite of the separation of ownership from control.”<sup>55</sup> Given the centrality of profitability to capitalist production relations, it follows that the profit motive determines the treatment meted out to the employees and what accrues to them from their contribution to the generation of surplus value.

Within the industrial relations system, we are thus confronted with a situation in which the two major actors or “partners” have fundamentally opposing interests. While the employer is interested in maximising profits, workers are interested in maintaining the highest level of wages and the best conditions of service possible. This conflict of interests characterises the relationship between ‘buyers’ of labour and ‘sellers’ of labour and makes the relationship a case of “antagonistic cooperation”.

It is important to stress, at this point, that the production relations of capitalist industry, as reflected in the ownership structure, explains the unequal power relationship that characterises industrial relations practice and the undue advantage conferred on employers within the same set up and they have serious implications for the practice of industrial relations. The hostility of employers to workers can also be understood against this background.<sup>56</sup>

Under the regime of capitalism, the attempt is to control and regulate the activities of workers in order to utilise them to utmost advantage, like the other factors of production. This in itself is a function of the commodity status of human labour power. Since human labour is viewed as a factor of production, the hired worker is economically bound to capital and his labour is controlled by the capitalist rather than by the worker himself.<sup>57</sup> As such, the exploitative character of bourgeois industrial relations is reflective of the exploitative nature of the capitalist mode of production.

Against the above background, government, which has been described as “the executive committee” of the modern state, has the responsibility of ensuring a conducive atmosphere within industry as a way of attracting investment, local and foreign. One implication of this is that “excesses” of workers must be curbed in order to guarantee a freehold of capital on labour. Within this dispensation, there is a tight limit to permissible radicalism by workers.

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<sup>55</sup> V. L. Allen, “Trade Unionism: An Analytical Framework,” in B. Barret, E. Rhodes and J. Beishon, (eds.), *Industrial Relations and the Wider Society*, Collier-Macmillan and The Open University Press, London, 1975, p. 63.

<sup>56</sup> F. Adewumi, “Trade Unionism and Industrial Relations: Issues and Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *The African Journal of Labour Studies, Journal of the Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria*, Vol. Nos. 1& 2, 2002.

<sup>57</sup> P. Savchenko, *What is Labour?* Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1987

In actual fact, there is a rigorous programme of labour control. The aim is to protect the interests of employers. Any action of labour that derogates from the hold of capital would be viewed with all seriousness. For instance, there are laws, which lay down the procedure for the formation of trade unions and the limits of their actions. There is also the law on strikes, which sets out clearly the circumstances under which labour can withdraw its service. All the processes of mediation, conciliation and arbitration are such that they intend to minimise the “damaging effects” of trade union actions. It is also instructive to note that trade unionism is tolerated to the extent that it does not pose any fundamental threat to the hegemony of capital in industries. When the force of legislation proves inadequate to curb “the excesses” of labour, there is the resort to the use of extra-judicial means and naked force and this is particularly true of Nigeria.<sup>58</sup>

Given the obsession of capitalist industry with maximising profit in the same dialectical process of reducing costs, including the cost of labour; the adversities of the capitalist economy are always visited on workers. This always comes to the fore during the periodic crises of capitalist development, both in the metropolis and dependencies, such as Nigeria.

To compound the problems of workers, the actions of unions that seriously challenge the power of capital are expressly outlawed. Along this line, when the state intervenes against a trade union, refusal to concede implies “a deliberate challenge to law and order, constitutional government and rule of democracy.”<sup>59</sup> Within the same context, strikes are attributed to the subversive influence of ‘militants and extremists’ within the unions. Yet employer’s intransigence is not similarly characterised.

Within the regime of capitalism, a dubious attempt is made to distinguish between ‘industrial’ and ‘political’ actions, each requiring different organisation and strategies. Consequently, to strike for ‘political’ and not an ‘industrial’ demand is viewed by the state as uncalled for and beyond normal trade union action. Those who push this position conveniently overlook the fact that wages and other conditions of work are outcomes of political decisions.

The neo-colonial character of the Nigerian society makes industrial relations practice particularly hectic and permanently turbulent. This is because the comprador bourgeoisie who constitute the ruling class and the agents of international finance capital who dominate the economy, which is the theatre of industrial relations, are almost always under intense pressure to

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<sup>58</sup> Adewumi, “The State and Industrial Relations in Nigeria. A Study in Labour Control Strategies.”

<sup>59</sup> Hyman, *Industrial Relations. A Marxist Introduction*, p. 145.

workers.<sup>60</sup> There is always the double pressure on management of enterprises to meet the needs of both local and foreign interests for profitability. There is also the fact that many of these foreign firms engage in a lot of unfair labour practices, non-recognition of unions and pay very low wages.

One major trend in Nigerian industrial relations is the heavy involvement of the state. This involvement is predicated on its being the so-called custodian of public good as well as the largest single employer of labour. This involvement is largely expressed through legislation and policy decisions. Developments like this have succeeded in rendering the much-advertised collective strength of workers vis-à-vis the employers impotent. Even when we talk of legislation, many of the laws are observed in the breach. A good example is the law on trade union recognition. Many private employers violently violate relevant provisions. Workers' lives are unnecessarily endangered in the course of employment, with government agencies charged with ensuring compliance and enforcement helpless to make any difference.<sup>61</sup>

The scenario described in the preceding paragraphs is the terrain where the practice of industrial relations unfolds and it is the context within which trade unions operate to advance and protect the collective interests of their members.

As argued earlier, the earliest unions were formed basically in response to the harsh conditions of, and the deprivations that accompanied the factory system, which developed as centres of economic activities in the wake of the industrial revolution. It can be said, without any fear of contradiction, that unions were formed primarily to play a role in the industrial relations set-up. This role is that of protecting and advancing the interests of their disadvantaged members against predatory employers backed by the might of state power.

It is precisely this role of defending members' interests that employers and their apologists would want the unions to jettison. This is why most of the dominant definitions and conceptualisation of trade unionism are nothing but attempts by the state, private employers and their intellectual 'war-horses' to re-conceptualise trade unions basically around the defence of terms and conditions of employment of workers, and even at that, not all the issues are negotiable.

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<sup>60</sup> Adewumi, "Trade Unionism and Industrial Relations: Issues and Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"

<sup>61</sup> See, F. Adewumi, "An Analytical Overview of the State of Occupational Health and Safety in Nigeria" in I. Awopetu, *et.al* (eds.), *Working in Danger*, Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, Lagos, 1998a; and F. Adewumi, "Beyond Institutions: Issues and Options in Ensuring Compliance with Labour Standards and Enforcing Workers' Rights in Nigeria" in F. Adewumi & S. Fajana (eds.) (2008), *Workers' Rights and Labour Standards in Nigeria*, Department of Industrial Relations & Personnel Management & Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Lagos, 2008.

This is not acceptable because; “In view of the fact that both industrialisation and the modern employment relationship are creations of the larger society, trade unions need to respond to such developments if they are to remain relevant to the yearnings and aspirations of their members.”<sup>62</sup> Allen argues in a similar vein, when he asserts “trade unionism is a social as well as industrial phenomenon”.<sup>63</sup>

It should be mentioned that trade unions as independent organisations of workers are not meant to satisfy the employers or management. As Flanders argues, “the first and overriding responsibility of all trade unions is to the welfare of their own members. That is their primary commitment not to a firm, not to an industry, not to the nation”.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, the prevailing attitude of management and the state that frowns at any union position/posture that is not supportive of, or at variance with the ‘official’ position is unacceptable.

In spite of the fact that unions were the creations of workers themselves for the furtherance of their collective interests within the employment relationship, efforts have always been made to co-opt them to the side of capital and a good number of industrial relations policies are geared towards this end. Hyman comments on this in these words, “policies designed to curb the oppositional basis of trade unionism and encourage a collaborative orientation shape the general character of industrial relations”<sup>65</sup> The state and employers have recorded varying degrees of success in this regard.

The main issue that arises in discussing the role of unions in industrial relations has to do with a definition of the role, who defines it and in whose interest? Many commentators display some ambivalence in this regard. For instance, while Allen and Flanders believe that the basic responsibility of the union is to its members, Flanders was quick to add that “trade unions cannot reasonably behave as if they were not part of the larger society or ignore the effects of their policies (and actions) on the national economy and the general public.”<sup>66</sup> The question Flanders failed to ask himself is whether the unions can equally ignore the effects of developments in the larger society on their own organisation and its objectives. The answer that is provided to this question will largely determine the role that is assigned to unions.

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<sup>62</sup> F. Adewumi, *Ideological Posturing and Trade Union Leadership in Nigeria. The Story of Comrade Ali Chiroma*, Hure Prints, Ibadan, 2004, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Allen, “Trade Unionism: An Analytical Framework,” p. 63.

<sup>64</sup> Flanders, “What are Trade Unions For?” p. 20.

<sup>65</sup> Hyman, *Industrial Relations. A Marxist Introduction*, p. 110.

<sup>66</sup> Flanders, “What are Trade Unions For?” p. 20.

A major plank of the debate on the role of unions in industrial relations has to do with the scope of trade union activities. In specific terms, what are the issues that can be raised and how far can they go in pursuing them? Reference was earlier made to the attempt in mainstream scholarship to distinguish between pure trade union action and those that are considered ‘political’ or outside ‘normal’ trade union action.

Within the Nigerian situation, unions are expected to address what have come to be described as “bread and butter” issues, that is, those issues relating to terms and conditions of service. It is, however, a fact that even when unions restrict themselves to those issues, employers are not forthcoming in honouring terms of agreement. On occasions when unions take their case to government, having been stonewalled by employers, employers in the organised private sector always cry foul. The Nigerian Employers’ Consultative Association (NECA) (which is made up of individual employers’ association) has for some times been challenging the right of the Nigeria Labour Congress (the central labour organisation) to negotiate with government on behalf of all workers. However, it appears that NECA fails to recognise that “although the essential activities of unions are concentrated at the point of production because it is there the impact of the dynamics of the system is greatest; they are not confined to the work place.”<sup>67</sup> It should also be possible for unions to mobilise public opinion against any action of employers they consider inimical to their collective interests. After all, trade unionism does not stop at the factory gates.

The attempt to assign to unions a supportive and collaborative role vis-à-vis the interest of employers has characterised both union-government and union-management relations in Nigeria. Apart from some brief period of radical posturing especially during the colonial period and the period immediately after independence, it would appear that the unions have become subordinated to employers’ and state interests, and consequently, rendered almost irrelevant in the industrial relations system. On many occasions, the Nigerian State usually finds it convenient to ask trade unions to put national interests above their own sectional interests.

This capitulation became evident under the Pascal Bafyau – led leadership of the Nigeria Labour Congress, from 1988 – 1994. The capitulation of labour leadership has made it much easier for government and employers to carry out anti-workers policies without any meaningful opposition. This period also coincided with the ascendancy of neo-liberalism. Ever since then, Nigerian workers and their unions have been at the receiving ends of ill-conceived state policies

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<sup>67</sup> Allen, “Trade Unionism: An Analytical Framework,” p. 36.

that have failed to achieve advertised results<sup>68</sup> (see Adewumi, 1998b, 2004b, 2008a). Job losses through periodic retrenchment, lay-offs and rationalisations have become the lot of Nigerian workers since the introduction of the structural adjustment programme and the various successor programmes of neo-liberal economics, including NEEDS. Many workers who are 'lucky' to hold their jobs are denied their legitimate entitlements such as salaries and allowances. Yet attempts by workers, through some individual unions, to seek redress are ruthlessly dealt with.

It is evident that given the realities of industrial relations practice in Nigeria and other countries that operate a similar political economy, both employers and governments have greatly circumscribed the capacity of trade unions to serve the purpose for which they were formed in the first instance. What obtains then is an effective conversion of the unions into instruments of control over their members. Given the character of capitalist society, this is not totally strange, for as P. Anderson argues:

It is a rule in a capitalist society that any institution or reform created for or by the working class can by that very token be converted into a weapon against it – and it is a further rule that the dominant class exerts a constant pressure towards this end... the working class is only concretely free when it can fight against the system which exploits and oppressed it. It is only in its collective institutions that it can do so, its unity requires disciplined organization, it becomes the natural objective of capitalism to appropriate it for the stabilization of the system.<sup>69</sup>

The real tragedy is the ease with which trade unions in Nigeria allow the process of conversion to take place. In light of the prevailing reality, what then can be done to ensure that the unions play a more meaningful role, relative to their members' interests, in the industrial relations system? While we shall come back to this later, it is necessary to explore further the process of withering of trade union power or what amounts to de-unionisation in Nigeria.

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<sup>68</sup> See, F. Adewumi, "Workers' Participation in the Development Process: Issues and Options" in F. Adewumi, (ed.), *Trade Unions, National Development and Military Rule*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Lagos 1998b; F. Adewumi, Funmi, "African Trade Unions and the Challenge of Globalisation, in S. Fajana, (ed.), *Global Trends and Industrial Relations in Nigeria. A Book of Readings*, Faculty of Business Administration, University of Lagos, Lagos: 2004; and F. Adewumi, "The Neo-colonial State, Globalisation and the Nigerian Working Class," *UNILAG Journal of Politics, A Journal of the department of Political Science, University of Lagos, Nigeria*, 4, 2008 (Rainy Season 2008).

<sup>69</sup> Hyman, *Industrial Relations. A Marxist Introduction*, pp. 67-68.

## **Neo-liberalism, State Repression and Trade Unionism in Nigeria**

Unpopular economic policies mostly imposed from outside have always required some measure of authoritarianism, if not repression, on the part of governments to push through. Since the collapse of the second republic, every government has unleashed some dose of repression on Nigerians, especially those that are opposed to their unpopular policies. The repressive character of the Nigerian State came to the fore during the Babangida administration. It used both repression and co-optation in dealing with the Nigeria Labour Congress. The principled opposition of organised labour to the regime's policies incurred the wrath of the dictator. It was just a question of time before the divergent orientations of labour and the government blew into the open. The formal imposition of the Structural Adjustment Programme in 1986 provided that opportunity.

Based on the refusal of labour under the leadership of Ali Chiroma to capitulate to the whims of the Babangida administration, it ensured that Chiroma did not get a second term in office as the President of the NLC. A stalemate was contrived at the Delegates' Conference scheduled for Benin City in February 1988; thus, paving the way for the state to intervene in the internal affairs of the Congress. The rest, as they say, is now history. A sole administrator was imposed for a ten (10) month period after which Babangida ensured that his "boys" assumed labour leadership. The Nigerian trade union movement has not really recovered from this development to date.

The hostile political environment continued under the Abacha regime. The incoherent response of organised labour to the political crisis that followed the annulment of the 1993 presidential election, provided the opportunity for the Abacha administration to dissolve the executive committees of the Nigeria Labour Congress, the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN) who were frontally involved in the attempt to force a de-annulment of the results of the 1993 presidential election in 1994. The remaining unions were forced into submission and could not even ensure that workers secure better working conditions. Under Abacha, the unions were practically demobilised.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Adewumi, "Responsiveness in Trade Unionism. The Challenge of Trade Union Leadership in Nigeria"; and F. Adewumi and J. Adesina, "Occupational Groups" in: O. Oyediran and A. Agbaje (eds.), *Nigeria: Politics of Transition and Governance, 1986-1996*, CODESRIA, Dakar, Senegal.

The situation of the trade unions since the return to civilian rule in 1999 has not changed significantly. Like its predecessors, the Obasanjo's administration would not brook any opposition; rather the regime would prefer a collaborationist labour leadership. As usual, Nigerian workers continue to bear the adverse consequences of economic reform packages, which after almost ten years do not show any sign of success. Apart from the fact of massive job losses (in the Federal Civil Service, for example, employment dropped from a figure of 240,000 in 2001 to 161,000 in early 2006), those who remain in employment are not guaranteed a security of tenure while they are forced to work under less than favourable conditions including lower wages.

The regime, in its quest for foreign direct investment, virtually surrendered its sovereignty to investors (foreign) who were frontal in insisting on labour market flexibility and exception from compliance with existing labour legislation/standards. This has resulted in a situation in which many expatriate companies across sectors flagrantly disregard workers' rights while subjecting them to less than pleasant working conditions. Of course, this is a regular pattern of conduct of these companies, who in this era of globalisation wield so much influence.

In the capitalist world, workers are forced to bear the brunt of the crisis of development. According to Wright, the conditions of crisis serve the function of restarting conditions favourable for subsequent profitable accumulation of capital.<sup>71</sup> One of these conditions is that "workers are thrown out of work, the reserve army of the unemployed swells, and capitalists can push wages below their value, thus increasing the rate of exploitation."<sup>72</sup> This gives the lie to the apologia that developments without the world economy are responses to impersonal market forces. It is also important to note that the move towards slim workforce is not dictated by advances/innovation in technology, but by the fact that:

Machines do not resist capitalist domination. Capitalists seek to replace workers with machines not simply because of the technological advantages that may result from the innovation, but because workers organize to resist exploitation.<sup>73</sup>

The response of organised labour to various government policies remains incoherent. Government and private employers find it very convenient to breach agreements freely entered

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<sup>71</sup> E. O. Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State*, New Left Books, London, 1979

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

into with the unions. The inconsistency of a labour leadership that blows hot and cold and openly flirts with an anti-workers regime has not helped matters at all. The robust contestation of, and engagement with, development issues by organised labour in the pre-1988 era have disappeared. All those mobilisation documents such as booklets, pamphlets, leaflets and posters are no longer common.

It would appear that the Obasanjo regime took advantage of the inconsistency and opportunism of labour leadership to deal with organised labour, the same thing that has continued under the Yar'Adua presidency. In spite of unilaterally imposing policy measures and terms on workers, the trade unions could not compel government to implement such. This engendered an acrimonious relationship between labour and government. A few instances will suffice to drive home the point:

- The initial reluctance of government to negotiate a new minimum wage with the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) at its inception in 1999.
- After being compelled to negotiate, refusal to faithfully implement terms of agreement for a very long time.
- The agreement reached between the Government and the NLC in 2000 granted a new minimum wage of N7, 500 and N5, 500 for federal and state civil servants respectively, while an increase of 25% in 2001 and another 15% in 2002 were agreed on.
- In 2002, government reneged on the agreed 25% (that is in spite of the concession made by labour to government in respect of the need to effect an increase in 2001), warning that it may be forced to retrench workers if the NLC insisted on implementation.
- Paradoxically, in spite of re-negotiating the percentage increase to between 12.5% -4%, the threat of sack of public servants remained.
- Up till now the increment which was further re-negotiated to 12.5% is yet to be fully implemented both at the federal and state levels with only 4 states implementing.
- Denial/ repudiation of an agreement between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the preceding military junta.
- It took a four-month strike in 2001 before government agreed to negotiate with ASUU in the first place.
- After negotiating fresh agreement with ASUU, the government equally refused to honour terms of agreement signed on June 30 2001.

- It is also significant to note that it took a warning strike by ASUU before government agreed to review the agreement, a review that was only concluded with the successor Yar'Adua government that was not forthcoming in signing the agreed terms, after negotiations were concluded in December 2008.
- In 2003, the non-implementation of an agreement reached between government and the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives degenerated into an industrial action.

Other instances of government's unilateral actions, which have implications for industrial relations practice and the unions' ability to protect members' interests include:

- Unilateral imposition of the monetisation policy on its employees and even at that, the government's refusal to faithfully implement terms thus imposed (many workers are still owed almost two years arrears of what is due to them,- workers in Radio and Television, Public corporations, Universities, Polytechnics, Teaching Hospitals and Research Institutes- several promises have not been fulfilled by government).
- The unilateral imposition of a new Pension Scheme without the input of those to be affected (those who messed up the old scheme by diverting pension funds are still left unpunished).
- Refusal to use statutorily established mechanisms for collective labour relations and social dialogue (negotiating machineries and NLAC).
- It took over one year for the NLAC to be re-constituted, and even at that, the body does not meet regularly.
- In January 2005, the federal government set up an 18-man committee to facilitate the proposed Civil Service Reforms without any representation of workers.
- Mention should also be made of the consolidation of emoluments in the public service. It was after the exercise that it dawned on most workers that it was a subtle move by government to increase the tax burden of workers.
- There was the privatisation and commercialisation of government enterprises. Apart from the fact that many workers were sent into pre-mature retirement, the victims had to endure long periods of hardship before getting their severance packages. Victims were also short-changed by the formula used in computing the severance package, which negated what was contained in their conditions of service. Again, even at that it was paid instalmentally and with some payments still outstanding.

The loss of jobs arising from privatisation of selected organisations is shown in the table below.

**Table showing Job loss in selected Privatised Organisations in Nigeria**

S/No	Organisation	1999	2007
1	Federal Housing Authority	1,500	422
2	MTEL	922	601
3	NITEL	11,500	3,308
4	Nigerian Ports Authority	13,400	4,986
5	Nigeria Railway Corporation	17,235	6,479

- Source: Field Survey, 2008

The sale of government houses was also one of the sour legacies of the Obasanjo administration. This happened without any serious opposition from labour. In actual fact, some labour leaders allowed themselves to be deceived that it was only government houses in Lagos, while those in Abuja would be left. Crass opportunism did not allow them to see through the dummy. They could not question the reasoning behind government's move to sell the houses. Governments in advanced capitalist countries build houses for civil servants on owner-occupier basis. Why should Nigeria's case be different? (For a full analysis of the performance of the Obasanjo government in the area of industrial relations as well as some components of the public sector reforms).<sup>74</sup>

The raw deal currently being meted out to teachers under the aegis of Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) is a vivid demonstration of the contempt which the Nigerian State has for teachers (and the entire working class by extension) as well as the seeming helplessness, if not capitulation, of labour leadership. It is worth recalling here that for quite some time the NUT has been clamouring for the professionalisation of the teaching profession (incidentally that was the major reason why the NUT broke away from the Nigerian Civil Service Union in 1930). This resulted in the setting up of the Teachers' Registration Council.

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<sup>74</sup> See, F. Adewumi, "Victims as Sacrificial Lambs. A Critique of Public Sector Reforms in Nigeria," Paper Read at the Guy Mhone Memorial Conference on Public Sector Reforms in Africa: Retrospect and Prospects, organised by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and Chancellor College, University of Malawi, Zomba, Malawi, held at Annie's Lodge, Zomba, Malawi, 22-24 August 2007; and F. Adewumi, Funmi, "An Assessment of the Performance of the Nigerian Government in the Area of Industrial Relations, 1999-2005" in S. Amadi & O. Bamidele, (eds.), *Civil Society Input into the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)*, Centre for Democracy and Development, Abuja, Lagos & London: 2006,

Logically, the NUT also called for the setting up of a separate salary scale, the Teachers' Salary Scale (TSS). In 2008, the NUT reached an agreement with the federal government for a 27.5% salary increase. Interestingly, this agreement was rejected by the state governors who claimed that it was unacceptable for the federal government to negotiate on their behalf in a federal system. The governors conveniently forgot to tell the nation that their stupendous salaries and allowances were determined by a federal agency (the Revenue and Fiscal Mobilisation and Allocation Commission). In any case, the governors are not forthcoming in implementing the agreement they finally reached with the NUT. The recent nation-wide strike embarked upon by teachers has not altered the situation much as less than 10 states have started paying the new rate. The excuse given by the defaulting states is that the global financial crisis has affected their capacity to pay!!! Again they forgot to tell us that the agreement was reached before the crisis.

In all this, it is not the position of the governors that it is baffling. Rather, it is the response of the NUT, whose officials are excusing the state governors. Just two examples would drive home the point:

We went on strike to give light to the struggle for the implementation of the TSS. We already have a commitment from government; government said it did not have enough resources to pay the 27.5(sic) increment at a go but except in phases. We were told that if we wanted immediate implementation of the TSS, there would be casualties...government had shown commitment to the implementation of the TSS (State Chairman, Lagos NUT). We have a letter from the Head of Service regarding the TSS and we believe that it will be implemented by June as promised.... Of course, it was wise to call off the strike. If we didn't, the government would have gone ahead to lay off some teachers. But we are confident that the government, having given its words, will implement the increase" (State Chairman Ogun NUT & another official who craved anonymity).<sup>75</sup>

If union officials can maintain these positions, the governments do not need any other spokespersons. However, it is worth noting that the fact that the NLC President was the National President of the NUT before his assumption of office at Labour House in Abuja could not save his union its present ordeal. Of course, there is a pattern to this. The textile industry and its workers suffered excruciating job losses when the erstwhile General Secretary was NLC

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<sup>75</sup> Quoted in *The Punch*, Friday, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2009, p.39.

President, just in the same vein in which the Railway Workers Union became almost extinct when its former General Secretary was also NLC President.

Earlier in June 2007, the NLC blew a good opportunity of getting major concession from a government that was yet to find its feet and lacking in legitimacy. The NLC had gone on a nationwide strike over a number of work-related and national issues and at a time many observers thought the NLC would hold out a little longer, it caved in to pressure from government and other beneficiaries of the status-quo. While it got a fraction of its demands, the promises made by government on the other issues still remain promises. The NLC had good company in ASUU that also succumbed to government pressure and blackmail to call off its own strike action over the re-negotiation of the 2001 Collective Agreement and the recall of the UNILORIN 49. Almost two years after, the government is yet to reach agreement with the Union.

The situation in the private sector is not any better. While job losses continue on account of factory closures and low capacity utilisation, employers continue to use various union-avoidance strategies such as outright non-recognition of workers' right to unionise, adoption of the strategic human resource management approach (which is hostile to unionism), out-sourcing of what is described as non-core operations. Unilateral determination of conditions and terms of employment (including target-setting), breach of terms of agreements (where reached), abuse of expatriate quota.<sup>76</sup> There are workers who work a 24-hour shift (especially in the hospitality industry) for less than N20, 000 a month!!!

The tragedy of the situation is that unions appear helpless in the face of the assault on their members. The leadership of labour conveniently forgets that:

Trade unions exist to promote sectional interests-the section of the population they happen to organize. There is nothing selfish or slightly disreputable about this; it is an essential part of the democratic process. Indeed once trade unions appear to be acting as servants of employers or servant of the government, they are bound to be written off by their own members.<sup>77</sup>

This has been the situation within the Nigerian trade union movement since 1988.

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<sup>76</sup> Food, Beverage & Tobacco Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (FOBTOB), Workshop Resource Materials on "Trade Unions & Membership Organisation: Strategies, Challenges & Prospects", FOBTOB, Lagos, 2004.

<sup>77</sup> Flanders, "What are Trade Unions For?" p. 20.

In practical terms, the unions (through the connivance of the leadership) have been largely converted to instruments of state control over their members. This development falls in line with the position of Hyman, that: “In essence, those who feel threatened by the unions because they wield social power have succeeded in using their power to turn the organizational control against the interest of their members.”<sup>78</sup> Perhaps, one reason why trade union leaders jettison the interests of their members is because “the situation of union leaders differ significantly from those of the members they represent; and this leads in turn to differences in attitudes, interests, objectives and conceptions of what is good for the members and for the union.”<sup>79</sup>

Many trade union leaders have been enmeshed in an untoward process of embourgeoisment, craving and lusting after the indulgences of their taskmasters. A few top union officials have ended up working for employers, while some are still hoping to do so!!! I make bold to say that such people should not have been employed to work for the unions in the first instance.

From the foregoing, the clear picture that emerges is that of a Nigerian trade union movement that cannot defend or promote even the economic interests of its members. Even the Webbs (as conservative as they were) recognise that a trade union should “maintain and improve the conditions of members’ working life”.

What then can be done to ensure that union members benefit from their own organisations? More importantly, what can be done to make the unions more relevant to the yearnings and aspirations of their members, thereby ensuring their continued relevance in the scheme of things?

### **Making the Unions Relevant: Some Considerations**

As argued earlier, a major challenge to the capacity of unions to live up to members’ aspirations and remain relevant in the ascendancy of market forces as the determinant of macro-economic development. This in itself is a fall-out of the emergence of a unipolar world dominated by American and Western interests as well as the globalisation of economic relations as dictated by the interests of international finance capital. The practical implication of this is that unions are operating in a hostile terrain, where relations are guided by the interests of employers, irrespective of the feelings of workers. The extent to which this will go depends on

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<sup>78</sup> Hyman, *Industrial Relations. A Marxist Introduction*, p. 67.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

the response of the unions, which again depends on the quality and commitment of the leadership as well as the vigilance of the followership. It is against this background that we shall consider a few options.

In spite of the disenchantment of the rank-and-file members with the performance of their leaders, they still believe that the union has a role to play in the employer-employee relationship. For example, in a survey carried out among members of the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (Oyo State branch) while 68% of the respondents claimed that the union was not living up to expectation, 96% of them submitted that the union is still relevant to their needs.<sup>80</sup> In another survey carried out in 2008 among workers in the telecommunications sector, 80% of respondents agreed that trade unions are not only desirable but would also make a difference in their situation.<sup>81</sup>

If workers still find the union very relevant to their needs, efforts should be geared towards making them more responsive. The major issue then is:

If workers create collective organizations in which they invest an area of control over their own action; how can they ensure that this control is used in their own collective interests rather than to serve the ends of those in charge of the union organization, or even some external interest?<sup>82</sup>

In other words, how do members ensure that their interests are well protected through the union machinery and this is a crucial issue if the unions are to remain relevant in the years ahead?

There are two ways of approaching this and they are not mutually exclusive. The first and more important approach is for the rank-and-file members to show more interest, and be more active, in union affairs. This is because:

trade unions are basically, democratic organizations. In the short term the union leadership has substantial control over the organizations. But in the long term it is members' activity or lack of activity that decided what the union is and what it is not<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> J. E. Eneghwa, *et. al.*, "Members' Perception of the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives, Oyo State Chapter," Unpublished Term Paper, Submitted to the Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, 1994.

<sup>81</sup> Field Survey, 2008.

<sup>82</sup> Hyman, *Industrial Relations. A Marxist Introduction*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>83</sup> Hammarstrom, "Local and Global. Trade Unions in the Future," p. 116.

It is precisely because of the lack of interest on the part of the union members that makes it possible for union officials to convert the union machinery for personal aggrandisement while trading away the union. There is evidence to show that there is a disconnect between trade union leaders and their members. General meetings are not held regularly, while executive committee members take most decisions without consulting rank-and-file members. In respect of the recent nationwide strike, a member of the NUT in Lagos state has this to say:

I hope our union leaders didn't compromise the struggle. They were the ones who represented us at all the meetings and all of a sudden, we heard that the strike had been called off. Government reneged on its promise of implementing the TSS and labour is taking it just like that. If we continue this way, going on strike without getting our demand, we may not receive our reward until we get to heaven. Why did we go on strike, we only wasted time on a venture that did not yield result<sup>84</sup>

A cross-section of respondents who belong to the NUT in Oyo State strongly believes that their leaders "have not represented them well enough". Interestingly in the same state in 2007, there was open disagreement between members of the union and its leaders over a local strike action called to demand implementation of an earlier agreement reached. While the leaders decided to call off the strike, the members insisted on continuing their action, ultimately the officials bowed to the wishes of their members.

Deriving from the above, there is the need to take the unions back to the members. This is necessary for any membership organisation, as the members constitute the strength. Union programmes and strategies should be jointly determined by the members and leaders and should not just be the imposition of the leaders, no matter how altruistic. A membership organisation such as the trade union thrives on internal democracy, with popular consultation and participation in the affairs of the union, constituting major components. Once private employers and governments are aware that the members are actively involved in union matters and that union leaders are prosecuting the agenda of their members, they are not likely to treat them with levity.

Efforts at encouraging active membership involvement should start at the branch level through regular attendance at meetings and involvement in other activities of the union. Attendance at meetings, for instance, would allow members make inputs into policies and programmes of the union. Such involvement will put the leaders/officials on their toes and make

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<sup>84</sup> See, *The Punch*, Friday April 10, 2009.

it difficult (not necessarily impossible) for them to mortgage the interests of members. This also calls for a strict monitoring of the activities of union officials as well as avoiding situations in which “policies to be adopted or agreements (are) signed without any involvement of the mass of union membership or perhaps without their knowledge”<sup>85</sup> This is exactly what presently obtains in many unions, thus making it easy for union executive members to freely issue threats of industrial actions and call off same without achieving any results. Membership involvement should also take into account diversity in union membership.

Part of the efforts to make the unions more responsive and relevant include strengthening the union organisation and making them rise up to the challenges of the time, including threats from government and employers. According to Ben-Israel and Fisher:

The most important way by which the union can deal with the challenges of government-employers and the workers is to become more efficient and to use means that correspond to those at the disposal of the other parties .... They must outline professional plans of actions and not limit themselves to reacting to the activities of others.<sup>86</sup>

In response to this, there is the need for the unions to have functional departments manned by competent hands. Effective links must be established between the various branches or units of the unions and their national headquarters. Regular communication must be maintained between the two in order to keep members abreast of developments within their unions, while their inputs/opinions should be sought, especially in respect of important and volatile issues. The union secretariat should serve as a resource centre for constituent units, especially in terms of information needed to strengthen their hands when dealing with managements. Along this line, the department of organisation should be staffed with dedicated organising/field secretaries.

Having secured the organisation base of the unions, the next challenge is for Nigerian trade unions to bring all their potential members into the fold. A situation in which more potential members are out of the unions is against one of the basic principles of unionism, “organise to mobilise.” From higher education through the hospitality, banking and finance, oil and gas, construction to the telecommunication sector, the story is the same. Workers and trade unions should invoke provision of S.40. of the Nigerian Constitution of 1999 on freedom of association against recalcitrant employers who should be charged for subverting the Nigerian

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<sup>85</sup> Hyman, *Industrial Relations. A Marxist Introduction*, p. 16.

<sup>86</sup> Ben-Israel & Fisher, “Trade Union in the Future. Organisational Strategies in a Changing Environment,” p. 94.

Constitution by infringing on a fundamental provision. Why should ASUU shy away from organising teachers in private universities? If MTN can allow its workers in South Africa to unionise, what should stop the National Union of Post and Telecommunication Employees (NUPTe) from organising workers of the same MTN in Nigeria? Nigerian trade unions should therefore, “mobilise to organise”.

There is also the need to re-ideologise trade union struggles in Nigeria. The circumstances that prompted the formation of unions make it impossible for them to be ideologically neutral. The problems workers are contending with today are created by capitalism. As such, confronting them requires a counter-ideology, which cannot be the same capitalist ideology. The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) confirms this reality thus:

Our times are characterised by the barbarity of capital at the expense of the working class and the imperialist barbarity at the expense of nations who resist. These two elements comprise capitalist globalisation. The results are: huge profits for the few, poverty for many and new phenomena of colonialism, racism and neo-fascism<sup>87</sup>

The position of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) also buttresses the need for trade unions to be ideological. Part of the Preamble to the IWW Constitution reads:

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organise as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.<sup>88</sup>

In other words, ideological undertones cannot be removed from trade union activities if they are to be meaningful. In the context of a neo-colonial dependent satellite economy, in so far as the capitalist relations of production prevail, ideology would still be relevant in defining the responses and programmes of trade unions to developments, not just within the employment relationship, but also within the polity as a whole. Class interests dictate most government policies.

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<sup>87</sup> World Federation of Trade Unions, *New Course*, World Federation of Trade Unions, Athens, 2008.

<sup>88</sup> Cited in F. W. Thompson & J. Bekken, *The Industrial Workers of the World: Its First 100 Years*, IWW, Cincinnati, Ohio, 2006, p. iv.

As such, workers “should realize the political and class character of the various economic policies (of government and respond appropriately)”<sup>89</sup>

Undoubtedly, militant action is required to force concessions from class-conscious employers who are always reluctant to give workers their entitlements. I recall here the words of Comrade Peter Asanba (National Treasurer of the NLC when Pascal Bafyau was President) that “*once you remove militancy from trade unions, you are left with cooperative societies*”. In any case, experience has shown that pandering to the whims and caprices of government and private employers do not get unions the desired results. In addition, that is an enduring lesson to be learnt from the founding fathers of the trade union movement worldwide.

Closely related to the above is the need to address the political side of trade union struggles. To be sure, there is no way trade unions can be apolitical as this would be a negation of not only the essence of trade unionism but also the very circumstances of their emergence. Unions arose as alternative locus of power to contest workplace relations with the employers, and this in itself is political. It is to this extent that it is correct to describe trade unions as political organisations operating in the economic terrain of industry.

The real issue is how to manage the political involvement of the trade union movement for the benefit of workers and not just to serve the interest of leaders who may not be more than political jobbers. That was what was achieved with the involvement of labour leaders in the Babangida circus show that was nicknamed political transition. How can a self-respecting trade union movement be represented in two political parties with opposing political orientations at the same time. It was just a case of crass opportunism.

In the circumstance in which the unions are today, a non-partisan involvement in the political process may be more rewarding. By this I mean the unions should not align wholesale with any political party but rather address political issues from the perspective of how such would profit the workers. In the same vein, political causes or candidates seeking elective offices can be supported based on negotiated benefits for workers. In the period between elections, organised labour should be willing to strike strategic alliances with other organisations in the interests of members. Given the low level of consciousness (both trade and political) among workers and the absence of a massive programme of workers’ education targeted at the rank and file members, a wholesale union political involvement may be disastrous or may end up

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<sup>89</sup> Adewumi, “The Neo-colonial State, Globalisation and the Nigerian Working Class”

benefiting only union officials. The critical issue is how the political involvement is managed in the overall interest of union members. The suggestion here is that the unions should embrace, at least for now, the idea of social movement unionism, which is not totally strange to the trade union movement in Nigeria.<sup>90</sup>

There is the need for internal unity within the trade union movement itself. The stark reality is the fact that most workers, manual or white collar, experience many common grievances such as job insecurity, lack of autonomy in work and unsatisfactory compensation and conditions of employment all of which should, ordinarily, provoke a common feeling of opposition and antagonism to capital, the owners of capital and their functionaries.

Given the inherent weakness of individual unions, it is imperative for the Nigerian trade union movement to respond collectively to developments within the polity and economy. This calls for inter-sectoral alliances in order to address economic problems facing workers. Essentially, the strategic placing of strong unions should be used to mitigate the vulnerability of weaker unions. That is the essence of trade union solidarity.

The fact that the Nigerian State is run by a parasitic, thieving, irresponsible and irresponsive elite does not help matters. The hostility of government that is rabidly intolerant of dissenting views and opinions has also compounded an already bad situation. Nigerian workers must come to terms with this grim reality. This reality demands solidarity among workers, it demands collective action and it demands a united front from the labouring masses if they are to overcome the adversities they face, not just in the world of work, but within the larger society as a whole. It is a fact that workers individually or isolated in their respective unions cannot single-handedly confront the might of employers.<sup>91</sup>

On the international level, Nigerian trade unions should take advantage of their membership of, and affiliation to, international trade union centres to campaign against the unfair labour practices of the TNCs and MNCs that are operating in Nigeria. The fact is that they cannot practise what they do here in their countries of origin. This level of solidarity should be a major justification for belonging to these bodies. The Nigerian trade union movement should

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<sup>90</sup> F. Adewumi, "Consolidating Democratic Governance in Nigeria: The Challenge of Social Movement Unionism" in *Nigeria Journal of Labour and Development, Journal of Michael Imoudu National Institute for Labour Studies, Ilorin, Nigeria*, Vol. 1, No. 1, May-June 2009

<sup>91</sup> F. Adewumi, "Unity and Division: The Dialectics of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement," *African Journal of Business Management*, Vol. 1, No. 3, June 2007. Available online @<http://www.academicjournals.org/abjbm>

also be part of the international campaigns against violation of labour standards and workers' rights.<sup>92</sup> This campaign should incorporate consumer boycotts and what is called social labelling by which anti-workers employers are stigmatised through organised campaigns.<sup>93</sup>

... I am convinced that the above issues and others not mentioned here are worthy of further research and I am ready to devote the next phase of my academic career to these in conjunction with other scholars who are socially committed.

## **Conclusion**

Given the reality of the employment relationship, the trade union organisation remains relevant and is the only hope of workers, nay humanity, for a decent existence. The very circumstances that necessitated their formation in those dark days are still very much with us. Workers are still as vulnerable as ever, if not more. The relevance of trade unions especially in dependencies like Nigeria has been made more compelling by unfolding developments within the world economy. A publication of the Belgian Christian Trade Union Confederation (CSC, Belgium) in trying to justify the necessity for a trade union argues that:

though enormous progress has been achieved through trade union struggles, we should not forget that today workers are still faced with insecurity, injustice and dependence. Those who still have a job are working under conditions that are getting more difficult every day. Those who are out have enormous problems in finding a job... Both at national and international levels, workers are increasingly living in a society dominated by foreign capital or under regimes where injustices, oppression and poverty prevail. Though multinationals are often the largest employers, they reinforce at the same time their hold over the workers and the peoples by imposing ruthlessly their prices, products and means of production.

This statement is as true (if not truer) today as it was when it was first made in the late 1980s. There is no greater force than the collectivity of the workers themselves that can mitigate the adverse consequences of the employment relationship and the capitalist political economy.

It is, therefore, necessary to re-invent trade unionism in Nigeria as a necessary step in ensuring the relevance of trade unions within the Nigerian social formation. This requires a rigorous programme of workers' education designed to develop both trade union and working

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<sup>92</sup> Adewumi, "Beyond Institutions: Issues and Options in Ensuring Compliance with Labour Standards and Enforcing Workers' Rights in Nigeria,"

<sup>93</sup> See, C. Scherrer & T. Greven, *Global Rules for Trade*, Westfalisches Dampfboot, Munster, Germany, 2001.

class consciousness among Nigerian workers. The content of such education programme should embrace issues affecting the employment relationship as well as broader issues of wider socio-political importance.<sup>94</sup> Such an approach would allow a holistic and comprehensive view of the challenges confronting them and the complexity of the struggle for a better society.

The process of re-invention cannot be entrusted into the hands of the present leadership of the trade union movement in Nigeria. The larger labour movement must drive the process. This should be done out of enlightened self-interest at least. This is because the trade unions are the “organizing centres of the working class.”<sup>95</sup> A virile labour movement may make up for the shortcomings and inadequacies of the trade union movement and possibly save the trade unions from themselves and their official leaders.

Finally, a labour summit should be convened by members of the labour movement to discuss the plight of the working people in Nigeria today and this should be with a view to drawing up a pan-working class agenda to secure a fair deal for the masses of the Nigerian people. We should take this as the beginning of the process of re-birth of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement. The trade union movement remains the only hope of the working people and all those who live on non-exploitative income.

... One last indulgence and I am done for today. May I call on everyone here present to join me in expressing solidarity to the “folks who brought us the weekend” by singing this song:

Solidarity for ever (3x)  
For the Union makes us strong. Aluta Continua, Victoria Acerta ...

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<sup>94</sup> F. Adewumi, “Workers’ Education and the Development of Trade Union Consciousness in Nigeria,” Paper presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> ILO/NLC/UNN Seminar on Workers’ Education and Social Mobilisation, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria, July 1989.

<sup>95</sup> A. Lozovsky, “The Role of the Trade Unions in the General Class Struggle” in: W.E.J. McCarthy (ed.), *Unions. Selected Readings*, Penguin Education, Middlesex, England, 1972 pp. 47-57.

**MANAGING EMPLOYEE RELATIONS FOR INDUSTRIAL HARMONY  
IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES**

**Professor Sola FAJANA\***

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**Introduction**

Every employment relationship gives rise to both consensus and conflicts. Consensus often does not attract public attention, but conflicts do. Conflicts are inevitable in every social relation. Conflict is so commonplace that analysts have identified both its positive and negative consequences. It seems consensual that while conflict is seen not necessarily as dysfunctional, open expressions and violent forms are often not recommended because of dire consequences on the stakeholders. Certainly, all stakeholders have had to put up with the negative costs of incessant conflicts in the Nigerian University System (NUS). Against this backdrop, this contribution aims at describing the magnitude of the conflicts in the NUS, the structure and a brief evolution of employee activism in the NUS, and the effects of prolonged labour activism. To prescribe appropriate solution, the model of employment relations in the largely non-unionised private universities, multi-unionism and pay parity through job evaluation, the invigoration of collective bargaining, funding issues as well as enlightenment and information management are explored.

**The Magnitude of the Problem**

Expectedly, the experience of long periods of strike actions in the universities dates back to the early 1990s. Specifically in 1993-94, the state reacted by passing a law dismissing all the academic staff because they were on a strike lasting more than one week. This particular incident led the sacked teachers to look for alternative employment in conformity with the dictates of public policy on unfair termination. Specifically, the law encourages staff who believed that their

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appointments were unjustly terminated to look for other gainful employment, pending the determination of their cases. Among other negative consequences, this action led to the following:

- Loss of interest, lack of commitment, diversion of loyalty, and general disillusionment about their careers, leading to an exacerbation of the brain drain phenomenon.
- The discovery among academic staff of more lucrative and easier ways of making money, even though this meant spending less time on their primary assignments.
- The availability to students of considerable idle time, who in turn converted such fallow times to cultism, prostitution, smuggling and other vices.
- After the strike, the secondary assignments were observed to be more income enhancing. Hence, academic staff and later their non-academic counterparts recorded serious reduction in the number of hours spent in the lecture rooms, laboratories and on research-related activities.

These consequences have exerted expensive tolls on the educational system top-bottom, which effects cannot possibly be removed within the next twenty-five years. For instance, the quality of graduates turned out by the educational system seems to have dropped significantly in spite of the increasing quality of global syllabi. In effect, Nigerian graduates are finding it extremely difficult competing with their counterparts from other lands. While these negative trends persist, a few positive gains are being recorded. For instance, at the end of each strike action, salaries are increased, funding slightly improved, and the gains won by one union is used as precedents for demand formulation by others and are indeed instrumental as such gains eventually are extended to other unions not only within the university system but to the entire educational system, involving primary, secondary and other tertiary institutions. This seems to reveal that the system of industrial relations and conflict regulation in the educational sector is fairly complex. We present a brief analysis of this complexity in the next sections.

### **Structure and a Brief History of University Based Labour Activism**

Industrial relations in the tertiary institutions can be presented in two periods.<sup>96</sup> The first was the era of the Association of University Teachers (AUT) and other similar unions, and the second was the period after 1978, which witnessed the restructuring of all the unions in the

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<sup>96</sup> See details in S. Fajana, "ASUU and NUT: Trade Unions or Professional Unions?" in Aloy Ejiogu (ed.) *Emergent Issues in Nigerian Education Vol. 2*, Lagos, pp. 50-71.

university system into three national groups: the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Senior Staff Association of Universities, Teaching Hospitals, Research & Associated Institutions (SSAUITRAI) and Non Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU). During the first phase, a national or central negotiating machinery was absent. Collective relations were localised at each university, with the issues restricted to staff welfare, fringe benefits and some aspects of physical conditions of work. Government fixed salaries and wages under the unified public service system. Each University Governing Council unilaterally determined the conditions of service of its employees. There was occasional use of Wage Commissions to review the salaries and working conditions of the public sector employees, such as Cookey, Udoji, Adebo, etc. The recommendations of these Commissions, once accepted, usually constituted the terms of employment of university staff. The scope of collective bargaining was in real sense limited to local issues within the jurisdiction of each Governing Council in the universities. Grievance processes were restrictive, involving only the Head of Department, Dean of Faculty and Vice Chancellor, such were rarely taken to the Governing Councils. Where joint consultation existed, its use was limited to information dissemination.

The second phase evolved with the restructuring of unions along industrial lines in 1978 when ASUU replaced the AUT. Between 1978 and 1980, ASUU manifested a somewhat sophisticated approach to industrial relations throughout the country. In response, the University Councils that hitherto felt very limited need for collective employers' actions were encouraged to modify their stance and show better attitude to unionisation. Thus, in April 1980, a Conference of Pro-Chancellors and Chairmen of Governing Councils, which held at the University of Lagos, resolved to form a national Universities Employers Association. The first national collective bargaining machinery in the universities was thus constituted on 20th May 1980 between the Pro-Chancellors and representatives of ASUU. The objective of this inaugural bargaining unit was to consider the union's demands. This was the commencement of real bargaining in higher institutions in Nigeria.

The centrality of ASUU's demands in 1980 perhaps illustrates its essence. When a trade dispute was consequently declared with the Governing Councils of Nigerian Universities after the 20th May 1980 meeting, the demands were that:

- The Universities be adequately funded to allow them realise their goals, vital to national development, for which they were established.

- Academic freedom and autonomous self-governance be restored to the universities, to enhance the morale and integrity of academic staff in the universities.
- A body be set up to carry out a comprehensive review of the conditions of service of university staff in Nigeria.

The foregoing, which may be regarded as the very first major programme of ASUU consequent upon its formation, stems from the objectives that are ostensibly declared in ASUU's Constitution. They are a reflection of the blurring in the characterisation of this union, as a conventional trade union or a professional association.<sup>97</sup> The other unions have similar objectives and adopt similar strategies.

Over time, ASUU succeeded in obtaining a salary system that has been specific to academic staff; viz. the University System Scale (USS) in 1993 and the University Academic System Scale (UASS) in 1994. As these gains were being recorded by ASUU, the other unions felt a need to have a piece of the cake. Thus, more turbulence has been recorded in recent times. The crises have come in all the bargaining units (national, state and local institutions). At times, the crisis attains a dangerous dimension, with the junior staff association pitched against ASUU in cases of parity seeking strikes, with other interested constituents of the campuses, for example the students, freely approached for support.

Early in 1992, ASUU declared an industrial dispute over three issues: (a) Gross under-funding of Nigerian universities; (b) Conditions of service for academic staff; and (c) University autonomy and academic freedom. This led ASUU under the leadership of Dr Attahiru Jega to embark on a 9-months nationwide strike in 1992 during which the Government at the peak of the crisis proscribed ASUU. An agreement was, however, reached in September 1992 with an ostensibly proscribed ASUU providing for overall improvement of the universities, and among other things, a separate salary structure tagged University Academic Staff Salary (UASS). This triggered off strike by SSAUTHRIAI and NASU members who were seeking parity in their salary scale with that of the ASUU members. Thus, after ASUU called off its strike and resumed lectures, the SSAUTHRIAI and NASU members began their strike demanding for parity with the requests granted to ASUU members.

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<sup>97</sup> Fajana, "ASUU and NUT: Trade Unions or Professional Unions?"

However in February 1993, the Secretary for Education made public his intention to cancel the UASS. He went further and abrogated the UASS and reintroduced the Elongated University Salary Structure (EUSS). This decision was seen by ASUU as a move merely to pacify the demands of the striking members of NASU. This prolonged strike served to put students in an undeserved dilemma and disrupted the 1992/93 academic session of most universities, with the effect that 1993/94 session had to be scrapped in most Nigerian universities.

ASUU then queried the *raison d'etre* for the cancellation of the UASS agreement in order to reach an agreement with another striking union. A one-month notice was given announcing the resumption of the suspended strike of 03 September 1992, if its demands were not met. Consequently, ASUU embarked on another strike on 03 May 1993, which lasted for another five months. The strike could have been called off earlier, but for the political impasse that engulfed the nation.

In 1994, the major strike by ASUU was partly politically instigated. At this time, it demanded for the actualisation of June 12 Presidential Election at which Bashorun M K O Abiola was proclaimed the undeclared winner and also for full implementation of all agreements reached earlier on. It also demanded for proper funding of education, a move that may be considered as a furtherance of ASUU's professional objectives.

Unfortunately, at this time, the Abacha-led regime was not prepared for any form of dialogue with ASUU as the regime was still facing political and economic problems, resulting from the demand of actualisation of June 12, 1993 Presidential Election results and the nationwide strike by oil workers which disrupted fuel supplies nationwide. Hence, ASUU suspended its strike, amidst public cry for mercy and 'professionally' responsible approach to crises management.

By December 1994, the government had taken a drastic step in the stoppage of ASUU members' salaries. This salary stoppage was described by ASUU's leadership as counterproductive and capable of deepening the crisis, one that could have been averted if the government had responded to ASUU's numerous efforts to enter into dialogue between January and August 1994.

Against the backdrop of the foregoing strike incidences, it could be safely concluded that in motive, ASUU has professional orientations, but some of the methods of conflict resolution being adopted are indeed syndicalist. Ironically, striking which may be inevitable in some circumstances may have negative effects on the realisation of professionalism in tertiary

institutions. For instance, ASUU itself made a stunning pronouncement that it could no longer vouch for the credibility of degrees, diplomas and certificates being awarded by Nigerian universities. After a prolonged strike incidence, more time is required to adjust to teaching on the part of teachers. For example, after the ASUU strike of 1993, teachers tended to have lost considerable amounts of their teaching skills due to long out-of-practice periods and discovery of more rewarding moonlighting (multiple job-holding) private practice opportunities. Aside from the 1996-7 strike under Abacha and the April-May 2001 incidents, long strikes have not been frequent in the NUS. The challenge, therefore, is for the NUS to look for alternatives to striking which is fast becoming counter-productive as observed.

Against the backdrop of the above therefore, the industrial relations actors preferred series of warning strikes. These are short duration actions intended at causing the breaching side to speed up its actions to facilitate mutual satisfaction of desires.

### **Further Explanation on the Crisis of the Millennium: 2001 to Date**

On December 28, 2002, ASUU declared an indefinite strike action to persuade the Federal and State Governments to honour the FGN-ASUU Agreement of June 30, 2001. At the end of its meeting on the same day, the National Executive Council of ASUU was satisfied that in the 18 months intervening between June 2001 and December 2002, all reasonable avenues for the resolution of the issues in dispute through dialogue had been exhausted by the Union. The Union believed that governments of the Federation should be held responsible for provoking this avoidable strike. The centrality of the union's struggle was hinged on the following: (a) under funding of teaching and research; (b) arbitrary cuts in salaries and demotion of academic staff; (c) failure to assist state universities; and (d) unjust sack of academic staff at the University of Ilorin. The uniqueness of the crisis stemmed from the actions of the other unions in the NUS to embark on strike actions almost simultaneously with ASUU over similar issues.

By the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2002, four weeks into the strike action, the government was yet to respond to the document submitted to it, specifying the minimum programme for the implementation of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN)/ASUU Agreement of June 30, 2001. Despite assurances of speedy response, government failed to invite ASUU to discuss the proposal, while students, press and the public support for, and understanding of ASUU's course continued to soar. The Union was aware of the possibility of salary stoppage, and propaganda that the strike had been called off. All such negative propaganda were ignored by members. The

union continued to mobilise and interact with other professional bodies, mobilised members for regular attendance at meetings, rallies, etc. Branches and zones continued to educate the people on the issues at stake. There was also the adoption of prayer and fasting programmes. The members were resolute.

Ministers and other functionaries of the government, even after starting negotiations with ASUU were quoted as deriding the blackmailing tactics of ASUU. This action may serve to aggravate an already tense situation and may jeopardise speedy resolution of crises.

As the crisis lingered, some of the stakeholders were having a field day raking in cheap advantages and benefits at the expense of short-term and long-term overall objectives of national development. For instance, some politicians may have used the crisis to score political points of incompetence on the ruling party. The World Bank could have seen this as another opportunity to sell the idea of commercialisation or privatisation of tertiary education (as would be seen in the meagre fiscal allocation made to education during the period 2003 to date).

This trend of ASUU nationalistic passion and government guided paternalistic request for understanding continued for the rest of the period. ASUU has consistently pursued without relent the survival of the NUS; the centrality of the 2016 demands is the implementation of the 2009 FGN-ASUU agreement, for which a referendum is currently being taken across the membership of ASUU. The state would as usual be pre-occupied with keeping into safe channels elements union members who could not show understanding for the state of the nation!

### **Effects of Prolonged Conflict Activities in Nigerian Universities**

The system of employee relations in the Nigerian University System has evolved around the incidence of multi-unionism spinning off several comparability issues. As precedents are set and used by contending stakeholders, the proverbial grass (students and parents) remain the significant groups that bear the brunt. Specifically, the following negative effects have become established over time:

- i. Prolonged strikes lead to disruption of the school calendar as well as other activities that depend on the calendar.
- ii. Disillusionment among students, leading to a low attraction to academic work; and the urge to settle for mediocre performance.

- iii. Disenchantment among graduates spending anxious periods waiting for mobilisation for youth service. Recently, the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) authorities have accumulated a large number of prospective Corps members, waiting to be mobilised for service, and this has posed serious operational challenges.
- iv. An accentuation of the low credibility ratings for the processes and outcomes of the NUS, especially as perceived by foreign sister institutions and employers in the global milieu.

## **Recommendations**

**The Model of Employee Relations in Universities with Private Ownership:** It is believed that additional private universities licensing would increase competition and performance. This scenario can ultimately reduce negative activities of trade unions in our Federal Universities, provided the private universities are able to sustain the current practice of non-unionisation into the future. Trade unions are institutions that are strategically formed in reaction to employers' workplace actions. Private universities in Nigeria do not ordinarily have trade unions. This situation is possibly explained by the employee relations strategy usually employed by their proprietors. Conflicts are inevitable in every organisation, and such are conveniently processed through dialogue and/or collective bargaining. Consequently, in the absence of trade unions, private universities pursue:

- i. Recognition of professional associations in the respective disciplines and professions for the purpose of furthering the professional development of staff members.
- ii. Regular dialogue with the various structures statutorily created for furthering consultations within the university, such as Senate, Governing Council, Board of Trustees, Congregation, Parents Forum, Junior Staff Forum, Senior Staff Forum, Students Forum, etc. Most of the recent concerns of trade unions alleging Vice Chancellors and Councils of corruption in recent times are borne out of inadequate information to respective constituencies.
- iii. Adoption of a paternalistic orientation that identified staff welfare deficits and consciously tackle them to pre-empt employee dissatisfaction, and minimise or discourage employee collective actions.
- iv. Contracting out non-core activities such as cleaning, security etc, to private companies. This will reduce the number of staff that are directly recruited. Nevertheless, any tendency towards practices that deny the attainment of decent work principles on account of non-unionism must be avoided.

**Tackling Multi-unionism and Pay-Parity through Job Evaluation:** Multi-unionism and the concomitant struggle for comparability must be resolved scientifically and pragmatically. As originally conceived in its global evolution, support staff in the universities are indeed an after-thought. The role of support staff consists mainly in the provision of back up actions to enable the first line operators (teachers) to concentrate on research and teaching. However, this narrow description of non-teaching jobs must now give way to a more flexible definition that reflects unavoidable dynamics in multi-skilling, information communication technology and the general blurring of occupations, arising from trends in globalisation. In effect, whatever differences that are still discernible between teaching and non-teaching jobs can be sorted out through careful policy and process of job evaluation and the appropriate pricing of jobs based on the points rating system. This is guaranteed to minimise conflicts over remuneration which is currently accentuated by the incidence of several unions co-existing in the education sector.

**Unions, Employers and Collective Bargaining:** Each university should be encouraged to draw up its own conditions of service, as was the case before Udoji in 1975. Conditions of service of university staff should be based on job evaluation and productivity as is done in other parts of the world. This will encourage competition and quality education in the system. The staff will be fully occupied and be alive to their responsibilities. Against this backdrop, all unions in the universities should negotiate directly with their Councils at the level of the University. Negotiations at the national level with government should be limited to discussions over matters with a national scope; such as the state of the nation. With the sustained call for true federalism, where states are strengthened and empowered, the appropriateness of engaging the federal government in collective relations in the Nigerian university system will wane. More importantly, all parties to collective bargaining must possess the requisite capacity to bargain in good faith, through training and re-training. Effective negotiations are skill-driven. Thus, insincerity, filibustering, hoarding of critical information, insertion of ambiguous clauses in collective agreements, and waiting for the point of implementation to renege, all affect the quality of the resultant agreement, and the fate of it at the point of execution; and the confidence of the parties in future negotiation efforts. The government should honour all agreements entered into with unions to earn itself credibility. To achieve this, the negotiation process must be transparent with no incidence of hidden agenda. Re-opener clauses must be reflected in negotiated agreements, as a most realistic strategy for confronting and resolving contextual

situations at the point of implementation, which may not have been anticipated during the negotiations.

**Review of implementation of agreements:** As outlined in the Education Strategic Plan, 2016, the establishment of a Unit in the Federal Ministry of Education that will regularly and consistently follow up on agreements government signed with staff unions in the tertiary sector has become absolutely necessary. This Unit will also organise regular discussions with officials of the trade unions in order to appraise agreements and understand one other.<sup>98</sup>

**Funding:** The 2016 efforts of government in funding university education are noted. The post-Needs Assessment interventions (2013-2018) are quite commendable. However, government is urged to ensure that universities are adequately funded i.e. infrastructures are put in place before full autonomy is introduced and implemented. In this direction, government should also ensure baseline funding for universities even after autonomy is granted. On fund generation, it is believed that universities should generate funds to supplement government funding. Many universities in other parts of the world including African countries like Makerere University in Uganda, generate lots of internal funds for their operations. Nigerian universities should not be an exception. It has become clear that government alone can no longer fund university education. Therefore, partial fees should be charged to supplement government's funding; and thus, parents should participate in some form of cost sharing. This strategy would also present a more relatively level playground between the fees structure in public and private universities. The enrolment figures of private universities would also improve because the fee differential would have been narrowed so as to cause parents and admission seekers to consider and patronise fee-charging institutions. In addition, avenues should be explored by universities towards involving donor agencies and development partners in the funding of university education.

**Enlightenment and Information Management:** The current National Universities Commission (NUC) information dissemination efforts are commended. There is need to improve upon this; and for other agencies in the NUS to take a cue. It is also suggested that efforts should be made to enlighten the public on government position as it relates to unions and strikes, so that the public should be made aware of the facts of the matter, and thus, assisted with forming their

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<sup>98</sup> Federal Ministry of Education, *Ministerial Strategic Plan-Final Draft*, Federal Ministry of Education, August 2016, p. 54.

own impressions about employment relations and industrial harmony in the NUS. There is a need to sensitise the public on the various activities of the unions and government's responses to the issues raised.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Industrial relations is dynamic, and thus all players must constantly brief and debrief to ensure the matching of realistic strategies with the issues that confront them. It is convenient to counsel the parties to accept winning some and losing some of their goals, but overall, the employee relations process must be governed by values of equity, fairness and justice. These values have informed the suggestions made in this paper. It is believed that if some of the palliatives suggested are considered, there will be brighter future for industrial harmony in the Nigerian University System.

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## 4

# INTERNAL DEMOCRACY AND WORKERS' POWER IN THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

**Funmi KOMOLAFE\***

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Unions in Politics, Politics in the Unions.<sup>99</sup>

Right from inception, the Nigerian trade union movement has sought relevance not only in employment relationship but also in the political, nay national development process. The movement made a lot of contributions (even when unsolicited) to national discourse on various issues affecting different aspects of our national life. What is lacking is the active involvement of trade unions, as organisations of workers, through substantial participation in various organs and agencies of national development.<sup>100</sup>

### **How Democratic are the Trade Unions?**

Opinions are diverse. What we have in many unions is popularly known as representative democracy. In other words, delegates are chosen to represent the interest of other workers. On the other hand, some have argued that true democracy is one that allows all members to vote for leaders of their choice. Election of officers for the trade union and the Central Labour Organisation is the focus here. A former Secretary General of the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity, (OATUU), Hassan Sunmonu, observes that:

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\* Funmi Komolafe, a veteran journalist, was Labour Editor of *Vanguard* Newspapers and a columnist.

<sup>99</sup> This was a sentence in the 1986 May Day Address to workers by the then President of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Comrade Ali Chiroma. The issue then was how to get the organised labour movement in Nigeria to be relevant in politics in terms of how the people were to be governed and who governed them. Nigeria at that time was in a military dictatorship which had promised to quit the political space for a democratically elected government. From then on, Labour's struggle for space in the polity was intensified. But since then a number of issues have arisen which have called to question internal democracy in the trade unions.

<sup>100</sup> Funmi Adewumi, (ed.) *Trade Unions, National Development and Military*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Organisation of African Trade Union, 1998.

“[in] many trade unions, elected and appointed leaders make themselves masters of their members and organisations instead of being servants. Cases abound where trade union leaders sell out their members to employers and governments, forgetting the “law of retributive justice.”<sup>101</sup>

The credibility of representative democracy was shattered during the aborted NLC Conference of 12<sup>th</sup> February 2015, where, for the first time, an NLC Delegates Conference ended in a fracas. The National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE) alleged that the officials of the Medical & Health Workers Union (MHWU) had denied workers from a section of the country representation to the delegates’ conference; because, MHWU officials believed such delegates would vote for the candidate from the other union for NUEE for ethnic reasons. Both unions presented candidates for the posts of the President of the NLC. MHWU presented Comrade Ayuba Wabba, while NUEE presented Comrade Joe Ajaero. MHWU also alleged that NUEE had gone to the South Eastern states of the country to financially induce candidates to vote for its candidate. Besides, it was also alleged that NUEE denied delegates from the North Eastern states representation to the delegates’ conference.

The above allegations are important for two reasons. First, Comrade Ayuba Wabba is from the North Eastern part of Nigeria, while Comrade Joe Ajaero is from the South Eastern part of the country. Secondly, it was the first time in the history of the trade union movement in Nigeria that delegates were denied representation because of ethnic affiliation. Thus, these allegations raise important questions, namely: would this have been if the unions were truly democratized? Would this have been if all workers were allowed to choose their representatives? The point being underscored here, thus, is that, had there been internal democracy in the trade unions, the decisive and deciding issue during the 2015 NLC Delegates Conference for representation would have been: “Who will represent workers’ interest?” Or put differently: “Who will stand for, defend and promote workers’ interest?” This, therefore, brings us to the question of internal democracy, which Comrade Hassan Sunmonu referred to in the quote above.

Unfortunately, internal democracy in our unions has fallen short of workers’ expectations. If there had been any, the problem of elected and appointed officials metamorphosing into *masters rather than servants of workers* would not be the case in the trade union movement. Funmi Adewumi was very critical of union leaders who had become Lords rather than managers of trade unions. He was critical of the lifestyle of many trade

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<sup>101</sup> Hassan Sunmonu, “Democracy, Development and Trade Unions,” in *ibid*.

unionists that lived flamboyantly at the expense of workers. Many union leaders have not done much to improve the working and living conditions of the rank and file members, including the take home pay of workers. Yet, they live fat on check-off.

A major factor responsible for this unfortunate, painful and miserable state of affairs is the fact that workers check-off dues are automatically deducted from workers' wages and salaries by the government on behalf the unions. This has created a generation of arm-chair trade unionists. Today, we have union leaders who insist on flying First Class in an airplane, when most of the rank and file workers they claim to represent can hardly feed and take proper care of themselves and their families, let alone fly on an economy class. This was not the cases during the colonial period and the early post-colonial period (1960 to 1978). During these periods, most of the elected and appointed union leaders constantly kept in touch with their rank and file and worked seriously to defend and promote workers' interest; because, if they did not, workers would not pay their union dues.

### **Labour Lords or Labour Leaders?**

A new dimension to distorted democracy in the unions is a trend that has seen elected presidents of unions, who are supposed to be part-time officials, become General Secretary, which is a full time job. The question is: "Why is this so?" The answer is simple. Elected officials use this method to become sit-tight leaders, which they are aware could be challenged, if they remain elected officials. The second reason is that since the law in Nigeria does not allow for Executive Presidents in the Trade Unions, only a transformation to the post of General Secretary would give them full control of the Union Secretariat and indeed the purse of the union. To achieve this aim, the list of delegates to the national conference of the union is doctored to suit the ambition of these union leaders. Simply put, workers that are likely to oppose them never make the list. Only those who will rubberstamp personal ambition make the list.

It is, therefore, not surprising that political parties have also toed the lines of unions by compromising primaries of candidates with financial inducement, amongst others, and the nation is worse off. Trade unions that should have set the pace for political parties have failed woefully. Consequently, people with questionable character are the ones who get elected in the legislative and even the executive arms of government. This has made the electorate to lose faith in our democracy as such people never represent the interest of the electorate, but their selfish interest.

## **Need for Transparent Democracy in Unions.**

The time for a true and qualitative change in our unions has come. It is time for all members of trade unions to have a say in who represents them. The cost of organising a platform for true democracy should not override the interest of workers. In this regard, I concur with the view of Hassan Sunmonu that:

... Membership-empowered democracy has to be installed and nourished in the trade union movement. Unity, in spite of diversity, is also an objective that cannot be ignored within the trade unions ... With popular- participatory and worker-empowered democracy, as well as accountability assured within the trade unions, they will then have the moral authority to demand for same within their communities , towns, countries, regions and internationally. After all, “Charity begins at home”.<sup>102</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Trade unions in Nigeria can be said to have scored below average. A significant reason for this lies in to the fact that *most union leaders* have discarded popular participation and democratic practices in the affairs of the unions. In so doing, they have destroyed the concrete and organic relations between the leadership and the rank and file, virtually subordinated and completely alienated the latter in the affairs of the unions, thereby disrupting democracy and democratic practices, which are part and parcel the tradition, values and norms of the trade union movement. While this may not be the situation in all the unions, the exceptions are so insignificant that they cannot make any positive impact on the political class.

The above situation is not peculiar to Nigeria. As a matter of fact, these situations are prevalent in many African countries and this is a major reason the pace of development in many countries is nothing to write home about. Had trade unions defended and promoted the interests of their members against the local, national and foreign capital and acted as the conscience and defenders of national interests, many African countries would have developed at a faster space. In addition, African leaders would have been more accountable. Workers, in most African countries, are as disappointed in their leaders, as the electorate in the political class. Yet, trade unions ought to have been in the forefront of influencing political decisions, countering the

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<sup>102</sup> Sunmonu, “Democracy, Development and Trade Unions”

greed and authoritarianism of the ruling classes, propelling national development and neutralising ethnic, religious, regional and primordial conflicts and violence, instigated by the ruling classes.

Hope is, however, not lost. The down turn in the economy could cause more workers to take greater interest in the activities of their unions. Like the political class, labour bureaucrats and elected officials, who see the union as their empire, should prepare for a revolution that can take place when they least expect. Let us keep the struggle on so that our departed Comrades, like Professor Funmi Adewumi and Professor Abubakar Momoh, will not have laboured in vain.

## **PROMOTING WORKERS' WELFARE AND JOB STABILITY THROUGH JOB TRAINING AND RE-TRAINING**

**Ade A. OLA-JOSEPH\***

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### **Synopsis**

Professor 'Funmi Adewumi was very critical and holistic in his thoughts and writings. He spent a great part of his time writing and propagating the interests and welfare of workers. He wrote profusely on unions membership, trade union democracy, training and re-training of workers in the workplace. I sincerely hold the view that he was not oblivious of the fact that there could still be convergence of interests between the employers of labour and workers. It is common place for owners of capital to talk about high cost of production, while workers would emphasise good welfare. The two demands are mutually inclusive and not diametrically opposed. The ability to strike the delicate balance between employers' and employees' interests in a win-win situation, I am convinced, was what compelled Professor Adewunmi to posit that:

In spite of this general trend, some trade unions have managed to keep 'their heads above water' and secured concessions for their members. *They have been able to strike the delicate balance between members' interests and those of employers.*<sup>103</sup>

I am convinced that modern day industrial relations should be able to have a convergence of the various competing interests. Job training is a tool that should be acceptable to trade union and employers to enhance both workers' welfare and high productivity. Training enhances skills for high job performance and high job performance provides high compensation and good pay for workers. High performance leads to high productivity, a thing the employers highly desire. It is in this light that job training and retraining become a pre-requisite in the workplace. It should form part of workers' right that unions must be ready, at all times, to aggregate and enforce in

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\* ADE A. OLA-JOSEPH was formerly Executive Secretary, Food, Beverage and Tobacco Senior Staff Association (FOBTOB) and an ardent Supporter of International Trade Union Solidarity.

<sup>103</sup> F. Adewunmi, *Organising and Managing Affluent Employees Trade Unionism and Industrial Relations In Nigeria's Food, Beverage and Tobacco Industry Story of Fobtob*, Ibadan, 2015, p. 22.

the workplace. The employer may complain of high cost of training, unions should emphasize the cost benefits. It should form an essential part of items for negotiation like salaries, housing, medical etc. because it has a way, when properly used, of enhancing the welfare of workers. If we must promote the interest and welfare of workers, trade unionists must be motivated to place training and re-training of workers in the front burner.

### **Concept**

No organisation can afford the luxury of treating with laxity the need to train its staff. This is more so, in this age where changes are taking place with the speed of lightning. Training is a process of developing and understanding some organised body of rules, method and facts. It also involves the development of skills needed for effective performance of a specific task.<sup>104</sup> Training involves efforts in the organisation to teach, instruct, coach and to develop the employees in the areas of technical skill, knowledge, principles, techniques, as well as providing employees with adequate knowledge of their organisation.<sup>105</sup> Training in industry should not be seen wholly in terms of acquiring a body of knowledge only, but much more for making workers behave in a different and positive manner. Training, as a process, incorporates all matters that have to do with acquiring skills or learning concepts to increase the performance of employees.

In this present world where things keep changing with neck breaking speed, no organisation can afford to distant itself from a continuous training programme for its employees. Training is a continuous process in this ever changing world. The rate which things are changing, it is no longer possible for a worker to stay motivated for their job from the beginning till s/he retires without being trained and retrained. D. Seymour, indeed, stresses that the training given to a worker under twenty-one would be largely outdated by the time he is thirty-one.<sup>106</sup> Training helps to stabilise employment and encourages long service, as it keeps workers abreast with technological changes.

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<sup>104</sup> Ralph Currier Davis, *Industrial Organization and Management*, Haper and Row, New York, 1957.

<sup>105</sup> Avice Saint, *Learning At Work: Human Resources Organization Development*, Nelson-Hall, Chicago, 1974.

<sup>106</sup> D. Seymour, "Retraining for Technological Change", Paper read to Retained Conference of Institute of Personnel Management 1966.

## **Locating the Needs for Training**

Efficient training addresses cost-benefit issues, while effectiveness looks at whether the end objective is realised. The necessity for training, according to Egungwu, are: when new employees join an organisation and require familiarisation with the organisation's products, service, personnel policies and practices; when some employees become unsuited for their jobs; when new equipment are to be introduced or when job methods changed; when employees are to be promoted or transferred to another position; when there is a need to delegate some responsibilities to subordinate; and when performance levels are to be maintained or improved upon.<sup>107</sup> To achieve effective training, there is the need to painstakingly study the need(s) for it. Hence, these areas must be objectively looked into: locating training needs; analysing alternatives to achieve these needs; resources for use in training; and the learning objectives.

## **Efficient and Effective Training**

As noted above, efficient training addresses cost-benefits issues, while effectiveness looks at whether the end objective is realised. Though training occupies a prominent position in an efficient organisation, it should not be seen as the be-all or a panacea to all problems in that organisation. For any training to be effective, the need for it must be established. The need for training can be realised when the following problems have been studied: high scrap record, excessive absence, too many quits, (employees turnover) and fires (sack), low production, abnormal amount of complaints, unusual tardiness, high accident rate, too much overtime, poor employees, low morale and lack of co-operation from employees. Even after these problems have been well deciphered, and it has become clear that there is a need for training, and training is carried out; there could still be the persistence of some of these problems discussed above, if employees are not able to make use of the new skill acquired, when they return to their jobs in the organisation. If the training is not rewarding and if employees do not consider training necessary, the resultant effects of these are: employees may look out for promising opening in other organisations or may deliberately refuse to always put in their best. Hence, it is one thing to know that training is necessary, but it is another to make it very effective in order to take care of the problems it is intended to solve.

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<sup>107</sup> V. N. Egungwu, "Lectures on Manpower Development," Unpublished Paper, University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria, 1984.

Complaints are increasing about the growing ineffectiveness of training. The cost of training due to ineffectiveness is accelerating at a disturbing rate in many organisations. It is in this vein that job and skill analyses are necessary for effective training. For they save time by indicating those fields where training is necessary and those where it is not. Training must, therefore, be specific or situational to be effective. Effective training must be both a tool of guidance and reinforcement. As a tool, training must provide rewards to trainees so that they carry out their work with enthusiasm both during training and post-training periods. In a nutshell, training must be skill acquisition-centred and trainees needs-centred.

Job analysis and performance appraisal are essential tools for designing effective training programmes. Training becomes effective when learners accept the need to change their performance, and when such training programme addresses what the trainees lack in their job. Trainees must be placed in relevant position where they can best utilise the skill and knowledge acquired after training. However, certain principles need to be observed, if training is to be effective and meaningful. These, according to Yoder, are: individual differences; relation to job analysis; motivation; active participation of trainees; selection of trainees; selection of trainers; training method; and principle of learning. The emphasis on individual differences is because the rate of learning varies from one individual to the other. Hence, cognisance should be taken of this when fashioning out the duration of training. Adequate job analysis should be carried out to know where the trainees are inadequate in their jobs. Adequate and relevant motivation package should be designed to make training worth its salt. It is also relevant that there should be active participation by all trainees, and that only those who are in need of training are sent on training. Apart from making training relevant to the needs of the trainees, the trainers must be well experienced in training matters. Effective training programme is one which emphasises knowing by doing, as opposed to other method of learning.<sup>108</sup>

Effective training must also set out to achieve the following for the trainees: give them greater knowledge of the environment in which they work or will work to complement formal education; and afford them opportunities to acquire and develop the correct levels of knowledge,

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<sup>108</sup> D. Yoder, *Personnel Principles and Policies. Modern Manpower Management*, Englewood Cliffs N.J: Prentice-Hall Inc. 1959.

skills and attitude which they must possess in order to perform their jobs effectively and to enhance the prospects of their carrier development.<sup>109</sup>

## **Evaluation**

The evaluation stages of training appear to attract the attention of many writers on efficient and effective training of staff. According to Hamblin, 'evaluation of training programme attempts to obtain information on the programme and use such a feedback to assess the value or the effectiveness of the training'.<sup>110</sup> Training evaluation involves the systematic collection and assessment of information, with a view to deciding how best to make use of available training resources, in order to achieve organisational goals.<sup>111</sup>

To achieve effective evaluation of training programme, it is suggested that these four levels of analysis be used: reaction level; learning level; job behaviour level; and functioning level. Reaction level has to do with trainees' reaction to the training programme, their opinion and attitude towards the programme. The learning level attempts to assess the amount and quality of learning which takes place in a particular training session. Behaviour evaluation deals with the analysis of changes in behaviour brought about by the training. The functional level concerns itself with cost and efficiency. It has to do with whether the training actually reduces cost and improves the organisation as a whole.

Another way to make training meaningful is to make it an effective tool of motivation. Thus, organisers of training programmes must be concerned with how to make training motivating, especially in the area of reward system.

A well-trained worker would be dynamic, productive and confident. A productive worker would no doubt be an asset to the employers; being an asset makes him a person to be sought after, thus ensuring stability of job even in the face of re-structuring and redundancy. A well-trained worker that is productive would ordinarily be well-paid. Training, therefore, becomes a tool for promoting workers' welfare and ensuring stability of employment.

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<sup>109</sup> V. N. Egungwu, "Lectures on Manpower Development," Unpublished Paper, University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria, 1984.

<sup>110</sup> A. C. Hamblin, Evaluation of Training Industrial Training International 1970.

<sup>111</sup> Peter Warr, "Evaluating Management Training," *Journal of The Institute of Personal Management* (Business Publications Ltd, London, February 1969)

**POWER MEDIATES THE POWER OF EQUITY, PUBLIC HEALTH  
EDUCATION AND PRACTICE**

**Olutoyin MEJIUNI, (Ph.D)\***

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**My Association with Funmi Adewumi**

I saw Professor Funmi Adewumi for the last time in January 2017. It was after the wake of Professor Dele Layiwola's mother in Agbowo, Ibadan. Funmi asked for my number, and indicated he had to go to Lagos that evening. I was seeing Funmi for the second time in about six weeks, and that was unusual! I met Funmi through Professor Olufemi Taiwo (Mallam) sometimes in 1989/90, when Funmi was with the Nigeria Institute for Labour Studies (NILS; now named the Michael Imoudu National Institute for Labour Studies) Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. I was on my Ph.D and informed Mallam that I would be visiting with my parents in Ilorin. He counselled that I should meet with Funmi who may be able to provide literature and some guidance in respect of some aspects of the subject of my dissertation (training and development of workers). It was not the digital age at the time, the university system, especially the libraries, had received a lot of bashing from Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), and so we relied on the network of colleagues and friends to access current relevant literature. I sought Funmi out in Ilorin and, as it turned out, he lived two streets from my parents'. He was very friendly, appeared gentle and easy going, was passionate about his subjects of interest and

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seemed steely. I lost touch with Funmi after 1991/1992, but would occasionally hear about him from friends. About 2001/2002, we would exchange greetings in the traffic on Iwo Road in Ibadan. Then, on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 2016, I went to visit with Mallam and his wife, Yinka, and met Professors Dele and Peju Layiwola there. Funmi came in just after I got to Mallam's. Dele's Mum had just passed on, so discussions moved from that subject matter to vegans (you know who is!) to universities, and to where to begin to effect the structural repairs needed to fix Nigeria. I remembered the aside I had with Peju about how Funmi had not changed. When, in June 2017, Kayode Taiwo, Mallam's brother, called me and expressed condolence in the Yoruba language, I simply asked: Who again? Then he said: Funmi Adewumi. I was absolutely taken aback and, it was for me, one death too many; I lost my Mum; my dear friend, Patricia Cranton, passed on; a dear brother, Abubakar Momoh died; and then Funmi Adewumi. Much later, I seem to console myself with the fact that I had interacted with him in December 2016, and then very briefly in January 2017. Otherwise, I would have had to rely on memories of the literature he willingly gave me, his presence alongside other friends at some of our family gathering in Ilorin, and the fact that our mutual friends usually attest to the fact that Funmi seeks out his friends, even if the interaction is brief. May his soul find peace and his passion continue to inspire us the living.

### **The Key Argument of this Essay**

The central argument of this essay is that: public health education and practice cannot contribute to health equity if stakeholders do not challenge the practice of power and power relations, which are central to systems of patriarchy, economic and cultural exploitation, primitive acquisition, greed, lack of accountability, impunity, etc., that have contributed to health inequities/disparities. My perspective on the interface of equity and public health education, therefore, seems clear: it is a critical theoretical perspective, which involves critiquing social structures and power relationships, and articulating a vision of social justice and equality. I approach my exploration of the theme of this presentation through an examination of some key words.

I begin to explore my subject matter by citing three case examples. The case examples are:

- *The cases of women who did not show traces of depression or schizophrenia before they became wives and the men (and women) who have murdered their spouses.*

- Who has heard of *Temple Grandin*, the autistic American Professor who thinks in pictures and designed one third of the livestock handling machines in the US?
- Let us consider *the issue NHVMAS has been raising* and speculate on why HIV vaccines specific to the strain of the virus found in Nigeria is yet to be developed in Nigeria.

## **Public Health Education**

Public health education involves outlining specific teaching/learning objectives, planning, designing and implementing educational activities (including through instructional media and media of mass communication), towards improving community members' knowledge and awareness of the [possibility of] occurrence, the presence, emergence, and prevalence of specific communicable and non-communicable diseases among specific groups within the community. It also involves: training of health educators and improving community awareness and support for public health programmes and services; designing and conducting community assessments of attitudes to health services; and analysing statistical public health information. Finally, it involves the evaluation of the effectiveness of health education in regards to stated goals and objectives. Public health education targets schools, civic groups, community members, and health educators. It is, therefore, expected that public health education would improve public health and promote health equity.<sup>112</sup>

## **Equity**

Equity is usually thought of as social justice or parity. Social justice means non-discrimination on the basis of sex, class, race, ethnicity, creed, age, sexual orientation, disability/able-bodiedness and so on. One could also read this as non-discrimination on the basis of difference or identity, be it natural or constructed. Marshall wrote that to discriminate is to treat unfairly.<sup>113</sup> The notion and practice of discrimination includes attribution of characteristics to individuals and groups; characteristics, which, when socially and institutionally applied to

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<sup>112</sup> R. A. Hahn, & B. I. Truman, "Education Improves Public Health and Promotes Health Equity," *The International Journal of Health Services*, Vol. 45 No. 4, 2015.

<sup>113</sup> G. Marshall, *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998.

groups of individuals, define their rights and duties, which then affect the quality of their lives.<sup>114</sup> Discrimination involves unequal opportunities to access resources (usually stemming from social and institutional(ised) prejudices), and unequal and unfair distribution of rights and resources. Social injustice or discrimination also takes the forms of minimising, trivialising, and non-recognition of the issues, concerns, experiences, interests and needs of individuals and groups who are minorities; that is, those who are different from the majority or mainstream.

Finally, to discriminate is to dominate: to insist on prioritising the interests and needs of a group over those of others, by fiat. Such prioritisation would usually not have a rational basis; it is usually steeped in unconscious or hidden bias (prejudices) and subsequently, explicitly enforced through subtle or overt exercise of power. The group that dominates and prioritises its interests and needs would then usually also go on to enforce its own values, beliefs, moral precepts, and moral defaults. The dimensions of social injustice, therefore, range from the seemingly innocuous to abuse and outright violence, all of which impact negatively on the well-being of those who are different; that is, those whose interests and values are not mainstream, and are being treated unfairly or unjustly.

### **Social Determinants of Health**

This is the notion that our health, whether individual or collective, is affected by an array of factors, beyond basic biology or genetic makeup.<sup>115</sup> In the US, some experts, using data from the Centers for Disease Control, estimate that only 10% of good health is a result of health care. Much of the remainder has to do with social and economic factors, including income, education, racism, and related factors such as child-care, housing, vocational training, unemployment, literacy, social support, community violence, transportation, built environment, as well as food security and accessibility.<sup>116</sup> In Nigeria, in a study that examined the determinants of differential access to health services across the five states of Southeast Nigeria, Nnoyelu and Nwankwo reported that access to health services is strongly affected by factors such as level of education,

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<sup>114</sup> N. Wiley, “The Politics of Identity in American History” in C. Calhoun ed.), *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994.

<sup>115</sup> L. M. English, “Adult health Learning: A Critical Approach to Informal Learning About Health” in O. Mejiuni, P. Cranton, & O. Taiwo (eds.), *Measuring and Analyzing Informal Learning in the Digital Age*, PA: IGI- Global, Hershey, 2015, pp. 169-179.

<sup>116</sup> Wisconsin Centre for Health Equity, <http://www.wche.org/>

gender, patriarchal social arrangement, rural residence, poverty, religious and cultural beliefs about certain diseases and location of health facilities, etc.<sup>117</sup> Two thirds of the respondents in Babalola's study of literacy and decision making about health issues among married women in Southwest Nigeria indicated that the husbands of married women were sole decision makers on their health related issues.<sup>118</sup> Babalola's study underscores how patriarchy affects access to health. Mejiuni,<sup>119</sup> Mejiuni & Bateye,<sup>120</sup> and Odujinrin & Fashina<sup>121</sup> have pointed out that low level of education, poverty, patriarchy, socio-cultural practices, including early marriage, violence, and politically inflected religious injunctions/practices constrain women and children's access to health services.

The determinants of *differential access to health services* that have been highlighted result in health inequities or health disparity. *Health disparity* is used to indicate any difference in health between groups of people, which are not attributable to innate biological differences. Health inequity is "a disparity which is avoidable, which is often the result of social or economic conditions or policies, and which, therefore, represents an unfair or unjust disparity"<sup>122</sup> Even where innate biological/genetic differences exist, such as between women and men, or between neurodivergent and neurotypical persons, the requirements of social justice is that the health needs of those in the minority must be centred, must be considered as part of the mainstream; their needs must not be considered a matter for the margins or edge.

Nnonyelu and Nwankwo recommended that "provision of health services must be complemented with institutional arrangements and *massive public enlightenment that counter several social constraints* that prevent access and full utilization of health services by the people of southeast Nigeria"<sup>123</sup> This recommendation is an explicit challenge to public health educators. True, it is possible to attempt to use public enlightenment to raise awareness or even

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<sup>117</sup> A. N. Nnonyelu, & I. U. Nwankwo, I. U. (2014). "Social Determinants of Differential Access to Health Services Across Five States of Southeast Nigeria," *European Scientific Journal*, 3, 2014.

<sup>118</sup> A. C. Babalola, "Literacy and Decision Making on Health Issues Among Married Women in Southwest Nigeria" in V. C. X. Wang (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Advancing Health Education through Technology*, IGI Global (Medical Information Science Reference), Hershey, PA, 2016.

<sup>119</sup> C. O. Mejiuni, "Educating Adults Against Socio-culturally Induced Abuse and Neglect of Children in Nigeria," *Child Abuse and Neglect: The International Journal*, Vol. 15 No. 1, 1991.

<sup>120</sup> O. Mejiuni, & B. O. Bateye, "Religion, Education and the Well-being of Citizens of Nigeria" in H. Tiliouine & R. J. Estes (eds.), *The State of Social Progress of Islamic Societies: Social, Economic, Political and Ideological Challenges* Springer International Publishing, Switzerland, 2016.

<sup>121</sup> O. Odujinrin, & O. M. Fashina, "The Nigerian Child victims of their Culture and Political System" in J. A. Marvasti, (Ed.), *Child Suffering in the World*, Sexual Trauma Center Publication, Manchester, 2000.

<sup>122</sup> Wisconsin Centre for Health Equity, <http://www.wche.org/>.

<sup>123</sup> Nnonyelu, & Nwankwo, "Social Determinants of Differential Access to Health Services Across Five States of Southeast Nigeria," p. 286.

consciousness about socio-cultural inhibitors of access to health. *However, public health education is practised within specific socio-cultural and historical contexts.* Implicit and explicit decisions about who may, or may not, access health, including funding decisions are taken within specific contexts; unfortunately, they are the same contexts that produced those same socio-cultural and socio-economic factors that constrain access to health and health equity.

The recommendation of the Wisconsin Centre for Health Equity is, therefore, right on spot. The centre recommended that in addition to their repertoire of skills, competencies, tools and methods, stakeholders in the public health sector need to address the broad policy and system environment that so strongly influence health. Two of the three specific recommendations the Centre made are relevant to our purpose. The first is to *identify the social and economic policies and systemic arrangements* that can increase or decrease health inequities, and *explain the evidence* that links public health problems to the social determinants of health. The second is to build the civic capacity of communities to *understand and change* the policies and systems underlying health inequities, and partner with communities to secure needed policy changes.

The theme/thread that is central to these recommendations is power and politics, but more so power; the power of public/community (health) education. Knowledge is a power resource. There is productive power in equity/social justice/parity, while inequity/disparity leads to powerlessness. Even at the core of the link between equity and public health education practice, is the practice of power. It is, therefore, pertinent that we explore the notion of power.

## **Power**

Definitions of power “range from a view of power as brute force, through debates about individual versus structural capacities, to power as a complex social force that exists in, and produces, imbricated networks of shifting and contested relationships.”<sup>124</sup> Blackburn held that “the power of an individual or institution is the ability to achieve something, whether by right or by control or influence”, and further stated that power is “the ability to mobilize economic, social or political forces in order to achieve a result.”<sup>125</sup> Marshall identified power resources as: wealth and control over jobs; numerical support; competence; expert knowledge; control of information;

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<sup>124</sup> T. Nesbit, & A. L. Wilson, “Power” in L. M. English (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Adult Education*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2005, pp. 496.

<sup>125</sup> S. Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 295–296.

organisational capacity; control of instruments of force; occupation of certain social positions, etc.<sup>126</sup> We must assume that these power resources are among the economic, social or political forces that individuals, groups and institutions can mobilise to achieve a result. Another power resource I have added to the list is participation in decision-making processes as equals, not on assumption of equality; because of the possibilities that it represents. Nesbit and Wilson pointed out another approach to understanding power, and, that is the view that “power operates unseen and unacknowledged "behind the actor’s back" to influence people and their activities. For example, social forces such as class, race and gender largely determine people’s actions and thoughts”<sup>127</sup>

Foucault alerted us to the fact that we see power in terms of the apparatus of state; think power outside economic considerations unimportant; and believe that we do not exercise power, ‘others’ do.<sup>128</sup> He believed that power is “present in the smallest, apparently most inconsequential human interaction”<sup>129</sup> and is exercised through the body, sexuality, family, kinship, knowledge, technology, and so on. From Foucault’s position, we can deduce that power is present in all spheres and institutions of life; in both the private sphere (home or domestic) and the public sphere (community, government). When *power resources are mobilised or utilised to enhance the capabilities of persons, groups and institutions, they become enablers and are viewed positively. However, when they inhibit capabilities, they are viewed as disablers, dead hands and repressive.*<sup>130</sup> Foucault cautioned that it is erroneous to think of power as inhibiting, controlling and repressive alone. He believed that *resistance to power is found right at the point where power relations are exercised.*

Power, then, can represent both repression and resistance, with the implication that there can be no single locus and mode of power, because different individuals and groups can exercise different modes of power, at different times, and in such are to be found the possibilities of different kinds of resistances. Resistance to power can be forged by accessing and mobilising the

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<sup>126</sup> Marshall, *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*.

<sup>127</sup> Nesbit, & Wilson, “Power,” p. 497.

<sup>128</sup> M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1980.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> O. Mejiuni, *Women and Power: Education, Religion and Identity*, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Dakar, 2013.

same power resources that can be used to inhibit and control, and by acts of individual will or active agency.<sup>131</sup>

### **Back to the Thesis of this Essay**

I return to the thesis of this essay, which is that: public health education and practice cannot contribute to health equity if stakeholders do not challenge the practice of power and power relations which are central to systems of patriarchy, economic and cultural exploitation, primitive acquisition, greed, lack of accountability, impunity, etc., that have contributed to health inequities/disparities.

I also return to my perspective on the interface of equity and public health education, which is a critical theoretical perspective, involving critiquing social structures and power relationships, and articulating a vision of social justice and equality. Brookfield identified seven learning tasks that are the enterprise of critical theorists: challenging ideologies; contesting hegemonies; unmasking power; overcoming alienation; learning liberation; reclaiming reason; and practicing democracy.<sup>132</sup> I return also to the case examples of how public health education could have influenced/changed structural problems, but did not.

First, I examine the cases of *women who did not show traces of depression or schizophrenia before they became wives*. This is not about postpartum. Granted, some of the women may carry genes that could result in episodes of mental illness, especially if they follow Mendelian patterns of inheritance. But who is asking questions about the environment of that marriage that served as ‘triggers’ for the episodes? Who is talking about how the processes of sex-role socialisation and how the demands of sexual division of labour, and masculinities and femininities place pressure on women as well as men? Who is talking about genetic screening, not as a means of discrimination, but as a way of learning about, understanding and supporting our family members, especially spouses? Why are we not raising these issues seriously as part of discourses of public health? Apart from the outrage, and the demand to prosecute husbands (and wives) who have killed their spouses, who is talking about the extreme forms of masculinities that get unemployed and jealous husbands to kill their wives? Men who are feeling less than men because they have been socialised by their parents, their peers, religious leaders

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> S. Brookfield, “Unmasking Power: Foucault and Adult Learning,” *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, Vol. 15 No. 1, 2005.

and the media that men are the breadwinners, and also that they should cover their faces in shame when their wives and girlfriends sleep with other men or they suspect they slept with other men? *The power of patriarchy keeps these discourses out of the public sphere.*

Second, I explore the story of *Temple Grandin*, the autistic American Professor who thinks in pictures and designed one third of the livestock handling machines in the US.<sup>133</sup> Do we know how many neurodivergent<sup>1</sup> persons like her (including persons with bipolar, ADHD, and dyslexia) we have denied opportunities *because of our androcentric (malecentric) society* that demands ‘normalcy’ from all of us, no matter how that is conceived? Do we know how roles and responsibilities are shared among parents and relations who are supporting neurodivergent persons?

Finally, let us consider *the issue NHVMAS has been raising* and speculate on why HIV vaccines specific to the strain of the virus found in Nigeria is yet to be developed in Nigeria. *Power serves particular interests.* The persons who have occupied decision making positions where they wield the power to allocate resources for the development of HIV vaccine in Nigeria need the money that would go into vaccine production for their pockets, the pockets of their kins and their political future. We need to challenge the systemic problem of corruption. We need to draw out the implications of every missing naira and kobo for inequities in the health sector. The amount of cotton wool and bandages stolen funds could buy. The drainages that could be cleared so the larvae of anopheles will not thrive, and the lives that could be saved by the development and production of HIV vaccines.

## Conclusion

The debates and discourses about the interface of power and equity and how they determine health and wellbeing must take place in all spaces where knowledge construction take place. They must be part of public health education content because we have shown that unequal power relations and social injustice are major causes of poor health.<sup>134</sup> We must pay attention to

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<sup>133</sup> T. Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures: My Life With Autism (2nd ed.)*, Vintage Books, New York, 2006. Also see, T. Grandin, *Temple Grandin: Autism Gave Her a Vision. She Gave It A Voice.* DVD. HBO Films, (not dated) and T. Grandin, T. *Temple Grandin: The World Needs All Kinds of Minds.* <http://www.ted.com> (not dated)

<sup>134</sup> M. Bassett, “We Must ‘name racism’ as a Cause of Poor Health,” *Huffington Post* 02/08/2017. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/racism-as-cause-of-poor-health\\_us\\_581a1376e4b01a82df6406d6](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/racism-as-cause-of-poor-health_us_581a1376e4b01a82df6406d6)

the dynamics of power, which shape the context of public health education, and how power resources and power relations affect the frameworks, the contents, the strategies, and the financing of public health education.

**WORK-VALUE AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA:  
THE MYTH, THE UTOPIA AND THE REALITIES**

**Oluranti SAMUEL, D.Phil.\***

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**Abstract**

The Nigerian educational institutions, from where human capital is nurtured and developed, have been undergoing a lot of criticism lately, due to the perceived poor representation of most of their graduates in the labour market. The poor work-value has soaked every facet of our industrial activities, and further exhibited in the various unethical behaviours displayed by workers. It manifests in several social vices. The questions one needs to ask are: What values are the students deriving today in our schools? Are the perceived negative values societal-infested or school-induced? How are the activities in schools of serious consequences to work-value? What have been the results of work-value degeneration to the growth and development of our manpower? This paper traces the role of various stakeholders in the educational system that engendered this negative trend. In addition to secondary data and interview, the paper relies on data from a survey conducted in 2014 and 2015 on the assessment of effects of educational values on workers. The participants were drawn from unionists (n=156) at two different capacity building programmes in May 2014 and September 2015. The employers' group (n=32) were similarly attracted at another programme in May 2015. The data were obtained by means of a 4-item Lickert type scale of agreement. The paper discovered that all the stakeholders in the educational sector are guilty of this work-value degeneration. It advocates for total work-value

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re-orientation, which should emerge from home to schools and to the society at large. This can be achieved if all stakeholders adhere religiously to their roles in the educational sector.

## **Introduction**

The recent reactions and vituperation by many Chief Executives about the qualities of the graduates produced by our universities, as well as the discriminating attitudes of some of them, especially between graduates of States and Federal universities on one hand, and those of the Polytechnics on the other, are pointers to the fact that employers are not getting the best from their staffers. It is popularly said that people are the most organisational assets. These assets are, therefore, also known as the intellectual capital of the nation and organisation. No organisation will do away with an employee when the value they contribute is recognised. Considering the fact that most of the employees are products of our various institutions of higher learning, the question remains as to whether they have actually imbibed the right work-values in their various institutions. Are the imbibed work-values, if any, put into use in the workplace? What differences, if any, are there between the imbibed work-values and the ones in existence in the workplace? What are the expectations of the employers and why are they not being met? What necessary roles could be prescribed for the stakeholders in integrating the right work-values into our various institutions of higher learning?

This paper assesses the current work-values and the impacts of our educational institutions on this phenomenon. It assesses the expectations and the realities and prescribes roles for the stakeholders in order to produce the best intellectual workers.

## **Conceptualising Work**

Historically, the meaning of work has not being the concern of many people. As an integral part of everyday life, work was meshed with all major institutional functions. Typically, work consists of a set of activities hereditarily prescribed as part of a particular status or position in the community. Work has more meaning than mere survival or maintaining tradition. Work is the driving force giving direction and meaning to contemporary living. Though work satisfaction tends to decrease with the level of occupational skill, work still occupies a central role in the lives of most people. This is premised on the fact that there is no other activity which provides as much social continuity to life as does work. Work is also the link between the individual and the

society in which s/he lives, and the individual's place in society is primarily determined by the place s/he occupies in the area of production, as well as distribution of products and services.<sup>135</sup> It is work and not leisure that gives status to an individual in his family.<sup>136</sup>

The concept of work has been viewed differently through the ages. Tilgher, in his historic analyses of work, asserts that to the Greeks work was a curse and nothing else. Their name for it – *ponos* – has the same root as the Latin *poena*, meaning sorrow. Like the Greeks, the Hebrews thought of work as painful drudgery. It is a hard necessity, accepted as a penalty, as an expiation, through which man may atone for the sin of his ancestors and reconquer his own lost spiritual dignity. Primitive Christianity followed the Jewish tradition in regarding work as a punishment laid on man by God. This is because of man's original sin. It, however, added that to work is necessary not only to earn one's living, asking alms of no man, but above all so that the goods of fortune may be shared with one's needy brother. Luther held that work is a form of serving God. That is, there is just one best way to serve God – to do most perfectly the work of one's profession. To Calvinist, work is the will of God. To please God, the Calvinist believes that work must not be casual. It must be methodical, disciplined, rational, uniform and specialised. Since the Calvin's day, work has never lost its dignity, but work for work sake is no longer preached. Work gives man the joy of victorious force, bestows on him the hard pleasure of feeling his personality triumphant, and enables him to feel that in himself alone is the source of all pleasure and joy.<sup>137</sup>

O'Toole defines work as an activity that produces something of value for other people. Work is "any activity or expenditure of energy that produces services and products of value to other people"<sup>138</sup> Hall opines that work is the effort or activity of an individual that is undertaken for the purpose of providing goods or services of value to others and that is considered by individual to be work.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> See, O. Samuel, "Educational Value and Human Capital Development in Nigeria," Paper presented at the First College of Social and Management Sciences Conference, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State on the theme Values, Virtues and Development Crises in Nigeria on 27 May, 2006.

<sup>136</sup> Sigmund Nosow & W. H. Form, *Man, Work and Society*, Basic Books, Inc, New York, 1962.

<sup>137</sup> A. Tilgher, "Work Through the Ages" in Sigmund Nosow, & William H. Form, *Man, Work and Society* Basic Books, Inc, New York, 1962.

<sup>4</sup> M. F Fox, & S. N Hasse-Biber, *Women and Work*, Mayfield Publication Company, California, 1984

<sup>139</sup> R. H. Hall, *Sociology of Work: Perspectives, Analyses and Issues*, Pine Forge Press, New Delhi, 1994.

## What is Work Value?

A value is something that we desire—a "good" that guides our thinking, actions, and lives. Values are involved in all sorts of areas: moral values—right and wrong. People's behaviour has positive and negative value. Value could be classified into: a) intellectual values: truth, understanding; b) aesthetic values: beauty, creativity; c) economic values: economic security, work (beyond the pay-check); d) psychological values: happiness, satisfaction; e) social values: friendship, acceptance, and respect; and f) religious values: value of knowing God. These areas each represent different aspects of life, each an area of study. All areas of life and study are value-laden. Value is inherent in the very nature of things - the potentiality for certain value being realised. A person might have all the right ideals without having actualised them. Value is a matter of character, while character can be said to be the collection of one's values. Bad character would be an absence of good traits, or even a collection of recognised bad traits, which includes selfishness, cruelty, avarice, jealousy, hostility and other similar vices.<sup>140</sup>

Before a person learns about a particular job, s/he learns how to feel or think about work. In other words, the person first develops work values.<sup>141</sup> Work value is the conception of what is desirable, which individuals hold with respect to their work activities;<sup>142</sup> judgments about work orientation;<sup>143</sup> and an employee's awareness of what s/he seeks from the work situation. In other words, work value may be defined as the meaning, which an individual attaches to his or her work role. Work value can be determined by assessing individual's attraction(s) in their job or occupation.

Quite a number of work-value dimensions have been identified by many researchers on organisational behaviour. Super and Crites have delineated work values into the following categories or clusters: a) scientific-theoretical values; b) social welfare; c) materials; d) systematic; e) contact; and f) aesthetic.<sup>144</sup> Scientific-theoretical values belong to the realm of intellectualism, such as ought to exist among university people, for example. Opportunities

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<sup>140</sup> See, D. Elliot, "Moral Values for Public Education" in *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, Spring, Vol. 8, Issue 1, 2004.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* p.274+

<sup>142</sup> A. L. Kalleberg, "Work Value and Job Rewards: A Theoretical Analysis," *America Sociological Review*, Vol. 42, 1977, 124-143

<sup>143</sup> See, M. L. Kohn, *Class and Conformity: A Study in Values*, Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey, 1969; and A. Ejiogu, "Value, Attitude and Behaviour" in A. Ejiogu, I. Achumba, and N. Asika, (eds.) *Readings in Organizational Behaviour in Nigeria*, Malthouse Press Ltd, Lagos, 1995.

<sup>144</sup> Cited in *ibid.*

should abound for the cultivation and nurture of the spirit of equity, objective analysis of issues and events, and the pursuit of truth and excellence. Social welfare value represents such attributes as altruism, selflessness and empathy, which ideally should be internalised by social workers in orphanages, old people's homes, mental homes, as well as among medical and paramedical workers. It further pertains to catering for needy and under-privileged/ marginalised members of the group or society at large. Material values are geared towards economic benefits and the satisfaction of workers' physiological and safety/security needs as has been postulated by Maslow. Aesthetic values emphasise on the beautiful – beauty of person and of environment. Architects, town planners, designers, horticulturists, home interior decorator and women in general are known to manifest these values.<sup>145</sup>

Rosenberg identified ten occupational values. These include use of special ability, a good deal of money, creativity, status/prestige, working with people, secure future, independence, leadership, adventure, and altruism.<sup>146</sup> According to Ejiogu, Super and Crites later categorised work values into fifteen, which include: way of life, security, prestige, economic associates, supervisory relations, variety, altruism returns, creativity, independence, intellectualism, aesthetics, achievement, surroundings, and management. However, values could be grouped broadly into three. These include a) values that pertain to the job per se; b) values that bother on interpersonal relations; and c) values relating to the external environment of the job.<sup>147</sup>

By assessing the dominant work values in today's workforce, workers are grouped into the following cohort: the Veterans – those who entered the workforce in the 50s and early 1960s, with 65+ as their approximate current age. They were hardworking, conservative, conforming and loyal to their organisation; the Boomers – who entered the workforce between 1965 and 1985, and they were in their early 40s and mid-60s. "They were influenced heavily by the civil rights movement, women's lib, the Beatles, the Vietnam war, and baby-boom competition".<sup>148</sup> Though they distrusted authority, they placed a great deal of emphasis on achievement and material success. They were pragmatists who saw the organisation that employed them as vehicles for their careers; the Xers – they entered the workforce between 1985 and 2000. They have been shaped by globalisation, two-career parents, AIDS, and computers. They value

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<sup>145</sup> A. Ejiogu, "Value, Attitude and Behaviour"

<sup>146</sup> Cited in *ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>148</sup> S. P. Robbins, *Organizational Behaviour*, (11<sup>th</sup> Edition) Prince Hall of India Private Limited, New Delhi, 2005.

flexibility, life options and the achievement of job satisfaction; the Nexters – came into the workforce from 2000 to the present day. These sets of workforce do not enjoy the days of hiring bonuses and abundant jobs. They face insecurity about jobs and careers. They are at ease with diversity and they take technology for granted. They live more of their lives with ATMs, DVDs, cell phones, laptops and the Internet. Most of them are under 30 years of age.

The classification of work value, notwithstanding, the awareness of the centrality of their function especially in shaping one's job attitudes and performance, is also of importance. Rokeach opined that values in general perform a dual role; they help individuals "to evaluate and judge, to heap praise and fix blame on ourselves and others"; they also motivate the individuals towards the attainment of the "valued object". In addition, values perform standardising and motivational roles, and it is a belief upon which a man acts by preference.<sup>149</sup>

Values can be distinguished between people of different work orientations and commitment. Workers who value high economic returns would be insatiable, notwithstanding how commensurate the employer intends to pay them. They will likely be involved in moonlighting, even at the expense of their work employers. The workers who are not good in creativity might not do well in design and construction industries. In addition, people who have flair for independence and intellectualism are likely to be satisfied in research institutes and the universities.<sup>150</sup> As Morse asserts, the work values held by individuals in an organisation constitute an intervening variable between performance and job satisfaction.<sup>151</sup>

Work values are usually transmitted from parent to child. Another great influence on work values is the person's colleagues. In addition, students learn from both faculty and peers and socialisation is both formal (intentional) and informal (coincidental). The development of work values is not some neutral and placid activity. Instead, values are hammered out of interactions with real people in real organisations and throughout a person's work life. In addition, a person's values both affect and are affected by work experiences.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> M. Rokeach, *The Nature of Human Values*, New York: Free Press, 1967.

<sup>150</sup> A. Ejiogu, *Value, Attitude and Behaviour*.

<sup>151</sup> N. C. Morse, *Satisfaction in the White Collar Job*: University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, Ann Arbor, 1953.

<sup>152</sup> R. H Hall, *Sociology of Work: Perspectives, Analyses and Issues*, Pine Forge Press, New Delhi, 1994; and see, J. T. Mortimer, "Intergenerational Occupational Movement," *American Journal of Sociology* 79, 1974, pp. 1278-1299.

## Education and the Development of Work Value: The Myth and Utopia

Education is the more or less formal and systematic process by which information that prepare children for life are transmitted.<sup>153</sup> We will never improve the work value base of our society by ignoring them in the education of the young. Any time we hear people make references to “the good old days when education was education, when people were really taught in the schools”, it is an indication that something is actually missing from our homes and schools - missing for years. The missing element is a strong, unarguable notion of right and wrong, good and bad.<sup>154</sup> Coles discovered that students nowadays have complicated belief systems that usually run counter to traditional values.<sup>155</sup> More than parents, teachers or authoritative officials, students turn to peers for guidance on matters of right and wrong.<sup>156</sup> It is also important to state that despite the growth in technology and the numbers of schools, value degeneration in the qualities of education is becoming alarming. Effective character education improves student’s behaviour, makes schools into more civil communities, and leads to improved academic performance. Elliot asserts that the inclusion of character development emphasis within the curriculum of schools will: a) add meaning to education; b) sustain and strengthen our culture; c) model civility; and d) build true character.<sup>157</sup>

That which we say we value does not necessarily reflect our value-core. Instead, that which we prove in practice we value — those “things”, which despite our ethics, morals, beliefs, philosophies, or theologies, to which we naturally return again and again—are our true values. We all have consciously or unconsciously developed “value-driven mental matrices—those ‘mothers’ or ‘wombs’ - which motivate or predispose us to manufacture and emphasised certain ethics, morals, beliefs, philosophies, or theologies. We create secondary values often to counter or to justify our core primary values.<sup>158</sup> The value education should impact on job in Nigeria in particular are exemplified in the Philosophy and Goals of Education in Nigeria, which are ideal and laudable. Pursing them to the letter, however, has been the problem. In Nigeria’s philosophy of education, it is believed that:

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<sup>153</sup> D. Crabtree, *Rethinking Education*, 2004 <http://msc.gutenberg.edu/2001/02/rethinking-education/>

<sup>154</sup> O. Samuel, “Educational Value and Human Capital Development in Nigeria.”

<sup>21</sup> C. R. Coles, “Elaborated Learning in Undergraduate Medical Education,” *Medical Education*, Vol. 24, No. 1, January, 1990, pp 14-22.

<sup>156</sup> Elliot, “Moral Values for Public Education”.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> See *ibid* and Samuel, “Educational Value and Human Capital Development in Nigeria.”

- (a) Education is *an instrument for national development*; to this end, the formulation of ideas, the integration for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education.
- (b) Education fosters the *worth and development of the individual*, for each individual sake, and for the general development of the society.
- (c) Every Nigerian child shall have *a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities* each according to his or her ability.
- (d) There is need for *functional education for the promotion of progressive*, united Nigeria; to this end, *school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive*; while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education. (Emphases mine.)

The Nigeria's philosophy of education, therefore, is based on: (a) the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen; (b) the full integration of the individual into the community; and (c) the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal school system. The national educational goals derived from the philosophy include (a) the inculcation of national consciousness and unity; (b.) the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the society; (c.) the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around us; and (d.) the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society. It is further emphasised that "education shall be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change; any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution."<sup>159</sup>

## **Methodology**

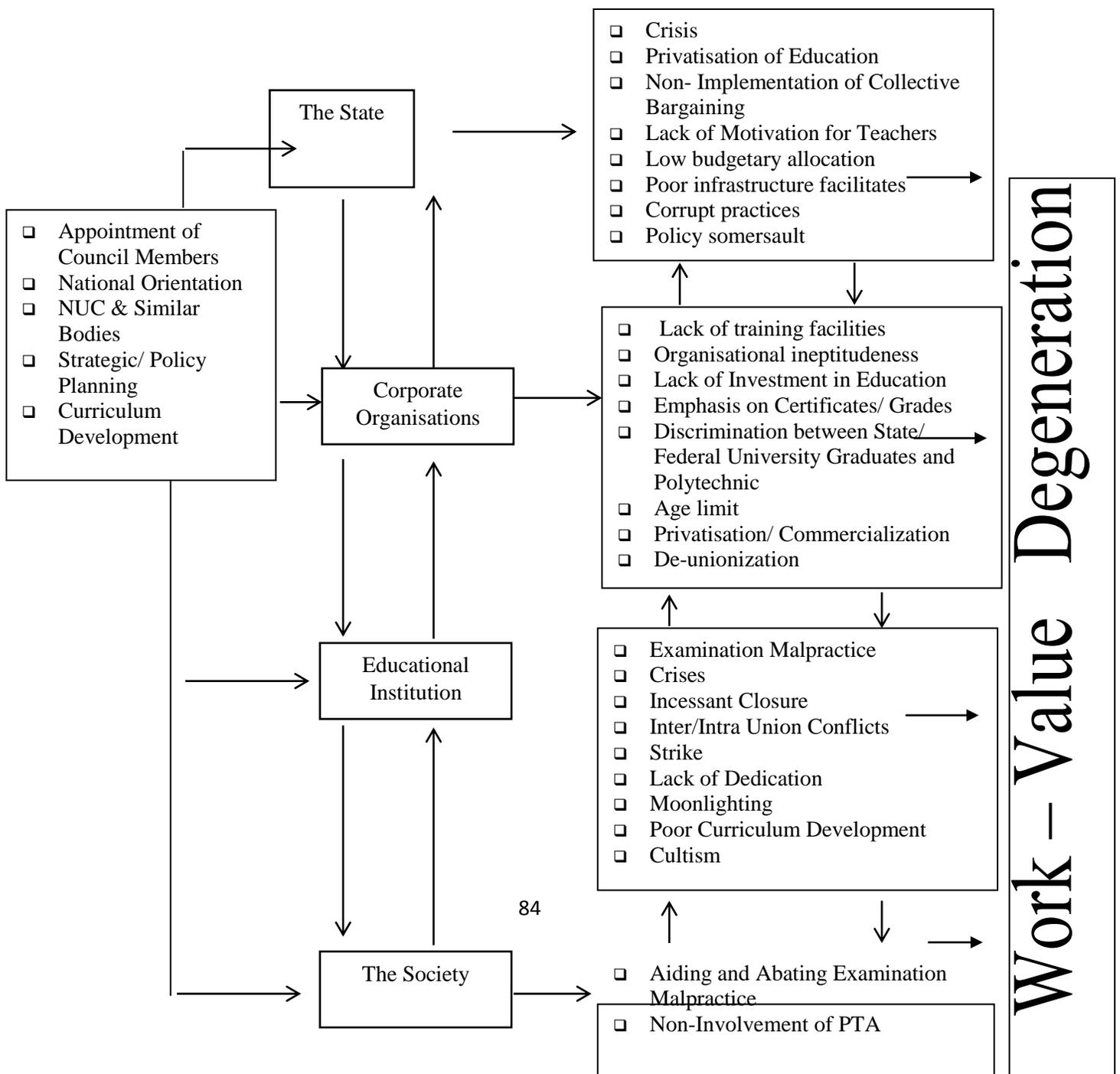
This paper relies on upgraded data from a survey conducted in 2014 and 2015 on the assessment of effects of educational values on workers. The participants were drawn from unionists (n=156) at two different capacity building programmes in May 2014 and September 2015. The employers' group (n=32) were similarly attracted at another programme in May 2015. Besides, there was the use of interview and secondary data.

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<sup>159</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) *National Policy on Education*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, NERDC Press, Yaba, Lagos.

The operational research questions were: what is the relevance of values imbibed in the schools to the workplace? What factors have contributed to value degeneration in the workplace? What effects would such a sustained trend have on the quality of human capital development and production of goods and services in Nigeria? The data were obtained by means of a 4-item Likert scale of agreement with given statements to which the respondents reacted in a self-administered questionnaire. The simple percentile score was performed for each statement and tabulated. The results are presented in what follows.

**Figure 7.1**  
**A Conceptualisation of Stakeholders' Role in Work-Value Degeneration in Nigeria**



## Findings

The following tables contain the findings on the issue of work value. Table 1, adopting some instrumental values expected at workplace, presents the outcome of workers and employers assessment of these work-values. The responses represent the percentage of the respondents who agreed to the manifestations of the work-value variables. Though there are some differences in their responses, the two groups are in agreement on variables 2, 4, 7, 11 to 15. Their differences are pronounced on variable 6, 17 and 19 (See Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1**  
**Workers' and Employers' Assessment of Work Value**

	Work Value	Percentage that agreed to the manifestations of work-value	
		Employees (n=156)	Employers (n=32)
1.	Respect for elders	91.02	87.5
2.	Helpful (working for the welfare of others)	42.94	43.75
3.	Logical (consistent, rational)	50.64	37.5
4.	Keeping appointments	43.59	40.62
5.	Cheerful (light-hearted, joyful)	67.3	68.75
6.	Obedient (dutiful, respectful)	62.18	71.85
7.	Honest (sincere, truthful)	44.87	43.75
8.	Self-control (dependable, reliable)	39.74	40.62
9.	Responsible (dependable, reliable)	55.77	46.87
10.	Clean (neat, tidy)	91.66	90.62
11.	Intellectual ( intelligent, reflective)	41.03	40.62
12.	Imaginative (daring, creative)	46.15	43.75
13.	Courageous (standing up for one's beliefs)	52.28	50
14.	Independent (self-reliant, self-sufficient)	47.43	40.62
15.	Capable (competent, efficient)	40.38	43.75
16.	Broad-minded (open-minded)	51.92	46.87
17.	Polite (courteous, well-mannered)	60.25	43.75
18.	Ambitious (hardworking, aspiring)	63.46	50
19.	Loving (affectionate, tender)	69.23	90.62
20.	Forgiving (willing to pardon others)	53.84	53.12

Table 2: Some of the factors responsible for work-values degeneration are reported in this table. They are the compressed stakeholders' involvement in work-value degeneration as shown in the conceptual framework. The interesting thing about the result is that there are insignificant differences in the responses of both parties. They both agreed, for instance, that square pegs in round holes, bad economic policies, poor infrastructural facilities, and political crises coupled with the life style of politicians, poor budgetary allocation to education, poor curriculum, and examination malpractices among others are factors militating against work value.

**Table 7.2**  
**Workers' and Employers' Assessment of Factors Responsible for Work-Value Degeneration**

	Factors	Percentage that agreed to the factors	
		Employees (n=156)	Employers (n=32)
1.	Privatisation of education (cost to parents)	85.25	78.12
2.	Appointment of wrong people into positions	89.1	87.5
3.	Bad government economic policies	89.74	90.62
4.	Poor infrastructural facilities	88.46	81.25
5.	Political crises	66.66	84.37
6.	The flamboyant life style of political office holders.	73.71	68.75
7.	Incessant strike in the educational sector.	92.94	90.62
8.	Poor budgetary allocation to education.	82.05	81.25
9.	Poor curriculum development	87.82	87.5
10.	The craze to travel abroad	58.97	59.37
11.	Unfair labour practices on the part of employers	87.82	65.62
12.	The no. of unemployed school leavers	85.25	75
13.	Teaching facilities in schools	86.67	87.5
14.	Treatment of the disengaged workers	83.33	59.37
15.	Examination malpractices	91.66	87.5
16.	Fraud in the workplace	81.41	90.62
17.	Low wages/salaries	94.23	93.7
18.	Impacts of globalisation on the economy	50.64	53.12
19.	Obsolete labour legislations	78.2	68.75
20.	Corruption in high places	87.82	84.37

## Discussion

**Assessment of Work Value - The Realities:** In this environment, harnessing the human capital – the accumulated skills, experience, wisdom and capabilities of all the people employed in an organisation is fundamental, not only to the success of the organisation, but to that of the society at large. This is important considering the level of the education of the present workforce. However, at a time when skills are more complex and transferable, traditional loyalty is reducing, and the significance and value of knowledge is rising, there is also a premium and renewed focus on managing human capital, many employers are decrying the weaknesses or ineptitudeness they have discovered among their employees. Instead of becoming knowledge workers, it would seem that many members of the current workforce, as well as students about to emerge from schools, are in danger of becoming the new “techno-peasants”. This is because our educational institutions, from where the country’s human capitals are nurtured and developed, have long departed from their original roles in building value, morality and character.

Areas of assessing competence of employee in an organisation include i.) client satisfaction levels; ii) the strength of key client relationships; iii) employee motivation and energy; iv) levels of collaboration among staff; and most importantly v) financial results.<sup>160</sup> Competition in the modern enterprise is about who best can complete the work that needs to get done. This in turn is determined by the following closely related concepts a) energy; b) drive; c) enthusiasm; d) excitement; e) commitment; f) passion; and g) ambition. Where these exist, the disciplined can be found to engage in diligent execution and thereby outperform the competition.

Another important distinction between physical infrastructure and human capital investment is that the former type of investment customarily requires one-time capital expenditures, while the latter category enjoins investments on an interminable basis. On the other hand, to mould a generation of educated workers will entail investments in human capital in an incessant basis.

**The Dearth of Knowledge and Value-Oriented Workers - Possible Causes:** As the world economy has grown during the past years, a demographic time bomb is in the making. The

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<sup>160</sup> D. Maister, “Creating Value through People” in *Business: The Ultimate Resource*, Bloomy Publishing Plc, London, 2002.

decline of knowledge workers is alarming. Increasing retirement, based on privatisation, consolidation, re-engineering and other lexicons in the present workplace will combine with the labour market, saturated with pools of intellectually weak, certificate-consciousness graduates, to produce a dramatic knowledge-worker shortfall for sometimes. This will definitely cause skill war, where organisations will beef up salaries just to attract these workers from a diminishing supply, even from the pool of the so called qualified candidates. A skill is a systematic, possibly routinised, mode of instrumentality apt for the exploitation of casual regularities in the interests of various human productive purposes. In modern times indeed, skill often seems synonymous with technical instrumentality.

Ibru stressed that greatness remained elusive to the country, despite the availability of necessary prerequisite for it, because the role of human capital development in actualising it had been either grossly misunderstood or underrated by stakeholders in the economy. She drew a lesson from Japan, which she described as “a country with little or no raw material and an island, which is surrounded by water and rather isolated, but which nonetheless emerged an industrialised country since 1960s”.<sup>161</sup> What happened that changed Japan into a world class producer of goods for a teeming, discerning world consumer; according to her, was that the development of personnel took a centrifugal position in the rolling plan and strategy for industrialisation. That is, human capital development was given pride of place in Japan’s plan to be counted among the industrial nations of the world. Investment in education is a fundamental issue on the work-value oriented human capital development. Ibru disclosed that Japan’s budgets for education remained sufficient; adding that the country’s focus on education was such that a Japanese child spent more time in educational pursuit than an average pupil in any other country. In Japan, managerial and leadership skills were built into their curriculum and were emphasised, such that quality and excellence were guaranteed.<sup>162</sup> Besides, she emphasised that “Mathematics was not only compulsory for every Japanese child, but also that the technology of teaching it were developed for all schools to apply without exception.”<sup>163</sup> Apart from the focus on education, high discipline is deeply entrenched in their culture. This has made it possible to

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<sup>161</sup> C. Ibru, “Human Capital Development: The Nigerian Experience,” paper presented at the Dinner of Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria (IPMN), 2004.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

develop strong national commitment to their national aspirations. The culture of excellence has created positive impact in the way they are assessed world over.<sup>164</sup>

In Nigeria, the failure of the schools to meet up with the demand of modern economy in most of the organisations, is no longer history. The country's educational system was neither skewed towards creativity nor entrepreneurial pursuit. Most of the universities, according to Ibru, are churning out ill-prepared graduates for local and international business challenges. The so-called learning organisations themselves have largely failed in the boardroom for two reasons. First, the CEO's, Managing Directors and small-scale business owners, still will see no connection between company profit and investing in their human capital because, they believe, it cannot be measured. Secondly, current training programmes often do not improve employee performance, because they are not based on the most recent advances in teaching critical workplace-competency and problem-solving skills.<sup>165</sup>

One needs to ask a fundamental question: Why has the Nigerian educational system deteriorated so much in recent decades? The answer to this is prevalent on every angle. While each of the stakeholders emphasise a different aspect of the problem, the combined impact is clear: the concept of relativism has thrown education into complete disarray. Truth, which used to be central to the mission of education, has been trivialised and fragmented by relativism, leaving education without a clear purpose. It is obvious that our future as Nigerians and the economic prosperity of our state will depend on the quality of our education, the skills of our work force, and the productivity of our citizens. Unfortunately, our present academic and technical skill levels are inadequate to compete in an increasingly demanding international economy. Funny enough, legislators who champion most legislation are very proud of their achievements. However, some of their reforms are far too superficial to produce any real improvement in our educational system. Most of the reforms are designed to make students better labourers.

Complex workplace performance issues need to be stated in a language and format that will move business leaders to give their personal support. From several observations, people in high place support the concept of better education in general, but it is in the implementation that supports fall apart. Many countries, unlike Nigeria, understand that knowledge equals profits. Rather than ignoring the relationships, they are acting on critical interactions, among technology,

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<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

smarter employees, and return on investment (ROI). They invest extensively in students' career education at every level of education and employee-retraining programmes and reap the short and long term profits.

**Improvement of Work-Value in a Reforming Economy - Role Prescriptions:** Investing in human capital with emphasis on work value will produce better business returns, provide cost savings and efficiencies, maximise the use of available resources and addresses specific performance and productivity issues. To succeed, therefore, all stakeholders in the educational sector must rise to the challenge and their responsibilities.

### *The State*

- Investments in human capital are measured in cash – clearly highlighting the benefits of acting and the perils of inaction. It is therefore imperative for government at all level to visit the issue of budgetary allocation to education, and let it attract the level it deserves. Budgetary allocation to education must be spent on such and not seen as booty to be shared by policy makers.
- It is imperative for government to rise to her social responsibilities and avoid the abandonment phenomenon through several unpopular and elitist educational policies.
- The state and its agents should install structures that would enable the country develop the type of human resources capital that would have commitment toward nation building and create opportunities to industrialise and provide jobs for unemployed Nigerians.
- The state and various stakeholders must talk less and do more, add value and write less value statement.
- The state should stop paying lip services to human capital development. Specifically, government should start from the nursery schools where the needed talents will be identified and exposed to good climate. These will grow to become icons.
- At the national level, there is the need to ensure a merger of the three forms of human capital for the country's overall good, namely; social capital from the community, intellectual capital of the academia and organisational capital from industries.<sup>166</sup>
- There is the need for an interface between the academia and the world of work. One of the targeted objectives for this is to ensure that no curriculum would emanate from academia without industry input.

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<sup>166</sup> F. Korode, in “Professionals Hinges Economic Growth on Human Capital Development”, *The Guardian* (Newspaper, Lagos) Tuesday 24, 2004

- Policy makers must have the courage of the convictions they espouse, maintain a long-term focus, and intervene personally whenever there are departures from the value and vision that create excellence.
- The problem with implementation of strategies is the absence of certain and recognisable consequences for non-compliance. If those managing education lack the courage to tackle individuals/groups who are not behaving in accordance with the expected strategy, then the other will quickly realise that the new strategy is not something they have to adopt.

### ***Employers/ Corporate Organisations***

- The key is high-quality re-education programmes that motivate employees to use their own learning by applying innovative thinking on the job. Thus, such a strategy will increase personal performance, better their lifetime careers, and in turn give business a high return on investment in human capital.
- Organisations should invest in education through endowment funds, building of classrooms or lecture theatres; supplying of equipment, competition, scholarships and other important roles to motivate students and other stakeholders.
- Corporate bodies, especially those training in human resource, should articulate their roles much more in terms of value creation, even as they should ensure a mechanism that would enhance corporate performance.
- Corporate organisations must build competitive, not comfortable organisations. They must create time to strategise proactively to meet today's and tomorrow's business demands of human capital requirements that will enable us take our nation to the new frontier, and thereby, take our rightful place in the economy of nations.
- Relevant and appropriate performance development programme in skills, education, and training areas should be selected and pursued by organisations. They should be directly linked to productivity improvement needs and the strategy of the business.
- The personal knowledge of employees across the organisation should be assessed. This will give managers benchmarks for understanding its human capital strengths and weaknesses.
- To create real value, businesses must better leverage their human capital by helping to develop larger numbers of their employees into better-educated workers, who will then be able to create more high-value-aided products and services at extremely low cost. This is better than laying them off or refusing to employ.
- Financial results are the outcome of excellence (or lack of it) in the key processes that produce the value that customers and client pay for. What an employer must manage are the things that produce value: energised employees who deliver outstanding quality and

service to marketplace. The real thing is the ability to get people sufficiently focused so that they eagerly and willingly strive for high standards.

- The role of the manager/employer is to be a net creator of enthusiasm, excitement, nag, support, critique, praise, encouragement, confrontation and comfort, as individual people and group of people struggle to live their work lives according to high standards.

***Educational Institutions:***

- Teaching is not a job for dullards. It is an intellectual job for the intellectuals<sup>33</sup>. What seems missing so far as the teaching profession is concerned, is the ethical and moral dimension - especially attitude and values. Teachers must wake up to their responsibilities and do them conscientiously. This is because good teaching is a moral enterprise, which can be conducted more or less skilfully. Similarly, every educator makes decisions about what to pass along to their students. Those decisions are rooted in the educator's understanding of the meaning of life.
- Staff development programmes should be emphasised at all levels of education. This could be through higher education, training programmes, seminars, conferences, scholarship, grants, mentoring etc.
- The primary goal of education, one that is achievable, is to turn students into capable, daring seekers of truth. Therefore, the primary task of one who wants to understand truth is to discover the basis and nature of virtue-to learn the art of right action and to cultivate wisdom. Educational institutions must provide the environment for this to be achievable.
- Curriculum development for courses should be the type that will make the students relevant in the society and must not be the money-making ventures that are based only on certificate distribution. The skills a student should learn should essentially be those held to be the cornerstones of education. This is because education must equip students with the skill and information needed to make sense of reality.
- Teachers at all levels should be sources of motivation. A teacher's excitement and enthusiasm can infest students.<sup>167</sup>
- Modern methods of teaching should be taught in various teacher training colleges and to all people involved in impacting knowledge. If the goal of education is to train students to learn to live wisely, this will have important implications for the methods and content of education. Strategies are always developed with respect to some goal; the slightest change of goal will have ramification for strategy employed.
- Love of learning is contagious. If a child is surrounded by people who are excited about and value learning, they will likely inherit this attitude. On the other hand, if a child is

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<sup>167</sup> M. Ba, *So Long a Letter (Une si longue lettre)*. Heinemann, Senegal, 1981.

surrounded by people who do not value learning, they will likely adopt this attitude. A child's entire educational experience should indicate to him that learning is exciting and valuable.

- Methods of dealing with various types of examination malpractice should be devised and culprits brought to face the consequences without any prejudice.
- Management of these institutions should devise strategic methods of managing various crises in the system: industrial and social. These have been the bane of several closures.

### ***Society***

- Parents should be made to contribute to the development of education, notwithstanding the free education syndrome. This is because in reality, nothing is free, some people are paying for it.
- Parents should also create conducive environment for learning for their children.
- Payments of tax by the informal sector of the nation's economy and levy to enhance the growth of education should be considered.
- The society should consider merit and be sure of people they vote into power. They should not allow money to dictate who they vote for.

### **Conclusion**

The dearth of intellectual workers being experienced in today's workplace is largely due to several factors as outlined in the paper. However, one needs to emphasise that our current educational systems need serious overhauling. We no longer share the work-values of previous generations, and some of the changed work-values have direct bearing on education and vice-versa. This change of goal has its impact on every aspect of education, from curriculum to method and organisation. The skills and subjects taught now may have the same names they have had for centuries. But, they are, in fact, different skills, taught with different goals in mind. The impacts of this change are incalculable. This paper has discovered that all the stakeholders in the educational sector: the state, corporate bodies, educational institutions and the society at large are guilty of this work-value degeneration, through their various negative roles, either overtly or covertly. This phenomenon has affected not only the caliber of human capital being sent into the labour market, but the qualities of products and services. There is no shortcut to the expected cure. This paper advocates total work-value re-orientation, which should emerge from home and subsequently extend to the society at large. Unless all stakeholders invest in people to reverse the

dangerous trends of discounting work-value, both new technologies and management systems will fail as they become more complex and require more people, who can think for themselves and adapt information.

**NEO-LIBERALISM AND THE GROWING INCIDENCE OF  
PRECARIOUS WORK: CHALLENGES FOR TRADE UNIONS**

**Comrade Ismail Bello\***

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**Tribute**

I am a proud beneficiary of the profound intellect of our Brother, Friend and Comrade, Professor Funminiyi Adewumi, through our occasional conversations, his writings and direct engagement in the course of workers education activities. Early in April at the NLC planning meeting for the Rain School in Uyo, he was unanimously listed as a Resource Person. Similarly, just few days before his demise, he was listed to speak on the NLC's minimum wage struggles at the Textile Union Annual Education Conference. Professor Adewumi was one scholar whose radical views were supported with empirical studies and findings. An itinerant scholar, everywhere he went he made impact in the application of theoretical knowledge to practical problem solving activities. In one of the tributes I read online, a colleague, Hilma Mote, eulogised him for his role in producing the Training Manual for Namibian Domestic Workers and a paper on Industrial Development Options for Namibia, with Ntwala Mwilima. At trade union conferences he spoke with passion and conviction that trade union organisations are the only hope of workers and humanity for a decent existence. This conviction runs through his scholarly works on trade union unity and leadership, globalisation and decent work, workers' rights, among others. He has over six publications with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). Adewumi was unrepentant about his views on workers' control of their unions, even when some of us, career unionists, are opposed to this. He spoke truth to power expressing his critical views freely. A gentleman to the core, he was openly opposed to oppression and injustice in all forms. The Nigerian trade union movement

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and indeed trade unions on the continent will miss this great son of Africa, but we are consoled that the enormous work he did to support the struggle for decent existence shall live on. That his works will live on is evident by the enormous inspiration I drew from his writings in putting this paper together. Adieu Professor Funmi Adewunmi.

## **Abstract**

The crisis of capitalism, foisted on developing countries through unequal trade and financialisation, has ensured the dominance and supremacy of global capital over state control. Multinational Corporations (MNCs) are now in control of financial resources beyond the reach of many countries. This development has impacted negatively on industrial development, labour relations and the general wellbeing of people in several countries. It has also eroded the rights of working people won over many years of collective struggle. In no small measure, it is responsible for the current crisis in social institutions, trade unions inclusive. The changing employment relationship from stable, well remunerated, dignified and protected to a precarious form, where basic rights are not respected and remuneration is not only poor but not guaranteed, has impacted negatively in the workplace and indeed in the larger society. Capital is exerting enormous pressure on workers and extracting more hours with decreasing pay through such strategies as casualisation and outsourcing.

Yet the state is rolling back on social spending on education, health care and privatising essential public infrastructure and utilities like road, railway, electricity, water, etc., - services that the working class cannot afford with their miserable wages. The resulting inequality is grim and provocative, but the working people cannot simply lament or expect that the problem will resolve itself. It is time to reinvent our organisation, build unity and broad-based labour and civil society coalition to defend workers, and indeed, the Nigerian people against rampaging impacts of neo-liberalism.

## **Introduction**

The advent of democratic governance, after prolonged period of misrule and bad governance by the military, raised huge expectations for accelerated development and improved welfare for workers in particular and improved living condition for Nigerians in general. The autocratic military administrations of Generals Muhammadu Buhari (31<sup>st</sup> December 1983 – 27<sup>th</sup>

August 1985), Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (27<sup>th</sup> August 1985 – 26<sup>th</sup> August 1993) and Sani Abacha (17<sup>th</sup> Nov 1993 – 8<sup>th</sup> June 1998) were characterised by extreme violation of human and trade union rights, wage freeze policies, as well as constrained opportunities for union organising and social dialogue.

Since 1981, when the crisis of capitalism compelled the Alhaji Shehu Shagari administration (1<sup>st</sup> October 1979 – 31<sup>st</sup> December 1983) to adopt austerity measures, which eventually laid the basis for its overthrow, succeeding military administrations have completely abandoned the modest role of the state in development, by setting aside the principle of development plans and state investment in strategic sectors for the wholesale principle of neo-liberalism with the adoption of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986. Its major elements being: (i) supposed supremacy of market forces- market is the most efficient means of allocating resources; (ii) trade liberalisation; (iii) currency devaluation; (iv) removal of subsidy- school meals, school fees, fuel subsidy, etc.; (v) commercialisation of welfare and social services such as medical care; (vi) privatisation of public enterprises, including electricity and water; (vii) labour market flexibility; and (viii) violation of civic and trade union rights.

These policies bear the distinct marks of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, who are fond of prescribing similar therapies for countries with different economic challenges. These economic policies were devised to further accelerate and deepen the domination of global capitalism. The collaborative programmes - SAP, Vision 2010, National Economic Empowerment & Development Strategies (NEEDS), Vision 2020 and now Economic Recovery & Growth Plan (ERGP) - embarked on by succeeding Nigerian Governments are part of that free market agenda.

### **Implications of Neo-Liberalism on Labour and Trade Unions**

The transition from planned economies and a regime of macro-economic stability (stable inflation, low and stable interest rates, stable foreign exchange market, state support for education and healthcare) etc, to a regime of high rate of inflation, stagnant wages and factory closures, following the adoption of SAP, has shaken the very foundation of societies and has caused enormous strain for trade unions and CSOs. In concrete terms, *neo-liberalism* has

impacted the labour market significantly in several dimensions. We consider some of these elements and implications for workers and trade unions.

**Privatisation & Commercialisation:** The privatisation and commercialisation of public enterprises has led to massive lay-offs and rationalisation of staff. This development has generated untold hardship for a whole generation of workers in Nigeria Telecommunication Company (NITEL), Nigerian Airways, Ajaokuta Steel Mills, National Electric Power Authority (NEPA)/Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) just to name a few. In several cases, many of the sacked workers were not fully paid their gratuity and other severance packages. It is callous, to say the least, that since the liquidation of the Nigerian Airways in 2003, its former employees are yet to receive their severance benefits, and yet, large chunk of the company properties were looted and sold for peanuts.

In succeeding organisations, new form of employment contracts were entered into, violating the known labour standards encapsulated in our labour laws and international labour conventions. Employees were often compelled to accept short term contracts ingrained with prolonged working hours beyond the 8 hours a day and 40 hour weekly work, often without overtime payment. Worse still, such offers come with a non-union clause, making it difficult to organise workers in the privatised enterprises. For instance, unionised workers in the aviation sector up to 1999 were over 200,000; today, notwithstanding the multiplicity of Airlines, union members in the aviation sector are not up to 40,000.

**Trade Liberalisation, Collapse of Industries and Job Losses:** A whole generation of industries in the footwear and leather sector was lost to uncritical adoption of trade liberalisation under the Abacha regime in line with World Trade Organisation guidelines. The case of textile sector, where the union has waged over two decade of campaign and advocacy to save a dying sector, clearly shows the debilitating impact of trade liberalisation. The Abacha regime had liberalised the textile market in 1997 following the adoption of WTO guidelines. The result today is that an industry that once thrived on about 85 per cent share of the local textile market is barely in control of 15 per cent of the market currently.

Pam Sha (2014) has argued quite correctly that trade liberalisation policy which led to massive importation has resulted in in mass destruction of local industries. For instance, the bitter story of industries such as Kaduna textiles, Peugeot Automobile in Kaduna, Leyland Auto Industries in Ibadan, Steyr Automobile in Bauchi, NTM Truck Manufacturing in Kano and the

total collapse of industrial estates across the country are the telltale songs of forex crisis and trade liberalisation. The process of de-industrialisation and privatisation, which is marked by closure of industries or restructuring as the case may be, has led to retrenchment of workers.<sup>168</sup> The implication is obvious in terms of job losses and limit of collective bargaining to adequately address the welfare needs of workers.

**Currency Devaluation and Deregulation Policies:** A cocktail of negative free market policies of currency devaluation and deregulation of petroleum product prices has ensured increasing cost of production locally, leading to a situation where “Made in Nigeria” products cannot even compete with manufactured products from other parts of the world, particularly China, India and Thailand. The situation has been made worse by the increasing cost of electricity and the poor state of infrastructure. The implication is that, with increasing cost of production and poor performance of local industries, many of the industries began to close shops, laying off workers and decimating union membership. For instance, the textile union had a membership of about 100,000 in 1999, which declined to around 35,000 in 2016, despite aggressive union organising and campaigns over the last decade. In addition, the decline in public spending and the serial removal of subsidy on education and health care have ensured that Nigerian workers, and indeed, the very ordinary Nigerians are pauperised. The free market principle has created a situation where the poor as a percentage of the population have risen from around 20 per cent in the 80s to about 70 per cent now.

**Neo-liberalism, Wages and Social Dialogue:** As the struggles of Academic Staff Unions of Universities (ASUU) over working conditions of lecturers and university funding and the NLC struggles over minimum wage since 1981 have shown, a strong trade union movement and broad alliances is needed to compel employers to accept to dialogue over conditions of working people who have been negatively affected by neo liberal policies, which have resulted in sharp decline in real wages and in the deteriorating conditions of living. As Professor Attahiru Jega remarked:

Union’s agitation and strikes have become the only effective mechanism to get employers to the negotiating table. It therefore requires herculean struggle to persuade employers, public and private alike, to agree to negotiate through

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<sup>168</sup> Pam Sha, D., *Three Decades of Structural Adjustment Programme in Nigeria and Its Implications for Trade Union Structure, Organising and Resistance to Neo-Liberalism*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Lagos, Nigeria, 2016.

collective bargaining and even requires extra ordinary efforts by workers to get employers to implement such collective agreements. As the history of ASUU has shown, each of the agreements that it had signed with the Government has been preceded by long periods of strike: 1981-82, 1992, 1999, 2001.<sup>169</sup>

A cursory look at minimum wage struggles since 1981 also reveals a similar pattern of prolonged struggles, agitations and sometimes strike actions to get the government to accept dialogue on minimum wage and similar efforts accompany implementation. For example, prolonged agitations followed the implementation of the minimum wage under the administration of General Abubakar Abdul Salami (9<sup>th</sup> June 1998 - 29<sup>th</sup> May 1999), under the administrations of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (29<sup>th</sup> May 1999 – 29<sup>th</sup> May 2007); and the Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's (5<sup>th</sup> May 2010 – 29<sup>th</sup> May 2015) minimum wage negotiation and implementation were preceded by prolonged actions and protest rallies. Another process of protestation is on for another belated review of the minimum wage. Unfortunately, salaries, allowances and even ‘severance benefits’ of political office holders at all levels are adjusted and paid regularly. Indeed, nothing represents inexplicable inequality than the wide gulf between the pay structure of workers and the undeserved and criminal transfer of public resources as salaries and allowances for legislatures and other public office holders. It is gross injustice for Nigerian workers to earn 18000 Naira minimum wage, whilst a member of the National assembly earns a minimum of 3 Million Naira. The minimum pay for the worker is one of the lowest in the world and the pay of the members of the National Assembly, about the highest in the world. At another level, the transfer of public assets under the privatisation exercise through BPE has created a tiny class of very rich individuals and a growing number of extremely poor people.

### **Capitalist Prescription for Addressing the Imbalance**

The global capitalist architecture recognises the burden of growing inequality and extreme poverty on the human race. But its prescriptions are not to alter existing global economic framework, but to live with it, seeking token improvements and social balance. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) is at the centre of designing programmes and palliatives against extreme form of exploitation at work. The Fundamental Principles and Rights at work,

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<sup>169</sup> A. M. Jega, Enforceability of Collective Agreements: The ASUU Experience with Federal and State Universities- Remarks in ASUU 2014- Leadership Training Manual, p. 78

formulated in late 90s, and the Decent Work Agenda, developed in 2005, were aimed at moderating the extreme exploitation of workers.

**The Decent Work Agenda:** According to the ILO, decent work involves opportunity for work that is productive and that guarantees minimum and living wages for the workers. It also means work that is secured and done by free workers, who are entitled to form trade unions and engage in collective bargaining to protect their rights in the world of work. Decent work, therefore, delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration.

However, in this era of globalisation and undue competition for profit, workers worldwide continue to face hard times in the face of worsening conditions at work. Currently, workers in Nigeria and other parts of the world are exposed to worsening health and safety situations, with increased cases of deaths and injuries at work. There is an unacceptable increased demand for overtime work without corresponding reward. Workers are getting poorer because of poor remuneration. Jobs are no longer secured as employers opt for casual and short term flexible employment as part of the strategies to save cost and boost profit.

**Precarious Work is Growing in all Sectors:** Regular, permanent and direct employment remains under constant attack from multi-nationals and other forces that are interested in promoting precarious work. Across sectors, more and more precarious workers are unable to realise their fundamental rights at work and enjoy social rights. *Casual, Outsourced and Contract Workers*, for instance, are not protected and are exposed to all kind of abuses, including unfair and unjust practices. These include low incomes, job insecurity, delayed payments of salaries and pensions, long hours of work without overtime payment, denial of sick leave and payment for sick leave, denial of annual leave and maternity leave, job insecurity, lack of redundancy benefits, poor health and safety conditions and non-payment of compensation for injuries sustained at work. In addition, poor working conditions, poor wages, lack of social protection, arbitrary deduction and non-remittance of pension contributions and taxes, denial of rights to join the union and bargain collectively are some of the effects of casualisation and other unethical employment practices currently being embraced by employers.

High number of women and young workers are caught in the web of precarious work. Because of their employment status, an increasing number of women have no access to maternity protection. Young people are also trapped in a vicious circle unable to move from precarious

work to permanent employment. An increasing number of workers find it difficult to make ends meet. The rise of precarious employment has multiple consequences affecting our societies leading to deepening poverty and increasing inequality.

The incidence of precarious work is growing at an alarming rate in all sectors of the Nigerian economy. Precarious work has taken over a good part of the chemical and non-metallic sub-sector of the manufacturing sector in Nigeria. The most disturbing is the change of employment status from conventional permanent to temporary employment in the form of casualisation, outsourcing and contract staffing.

In the textile and garment sector, for instance, over the last decade, management of Sino PP woven sacks, a Chinese owned sack manufacturing company in Kano, has frustrated the efforts of the union to assert the rights of the workers to freedom of association and collective bargaining, denying them the right to join the union in spite of favourable ruling at the National Industrial Court. The story is the same in the Steel and Engineering sector, where several employers are violating our employment laws with impunity, employing workers for years without letter of employment and without confirmation and denying workers the right to join the union. One of such steel factory is Iron Products Industries Limited in Ikotun, Lagos. Also, in the Oil and Gas sector, major players like Shell, Chevron, Agip and Mobil are busy outsourcing and engaging in casualisation of oil workers to contractors with no clearly defined conditions of service. The two unions in the sector, Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and Petroleum & Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), have consistently drawn attention to the grand conspiracy by the oil multinationals to phase out regular employment through outsourcing, contract staffing and casual employment. The oil majors have resorted to migrating the labour contracts to service contracts and have made the workers not to join the union or the workers are victimised for joining the union. Workers are often compelled to sign not to belong to the union, contrary to the provisions of the extant labour laws.

### **Trade Union Response: Anti-Casualisation and the Stop Precarious Work Campaigns**

A lot of trade union actions at national and international levels are directed at safeguarding the rights of workers to organise and join the union. These campaigns are at the heart of ongoing struggle to entrench the rights of workers at work and also to ensure that trade

unions and civil society organisations have a say in major policy decisions affecting their socio-economic wellbeing through social dialogue.

Since 2000, the NLC has been leading the campaign against casualisation and other forms of indecent employment. In recent years, Affiliates of Industrial Global Union Federation in Nigeria, including NUPENG, PENGASSAN, the National Union of Textile Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria, National Union of Chemical, Footwear, Rubber, Leather and Non Metallic Product Employees, the Non Metallic Product Senior Staff Association, the Steel and Engineering Workers Union and National Union of Electricity Employees working in collaboration with the Nigeria Labour Congress, the Trade Union Congress and broad coalition of Civil Society Organisations have organised rallies and picketing to highlight the dangers that precarious work constitute to workers and the society at large. These campaigns were undertaken to mobilise and ensure that every worker understands that it is an essential part of the ILO's fundamental principles and rights at work that workers shall be free to exercise the right to freedom of association and the right to organise and engage in collective bargaining as contained in ILO conventions 87 and 98.

To overcome rights violation at work, trade unions must devote resources and commit to organising. Organising is all about workers coming together to collectively solve problems encountered at work, including putting an end to all forms of employment that offend human dignity and deny workers access to living wages, social protection and promote the denial of the right to join the union. But, it must be stressed, that organising within the workplace is not sufficient to resolve the current challenges of precarious work, as they are symptoms of a deeper crisis of capitalism and its dynamics of extreme exploitation.

### **The Struggle against Neo-Liberalism and the Imperative of Trade Union and Labour Movement Unity**

NLC and preceding trade union federations have, throughout their existence, encountered divisions, but never has the division affected the unity of the movement and the broad interest of the working people the way it is currently manifesting. It is very retrogressive that the trade union movement could not find unity in the struggle to reverse the last increase in petroleum product prices in 2016, the same way it is struggling to build unity around the issue of minimum

wage. Differences in the past were ideological and principled, hence the primary purpose of trade unionism never suffered no matter the division. Progressive Scholars like Omotoye Olorode,<sup>170</sup> Dipo Fashina<sup>171</sup> and Dung Pam Sha<sup>172</sup> have underscored the need and necessity to reinvent the trade union movement. Funmi Adewunmi wrote extensively on this, amongst others, by stressing the critical role of workers themselves in directing and repositioning the trade unions in the overall interest of the working class. To this effect, he canvassed workers education strategy that develops the workers ideologically.<sup>173</sup> Dung Pam Sha put the current challenges very clearly when he stated that:

we are of the belief that the labour movement's capacity to fight neo-liberalism is affected by ideological clarity amongst all members, unity deficit, leadership deficit ...deficits in adherence to ethics and values, lower levels of workers' education, and unstable relations with civil society-trust deficits.<sup>174</sup>

Adewunmi was genuinely concerned about how to forge an enduring alliance between the trade union movement and the larger labour movement. He opined that a virile labour movement may make up for the shortcomings and inadequacies of the trade union movement, and possibly, save the unions from themselves and their official leaders. Ultimately, he stressed that the target should be a reinvention of the tradition of social movement unionism, which was at play in the anti-colonial struggle. A recourse to social movement unionism means that through the trade unions, other disadvantaged groups in the society will be given a voice within the polity. Through such a response, the labour movement will be put in a position to adequately address the socio-economic problems facing Nigerians.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> See, O. Olorode, *Rebuilding the Nigeria Labour Movement and the Labour Party*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Lagos, Nigeria. 2016.

<sup>171</sup> See, O. Fashina, "History and Development of Trade Unionism in Nigeria: A Political Economy Approach in Meeting the Challenges of Effective Leadership in the Nigeria University System", *ASUU Leadership Training Manual*, 2014

<sup>172</sup> See, Dung Pam Sha, *Three Decades of Structural Adjustment Programme in Nigeria and Its Implications for Trade Union Structure, Organising and Resistance to Neo-Liberalism*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Lagos, Nigeria, 2016, p. 63

<sup>173</sup> See, F. Adewunmi, *Prospects and Challenges of Trade Union Unity in Nigeria*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Lagos Nigeria, 2010.

<sup>174</sup> Dung Pam Sha, *Three Decades of Structural Adjustment Programme in Nigeria and Its Implications for Trade Union Structure, Organising and Resistance to Neo-Liberalism*.

<sup>175</sup> Adewunmi, *Prospects and Challenges of Trade Union Unity in Nigeria*.

**MULTINATIONAL ACTORS, CLASS CONSPIRACY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: INSIGHT FROM THE OIL AND GAS SECTOR**

**Jubril Olayiwola JAWANDO\***

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**Abstract**

Multinational corporations (MNCs) are neo-imperialist agenda in the whole of developing countries, particularly in Africa. As such their powers have assumed different dimensions with new actors emerging daily. Sovereignty of power, which previously resided in the masses through democratic principles, has become eroded through economic potentialities of the powerful few who now through their allies control the resources of most nations. With globalisation, it has become easy for multinational corporations to control state apparatus using their economic power to direct political, legal, social, cultural, and all other spheres of the society. MNCs now direct state affairs by deciding who gets into power and control the economic activities by deciding who gets what, when and how. This paper takes a cursory look at the new power relations, class conspiracy and multinational hegemony in oil and gas sector. Using International Political Economy as its theoretical foundation, it examines the role of MNCs and the conspiracy in the oil and gas sector in Nigeria. This paper's position is that MNCs' hegemony and class conspiracy in the oil and gas sector is a bane of economic development in Nigeria. This paper concludes that policy responses in the past overlooked the serious impacts of this conspiracy on Nigeria's development. The effort by the government to restructure the oil and gas sector is a welcome development, which could reduce the myriads of problems in the sector and bring about proper transparency and accountability that might bring meaningful economic development, if genuinely implemented.

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## Introduction

Since oil was discovered in Nigeria in 1958, a lot of attention has been focused on the largest black nation in the world. This natural endowment has endeared small, medium and large corporations to Nigeria for business opportunity in the oil and gas sector. A lot of bi-lateral agreements have been signed with Nigeria by sister African nations and other countries of the world. One of such group which has been prominent in the economic scene of Nigeria is MNCs. Multinational Corporations are strategically located all over the world. Their geographical spread makes it possible for them to play a prominent role in the global political economy having control over production facilities in at least two countries. Two major characteristics are often associated with MNCs: first, their activities expand beyond one nation. Second, they are responsible for most foreign direct investment (FDI).<sup>176</sup>

The period from 1970 to 2000 was characterised by an enormous growth of activities in multinational enterprises. In 1970, it was recorded that there were only about 7,000 MNCs<sup>177</sup>, this has increased significantly to 63,000 parent firms, with around 690,000 foreign affiliates by the year 2000.<sup>178</sup> One analysis suggests that there are some 82, 000 MNCs worldwide, with foreign affiliates in the world. These companies play significant and growing role in the world economy. For instance, exports by foreign affiliates of MNCs are estimated to account for about one third of total world exports of goods and services. And the number of people employed by MNCs worldwide, which has increased about four-fold since 1982, amounted to about 77 million in 2008 - more than double the labour force of a country like Germany<sup>179</sup>. MNCs have been spreading their tentacles not only numerically but also financially. Between 1990 and 2000, there has been an expansion in sales of the largest 100 MNCs from \$3.2 trillion to nearly \$8.4 trillion.<sup>180</sup> MNCs have also been favoured by their size and enormous economic power, which

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<sup>176</sup> J. H. Dunning & S.M Lundan “*Multinational Enterprises and the Global Economy*”. United Kingdom: Edward Elgar Publishing 2008

<sup>177</sup> E. Kolodner, “Transnational Corporations: Impediments or Catalysts of Social Development?” *Occasional Paper No. 5, World Summit for Social Development*, Geneva, 1994

<sup>178</sup> UNCTAD, 2000. *World Investment Report 2000: Cross-Border Mergers and Acquisition and Development* United Nations, New York and Geneva, 2000.

<sup>179</sup> UNCTAD “*World Investment Report: Transnational Corporations, Agricultural Production and development*” United Nation, Geneva, 2009

<sup>180</sup> World Resources Institute, “Driving Business Accountability” in *World Resources 2002 - 2004: Decisions for the Earth: Balance, Voice and Power*. DC: World Resources Institute, Washington, 2003.

have made it easier for them to persuade political decisions and development policies of their host countries, most especially in developing countries.

In a study conducted by the United Nations, it was estimated that there were over 60,000 MNCs operating in the contemporary global economy. These firms jointly control more than 900,000 production plants and employ about 86 million people across the globe.<sup>181</sup> Collectively, they account for about one-quarter of the world's economic production and about one-third of the world's trade. Between 1980 and 1993, over four million jobs were shed by the largest 500 industrial corporations in the US. The International Labour Organization (ILO) calculates that global unemployment rates are at an all-time high of 202 million in 2013.<sup>182</sup> Again, some 39 million people have dropped out of the labour market as job prospects proved unattainable, opening a 67 million global jobs gap since 2007.<sup>183</sup> Of the 2.8 billion workers in the world in 2005, nearly 1.4 billion still did not earn enough to lift themselves and their families above the two dollars per day poverty line - the same proportion as ten years ago.<sup>184</sup> The speedy growth in the size, power and scope of MNCs has hastened the emergence of new international power distributions, both political and economic. As a result of the perceived profit associated with them, political and economic decisions by elected governments are more and more made to favour the investment and marketing needs of MNCs.<sup>185</sup> Therefore, corporations sometimes influence the domestic policy outcomes of their host developing countries by threatening to move jobs overseas. This further raises questions about whether corporate power enables MNCs to undermine sustainable development by sabotaging domestic labour standards, most especially in developing countries like Nigeria.<sup>186</sup> It is against this backdrop that this paper raises some fundamental questions on class conspiracy in the oil and gas sector in Nigeria. This paper examines multinational actors and class conspiracy and the effect on economic development in Nigeria.

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<sup>181</sup>T. Oatley, *International Political Economy 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, Joseph M. Griedl, New York, 2008

<sup>182</sup> International Labour Organisation, *Global Employment Trends: Recovering from a Second Jobs Dip*, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2013

<sup>183</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> International Labour Organisation, *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2006.

<sup>185</sup>A. Abdul-Gafaru, "Are Multinational Corporations Compatible With Sustainable Development in Developing Countries?" Paper prepared for the Conference on Multinational Corporations and Sustainable Development: Strategic Tool for Competitiveness – Atlanta – Georgia, 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> October 2006

<sup>186</sup>E. Okafor, "Globalization, Changes and Strategies for Managing Workers' Resistance in Work Organizations in Nigeria," *Journal of Human Ecology*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2007.

To adequately provide answers to the above questions, this paper has been structured into six sections: the first section gives background information into the historical development of MNCs. The second section examines the role of oil multinationals in the development of Nigeria's oil producing communities. Following this, is the section on multinational hegemony in Nigeria. The fourth section discusses the theoretical background of the study. The penultimate section extrapolates class conspiracy in the oil and gas sector in Nigeria and the last section is a recap of the entire work.

### **Historical Development of Multinational Corporations (MNCs)**

The earliest historical origins of multinational corporations can be traced to the activities of international merchants such as the Hudson Bay Company and the Royal African Company which laid the foundation for MNCs. They were the first to establish branches all over the colonies during the colonial era. Currently, the erstwhile colonial masters, Britain and France still own majority of shares in international companies all over the world, but the United States and Japanese based companies have surpassed them. Thus, the largest multinationals today are U.S based. Their global dimension increased tremendously since after the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>187</sup> During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the search for resources, including minerals, petroleum, foodstuffs and pressure to protect or increase markets, led to the expansion of multinational organisations almost exclusively from the United States and a handful of Western European nations. Sixty percent of these corporations' investments went to Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Fueled by numerous mergers and acquisitions, monopolistic and oligopolistic concentration of large multinationals in major sectors such as petrochemicals and food also had its roots in these years.<sup>188</sup>

Furthermore, the high demand for natural resources provided an impetus for European and US corporate ventures between the first and second world wars. In spite of this, corporate investments from Europe declined and the activities of US MNCs expanded vigorously. In Asia, countries like Japan during this period witnessed the growth of the *zaibatsu* (or "financial clique") including Mitsui and Mitsubishi. These giant corporations, which worked in alliance

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<sup>187</sup> E. Duru, *Oil Multinationals and the Niger Delta Crisis; Issues and Perspectives*, Thumbprints International Company, Abuja, 2010.

<sup>188</sup> J. H. Dunning, *Globalization of Business*. Routledge, London and New York, 1993.

with the Japanese state, had oligopolistic control of the country's industrial, financial and trade sectors.<sup>189</sup> Many economists insist that three major factors led to the proliferation of MNCs. First, the advent of the post-World War II economic recovery in major capitalist countries led to the new scramble for investment fields. Second, the introduction of convertible currencies, facilitated by international businesses and finally the advent of the first post-war capitalist crisis, which began after the Korean War.

In the last five decades, there has been an increase in the proliferation of multinationals. In 1970, there were about 7,000 parent MNCs, but today that number has jumped to 38,000. 90 percent of these companies are based in the industrialised world, which controls over 207,000 foreign subsidiaries.<sup>190</sup> According to the International Finance Corporation (IFC), influx of foreign direct investment to the emerging markets has grown by an average of 23 percent per year between 1990 and 2000. International Finance Corporation (IFC) also noted that the combined value of stock markets in emerging economies was set to exceed \$5 trillion in 2006.<sup>191</sup> Similarly, the number of millionaires globally increased to 8.7 million in 2005, 5.7 million of whom are based in North America and Europe. Forbes reported a 15 percent rise in the number of billionaires since 2005, who have a combined worth of \$2.6 trillion.<sup>192</sup> There has also been a significant increase in MNCs' investment in the less-industrialised world since the mid-1980s; investment and private bank loans have grown far more dramatically than national development aid or multilateral bank lending. Worried by debt, low commodity prices, structural adjustment, and unemployment, governments throughout the less-industrialised world today view MNCs, as "the embodiment of modernity and the prospect of wealth: full of technology, rich in capital, replete with skilled jobs."<sup>193</sup> As a result, nation states whose political leadership entrusts their country's wellbeing in the hands of foreign investors are under constant pressure to maintain condition which will hold capital in their territory.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>189</sup>*The Economist* "Everybody's Favourite Monsters: Survey of Multinationals, 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1993.

<sup>190</sup>Kolodner, "Transnational Corporations: Impediments or Catalysts of Social Development?" UNCTAD, 2000. *World Investment Report 2000: Cross-Border Mergers and Acquisition and Development*

<sup>191</sup> World Resources Institute, "Driving Business Accountability"

<sup>192</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup>*The Economist*, "Everybody's Favourite Monsters: Survey of Multinationals", 27 March, 1993

<sup>194</sup> R. Petrella, *Globalization and Internationalization. The Dynamic of the Emerging World Order in Boyer and Dacke Nations and Markets*, Routledge, New York and London, 1996.

At the international level, corporate lobbyists have pushed for policies that will benefit their business enterprises and allow them to get away with harming the environment. As observed by the World Resources, over 30,000 corporate lobbyists are based in Washington and Brussels, which ultimately outnumbered the US Congress and European Commission staff that they lobby.<sup>195</sup> It is important to stress that majority of the lobby groups represent business interests who spend billions of dollars, annually, championing their main cause to access emerging economies markets. Corporations and their agencies in the US spent \$9.7 billion lobbying Congress between 1997 and 2000, about \$4.5 million per year per member of congress. These interests by MNCs giants in the auto, mining, oil and chemical industries were demonstrated at the Kyoto global climate change conference.<sup>196</sup> Furthermore, the pace and the amount of foreign direct investments to countries outside the developed world are accelerating.<sup>197</sup> Many policy makers and scholars have not been conversant with the changes in the relations between MNCs and foreign states. MNCs manipulate existing power structures to their advantage by restraining the sovereignty of the states in which they operate,<sup>198</sup> while states engage in competition with one another to attract MNCs, namely, to boost economic development of their states, as well as for their positive externalities.<sup>199</sup> What then is the role of multinational oil corporations in the development of Nigeria's oil producing communities?

### **Role of Oil MNCs in the Development of Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities**

The first oil multinational to embark on major oil prospecting in Nigeria was Shell D'archy in 1937. In 1956, a new company known as Shell-BP Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited jointly financed by the Royal Dutch/Shell group of companies replaced Shell D'archy.<sup>200</sup> Shell BP commenced its operation in Owerri and its first exploration

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<sup>195</sup> World Resources Institute, "Driving Business Accountability"

<sup>196</sup> A. Shah, "Corporations and the Environment", 2002 cited online at: <http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Corporations/Environment.asp?p=1> retrieved on August 21<sup>st</sup> 2009]

<sup>197</sup> R. Mataloni, & D. Yorgason, "Operations of U.S. Multinational Companies: Preliminary Results from the 1999 Benchmark Survey," *Survey of Current Business*, 2002, 24-54; and R. Mataloni, "U.S. Multinational Companies: Operations in 2001," *Survey of Current Business*, 2003, November, 85-105.

<sup>198</sup> J. Davis, D. Reyes, & I. Stern, *Whose Sovereignty? Corporate Governance and State Compliance*, Strategic Management Society, Chicago, 1999.

<sup>199</sup> J. M. Stopford & S. Strange, *Rival States, Rival Firms: Competition for World Market Shares*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2002.

<sup>200</sup> E. Duru, *Oil Multinationals and the Niger Delta Crisis; Issues and Perspectives*. Thumbprints International Company, Abuja, 2010

drill was at Ihuo in the present Ikeduru Local Government Area of Imo State. However, in 1956, the company moved its eastern headquarters to Port Harcourt upon the discovery of oil in commercial quantity at Olobiri and Afam. The two wells then produced about 700, 000 and 900, 000 barrels of oil respectively per day.

The role of Shell in the development of oil producing communities of the Niger Delta is more of a myth than reality.<sup>201</sup> To support this assertion, the World Bank confirms that the Niger Delta region's growth and sustainable development remain unfulfilled and its future is threatened by deteriorating economic conditions that are not being addressed by present policies and actions.<sup>202</sup> The report noted that, despite its vast oil reserve in the region, the people remain poor. GNP per capita is below the national average of \$280. Similarly, the educational levels of the Niger Delta are below the national average and are particularly low for women. While 76 percent of Nigerian children attend primary schools, this level drops to 30 percent in some parts of the Niger Delta.

Oil exploitation in the Niger Delta, where Shell is the chief 'culprit', has threatened the means of livelihood of the people. There is a mass movement of jobless youths to the towns and cities and abandonment of the elderly in the villages. It confirmed that in towns and cities, there were no jobs for the migrating unskilled villagers because the oil money was not invested there but channeled to other major towns and cities outside the region or invested in infrastructure from which the region hardly benefited.<sup>203</sup> Even the few indigenes that benefited from bursary allowances, it is clear that the indigenous beneficiaries of these educational scholarships who later joined Shell's skilled workforce were indoctrinated to toe the same line with Shell against their communities.<sup>204</sup> This attitude aligned with the radical argument of Ake<sup>205</sup> and Nnoli<sup>206</sup> that MNC-propelled development is pseudo and individualistic in character without an iota of benefit to the larger society.

The role of oil multinationals exploration and exploitation activities have greatly damaged the environment with the gradual buildup of water, soil, air pollution and gas flaring

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<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> World Bank, *Defining an Environment Development Strategy for Niger-Delta*, USA. 1995

<sup>203</sup> U. E. Ite, "Partnering with the State for Sustainable Development: Shell's Experience in the Niger Delta, Nigeria", *Sustainable Development*, Vol. 15, No. 4, July-August 2007, accessed on: 21/08/2016, at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sd.312/pdf>

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> C. Ake *A Political Economy of Africa*, London: Longman Group, 1981

<sup>206</sup> O. Nnoli, (ed.), *Path to Nigeria development*. CODESRIA Series, Dakar, 1981.

taking their toll on the region's eco-system. A 1998 Oil Spill Intelligence Report indicated that the largest Nigerian spill was recorded in 1980, when an offshore well blowout in which more than 200,000 barrels of oil (8.4 million U.S. gallons) were discharged into the Atlantic Ocean from a Texaco facility. Department of Petroleum Resources estimated that over 400,000 barrels (16.8 million U.S. gallons) were spilled in this incident.<sup>207</sup> Following this 1980 major spillage, as many as 180 people from one community were reported dead as a result of water pollution. In fact, tests conducted to determine the hydrocarbon content of drinking water in some Delta communities found levels of 360-600 times the levels allowed in European Union countries. Similarly, Akpofure *et al*, and Nwilo and Badejo gave a vivid account of the hazards of oil spillage and gas flaring caused by Shell and other oil MNCs, which often lead to oil spills, oil drifts with the tide and pollutes rivers and creeks, resulting in the death of fishes and mangrove trees which are sources of fuel.<sup>208</sup>

One of the immediate effects of this pollution is that the inhabitants of the affected communities have most of their totemic animals dead and found floating during and after oil production.<sup>209</sup> Ironically, while oil companies have profited from oil resources, the local communities are subjected to the excruciating agony of non-stop emissions that cause stratospheric ozone depletion, skin cancer, severe mucosal irritation, nausea, and vomiting, leaving an environment practically unable to sustain human life.<sup>210</sup> Also, the degradation of air and water quality from oil pollution, gas flaring causes acid rain, which damages and hinders the pollination and growth of crops in these predominantly farming communities. It has been reported that *an* estimated 20 percent of global gas flares occur in the Niger Delta, from approximately two billion cubic feet of natural gas burned daily. Gas flares are also suspected to contribute to global warming, which leads to increases in GHG emissions and frequency of natural disasters like flooding.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Oil Spill Intelligence, Effect of Nigerian Spill Termed 'minimal' as last known Patch Disperses," *Oil Spill Intelligence Report*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1998, pp. 21-39

<sup>208</sup> Akpofure, Efere & Ayawei "The Adverse Effects of Crude Oil Spills in the Niger Delta," Urhobo Historical Society, 2000; and Nwilo & Badejo "Oil Spill Problems and Management in the Niger Delta", International Oil Spill Conference, Miami, Florida, USA, 2005

<sup>209</sup> D. Omoweh, *Shell, Environment Pollution, Culture and Health in Nigeria: A Sad Spectrum*, Wissenswert: Germany, 1996, 115 -143.

<sup>210</sup>S. W. Peters, "Gas Flares and Construction Site Ecological Damages in South Eastern Niger Delta," paper presented at the International Conference on Infrastructure Development and the Environment, 10-15 September, 2006, Abuja, Nigeria

<sup>211</sup>A. Okorie, "Nigerian Oil: The Role of Multinational Oil Companies," *E297c Term Paper* Spring Quarter, 2005.

As noted by Roberts, there is a critical paradox in the appearance that the farther a Nigerian city or settlement is from the theatre of oil production, and then the greater is its share of benefits from the oil industry. The neglect of the development of the oil mineral producing areas has been interpreted by some of the affected ethnic communities as an attempt by federal authorities ‘to drive the people to extinction’.<sup>212</sup> This is evident in most communities in the Niger Delta whose livelihood depends on fishing and farming. The land devaluation and damage to natural resources have made agriculture to suffer, food has become expensive and even scarce, and exportation of key crops such as palm products has decreased dramatically. According to Koziell, the once vibrant communities have been devastated by the inability of the environment to support and sustain human life and settlements.<sup>213</sup>

With corrupt administration at all levels of government, necessary infrastructure such as roads, clean and portable water and electricity are unavailable to these communities thereby exacerbating their conditions. Proper healthcare is also not accessible to numerous localities, where the effects of environmental pollution are most evident. The state conspicuously directly and indirectly gives the MNCs hegemony over local communities. What then is the multinational corporations’ hegemony in Nigeria?

### **Multinational Corporations’ Hegemony in Nigeria**

At the time of independence in 1960, many Nigerians were very optimistic that Nigeria’s independence would bring about sustainable development and good governance.<sup>214</sup> A few years later, the hope of a prosperous nation was shattered, just as corruption and pillage of national resources continued to gravitate in all sectors of the economy, especially in the oil and gas sector. This has systematically dragged the nation into a mess so serious that majority of Nigerian citizenry, who were wallowing in poverty at city corridors and rural areas in the country, had to

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<sup>212</sup>N. Roberts, “Managing the Minorities and Development Problem in Nigeria Federalism: The OMPADEC Initiative,” Ibadan: *NISER Monograph Series No. II*, 1998.

<sup>213</sup>J. Koziell, “Overview: Why is Biodiversity Important?” in *IUCM and ICMM, Integrating Mining and Biodiversity Conservation: Case Studies from Around the World*, 2-3, 2004.

<sup>214</sup>J. Adesina, “Adjustment and the Transformation of Labour Identity: What’s New and Does It Matter” in J. Attahiru (ed.), *Identity transformation and Identity Politics Under Structural adjustment in Nigeria*, , Nordiska Afrikainstitutet in collaboration with the Centre for Research and Documentation, Uppsala & Kano, 2003; Transparency International, *Global Corruption Perception Index: Special Report on Judicial Corruption*, Pluto Press, London, 2007; and M. Faseke, “Corruption and the Image of the Nigerian Civil Service: A Historical Discourse,” *The Constitutions: A Journal of Constitutional Development*, Centre for Constitutionalism and Demilitarization, 2010, pp. 101-111

resort to criminal behaviour that they would not have ordinarily involved themselves, but for the ensuing crisis of good governance.

At the peak of this crisis came the alliance between foreign capital, the foreign bourgeois class and the domestic ruling elites. This alliance was so strong that organisations that operate in peripheral nations like Nigeria must accept the dictates of these classes either wholeheartedly or partially. According to the Constitution of Nigeria, the federal government owns all minerals, oil and gas in Nigeria. Despite its dominant stake through Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the oil revenue has not made a significant difference in the lives of the citizens. According to World Bank document on OPEC, approximately 80 percent of revenues from Nigerian oil and natural gas accrue to only 1 percent of the population.<sup>215</sup> The other 20 percent is spread out to 99 percent of the population; therefore, leaving Nigeria with the second lowest per capital oil earnings of about \$212 (N28, 408) per person in 2004.<sup>216</sup> This hegemony becomes visible in the case of Shell's long-term investment in Nigeria since oil was discovered in Oloibiri in the Niger Delta after half a century of exploration. This is an alliance between a strong MNC, an attractive market, but a weak state. As noted by OECD:

Weak institutions not only fail to provide guidance for responsible corporate behaviour, they also tend to actively undermine it. Weak institutions very often mean that property rights are poorly protected, contracts are difficult to enforce and companies are faced with arbitrary and excessive regulations (red tape). As a result, companies may be tempted to use bribery and other corrupt practices as a political 'risk insurance' to protect investments. Similarly, they may be lured to manipulate rules in their favour, avoid the enforcement of regulations, gain lucrative contracts or resource extraction permits, or simply to cut through red tape and administrative hold-ups.<sup>217</sup>

The above summation is clearly seen in the way most multinational companies either pay little attention to social services or ignore a whole lot of social responsibilities to the people who own the resources, which they are exploring to their mother nations in anticipation of the huge

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<sup>215</sup>World Bank "Regulation of Associated Gas Flaring and Venting. A Global Overview and Lessons from International Experience, World Bank Group Report Number 3, April 2002

<sup>216</sup>Vanguard Newspaper (October, 26) 2004 online news.

<sup>217</sup>OECD, *Risk Awareness Tool for Multinational Enterprises in Weak Governance Zones*: OECD, Paris, 2006, Pp. 31-34

capital from the business.<sup>218</sup> It was as a result of the social consequences of the oil business in the Niger Delta that the World Bank lamented that “despite the vast oil reserves, the Niger Delta remains poor.”<sup>219</sup> Because of the weakness of the state, the oil companies resist paying compensation when they are approached by community leaders. This failure by the state has further given the multinational corporations hegemony.

Furthermore, as observed by Transparency International Report, the weakness of Nigeria, especially in its fight against corruption, is a threat of internal disorder given its ethnic, religious, and secular rivals for domestic authority. These threats of internal disorder and disruption imply that a strong MNC, such as Royal Dutch/Shell, Total, Agip and ExxonMobil, will consistently disregard the welfare of local communities, act largely with impunity in enclave economies, while systematically destroying the natural environment.<sup>220</sup> This will make them attempt to extract additional returns in negotiations with the state to invest in the extraction of Nigerian oil. Strong MNCs must diligently manage investments in weaker states. The Royal Dutch/Shell example in Nigeria provides a cautionary tale. Insofar as the state retains the competence and inclination to balance, first and foremost, the well-being of society with the interests of business and its need for revenue, there is less or no degree of freedom to critique the abuse of corporate power. However, situations persist where the MNC has accumulated such influence within a territory that the weak state acts as an agent of the MNC. Evolving with the state in this process is a corrupt political class who lives on capital accruing from oil wealth in connivance with elites of the oil producing regions. In such situations, the state either implicitly or explicitly assists the MNC to earn abnormal returns on its investment. In such circumstances, the state can and does fail to guarantee the most fundamental rights due its citizens.

There have been numerous cases in recent years that raise some aspect of this question. Few, though, have seen the level of public scrutiny directed toward the Royal Dutch petroleum company, its partner, the Shell Transport and Trading Company (Royal Dutch/Shell), and their subsidiary, the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC). Since 1958, with the initial production of Nigeria’s first commercially viable oil fields, Royal Dutch/Shell has

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<sup>218</sup>O. Ajiboye, J. Jawando, & W. Adisa, “Poverty, Oil Exploration and Niger Delta Crisis: The Response of the Youth,” *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol. 3 No. 5, May 2009. Available online at <http://www.academicjournals.org/AJPSIR>

<sup>219</sup>World Bank Defining An Environment Development Strategy for Niger-Delta,” *World Bank Development Report*, Washington DC 1995

<sup>220</sup> Transparency International, *Global Corruption Perception Index: Special Report on Judicial Corruption*

been the country's leading oil producer. Oil proceeds contribute about 90 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange and 80 percent of the state's total revenue, whereas Royal Dutch/Shell draws 14 percent of its global production from Nigeria. As a result, the corporation and the government share the reasonable interests of maximising productivity and minimising regulation.

In Nigeria, though, given the level of institutional corruption combined with the generally unrepresentative nature of its central government, the state's capacity to enforce the law has become a mechanism to enhance oil production at the expense of its people and its environment. Perhaps if the government of Nigeria owed its legitimacy to its citizens, there would be some balance sought between what is profitable and what is responsible. Unfortunately, this is not the case, nor have the people of Nigeria ever enjoyed an extended period of true governmental accountability.

In one example, after the coup d'état in November 1993, the military regime of General Sani Abacha ruled with little regard for human rights, the environment, and international public opinion. Instead, his security forces were implicated in the deaths of thousands of political and environmental activists, across the country. One of which was the killing of nine environmental activists, including Ken Saro-Wiwa, despite diplomatic objection in 1995 in Ogoni, where SPDC extracts most of its oil. This hegemony is further demonstrated in the way Shell in 2010 was accused of bribery practice with Nigerian officials in order to gain profit. Bribery and corrupt practices are concealed from the glare of public scrutiny and company financial reports are mostly silent on the issues.

Such practices are often disguised in the financial report as legitimate expenses. In many cases, western firms and agents have been guilty of offering and paying bribes to government officials to secure government contracts and other advantages.<sup>221</sup> For example, Shell bribed Nigerian officials to make it easier for them to import goods and equipment, get lower taxes and avoid the customs.<sup>222</sup> It was found out that Shell paid 2 million U.S Dollars to its Nigerian workers in its deep water Bonga project. Shell actually knew that part of the

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<sup>221</sup>APPG, 'The Other Side of the Coin: The UK and Corruption in Africa', *A report by the Africa All Party Parliamentary Group*, March, 2006; O. M. Bakre, "Looting by the Ruling Elite, Multinational Corporations and the Accountants: The Genesis of Indebtedness, Poverty and Underdevelopment in Nigeria," paper presented at the 2008 University of Essex Tax Workshop, Essex Business School, University of Essex, UK, July, 2008; P. Sikka, "Enterprise Culture and Accountancy Firms: The New Master of Universe", *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2008, pp. 268-295; and O. J. Otusanya, O.J. *An Investigation of Tax Evasion, Tax Avoidance and Corruption in Nigeria*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Essex, United Kingdom, 2010.

<sup>222</sup> Transparency International, *Global Corruption Perception Index: Special Report on Judicial Corruption*.

money will go to Nigerian officials who will make Shell avoid the customs process. This will give Shell an obvious competitive advantage in the market. Shell actually gained \$14million profit from this bribery of the Bonga project.<sup>223</sup>

In many places, MNCs have been able to take advantage of a world divided among sovereign powers because domestic laws do not apply to other sovereign states. The fragmentation of traditional sources of authority and regulation has allowed MNCs to use their flexible, superior organisational structures, and efficient exploitation of resources to garner abnormal in-country profits, while taking little responsibility for damages done. The Shell oil case in Nigeria illustrates how major MNCs further eroded the imperfect sovereignty of the already-weak state, becoming the focal point of power within a territory, and thereby not only evading accountability for violations of international norms of human rights and the environment, but also potentially earning abnormal returns on its investment along the way. It is in the light of this that, that the next section examines the international political economy theory upon which this paper is anchored.

### **Theoretical framework**

The theory known as “the international political economy theory” emerged from the mainstream political economy pioneered by Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Karl Marx. The theory has two ideological classes-the liberal and the Marxist, and in recent times, it has developed its third arm. This third arm is comprised of those who believe in a mixed economic system. What exactly do the international political theorists seek to explain? What is the focus of the international political economy? How does the assumption of the school help us in explaining the nature of contradictions shaping the relationship that exists between MNCs and the state in a country like Nigeria?

Immanuel Wallenstein is one of the proponents of the international political economy theory; this is why his theoretical positions on capitalism, the global political economy, the effects of colonial imperialism and the emergence of neocolonialism have been very germane

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<sup>223</sup>J. Ferguson, “Seeing Like An Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 107 No. 3, 2005, pp. 377-392

today. In one of his studies, <sup>224</sup>he argued that there is a global system artificially created by global capitalism, and it is this system that determines the hope and interests of every player in the world system. He posited that this system is a 'world system' which is put in place to secure the survival of capitalism and capitalist ideologies. How are these ideologies sustained? Who are the people promoting them and on behalf of whom? Wallenstein explained that capitalist ideologies are sold to the developing nations by foreign bourgeoisie class in order that they can exploit these nations. But this process is not accidental at all. The emergence of colonialism and the sustenance of colonial ideologies in the developing nations have led to the creation of three international divisions of labour. These divisions symbolise the classification of the whole world into three productive classes- the core, the semi-periphery and the periphery.<sup>225</sup> Wallenstein further posited that the peripheral nations that are at the bottom of the ladder of the world system are indeed suppliers of raw materials and human resources to the advanced capitalist nations from whom they buy finished goods from these resources at high costs. It is not unnatural that these nations are poor. They will be poor because both their political life and economic systems are shaped by the ideologies sold to them by the foreign bourgeoisie class. The way and manner the governments of these nations run their economies are determined by the interests that the foreign nations have in their countries.<sup>226</sup> What then is the conspiracy in the oil and gas sector in Nigeria?

### **Class Conspiracy in the Oil and Gas Industry in Nigeria**

Conspiracy has been used in this paper to mean the plot by powerful people or organisations working together in secret to accomplish some usually sinister goal. Over the years, there seems to be a lot of cover up between government officials, powerful politicians and the multinational companies in the oil and gas sector. It was reported that there are highly connected people in and outside government, oil companies, businessmen, retired and serving military officers, including people you never thought could be involved.<sup>227</sup> The Nigeria's oil sector is, perhaps, the largest sector of the Nigerian economy, at least since the mid-1990s. This has been consistent with the federal government of Nigeria's reports on the Nigerian economy.

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<sup>224</sup>I. Wallenstein, *The Modern World System 1: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteen Century*, Academic Press, New York, 1975.

<sup>225</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup>*Vanguard Newspaper*, 25 August, 2013, p 9

For instance, it has been reported repeatedly that the Nigerian oil and gas sector is one of the largest in Africa and seventh largest in the world.<sup>228</sup> In addition to this, several reports have also shown that the sector is a significant contributor to the Nigerian economy through increases in the nation's gross domestic product and foreign reserves. Between 1956 and 2000, the Nigerian oil industry has consistently placed itself as the sole source of public expenditure, fueling not only the ministries and parastatals of the federal government, but also the 36 state governments in the federation. This is why some scholars have referred to the Nigerian oil industry as one of "Africa's natural reserve",<sup>229</sup>

It is important to note that the oil industry has been having tremendous influence on the Nigerian economy. One of the influences is the influx of foreign investors in the upstream and downstream sectors of the Nigerian oil and gas industry. Between the 1980s and late 1990s, it is estimated that over 100 foreign investors had invested so much capital in the country's oil sector. These investments had spanned virtually all spheres of oil and gas business. Oil generation is one sector, where the foreigners have had high levels of domination. The reason for this is not far-fetched. Foreign investors have the manpower including the requisite skills to make things work in the industry. Aside from this, there is high level of investment in technologies for refining oil resources. All these potentials make foreign capital, the dominant actor in the oil and gas sector of the Nigerian economy, the hegemonic class.<sup>230</sup>

No wonder, Nigeria has gained for herself, in the recent years, vantage position in the contemporary Africa's oil industry. Nigeria was at one time, the seventh largest oil producing country in the world.<sup>231</sup> But due to the challenges in the Niger Delta areas about eight years ago, the production level has depreciated largely from the position it was previously occupied in the global oil market. Although the entry of foreign investors into the Nigerian economy has boosted the images of the economy, it has not been favourable to the subaltern classes therein. Not only this, there are many jobs which ordinarily ought to be given to Nigerian professionals, which are

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<sup>228</sup>*The Punch Newspaper*, 24 April 2008: p. 24.

<sup>229</sup> F. Egwaikhide, V. Isumonah, & S. Ayodele, *The Federal Presence in Nigeria: The "Sung" and "Unsung" Basis for Ethnic Grievance*. CODESRIA, Dakar – Senegal, 2009.

<sup>230</sup>C. L. Obi, "The Impact of Oil on Nigeria's Revenue Allocation System: Problems and Prospects for National Reconstruction" in K. Amuwo, *et al* (eds), *Federalism and political restructuring in Nigeria*, Spectrum Books, Ibadan, 2004.

<sup>231</sup>*The Punch Newspaper*, 24 April 2008: p. 24

being given to foreign professionals against the country's labour laws. What exactly is the factor that has sealed the hope of many downtrodden Nigerians trying to make a living in the sector?

The failure of the postcolonial state and the oil doom of the late 1970s that hit the global oil market have been collectively attributed as the causes of abject poverty in Nigeria. Other factors are the high rate of inflation, job losses, mass retrenchment in the public service and high rate of unemployment, increasing crime rate, high level of insecurity of lives and properties and massive looting of public treasury.<sup>232</sup> The Federal Government Report on Millennium Development Goals for the period between 1980 and 1996 showed that the proportion of the downtrodden in Nigeria rose from 28.1 percent in 1980 to 65.6 percent in 1996. This translated into 17.7 million poor people in 1980 and 67.1 million people in 1996.<sup>233</sup> By 2015, it is estimated that between 30.1 million and 40.4 million people would still be living in poverty, if nothing is done to reduce the problem drastically.<sup>234</sup>

What exactly is the role of class conspiracy in this discussion that is fast making waves in many public arenas? This section is meant to interrogate this question. Class conspiracy is a condition that allows a dominating class to exploit the system, sabotage the interests of other people within the class, or other classes within the same system. Class conspiracy is inevitable in a global capitalist system since the goal of every participant therein is to accumulate capital at the expense of the labour power of the proletariat class. Labour is a commodity which the proletariat class sells to the bourgeois class in anticipation of wage earnings that will keep them and their families alive. The issue of class has been extensively dealt with in many quarters, but little is known about the nature and character of class conspiracy in Nigeria, especially in the oil and gas industry.

Historically speaking, the Nigerian economy is a dependent economy because of its colonial and postcolonial legacies. The dependency syndrome is virtually in all sectors of the Nigerian economy, such that the large chunk of what we refer to as the Nigerian economy is owned by the Nigerian government, privileged comprador bourgeoisie, foreign investors, the super powers, the political class, the professionals, and the workers. In a dependent economy like Nigeria, every class therein looks for and survives on foreign economic and technological powers. The dependency of the economy is what usually exposes it to "*Dutch Disease*,"

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<sup>232</sup> Ajiboye, Jawando, & Adisa, W. "Poverty, Oil Exploration and Niger Delta Crisis: The Response of the Youth"

<sup>233</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria, *National Millennium Development Goals Report*, FGN Press, FCT, Abuja, 2004.

<sup>234</sup> Ajiboye, Jawando, & Adisa, W. "Poverty, Oil Exploration and Niger Delta Crisis: The Response of the Youth"

meaning, a situation when an economy is confronted with crashes because of over dependence on one-product.

Having mentioned the various classes in the Nigerian oil and gas industry, where then is class conspiracy in the sector? Over the years, foreign capital has been able to perfectly gain the control of the mainstream of the Nigerian oil industry. Most oil companies in the country today are either owned by or funded by foreign investors. The local refineries have been steadily crippled by this class, in collaboration with the people in government, corrupt public officials and corrupt military elites. Between 2003 and early 2005, the Willbros Group was indicted for having violated the Federal Corrupt Practices Act 1977 (FCPA 1977) by authorising bribery schemes through hired agents (consultants) based in Western countries valued at \$6 million to make corrupt payments to public officials in Nigeria in order to assist in obtaining and retaining business for the Willbros Group and its subsidiaries<sup>235</sup> It was established by the court that:

... The purpose of the conspiracy was to make corrupt payments to officials of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the National Petroleum Investment Management Services (NAPIMS), senior officials in the executive branch of the Nigerian government, and to a political party, as well as the officials of the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd. (SPDC).<sup>236</sup>

Similarly, the Halliburton bribery scandal of \$180 million involving top government officials to secure four contracts, worth over US \$6 billion, to build a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) facilities in Nigeria is a good example of the conspiracy that has exposed the historical nature of this conspiracy.<sup>237</sup> The foreign bourgeois class also uses its ability to control large investment in the oil and gas sector to exploit Nigerians. Studies have shown that most indigenous workers who are usually employed by foreign companies work either as casual workers or contract staff.<sup>238</sup> Conditions of work, in most of these companies, encourage unjust

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<sup>235</sup> See, *The Punch*, 26 July 2007, p17-19

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> *Newswatch Magazine*, 8th November, 2010, pp. 12-17.

<sup>238</sup> P. Cappelli, & D. Neumark, "External Churning and Internal Flexibility: Evidence on the Functional Flexibility and Core-periphery Hypotheses," *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 43 No. 1, 2004, pp. 148-182; Okafor, "Globalization, Changes and Strategies for Managing Workers' Resistance in Work Organizations in Nigeria,";

F. Adewumi, *Unions Without Unionism: Towards Trade Union Relevance in Nigeria's Industrial Relations System and Polity. An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at Crawford University, Faith City, Igbesa, Ogun State, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2009*; and E. Okafor, "Nonstandard Employment Relations and Implications for Decent Work Deficits in Nigeria," *African Research Review*, Vol.6 No. 3, 2012. pp. 93-100.

termination of appointments of indigenous employees. Casualisation of labour, which is seriously frowned at by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), is a routine practice. The surprising thing in this illegal practice is that most members of the political class in Nigeria do not seem to see these actions as unconstitutional.

There is also class conspiracy in the taxes due to be paid by most of these Multinational oil Companies. Tax evasion is a challenge that the Nigerian government is yet to overcome. Of course, tax evasion is inevitable in a dependent economy, since civil servants and bureaucrats who are supposed to collect the tax are corrupt. Corruption has tainted the image of the Nigerian public service. Where civil servants have the monopoly of collecting taxes from foreign investors, they either manipulate the tax or underrate them, so that, at the end of the transactions, a large chunk of the illegal deductions enter their pockets as compensation.

Class conspiracy is also evident in the negotiation for or bidding for oil blocks. In most cases, where there are stiff competitions, foreign investors try to bypass the rules, engage in rent-seeking, bribery and all sorts of illegal activities that are indirectly having economic cost on the nation's economy. The Nigerian Petroleum Act 1969 gave the Minister of Petroleum the discretionary powers and full authority to allocate licenses for oil blocks for the exploration, prospecting, and mining of oil. The bidding process is one of the critical avenues of high profile corruption because of the archaic laws and the autocratic military interventions in the running of the oil and gas sector. During the military era, most licenses were awarded on a discretionary basis by the head of state. For instance, the former minister of defense under Obasanjo civilian administration and one time Chief of Army Staff under the Murtala/Obasanjo military era, Lt. - Gen. Theophilus Danjuma, shocked the world at a consultative forum in Abuja in 2010, on how he realised \$500 million (N75 billion) as profit from the total of \$1 billion from the sales of an oil block located at Port Harcourt, River State, which was allocated to him by the late Gen. Sanni Abacha.<sup>239</sup> On the assumption of office in 1999, former President Olusegun Obasanjo revoked eleven oil blocks given to senior military officers and their allies by the previous military government. To end such sharp practices, President Obasanjo that doubled as de-facto minister and later senior Minister of Petroleum (1999–2003 and 2003-2007) attempted to introduce competition and transparency into the Nigeria's oil block bidding processes.

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<sup>239</sup>*The Punch Newspaper*, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2010, pp. 1-2

Specifically, the 2000, 2005, 2006, and 2007 oil bid were to some extent publicly advertised by the government, indicating the available blocks and selection criteria and as well, disclosed the various bids received. However, the whole processes according to the U4 2009 Report, suffered serious shortcomings by giving advantages to “certain preferred companies.”<sup>240</sup> Oil blocks were given freely to individuals who were highly connected to those in power. Politically, oil blocks are used as a form of reward and punishment to compel or elicit certain behaviour of targeted individuals. These individuals in turn sell the blocks to international oil companies and earn a substantial amount of money as income.<sup>241</sup> Thus, it would be germane to ask a question. Would this conspiracy end and how do we reduce this conspiracy in the oil and gas sector in Nigeria? Further research effort will buttress this point.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has taken a critical look at multinational actors and class conspiracy in the oil and gas sector in Nigeria. Since oil was discovered in Nigeria in 1958, this conspiracy has continued unabated. Successive governments in Nigeria have been linked to this conspiracy. The effect of this alliance between multinational corporations and local collaborators has affected the lives of millions of Nigerians who live below the two dollars per day poverty line. The effect has been most devastating in the Niger Delta, which has been marginalised, neglected and these attitudes have in no small measure resulted in hostile relationships between the state and the people of this oil rich region, whose environment is constantly polluted and still remains underdeveloped. Pathetically, the traditional economy was not only bastardised, but over the years has been submerged by the oil business. Similarly, the corruption in the oil and gas sector has encouraged tax invasion and all forms of illegal deals which have further impoverished the citizenry. It is an irony to hear that a country as blessed as Nigeria with abundant human and natural resources is still ranked among the poorest countries of the world, because of mismanagement and bad leadership as a result of the conspiracy of some powerful few. What do

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<sup>240</sup> U4, *Reforming Corruption Out of Nigerian Oil: Progress and Prospects*. Retrieved April 22, 2013, from Anti-Corruption Resource Centre: [www.u4.no/themes/natural-resource-management/](http://www.u4.no/themes/natural-resource-management/)

<sup>241</sup>B. Louis, “Understanding Corruption in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Sector: Issues and Challenges,” paper presented at the Anti-Corruption Training for Oil and Gas Sector, organised by African Diaspora Initiative at the U.K Bello Conference Centre, Minna, Niger State, 30<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

we expect in terms of meaningful development? This paper has tried as much as possible to establish the hegemony of multinational corporations and the class conspiracy in the oil and gas sector in Nigeria relying on the international political economy theoretical paradigm. This paper's position is that multinational corporations' hegemony and class conspiracy in the oil and gas sector is a bane of economic development in Nigeria. This paper concludes that policy responses in the past overlooked the serious impacts of this conspiracy on Nigeria's development. The effort by the government to restructure the oil and gas sector is a welcome development which could reduce the myriads of problems in the sector and bring about proper transparency and accountability that might bring meaningful economic development, if genuinely implemented.

**JOURNEY TO NOWHERE: NIGERIA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC  
TRAJECTORIES AND THE IMPERATIVES FOR PARADIGM SHIFT**

**Aderemi Medupin, Ph.D\***

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**Abstract**

Our effort here is basically to express displeasure with the way those who rule Nigeria have led the nation along a wrong path marked by inefficiency and inequity. The inefficiency is partly explained by the failure of most of the policies ostensibly packaged to bring succour to the populace, but in reality end up enriching a few. The failure of public policy is also partly, and indeed fundamentally, explained by the manner in which the process of policymaking is conducted, as it is devoid of popular participation, and therefore, undemocratic. The objective results of these policies are heightened wealth inequality and widespread poverty. References to SAP and privatisation are made to demonstrate the ideological foundation of these neoliberal policies and to explain why they are not suitable to Nigeria's development needs. On the bases of the outcomes of the public policies, which have been tried, the need for a change of direction becomes obvious and as a first step, the ambition of making the Nigerian state assume a developmental status, even as an interim measure, is recommended.

**Introduction: Clearing Some Conceptual Fogs**

In everyday parlance, a journey is a purposive movement implying a destination. In the broader case of a country, where there may be divergent convictions on the desired destination, there is need to grapple with some basic issues, including the following: Is there an agreement on our destination? Or put differently: where is the train taking us or where should it take us? Why the journey? In other words, what is the rationale for the journey? All these are directly linked to

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the choice of destination as well as the chosen route. Who is piloting the vehicle? Or put differently: who is our driver? A more provocative way of posing the question would be: What is the quality of our leaders/leadership? The focus of this introductory section is to address these questions, but not necessarily in the order they are posed above. Of course, the questions and the considered answers concern Nigeria.

A tentative reference on Nigeria's assumed destination is the 1999 Constitution, albeit of doubtful legality - especially the stated philosophy of governance. In its Preamble, the general purpose is stated as "promoting the good government and welfare of all persons in our country, on the principles of freedom, equality and justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of our people". More specifically, in Chapter II titled "Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy", in its section 14.1, it is provided that: [T]he Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a State based on the principles of democracy and social justice. Section 15.5 states that: The State shall abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power, while Section 16.1(a) requires the State to harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, dynamic and self-reliant economy; and Section 16.2 (c) demands that the State should ensure that the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or of a group.

From these constitutional provisions, the nation's socio-economic destination and the way to it has been spelt out, albeit vaguely, but clear enough for a committed pilot to chart the direction. So, we have, as stipulated in the organic law of the land, what should be; the question now is: what is or has been? These are the key concerns of the paper.

The people who have been steering the ship of the Nigerian State, before and since political independence, have, of course, been the bourgeoisie - whose worldview is well known to be at variance with what can lead to an integrated national economy and take the people out poverty, while narrowing wealth gaps. The choice of development pattern is always made by the ruling elites, those who wield power and influence. For example, during the industrial revolution in Britain, the landed gentry and the squires and later the successful businessmen formed the ruling elites. What marks the vision of leadership and hence driver across countries, and historically, is explained by their ideological orientation, thereby defining the form, and especially, the content of the public policies they design.

## Failure of Public Policies

The widely invoked definition of public policy offered by Thomas Dye remains valid for our purpose here, to wit: “what government choose to do or not to do”, including the distribution of benefits.<sup>242</sup> Our attention drawn by Ebiensa to the option by government of “not to do” becomes instructive, when we consider its actual implication, because a decision by government to ignore a problem or make changes, is in a sense a policy decision, as it tends to favour the perpetuation of the status quo.<sup>243</sup> Secondly, there may be a divergence between what governments decide to do and what they actually do. It is indeed the practical implication of the second element of government choice on policy that, as will become clear later, captures the Nigerian reality.

There are two distinct levels at which public policy performance can be analysed, namely: (i) choice of policies; and (ii) project delivery of the policies. The first and primary shoots out from the ideological preference of the policy makers, while the second and derivative is essentially a technical issue of competence on the part of implementers. From the basic existential fact of relative resource scarcity, the challenge of making a choice among alternative policies and projects, at any given time, stands as a constant. However, since the beneficiaries of projects will vary with the project types, the choice of projects cannot be just a technical issue but one rooted in class preferences summarised as ideology. At the technical level of project delivery, several factors have been identified as explanations for the failure of public policies in Nigeria, the overriding one being the challenge of implementation. Robust evidence exists showing that in terms of the stated objectives, most of the development plans drawn for implementation in Nigeria cannot be faulted. However, usually, we find wide gaps between formulated policy goals and the achievement of those goals as a result of ineffective implementation in almost all facets of public administration in Nigeria. Makinde has attempted a decoding of the implementation challenge or gap by tracing it to its major sources that include the policy itself, the policy maker, or the environment in which the policy has been made. Of

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<sup>242</sup> See, T. Dye, (ed), *Understanding Public Policy*, Prentice Hall Inc., New Jersey, 1975, p. 1

<sup>243</sup> K. I. Ebiensa, “The Nigerian State and the Politics of Public Policy Implementation,” 2009. Accessed from: <http://kimiebi.blogspot.com.ng/2009/12/nigerian-state-and-politics-of-public.html>

these factors, the one of immediate interest here is the process of bringing about policies in Nigeria, making the failure of implementation traceable to the policy itself.<sup>244</sup> As he put it:

[I]mplementation gap can arise from the policy itself when such a policy emanates from government rather than from the target groups. By this, it means that planning is top-down. And, by implication, the target beneficiaries are not allowed to contribute to the formulation of the policies that affect their lives.<sup>245</sup>

This verdict touches on how the process of planning for development in Nigeria has not paid fidelity to democratic principle of popular participation.

Going back to the issue of project preference, we confront the question about what connection exists between theory and policy. The relations between economic theory, economic policy and economic development are complex. The most common perception of this triangle of interactions derives from the conventional Keynesian view best represented by Keynes' famous description of politicians as the slaves of some defunct economist. According to this view, economic policy is capable of moulding economic development quite strongly. But economic policy makers, in turn, are heavily dependent on the advice of economists when choosing among policy and project alternatives. It is appropriate to acknowledge that a certain tension, or lack of correspondence, exists between economic policy debates within an intellectual community of economists on the one hand, and within the broader national policy arena, on the other. These two intellectual communities consist of different types of people. The former is made up of professional economists, while the latter covers a looser group of politicians, civil servants, interest organisations, press, and general public (as well as some economists in their capacity as members of these groups). The main point to take from this seemingly complex scenario is the fact that governments pick their economic and policy advisers consciously in the realisation of the need for ideological compatibility. In our contemporary time, the tension between economic theory and economic policy has been accentuated by the internationalisation of economic theory, and especially, of the neo-classical synthesis in the post-war period. This is what is broadly characterised as neoliberalism. The neoclassical synthesis conceives the central task of

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<sup>244</sup> T. Makinde, "Problems of Policy Implementation in Developing Nations: The Nigerian Experience," *Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2005, pp. 63-69

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

macroeconomic policy as the stabilisation of aggregate demand, utilising the tools of fiscal and monetary policy.<sup>246</sup> After all, there were economists in Nigeria who echoed Margaret Thatcher's 'there is no alternative' (TINA) in the wake of the popular protest against IMF and its recommended SAP.

### **Specific Public Policies**

It is not considered necessary or useful to make a rigorous distinction between "policy" and "programme". Although in technical parlance they are different and both link the lower ladder known as "project". As the following paragraphs will show, what is ordinarily a sub-set of one is given a separate treatment on its own.

### **Structural Adjustment Programme**

Structural adjustment is the name given to a set of "free market" economic policy reforms imposed on developing countries by the Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)) as a condition for receipt of loans. SAPs were developed in the early 1980s as a means of gaining stronger influence over the economies of debt-strapped governments in the South. To ensure a continued inflow of funds, countries, already devastated by debt obligations, had little choice but to adhere to conditions mandated by the IMF and World Bank. The fact is that SAPs were designed to improve a country's foreign investment climate by eliminating trade and investment regulations, to boost foreign exchange earnings by promoting exports, and reducing government deficits through cuts in spending. At inception, SAP was touted as if it had no alternative as a route to economic growth and recovery, leading to the popularisation of the dismissive phrase: 'there is no alternative' (TINA) especially in the 1980s.

It is pertinent to draw attention to the fact that the Third World Network and Freedom from Debt Coalition have proposed numerous alternative policies in the areas of international trade and sustainable development. Some specific alternatives for reform include:

- i) Promoting diversification in the products that Southern countries export and increase processing capacity. This would coincide with the recognition of providing some protection to infant industries and the promotion of greater regional trade.

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<sup>246</sup> J. Pekkarinen, "Keynesianism and the Scandinavian Models of Economic Policy," *WIDER Working Paper No 35*. February 1988.

- ii) Recognising the need for states to play a greater role in facilitating the diversification away from traditional commodities, determining and promoting investment priorities; economic policies and planning which include a gendered analysis of the various options.
- iii) Policies that take into account environmental impacts and include sustainable natural resource use that benefits local communities.
- iv) An emphasis on non-price structural reforms such as land reform, institutional reforms to increase democratic practice and accountability.
- v) At the international level, measures to reduce the debt problems of poorer countries, regulate capital markets and address unfair trading practices.

Although SAPs differ somewhat from country to country, its common fallouts typically include:

- i) A shift from growing diverse food crops for domestic consumption to specialising in the production of cash crops or other commodities (like rubber, cotton, coffee, copper, tin etc.) for export.
- ii) Abolishing food and agricultural subsidies to reduce government expenditures.
- iii) Deep cuts to social programmes usually in the areas of health, education and housing and massive layoffs in the civil service,
- iv) Currency devaluation measures which increase import costs while reducing the value of domestically produced goods;
- v) Liberalisation of trade and investment and high interest rates to attract foreign investment.
- vi) Privatisation of government-held enterprises.
- vii) Undermining national food security through an over-reliance on investment that is short-term, and concentrated in the export sector.
- viii) Making many basic necessities inaccessible to local people as currency devaluations drastically reduce the buying power of local wages.

With specific reference to developing economies, the results of SAPs include the following:

- i) Over-emphasis on the restoration of balance of payments instead of adopting a more just and equitable approach to resolving the debt crisis.

- ii) Undermining the state's sovereignty and limiting its role for socio-economic intervention through a fixation on deregulation, privatisation and dismantling of the state in the name of unfettered "free markets".
- iii) Lack of transparency, accountability and public participation in their design and implementation.
- iv) Hurting the poor disproportionately through deep cutbacks in social programmes. User fees, privatisation, massive layoffs and cutbacks of social services have led to malnutrition, school and hospital closures, recurrence of previously eradicated disease, and deepening poverty.
- v) Undermining national food security through an over-reliance on investment that is short-term, and concentrated in the export sector.
- vi) Making many basic necessities inaccessible to local people as currency devaluations drastically reduce the buying power of local wages.
- vii) Exacerbating the disparities between the rich and the poor by facilitating income concentration by the wealthy and the exclusion of the poor from decisions and control over resources.

It was in response to a combination of the apprehension and empirical manifestation of these results that protests were staged across Africa including Nigeria in the mid-1980s throughout to the 1990s. As Crockett recalled, by the end of the 1990s, several demonstrations and protests against structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) had taken over the streets of dozens of African states. In Algeria, over 200 people were killed in the riots against high prices of food and unemployment. Security forces in Nigeria massacred 20 students after they staged a protest against the introduction of SAP. The University of Khartoum in Sudan closed down after students occupied the buildings and streets around the area.<sup>247</sup> The blame was placed on the structural adjustment programmes that were intended to enhance the economy, but instead devastated it. It is worth recalling that the imposition of SAP on Nigerians was achieved with military force even if preceded by a feigned democratic debate about the main outcome, which was promptly ignored because it pointed to an unambiguous rejection by the people.

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<sup>247</sup> S. Crockett, "Were SAPs Designed to Keep Africa Economically Subservient to the West?" Thesis submitted to University of London. March, 2012.

## Privatisation

Privatisation is conceived as a strategy for reducing the size of government and transferring assets and service functions from public to private ownership and control. It is based on the arguments that:

- i) Government is into more things than it should be. It is intruding into private enterprise and lives.
- ii) Government is unable to provide services effectively or efficiently;
- iii) Public officials and public agencies are not adequately responsive to the public.
- iv) Government consumes too many resources, and thereby, threatens economic growth.

Of course, these arguments are constructed within a definitive ideological bias in the era of neoliberal triumph and they are the standard mantra of neoclassical economists. The principle and policy of privatisation gained special currency in the 1980s and 1990s and has remained with policy makers across the globe, rearing its head to mark the distinctive characteristic of the economies that emerged in Russia and Eastern Europe, consequent on the collapse of state socialism in those parts of the world.

In Nigeria, the clamour for privatisation was encouraged by the observed poor performance of public enterprises which had gulped huge public funds. For example, between 1975 and 1985 alone, government capital investments in public enterprises totalled about ₦23 billion. In addition to equity investments, government gave subsidies of ₦11.5 billion to various state enterprises.<sup>248</sup> On the other hand, between 1960 and 1965, the Nigerian Railway Corporation alone had 13 enquiries into its activities and in 1965 it had a deficit of N7 million and the World Bank described its finances as disastrous. The actual implementation of commercialisation and privatisation started in 1988 with the inauguration of the Technical Committee on Privatisation and Commercialisation as contained in Decree No. 25 of 1988. The Public Enterprises (Privatisation and the Commercialisation) Act in 1999 empowered the BPE to change emphases from commercialisation to encouraging core investors, and promoting foreign investment in the privatisation programme.

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<sup>248</sup> D. O. Adeyemo, "A Review of Privatization and Public Enterprises Reform in Nigeria," *Contemporary Management Research*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2008, pp. 401-418 December

The privatisation and commercialisation programme was declared as aiming to achieve the following objectives:

- i) To restructure and rationalise the public sector in order to lessen the dominance of unproductive investments in that sector.
- ii) To re-orientated the enterprise for privatisation and commercialisation towards a new horizon of performance improvement, viability and overall efficiency.
- iii) To ensure positive returns in public sector investment in commercialisation enterprises.
- iv) To check the present absolute reliance of commercially oriented parastatals on the Treasury for funding and to encourage their approach to the Nigerian capital market.
- v) To initiate the process of gradual cession to the private sector of such public enterprises, which by the nature of their operations and other socioeconomic factors are best performed by the private sector.
- vi) To creating a favourable investment climate for both local and foreign investors.
- vii) To reduce the level of internal and external debts.<sup>249</sup>

These are persuasive objectives, although there was expressed concern by the policy makers on the likely impact its implementation would have on poverty or wealth distribution.

Right from the outset, the underbelly of privatisation was apprehended by civil society and their organic intellectuals. As Oji et al indicated, privatisation in Nigeria has not been a popular reform programme and it has received so much criticism from organised labour, the academia, civil society and individuals.<sup>250</sup> There have been numerous strikes by unions against proposed sell-offs, which they fear would lead to loss of jobs, damages on the poor through loss of employment, reduction in income, and reduced access to basic social services or increase in prices.

### **Policy Results**

The combined outcome of Nigeria's public policies has been variously acknowledged, including the American Congress summary in the report that: Despite its oil wealth and large economy, Nigeria's population is among Africa's poorest, and the distribution of wealth is highly unequal. The average life expectancy for Nigerians is just over 53 years, and the

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<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> R. O. Oji, E. C Nwachukwu & I. O. Eme. 2014. "Privatisation of Public Enterprises in Nigeria: A Thematic Exposition," *Singaporean Journal of Business Economics and Management Studies*, Vol.3, NO.2, 2014.

percentage of the population living in absolute poverty (less than \$1.25 a day) has grown over time. Decades of economic mismanagement, instability and corruption have hindered investment in education and social services and stymied industrial growth.<sup>251</sup> These results of the series of policy measures initiated and implemented by successive governments in Nigeria are evident in the living conditions of the majority of the people of the country. Apart from the composite Human Development Index (HDI) computed and released annually by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and on which Nigeria scores poorly, two specific measures of policy outcome in Nigeria are poverty and wealth distribution, both of which are interrelated. The level and pattern of inequality within and between countries is now widely recognised as the critical problem—hindering inclusive growth, undermining social cohesion and acting as a barrier to poverty reduction.<sup>252</sup>

## Poverty

The Central Bank of Nigeria (1999:1) defines poverty as:

... a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his or her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter; is unable to meet social and economic obligations, lacks gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem; and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, portable water, and sanitation; and consequently, has limited chance of advancing his or her welfare to the limit of his or her capabilities.<sup>253</sup>

Matt Bruenig posited that there are two schools of thought on the causes of poverty; namely, (i) that which explains poverty as being caused by the poverty stricken individual and (ii) that which posits that poverty is caused by the structural system. He argued that the first is right wing, because it blames the victims as being responsible for their problem. This school specifically argues that poverty stricken individuals are lazy, uneducated, ignorant, or otherwise inferior by nature. To this school, therefore, the solution to poverty is to help poverty stricken people through various programmes to overcome their inherent laziness, ignorance, educational backwardness, amongst others. Thus, its solution is highly paternalistic. The second school, on

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<sup>251</sup> L. P. Blanchard, "Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service Report 7-5700*, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

<sup>252</sup> UNIRSD, (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development), *Combating Poverty and Inequality. Beyond 2015*, Brief 01, February 2013.

<sup>253</sup> Central Bank of Nigeria, *Nigeria's Development Prospects: Poverty Assessment and Alleviation Study*, Central Bank of Nigeria in Collaboration with the World Bank, 1999.

the other hand, is described as left wing, because, unlike the first, it sees poverty as a systemic and structural problem. This school argues that people are in poverty because they find themselves in holes in the economic system that delivers them inadequate income. He maintained that because individual lives are dynamic, people do not sit in those holes forever. One year they are in a low-income hole, but the next year they have found a job or got a promotion, and are not anymore. But that hole that they were in last year does not go away. Others inevitably find themselves in that hole because it is a persistent defect in the economic structure. It follows from this that impoverished people are not the same people every year. It follows further that the only way to reduce poverty is to alter the economic structure so as to reduce the number of low-income holes in it.<sup>254</sup>

Without doubt, the legitimate explanation is the structural basis of poverty as the Nigerian reality manifests. High and rising unemployment inevitably engenders and exacerbates poverty and this is the Nigerian experience, even as the Buhari administration has struggled to address the menace through its *Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP)*.<sup>255</sup> Employment is the grand basis for realising inclusive growth. As UNRISD (2013) crafted the message, employment represents a critical channel through which additional income generated by growth can be widely distributed throughout a population.<sup>256</sup> The National Bureau of Statistics, in a Report on poverty, crafted from a Harmonised Nigeria Living Standard Survey (HNLSS) and supported by the World Bank, Department for International Development (DFID) UK, revealed that in February 2012, 61% of Nigerians were living in poverty and that there has been no reported improvement in the country's poverty situation. Poverty is, of course, a global phenomenon, albeit of varying acuteness. However, the share of sub-Saharan Africa is well known,<sup>257</sup> but all such instances are evidence of public policy failure.

## **Wealth inequality**

An obvious evidence of the collective failure of public policies in Nigeria is the gross inequality in income among the citizenry and residents. Oxfam International captures the poverty situation in Nigeria when it reported that more than half of the Nigerian population still grapples

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<sup>254</sup> M. Bruenig, "Two Theories of Poverty" - posted on July 28, 2014. Accessed from: <http://www.demos.org/blog/7/28/14/two-theories-poverty>

<sup>255</sup> *Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP)*

<sup>256</sup> UNRISD, *Combating Poverty and Inequality. Beyond 2015*,

<sup>257</sup> see Appendix 1.

with extreme poverty, while a small group of elites enjoys ever-growing wealth. It added that while income inequality is a global phenomenon, in Nigeria the scale of inequality is extreme.<sup>258</sup> In one day, the richest Nigerian man can earn from his wealth 8,000 times more than what the poorest 10% of Nigerians spend on average in one year for their basic consumption. The most disturbing dimension of the country's income inequality is that the population of the poor is on the rise; whereas in 2004 the number of people in the poverty bracket was 69 million, by 2010, the figure had risen to 112 million.

Paradoxically, at the same time, Nigeria has nearly 16,000 millionaires, and that number has jumped by 44 per cent over the past six years.<sup>259</sup> According to Oxfam's calculations, the amount of money that the richest Nigerian man can earn annually from his wealth is sufficient to lift 2 million people out of poverty for one year.<sup>260</sup> Of direct interest and programmatic relevance is the calculation showing that lifting all Nigerian people living below the extreme poverty line of \$1.90 out of poverty for one year will cost about \$24 billion, which is just lower than the total wealth owned overall by the five richest Nigerians in 2016, which was equal to \$29.9 billion.<sup>261</sup> Poverty and inequality in Nigeria are not due to lack of resources, but to the ill-use, misallocation and misappropriation of such resources. At the root, there is a culture of corruption and rent-seeking combined with a political elite out of touch with the daily struggles of average Nigerians.<sup>262</sup> This disconnect is being consciously aggravated as the rich seek to create their own world, literally as evidenced in the birth of the infamous Banana Island with exquisite residential apartments, some, if not most, which are built from stolen public funds and are privately controlled. In the words of York:

Everything from its electricity and drinking water to its transit systems and telecommunications will be privatized and operated independently from the decrepit public infrastructure. It allows the rich to abandon Lagos, retreat from the poor and segregate themselves in their own self-contained enclave.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Oxfam International, *Inequality in Nigeria-Exploring the Drivers*. May, 2017, Accessed from: [https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file\\_attachments/cr-inequality-in-nigeria-170517-en.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/cr-inequality-in-nigeria-170517-en.pdf).

<sup>259</sup> G. York, "Boko Haram Insurgency Exposes Nigeria's Extreme Economic Inequality" in *The Globe and Mail*, 16<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

<sup>260</sup> Oxfam International, *Inequality in Nigeria-Exploring the Drivers*.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>263</sup> York, "Boko Haram Insurgency Exposes Nigeria's Extreme Economic Inequality"

The quoted cryptic from a popular Nigerian novelist, Ben Okri, says volumes on the Nigerian reality, especially the roots of violent religious and ethnic sects. In his words:

In a country rich with oil revenues, where billions of pounds disappear from the national coffers with no one held to account, where going into politics is synonymous with acquiring vast and sudden wealth, where slums breed in larger numbers every day ... it is not surprising that violent sects grow from such a festering condition.

### **Enduring Explanation of the failure**

In Nigeria, like most economies within the contemporary global economic order, the neo-liberal ideology has become the dominating doctrine-with its far reaching disastrous consequences. The duo activists, Elizabeth Martinez and Arnoldo Garcia of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, have tried to explain neo-liberalism as a set of economic policies that have become widespread during the last 25 years or so. Although the word is rarely heard in the United States, you can clearly see the effects of neo-liberalism here as the rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer.<sup>264</sup> Martinez and Garcia gave a detailed illustration of neoliberalism and the main points includes the following:

- i) **The Rule of the Market.** Liberating "free" enterprise or private enterprise from any bonds imposed by the government (the state) no matter how much social damage this causes. Greater openness to international trade and investment, as in NAFTA. Reduce wages by de-unionizing workers and eliminating workers' rights that had been won over many years of struggle. No more price controls. All in all, total freedom of movement for capital, goods and services. To convince us this is good for us, they say "an unregulated market is the best way to increase economic growth, which will ultimately benefit everyone." It's like Reagan's "supply-side" and "trickle-down" economics -- but somehow the wealth didn't trickle down very much.
- ii) **Cutting Public Expenditure for Social Services** like education and health care, reducing the safety-net for the poor, and even maintenance of roads, bridges, water supply -- again in the name of reducing government's role. Of course, they don't oppose government subsidies and tax benefits for business.
- iii) **Deregulation.** Reducing government regulation of everything that could diminish profits, including protecting the environment and safety on the job.
- iv) **Privatisation.** Selling state-owned enterprises, goods and services to private investors. This includes banks, key industries, railroads, toll highways, electricity, schools, hospitals

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<sup>264</sup> <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=376>.

and even fresh water. Although usually done in the name of greater efficiency, which is often needed, privatisation has mainly had the effect of concentrating wealth even more in a few hands and making the public pay even more for its needs.

- v) **Eliminating the Concept of "The Public Good" Or "Community"** and replacing it with "individual responsibility." Pressuring the poorest people in a society to find solutions to their lack of health care, education and social security all by themselves -- then blaming them, if they fail, as "lazy".

Around the world, neo-liberalism has been imposed by powerful financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. It is raging all over Latin America. The first clear example of neo-liberalism at work came in Chile (with thanks to University of Chicago Economist, Milton Friedman), after the CIA-supported coup against the popularly elected Allende regime in 1973. Other countries followed, with some of the worst effects in Mexico where wages declined 40 to 50% in the first year of NAFTA, while the cost of living rose by 80%. Over 20,000 small and medium businesses have failed and more than 1,000 state-owned enterprises have been privatised in Mexico.

What has further compounded the Nigerian situation is the uncertain transition of the state from a pseudo-developmental one to a weak, failing or captured one. The weak/failed state reflects in generalised insecurity, while state capture exists where small corrupt groups use their influence over government officials to appropriate government decision making to strengthen their own economic positions as the Dangote phenomenon has brought into sharp relief.

In reality, state capture, like corruption, is difficult to prove. As Fazekas & Tóth observed, there has been intense scholarly interest in state capture across the globe, although virtually every study has had to rely either on qualitative data lacking sufficient breath, or on survey data lacking sufficient reliability.<sup>265</sup> It is, therefore, instructive that the IMF has innocuously exposed the shameless manner in which the state capture was achieved in Russia under Putin, who did not hide his awareness of the process and outcome in his country, as he was quoted in the following statement: "I only want to draw your attention straightaway to the fact

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<sup>265</sup> Fazekas, M. & I. J. Tóth, "From Corruption to State Capture: A New Analytical Framework with Empirical Applications from Hungary," Corruption Research Centre, Budapest, Working Paper Series: CRC WP/2014:01.November, 2014.

that you have yourselves formed this very state, to a large extent through political and quasi-political structures under your control. So perhaps what one should do least of all is blame the mirror."<sup>266</sup>

The relationship between the state and business in Nigeria is an interesting one that manifests two obvious strands. The first is the fraudulent claim that “*Government Has No Business in Business*” even as government is routinely invited to assist business; of course, this lie has assumed a global culture. The second strand is the undeniable fact that no major businessman or woman in Nigeria has become so without government patronage. This point would not have raised eyebrow; if the state was, in theory and practice, *a neutral state*. But concrete and historical reality shows that the state, since the dissolution of primitive-communal, classless societies, was and remains *an organ of class rule*.<sup>267</sup> Even Adam Smith, the foremost advocate of “free market,” argued that:

Wherever there is great property there is great inequality. For one very rich man there must be at least five hundred poor, and the affluence of the few supposes the indigence of the many. The affluence of the rich excites the indignation of the poor, who are often both driven by want, and prompted by envy, to invade his possessions. It is only under the shelter of the civil magistrate that the owner of that valuable property, which is acquired by the labour of many years, or perhaps of many successive generations, can sleep a single night in security... The acquisition of valuable and extensive property, therefore, necessarily requires the establishment of civil government. Where there is no property, or at least none that exceeds the value of two or three days' labour, civil government is not so necessary... Civil government supposes a certain subordination. But as the necessity of civil government gradually grows up with the acquisition of valuable property, so the principal causes which naturally introduce subordination gradually grow up with the growth of that valuable property...<sup>268</sup>

Smith continued:

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<sup>266</sup>Vladimir Putin, in a meeting with Russia's business leaders in July 2000 cited in J. Hellman & D. Kaufmann, “Confronting the Challenge of State Capture in Transition Economies,” *Finance & Development*, Vol. 38, No. 3, September, 2001

<sup>267</sup>See, K. Marx & Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of Communist Party*; and V. I. Lenin, “The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution” in *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 25, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977).

<sup>268</sup>A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. (With an Introduction by Mark G. Spencer), Wordsworth Classic of World Literature, London, 2012, pp. 708-709

... The rich, in particular, are necessarily interested to support that order of things which can alone secure them in the possession of their own advantages. Men of inferior wealth combine to defend those of superior wealth in the possession of their property, in order that men of superior wealth may combine to defend them in the possession of theirs...Civil government, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all.<sup>269</sup>

The Nigerian public sector is only so in name; in essence, however, it is the means by which the private sector legally, semi-legally and illegally enriches itself. This is the logic of the operation and, indeed, rationale for the existence of the state everywhere. The difference in the Nigerian case is the capping of the relationship with massive thievery.

A cross cutting factor undermining Nigeria's development is the obvious issue of corruption which has been a notorious subject in public debates in the country. Just as the oil sector dominates the country's financial inflows, so does the sector maintains a comfortable lead in the quantum of stolen public wealth through its arteries. In its 2013 report *Nigeria's Criminal Crude*, the London-based Chatham House estimated that 100,000 barrels per day, on average, were stolen in the first quarter of 2013. Niger Delta militants, Nigerian politicians, security officers, and oil industry personnel have been implicated in the theft and illegal trade of Nigerian crude. Challenges in addressing oil theft are compounded by a lack of transparency in the Nigerian oil industry. Worse still, the sector remains an enclave with little employment generation and linkages with the rest of the economy as reflected in the heavy reliance on imported refined petroleum products as the local refineries have largely been poorly maintained, if at all. Nigeria reportedly imports roughly \$10 billion in refined fuel annually (156,000 barrels per day according to OPEC data) for domestic consumption. The result is that the "market-determined price" of refined oil has to be on the high side, necessitating subsidy which has also been turned into a racket by some licensed fuel importers. Under the regime of the Jonathan-led Administration, a legislative inquiry revealed that an estimated \$7 billion allocated for the subsidy may have been misappropriated.<sup>270</sup> This perfidy was further confirmed by another commentator, who recalled how the House of Representatives had probed the subsidy regime reporting massive fraud in the downstream sector. The Ministry of Finance and later the

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<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 713-714.

<sup>270</sup> Blanchard, L. P., "Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy," p. 12.

Presidency subsequently set up the Aig-Imoukhuede Technical and Verification Committees, which made worse revelations about how the payment of subsidy had become a huge scam.<sup>271</sup>

### **Redirecting the Journey: The Imperative of a Paradigm Shift**

Our notion of paradigm here is not of the scale initially advanced by Thomas Kuhn; rather, it is invoked to signify a realisation that the series of the public policies that have been tried out in Nigeria before and since political independence have failed. Thus, the imperative of a change in our national direction. The obscene nature of policy outcome in Nigeria has been expressed in a most pungent observation by Oxfam:

The overlap between political and economic power bends the allocation of opportunities, income and wealth to vested interests, and biases policy-making in favour of the rich. A first consequence is the astronomical cost of governance. Nigerian lawmakers are one of the best paid in the world: the average annual salary is \$118,000, equivalent to 63 times the country's GDP per capita (in 2013).<sup>272</sup>

I share the conviction that in a capitalist oriented economy like Nigeria, the state promotes the interest of the bourgeoisie (the ruling class), which controls it, which will reflect in the laws and policies enacted and operated. Based on the policies of the Nigerian State, analysts have come with varying characterisations such as it being as exploitative, cruel and irresponsible, illegitimate, oppressive and repressive-and possibly a failed state.<sup>273</sup> This reference is clearly in diametrical opposition to the liberal conception of the state as apolitical and neutral in the exercise of power; therefore, it does not promote one interest against the other. Concern about the counter-productive orientation of the Nigerian state inevitably leads to a consideration of the contentious category called the *developmental state*, labelled alternatively as hard state.

The term developmental states was initially, and is still, frequently used to describe countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Vietnam, which have experienced rapid economic growth through state-led policies or interventions. Increasingly, and in more recent times, emphasis is being placed on the role of the state in achieving economic growth and poverty reduction, when defining the essence of a developmental state. This emphasis on the significant role of the state in successfully achieving economic growth conflicts with the

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<sup>271</sup> R. Abati, "Deregulation and the Politics of Public Policy" in *The Guardian Newspaper*, Lagos. 20<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

<sup>272</sup> Oxfam International, "Inequality in Nigeria-Exploring the Drivers"

<sup>273</sup> K. I. Ebienufa, "The Nigerian State and the Politics of Public Policy Implementation," 2009 Accessed from: <http://kimiebi.blogspot.com.ng/2009/12/nigerian-state-and-politics-of-public.html>

neo-liberal market focused assumptions about how to promote development that many development actors have been working with. Indeed, all the debates about the concept of developmental states issue form the contention on how and, indeed if, states should intervene in the market, and what role the state should play in development.<sup>274</sup>

One explanation of the essence of a developmental state which deserves mention is that of Bolesta, who argued that the developmental state, because it is positioned between liberal open economy model and a central-planned model, and is neither capitalist nor socialist, combines the positive advantages of state and private businesses.<sup>275</sup> Invoking another author, Bolesta reports how ‘the developmental state is an embodiment of a normative or moral ambition to use the interventionist power of the state to guide investment in a way that promotes a certain solidaristic vision of national economy.’<sup>276</sup> Going through the various definitions and explanations of the nature of the developmental state, there appears to be a consensus that such a state has its focus on the acceleration of the economy’s industrialisation and it implies a departure from a neo-liberal economic ideology and a drift towards state interventionism. This is without prejudice to the apprehension of such a state tending towards authoritarianism as it recoils from any obstruction to impede its avowed nationalistic developmental movement. As Bolesta argued, it seems justifiable to claim that a developmental state would be difficult to sustain in a fully democratic system in which people enjoy extensive rights. In order to follow a strict developmental path, one needs to limit society’s ability to counteract the state’s efforts, in favour of particular goals dependent on one’s affinity to a certain social group.<sup>277</sup>

In the Nigerian case, the active role of the state has been established in the 1999 Constitution as amended, requiring it to occupy the commanding heights of the economy. This provision is in spite of the sustained intellectual and policy attempt to literally criminalise state direct involvement in micro-macroeconomic management by the neoliberalists who have unceasingly propagated against such involvement. What makes the Nigerian State appropriate for an objective study, beyond ideological prejudice, is its uncertain perception, and hence, reception of the worldviews of the private sector operators. For example, whereas it was the Nigerian State that intermediated between foreign and local arms of capital in the immediate

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<sup>274</sup> L. Routley, “Developmental States: A Review of the Literature,” *ESID Working Paper* No. 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2012.

<sup>275</sup> A. Bolesta, *China as a Developmental State. Montenegrin Journal of Economics* No 5, 2007.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

post-independence era in defense of its local arm through the promulgation and actualisation of indigenisation programme, the public sector is nonetheless routinely ridiculed for its alleged extreme inefficiency. A more valid verdict on the Nigerian State; therefore, appears to be one that acknowledges its potential and actual effort to direct the national economy towards chosen end. This is without prejudice to the expressed sentiment that African States lack the capacity to pursue the statist model of Asia, since Africa is hemmed in as it tries to navigate between weak states and weak markets and doing so with open political structures.<sup>278</sup> The critical valid question appears to be: what is the chosen destination?

The ultimate state that can guarantee and sustain the humanity of the Nigerian people is evidently that which the producers of the nation's wealth occupy the driving seat. Raising the state to developmental status, notwithstanding its inevitable contradictions, would be a paradigm shift for Nigeria. Such a state, while focusing appropriately on industrialisation, will make the domestic market its primary constituency and devote less attention to export-orientation.

## **Conclusion**

At the bottom of the unfolding economic scenario of widening wealth inequality fuelled by rampant corruption and open pillage of common wealth is an undeniable force of 'revolutionary pressures' shooting out from social contradictions taking diverse forms including class, religious and ethnic colorations. The main argument of this paper is that successive Nigerian governments have initiated policies which have failed either on the technical ground of inefficiency or wrongly chosen policies, programmes and projects in the sense of not being geared to meeting the needs of the majority.

It is obvious, therefore, that very serious changes are required including changing the occupants of the driver's seat; changing the destination charted for the nation and radicalising the programmes and projects earmarked for getting to the desired destination. What is being proposed here may sound idealistic, but in truth, it is realisable and the realisation is of imperative historic urgency given the material and human costs of maintaining the status quo.

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<sup>278</sup>T. Mkandawire, 'Thinking About Developmental States in Africa' Accessed from: [http://archive.unu.edu/hq/academic/Pg\\_area4/Mkandawire.html](http://archive.unu.edu/hq/academic/Pg_area4/Mkandawire.html)

## Appendix: Top 10 Poverty in Africa Facts

<https://borgenproject.org/10-quick-facts-about-poverty-in-africa/>

How bad is poverty in Africa? The situation is improving, but Africa remains the poorest continent on earth. But what many people may not know are the effects of poverty in Africa—including hunger, disease and a lack of basic necessities.

1. Seventy-five percent of the world's poorest countries are located in Africa, including Zimbabwe, Liberia and Ethiopia. Extreme poverty is defined as living on \$1.25 or less a day with a GDP per capita of \$656 in 2016.
2. Approximately one in three people living in sub-Saharan Africa are undernourished. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations estimated that 239 million people (around 30 percent of the population) in sub-Saharan Africa were hungry in 2010. This is the highest percentage of any region in the world. In addition, the U.N. Millennium Project reported that over 40 percent of all Africans are unable to regularly obtain sufficient food.
3. In sub-Saharan Africa, 589 million people live without electricity. As a result, a staggering 80 percent of the population relies on biomass products such as wood, charcoal and dung in order to cook.
4. Of the 738 million people globally who lack access to clean water, 37 percent are living in sub-Saharan Africa. Poverty in Africa results in more than 500 million people suffering from waterborne diseases. According to the U.N. Millennium Project, more than 50 percent of Africans have a water-related illness like cholera.
5. Every year, sub-Saharan Africa misses out on about \$30 billion as productivity is compromised by water and sanitation problems. This amount accounts for approximately five percent of the region's gross domestic product (GDP), exceeding the total amount of foreign aid sent to sub-Saharan Africa in 2003.
6. Due to continuing violence, conflict and widespread human rights abuses, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that 18 million people are of concern to the agency, including stateless people and returnees.
7. Fewer than 20 percent of African women have access to education. Uneducated African women are twice as likely to contract AIDS and 50 percent less likely to immunise their children. Meanwhile, the children of African women with at least five years of schooling have a 40 percent higher chance of survival.
8. Women in sub-Saharan Africa are more than 230 times more likely to die during childbirth or pregnancy than women in North America. Approximately one in 16 women

9. living in sub-Saharan African will die during childbirth or pregnancy; only one in 4,000 women in North America will.
  
10. More than one million people, mostly children under the age of five, die every year from malaria. Malaria deaths in Africa alone account for 90 percent of all malaria deaths worldwide. Eighty percent of these victims are African children. The U.N. Millennium Project has calculated that a child in Africa dies from malaria every 30 seconds, or about 3,000 each day.

– *Jordanna Packtor*

**“EVERYTHING FOR THE STRUGGLE, VICTORY FOR ALL”:  
THE 1989 GREAT ANTI-SAP UPRISING IN NIGERIA**

**Ahmed Aminu YUSUF\***

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SAPI e get belle o; hiyoyo  
E no go born better o; hiyoyo.  
Na INFLATION e born o; hiyo  
E no go born better o; hiyoyo.  
Na UNEMPLOYMENT e go born o; hiyoyo  
E no go born better o; hiyoyo.  
Na POVERTY e go born o; hiyoyo  
E no go born better o; hiyoyo.  
Na FASCISM e go born o; hiyoyo  
E no go born better o; hiyoyo.  
Na WAHALA e go born o; hiyoyo  
E no go born better o; hiyoyo.  
Na...<sup>279</sup>

- Nigerian Students.

The Coordinating Committee of the POPULAR FRONT [of ABU Students], in the name of Nigerian Workers, Poor Peasants, Market Women, and other Oppressed Masses, as well as the Future Generations of Nigerians, and in the Spirit of Popular Democracy, Collective Consciousness and People’s Patriotism, hereby decreed (sic) and ordained (sic) that there will be a CONGRESS MEETING ... ON SAP [Structural Adjustment Programme].<sup>280</sup>

- Popular Front of ABU Students.

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\* Ahmed Aminu YUSUF is a Federal Public Servant and independent researcher. He was the Deputy National President of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), 1984-1985 and NANS’ Director of Travels & Exchange (1983 – 1984). He held various leadership positions in the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Students’ Movement throughout the 1980s. He was: at various times Member of the ABU Students’ Union People’s Parliament; one time Public Relations Officer of the ABU Students’ Union; National President, Youth Solidarity on Southern Africa (YUSSA); Central Committee (CC) Member of Movement for Progressive Nigeria (MPN); CC Member of Students’ Vanguard (SV); the Spokesperson of the Mass Democratic Movement of ABU Students; and Chairperson of the Popular Front of ABU Students; amongst others. He is currently working on “The Making of the Working Class, the 1945 General Strike and the Struggle for Nigeria”, amongst others.

<sup>279</sup> This was a student protest demonstration song against SAP, sung from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s. The song, in pidgin English, means SAP is pregnant, and it will not give birth to any good thing but inflation, unemployment, poverty, fascism and severe suffering and hardship.

<sup>280</sup> Popular Front of ABU (Ahmadu Bello University) Students, “Congress Meeting (Circular To All Students),” 1<sup>st</sup> June 1989.

## **Introduction**

In May-June 1989, Nigerian students, led by their umbrella organisation, the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), embarked on a nation-wide protest, which became known as the 1989 Great Anti-SAP Uprising. The protest saw the massive participation of non-students forces, which included different categories of workers, the unemployed and the lumpen proletariat, amongst others. What led to this uprising? What forms did it take? What were the reactions of the Federal Military Government (FMG), led by General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida? Of what significance was the uprising? The answers to these questions, amongst others, are the main problematic of this paper. The second and third sections of this paper give a background to the anti-SAP uprising. The fifth section highlights the uprising itself, while the sixth section examines the reactions of the FMG to the uprising. Section seven, which concludes the paper, discusses the significance of the uprising.

## **Background to the May-June 1989 Anti-SAP Uprising**

The May-June 1989 anti-SAP uprising occurred against the background of the imposition of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) neo-liberal policies, known as Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), in mid-July 1986. SAP sought to roll back the state's involvement in the economy by allowing market forces to "efficiently" allocate resources and give a free hand to private sector to trade and move capital freely. It specifically sought to commercialise and privatise public companies, utilities and services; progressively devalue the national currency – the Naira; withdraw state subsidies on social and welfare services; freeze and cut down wages, salaries and allowances; liberalise international business transactions, amongst others. By so doing, it was argued, the economy would be put in its "proper footing" because resources would be allocated efficiently as the state would be compelled to spend according to its resources.<sup>281</sup> But, despite its call for a return to the classical free market system, SAP, in reality, was intended to hold the hands of the labouring masses through wage and salary controls, removal of whatever social and welfare programmes vulnerable groups like students enjoyed,

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<sup>281</sup> See, for instance, Prince T. Momoh, *SAP: The Road Not Taken, 3<sup>rd</sup> Letter To My Countryman*, 15 June 1988 (Arzon Publicity Production Co. Yaba) and Prince T. Momoh, *Of Poverty and Riches: 4<sup>th</sup> Letter To My Countryman*, July 1988, Federal Government Press. Tony Momoh was General I. B. Babangida's Minister of Information from 1987-1989.

and the weakening of organised power of working and vulnerable masses, while strengthening the power of the private sector, especially multinational corporations, to accumulate capital and effectively dominate the state, the economy and the society.<sup>282</sup>

### **Immediate Causes of the 1989 Anti-SAP Uprising**

The immediate factor that led to the 1989 anti-SAP uprising was the hardship SAP brought on the students and the majority of Nigerians. It, for instance, led to the progressive underfunding of tertiary institutions, resulting in the inability of these institutions to maintain their academic facilities, purchase books for their libraries, finance research, provide medical, welfare and social services to students, staff and their families, as well as conduct practical lessons for medical, engineering, agriculture and science students. etc.<sup>283</sup> But, most importantly, it led to a situation where most students could hardly eat once in a day, partly due to the retrenchment of their parents; late payment and, in some cases, nonpayment of the salaries and wages of their parents and guardians; cancellation of students' scholarship and bursary programmes by state governments; amongst others. In fact, so pathetic was the inability of most students to feed themselves that, whenever they met, it was not uncommon for one student to greet the other with "*O guy, manpikin neva waka o!*" (pidgin English meaning, "Hi guy, I have not eaten o!"). In addition, students were

... crowded into dilapidated hostels crying for renovation in a manner reminiscent of slave ships of old. They fight with themselves for breathing space in both their hostels and lecture rooms. They receive lectures through windows of congested lecture halls.

Books are scarce and sold at very prohibitive prices. Libraries, where they exist at all, are empty halls with yawning shelves scattered with few archaic and undusted books long overdue for revision. Laboratories are store houses of test-tubes and empty bottles of chemicals. Even basic essentials such as water and electricity are beyond the reach of students on campuses.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> For a critique of SAP, see Y. Bangura, "The 1988 Budget: Adjusting the Structural Adjustment", paper presented to the Seminar on the Budget, organised by the Nigeria Economic Society, Kaduna/Abuja Chapter, 16 January 1988; Y. Bangura, "IMF/World Bank Conditionality and Nigeria's Structural Adjustment Programme" in I. J. Havnevik (ed), *The IMF and World Bank in Africa: Conditionality, Impact and Alternative* (Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1987; A. Olukoshi (ed.), *Crisis and Adjustment in the Nigerian Economy*, JAD Publishers, Lagos, 1991; and P. F. Wilmot, "SAP – A Poem" in *New Dimension*, January 1988.

<sup>283</sup> See, for instance, NANS Press Conference by Ahmed Aminu Yusuf (Deputy President) and Chom Bagu (Public Relations Officer) on "The Commercialisation of Education, Assault on Students' Unionism and Mass Retrenchment of Workers," Being the Communique issued at the 12<sup>th</sup> Senate Meeting of NANS, 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1984, at the Kaduna Press Centre.

<sup>284</sup> V. Ikem, "Lamentations of a Student" in *National Concord*, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1990, p. 2.

SAP equally compelled many students to seek various avenues to survive on campus. While some female students took to prostitution and even peddled hard drugs to keep body and soul together, some of their male counterparts took to petty crimes and armed robbery to survive.<sup>285</sup> Majority of students, however, survived by begging their fellow students for money and food, as well as doing away with clothes, textbooks, luxuries and other things that previously made campus life “the best”. The various measures like appeals, petitions and call for dialogue adopted by NANS and its constituent unions, to resolve the problems confronting students were met with stiff oppositions from the school authorities and insults from the military governments. The failure of these measures led to protests, which, in turn, led to closure of many schools, including the University of Benin, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Lagos State University, Lagos State College of Education, Federal University of Technology in Minna, and Auchi Polytechnic, as well as the rustication and expulsion of students leaders and activists.<sup>286</sup> NANS, as a result, began a nationwide mobilisation of students to bring pressure to bear on the school authorities and on the governments to reopen the schools and recall all the rusticated and expelled students. It was in these mobilisation processes that students began to call for national protest against the policies and practices of the military government in its entirety.

However, the crushing effects of SAP, especially on the working people, most of whom were parents and relatives of students, equally played a highly significant role in compelling students and, by extension, NANS to organise the uprising. The *Sunday Concord*, in one of its editions,<sup>287</sup> concentrated on the “Hard Times” SAP brought on the working and other vulnerable people. In this edition, a 43 year-old liquidated artisan said:

... Life is pretty difficult. I make between one Naira and two Naira (beginning). I live on charity. I don't go in buses and taxis, I can't afford it. If I fall sick, I am sure I will die because I can't afford medical bill... Look, I picked this cloth I am wearing from the street. Life in heaven or hell should be more peaceful than here. This is worse than hell. You see, I was born well, that is why I can neither steal, nor pick from the trash cans. I think, I prefer death to living here.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> See, “The Big Sex Trade on Campus” in *Quality*, 14<sup>th</sup> June, 1990

<sup>286</sup> NANS' Publicity Bureau, A Call To Save Education (a handbill).

<sup>287</sup> *Sunday Concord*, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1989

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8

A 36 year-old retrenched engineer, turned truck-driver and married with four children, said thus of the hardship of SAP on him and his family:

... I earn N220 a month which I spend this way: N40 for house rent and N180 for food. Even so, the N180 food allocation is barely enough to last us for two weeks. So I turn to borrowing every month. I owe a lot of money to many people. I really can't figure how much I owe. I eat once a day, at time none, so that the food at home can go round... In frustration, I sold my bus for N500 in 1985. But I spent the money on food.

Life is hell for us – the poor. I have told my friends that heaven should be a lot better than here. Patriotism means nothing in an era of economic doom. MAMSER is a hot air, signifying nothing... The present situation is simply tragic.<sup>289</sup>

The “middle-classes”, including staff of tertiary institutions of learning, most of whom, prior to 1985, saw themselves as glorified members of the ruling classes and had lived comfortably, were equally affected by SAP:

... Today, the story is different... the large proportion of the middle class now found their fate inexorably bound with the fate of the working people... As their salaries, battered and neutralized by inflation, frightening prices of food, wares, spare parts, gas and other petroleum products, the middle class is pushed to the background. His usual cavalier attitude to the underprivileged – the urban and rural working class, the unemployed- has begun to give way to cynical concern at least and a commitment to their destiny which has become synonymous with his best.<sup>290</sup>

Coupled with the above was the increase in political repression, which, following the imposition of SAP, took a “fascist” dimension. This led the National President of the Academic Staff Unions of Universities (ASUU), Festus Iyayi, in February 1988, to warn the organised opponents of the General Babangida's regime that:

... We are thus faced by a monster which “like the pagan god would not drink the nectar but from the skulls of its slain victims.” In our own case, the situation is going to be made worst by the fact the pagan god will attempt much seriously than ever before to recruit servants and worshippers from our midst.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 8-9

<sup>290</sup> O. Obafemi, “The Demise of the Middle Class” in *The Guardian*, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 1989, p. 9

<sup>291</sup> F. Iyayi, “Presidential Address to the National Delegate Conference of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU)” at the University of Nigeria Nsukka, February, 1988, p. 10.

The various measures adopted by the government to counteract and liquidate the critical opponents of SAP and the regime confirmed Dr. Iyayi's warning. These measures included, but not restricted, to: the gagging of the press, including the closure of media outfits, the disappearance and killing of some journalists and social critics; the frequent hunting, arrest and detention of students and workers leaders and social critics; the visible presence of the members of State Security Services (SSS) in schools, trade union secretariats and media houses, etc.; the recruitment of some students' and working class leaders and activists as agents of the SSS and government informants;<sup>292</sup> and the cooptation, by ways of granting political appointments, to well-known and respected intellectuals and social critics, including Professor Wole Soyinka, Professor Ikenna Nzimiro, Tai Salorin, etc.; and the proscriptions of ASUU and the apex labour union, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) in 1988 for their opposition to SAP and daring to demand for improved working conditions for their members, amongst others.

But the military regime equally directed its hostilities to the generality of Nigerians. The deliberate promotion of ethnic, religious and regional antagonism by top state officials;<sup>293</sup> the government officialisation, institutionlisation, and glorification of bribery, corruption and nepotism; the crude misinformation, misrepresentation and miseducation of the populace on national issues by the government's Directorate of Mass Mobilisation for Self Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) and media;<sup>294</sup> and the sacking of villages and killing of protesting peasants, especially in the oil producing areas of Niger Delta,<sup>295</sup> amongst others, severely tensed the political arena. In fact, so tense was the situation in the country that Edwin Madunagu was compelled to write that, "not even during the colonial era, not even during the Civil War were the popular masses so legally demobilized, disarmed, atomized and alienated as they are now. The situation, indeed, has some fascist features."<sup>296</sup>

However, the mother of the factors, which sparked the 1989 anti-SAP uprising, was the statement by the National President of NLC, Pascal Bafayu, that "NANS and the NLC are two separate independent bodies. There is no link between the two bodies. We pursue our interests

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<sup>292</sup> See, for instance, CLO, *Decree No. 2: A Special Publication of Civil Liberties Organisation*, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1990 and Victims: CDHR Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 1989.

<sup>293</sup> A. Tanimu, et. el., "Nigeria Cannot Afford A Religious War", Mimeo. ABU Zaria, 16 January 1990.

<sup>294</sup> S. Bako, "MAMSER and Social Reforms", Paper presented at the National Conference on Mass Mobilisation, organised by MAMSER at the University of Jos, 25<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> January 1988.

<sup>295</sup> See, for instance, "Irri: Plundered, Raped" in *African Concord*, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1989.

<sup>296</sup> E. Madunagu, "Danger Signals" in *The Guardian*, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1988, p. 9.

separately though some of the interests sometimes converge.”<sup>297</sup> This statement, which was made following the government’s dissolution and restructuring of the NLC and the proscription of ASUU, was seen and interpreted by most students as: contrary to the NLC-NANS Accord to collectively fight for common interests; totally against the spirit and letter of *NLC Charter of Demands*; a betrayal of the joint struggles students and workers collectively waged since 1982; and a signal that the NLC leadership had abandoned its mission of defending, upholding and promoting the interests of the working class.

With the NLC President’s statement, the proscription of ASUU and the cooptation of well-known and respected intellectuals, labour leaders and social critics into the business of government, *the mass of Nigerian students came to see themselves as the only social force, best placed, because of their social positions, privileges and organising ability to be: the voice of the voiceless; the loudspeaker of the oppressed; the defender of the defenseless; the mobiliser of the demobilised; and the motivator of the masses.* Put differently, *students came to see themselves as the only social forces left to mobilise and organise the working and vulnerable masses to rise up and defend their class and national interests. But for most of the radical students’ leaders and activists, who controlled NANS, the struggle was more than opposing the military government and terminating SAP; it was about bringing down the government, with the active participation of the popular masses, from the streets, no matter the cost, and bringing about a just, democratic and independent Nigeria, a Nigeria free from imperialist domination and control.* One of these leaders was reported to have said, “[w]e have to drag these people [the military dictators] out of office; if necessary we must be prepared to die in the process.”<sup>298</sup>

These sentiments were well aired at that NANS’ Senate Meeting, which took place at the University of Ibadan in April 1989. Issues raised and thoroughly debate during the meeting were how best to stir the ordinary people to struggle for their rights; terminate military rule from the streets; and bring about a peoples’ democratic Nigeria, free from IMF, World Bank and generally imperialist domination. Strategies were devised on mobilising and organising primary pupils, secondary schools’ children, workers, retail traders, drivers, bus conductors and other critical forces to join the struggle. The 16<sup>th</sup> of May 1989 was declared as a “National Forum Day” to

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<sup>297</sup> Quoted from *The Punch*, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1989, p. 13.

<sup>298</sup> Quoted from *Liberty: A Quarterly Journal Newsletter of the Civil Liberty Organisation*, Vol. 1, No. 3, December 1990, p. 9.

discuss the terrible, miserable and shameful “State of the Nation” and decide on common line of action. It was agreed that, apart from the mobilisation of students on the campuses, press statements be constantly issued; press conferences be regularly held; mass rallies be organised within and outside the campuses; personal contacts be made with associations of the working and other vulnerable people; amongst others. Pamphlets, handbills, posters, etc., critical of SAP and the military governments, were to be massively produced and widely distributed within and outside the campuses by the constituent unions. These documents, it was equally agreed, should depict the degeneration of the campuses, the terrible state of the nation, and the miserable conditions of working people. Demands, centring on the students, working people and national interests, were to be put up in all publications.<sup>299</sup> One of the many handbills produced by NANS, specifically meant for students, for instance, demanded the followings:

1. Immediate repeal of Decree No. 6 which legalises the criminal policy of rationalisation of higher institutions of learning.
2. Abolition of all fees paid in all State Universities, examination fees in Federal Universities and higher institutions of learning.
3. Accreditation of all courses in Polytechnics and Colleges of Education (where this has not been done due to bureaucratic structures).
4. Government should, as a matter of urgency, increase the funding of education.
5. Introduction of re-sit examination in all higher institutions.
6. Removal of [Vice Chancellor] Mrs. Alele Williams from Uniben [University of Benin] and [Vice Chancellor] Professor Ndagi of F.U.T (Federal University of Technology) Minna in order to restore peace and decency in these campuses and rationality.
7. Release of the jailed NEPA [National Electric Power Authority] men and Mr. Femi Aborisade – Labour Activists.
8. The immediate termination of the IMF/World Bank imposed Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).
9. Government should unambiguously recognise the African National Congress (ANC) as the sole and authentic representative of the South African people in their struggle for freedom.
10. A constitutional guarantee of full employment for all Nigerians.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Report of the 1988-1989 NANS’ President, Salihu Muhammed Lukman, to the Popular Front of ABU Students on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1989.

<sup>300</sup> NANS’ Publicity Bureau, A Call to Save Education Now (a handbill).

Another handbill called on Nigerian students, in alliance with the working people, to rise up on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1989 in “Defence of Our Country” because:

... Nigerian students cannot afford to watch any longer while their lives are battered. We have appealed and demanded. They have refused to bulge. We have been patient enough. Everywhere the clarion call is for: ACTION NOW! NO TO IMF/WORLD BANK! NO TO IMPERIALIST! YES TO A GREATER NIGERIA. LONG LIVE NANS.<sup>301</sup>

### **The 1989 Great Anti-SAP Uprising**

The anti-SAP uprising began at the University of Benin on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1989, partly because of the highly strained relationship between the authorities and the students, partly because of its highly organised Student Union, partly because of its politically volatile and restless students leaders and activists, but mainly because of the disastrous impact of SAP on the people of Bendel State. By 25<sup>th</sup> May the peaceful students’ protest within the campus and its environs had spread to Ring Road (City Centre) of Benin-City. For, on this day, students of the University of Benin trekked to the Government House – a distance of more than twelve kilometres – to present a protest letter to the Head of the Military Junta, through the Bendel State Military Governor, Colonel Tunde Ogbeha. The letter, amongst others, called for the immediate termination of SAP.

But no sooner had the students reached the Government House than the residents of Benin joined the protest. The demonstrators, which also included primary and secondary school children, workers, market women, the unemployed, the lumpen proletariat, etc., set the Bendel State House of Assembly (which also housed the Ministry of Health) and the High Court ablaze. They vandalised the Benin Prison, “liberated” its 600 inmates, stormed its food store and took away food.<sup>302</sup> They equally:

... pulled down the gates of the Maximum Security Prison. There, they also liberated prisoners. And to make their escape real, the mob escorted them to Ring Road (the City Centre), where they were advised to flee. The prisoners welcomed the advice and fled in different directions.<sup>303</sup>

Criminals, in addition, turned the protest into a looting spree.

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<sup>301</sup> NANS’ Publicity Bureau, *Arise in Defence of Our Country* (a handbill).

<sup>302</sup> *African Concord*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1989, p. 23.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.

... The Lennard's shop on Ring Road had its shoes and stockings looted. The Museum was also emptied of its artefacts. The Benin branch of Central Bank was stormed but the detachment of armed anti-riot policemen resisted the assault. An attempt was made to raid the Airport but the Security men did not yield to the mob.<sup>304</sup>

The anti-SAP uprising in Benin was so serious and furious that the Military Governor mobilised the armed forces and the police to bring down the uprising. He, in fact, issued “a shoot-at-sight order” to the latter. Attempts by the security forces to compel the students to leave their campuses and close down the schools further worsened the uprising, as the students leaders equally ordered all protesters to “shoot Ogbeha [the Governor] at sight.”<sup>305</sup> On May 26, the students again took to the streets. But what became frightening to the government was that wherever:

... they marched, it was as if the market women, school children, jobless and all shades of Benin residents had been waiting for them. The whole of Benin residents was up in protest. A new slogan brewed almost automatically: “How many can they kill?” The slogan was chanted by rioters religiously. Thus, even while the security forces began to shoot with metallic bullets, they refused to give up.<sup>306</sup>

Other slogans chanted by the green leaves carrying protesters were: “SAP MUST GO!”; “WE ARE DYING OF HUNGER IN THE NAME OF SAP”; and “BABANGIDA MUST GO.”<sup>307</sup> They also sang different protest songs. But of all the songs, that of the shining and radical Jamaican Reggae Super Star, Peter Tosh, dominated the air. One of the songs went thus: “Down [op]pressor man/ Where you gonna run to on that day...”<sup>308</sup> while the other was

Everyone is crying out for Peace  
But no one is crying out for Justice.  
I don't want no Peace  
I need Equal Right and Justice.<sup>309</sup>

In reaction to Colonel Tunde Ogbeha's “shoot-at-sight” order to the security forces, the protesters sang thus:

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<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23

Tunde!  
Tunde!  
Tunde Ogbeha!!  
If we die today  
We shall die no more!!!<sup>310</sup>

By May 27, the uprising had been brought down, at great human cost. The streets of Benin-City were littered with green leaves, which were the symbol of *solidarity*. All schools were closed, the streets deserted, dusk to dawn curfew imposed and red-eyes, battle dressed and heavily armed security men, including soldiers, patrolled the streets.

At Ibadan, preparation for the actual anti-SAP protest began at the University of Ibadan at the mid-night of May 29, 1989. The next day, at around 6.00 a.m., the students of the university, along with those of other tertiary institutions of learning, took to the streets, chanting similar songs like those of Benin-City. Primary and secondary school children, market women, workers and the unemployed joined the protest. Commercial activities came to a complete standstill. Polling-booths were burnt down; bonfires were made with tyres and government vehicles; and barricades were erected all over the city.<sup>311</sup> But, what generally:

...became a source of panic was the sheer fervour and size of the protesters as they combed all parts of the city. The situation became so tense that the Oyo State Government sent out a detachment of military policemen to quell the riots. They were sent at about midday. But the riots did not come to an end until dusk. Police and students played a seek and throw missiles game. Once they were dispersed at a particular spot, the crowd went back to regroup and relaunch its offensive. In spite of the anger of the police, some of the policemen egged on the protesters to “carry on” with the demonstration. Saying “we all are suffering from the same SAP”.<sup>312</sup>

At Enugu, students of the University of Nigeria embarked on the anti-SAP protest as early as 6.30 a.m. on May 30, 1989. The students burned down the offices of the FMG propaganda agency MAMSER, destroyed government vehicles and erected barricades. The protest, which was joined by school children and other social groups, paralysed business

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<sup>310</sup> Interview with 1988-1989 NANS' Public Relations Officer, Gbenga Olawepo, on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1991.

<sup>311</sup> *African Concord*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1989, p. 24.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25

activities. Armed policemen and soldiers were drafted to strategic places such as the Government House, prisons, banks and markets in order to contain the protest.<sup>313</sup>

At Lagos, the Lagos State Security Committee issued a statement on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1989, closing down all institutions of higher learning in the state and advising parents and guardians to “take care and prevent their wards from being used by disgruntled elements”.<sup>314</sup> The closures were surely meant to pre-empt the anti-SAP uprising from reaching Nigeria’s economic capital, which was spreading like a bush-fire in the harmattan throughout the country. However, the closures did not stop the rain from falling, as students of higher institutions of learning woke up as early as 6.00a.m., the next day to begin the anti-SAP protest, with different protest songs against SAP, the military and General Babangida. The protest, which lasted for four days and in which market women, workers, artisans, petty traders, the unemployed and school children massively participated, paralysed commercial and government activities, led to the destruction of government buildings and vehicles, the looting of shops, the smashing of bill-boards, the setting up of bonfires in most streets, the barricading of international high-ways, and the littering of the streets with green leaves, amongst others. For instance:

On the Lagos-Ibadan expressway, the major link to different parts of the country, stranded vehicles stretched many kilometres, unable to proceed to their destinations. Many passengers had to brave it on foot, with their luggage slung over their heads. A few metres from the toll-gates, at the Lagos end, the demonstrators barricaded the expressway at both sides.<sup>315</sup>

Attempts by the protesters to occupy the Murtala Mohammed International Airport, Ikeja, were aborted, as “fierce-looking soldiers, under the command of a Captain, blocked the (Airport) road on both sides with armoured vehicles.”<sup>316</sup>

In some parts of Lagos, it was the unemployed who led the anti-SAP uprising; in other areas, it was the primary and secondary school children; and, yet, in others, it was the lumpen proletariat, popularly known as the “area-boys”. All were united against the hardship of SAP, imposed by the Military Government, IMF and World Bank. As the *Newswatch* reported:

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<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>315</sup> *Newswatch*, 10 July 1989, p. 11.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

One spokesman of the rioters, who claimed to have graduated from the University of Lagos in 1982 but has not been able to get a job since then, told the *Newswatch* that “the main aim of the protest was to paralyse business life in Lagos for at least two days and see whether the Government will not cave in. It was time to give the people power. We are fed up with the military and SAP”. However, primary and secondary children, who joined the riots said they did so to protest the ₦20 levy imposed by the Lagos State Government. Many children complained to the *Newswatch* that their parents could hardly feed them properly, let alone pay ₦20 levy. “I joined them” a young girl of about 12 told *Newswatch*. She was barefooted, carrying a slippers and right in the thick of demonstrators on the Ojota-Oregun Road.<sup>317</sup>

So massive, spirited and restless were the furious demonstrators in their struggle against SAP, the Government and the Military, that:

... Many times, the police had to regroup in several parts of the city because they were nearly over-whelmed by rampaging demonstrators, who appeared in the early hours of the morning to be well-organised. In some areas, policemen simply abandoned their posts to escape the rioters. However, they are helped by helicopters on reconnaissance flights through-out the city.<sup>318</sup>

At Zaria, attempts by Popular Front of ABU Students and the Students’ Vanguard to start the anti-SAP protest on the 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1989 were aborted by security agents and a combined team of pro-government students’ groups like Gamji Club, Students’ Peace Movement and MAMSER Club. However, after three days of vigorous debates within students and fierce propaganda by the Popular Front of ABU Students, the anti-SAP protest began at 4.00 p.m. in the campus, with the following song:

Solidarity Forever  
Solidarity Forever  
Solidarity Forever  
We shall Always Fight for Our Rights.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June, primary and secondary school children, the University junior staff, amongst others, joined the protest. Attempts by well-armed policemen to restrict the protest within the campus failed as the demonstrators called on the police to “join us” or “shoot us.” Like Benin-City, Ibadan and Lagos protesters, they sang protest songs. Amongst the protest songs were:

Haiya ooo; Haiya  
Haiya ooo; Haiya  
Haiya we don come o; Haiya

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<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Patapata we go die for NIGERIA; Haiya.<sup>319</sup>

We like ammm  
We like ammm  
We like ammm  
We like ammm  
We we like NIGERIA  
We like am pass IMF  
Everytin dey for NIGERIAAA ooooo  
Make we join hands,  
To make NIGERIAAA BETTER  
Make we joins hands  
To make NIGERIAAA GREATER aaa.<sup>320</sup>

Although the atmosphere was tense, students and police exchanged pleasantries during the protest in Zaria. This subsequently led to the drafting of well-armed military men, dressed in war uniforms, within and around the campuses and others strategic areas in Zaria. By 4<sup>th</sup> June, most students had vacated their campuses, following the invasion of the campuses by well-armed military, mobile policemen and SSS.

All over the country, students, workers, the unemployed, among others, protested in one form or another. In the Northern states, however, the protest was not as fierce as that of the Southern states, mainly because most of the schools were either on holidays, or had their resumption date postponed, while others closed in anticipation of the anti-SAP protest. In addition, a lot of student leaders and activists were arrested and detained by the State Security Service (SSS) as soon as the anti-SAP protest began in Benin-City. Be that as it may, students and other oppressed people protested in one form or another, sympathised and solidarised with their colleagues in other parts of the country and supported the forms the protest took.

### **State Response to the Anti-SAP Uprising**

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<sup>319</sup> This song, in pidgin English, means: “We have come again (with our protest). Come lightning, come thunder, we are ready to die for Nigeria”, meaning that “The worst the Military Government will do is to kill us in our protest”.

<sup>320</sup> This song, in pidgin English means: “We (Students) love Nigeria. We love it more than IMF. Everything is available in Nigeria. So let’s unite and make Nigeria Better and Greater.” This song is in reaction to Government, IMF and World Bank propaganda that: “There Is No Alternative to SAP”.

The reactions of the security forces to the anti-SAP uprising were highly barbaric. In Lagos, for instance, it was reported that wherever the police went to quell down the protest, everybody there was considered a student and, therefore, a potential rioter. They:

...unleashed counter violence on the people in areas where rioters damaged no vehicle and burnt no house, attack no policeman. Rioters were chased helter skelter. Policemen threw teargas at them with reckless abundance. Innocent people returning home from work were chased about the area (Ketu). Cases of looting and extortion were reported. People who could not buy their freedom from the police, were arrested and taken to the station.<sup>321</sup>

In the Ketu Police Station, scores of detainees “died of exhaustion and suffocation induced by overcrowding” while others, in trying to prove their innocence, were shot to death by the police.<sup>322</sup> The outcome of the brutality and barbarism of the Nigeria Police Force and the armed forces was the death of many citizens, especially in Lagos and Benin. In Lagos State, the police admitted that “about 800 people” were arrested and detained. This figure is highly incorrect; for at the Ketu Police Station alone, “more than 200 people” were arrested and detained on the first day of the uprising.<sup>323</sup> The official figure of the dead nation-wide was officially put at “20”.<sup>324</sup> This figure is extremely conservative, because in Lagos State, police “dumped 50 in mortuary” at the Ikeja hospital alone, and:

...the victims might have been some of the people arrested during the Wednesday rampage but who were tear-gassed allegedly by some overzealous policemen in their cells in Ketu Police Station ... [And] at the General Hospital, Marina, an attendant confirmed on Saturday that “a large number of corpses” were deposited by the police at the mortuary last Thursday.<sup>325</sup>

The military junta reaction to the uprising, apart from the rationalisation of the killings and injury of protesters and non-protesters, was that the students were instigated to protest by outside, non-students forces. The Head of State, General Babangida, specifically identified four groups of people who caused the uprising; namely: (i) the business community and professional

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<sup>321</sup> *African Concord*, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1989, p. 27.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>324</sup> *National Concord*, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1989, p. 27.

<sup>325</sup> *The Punch*, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1989, pp. 1 & 7.

commission agents who were offended by the removal of import license and the plugging of other avenues of making quick money; (ii) the political class who looted and plundered the nation's wealth between 1979 and 1983 and thereby plunged the country into heavy external debts; (iii) the professional politicians who were angry because they were excluded from partisan politics and, therefore, wanted to hold the nation to ransom; and (iv) the extremists who were offended because they were prevented from exploiting religious and ethnic sentiments to further their private interests.<sup>326</sup> The primary objectives of these “detractors”, according to him, was to use SAP as a smokescreen “to destroy the military in its ability”, to undermine its “cohesion”, its “will to carry on with the tasks ahead” and to “ruin our fatherland”.<sup>327</sup> He then appealed to the military not to:

... allow itself to fall prey to the divisive antics of our detractors. We must not allow the military as an institution be humiliated or be disgraced out of office as was the case in some countries which are now back to square one or even worse. We, by our collective action, hold the key to the stability of this country and guarantee of a better future for our children and their children.<sup>328</sup>

This statement by the head of the military junta came under sharp criticism from right, left and centre as well as from professionals and non-governmental organisations.<sup>329</sup> The Civil Liberties Organisation, for instance, stated thus:

The truth of the matter is that most Nigerians are dying of hunger, unemployment and economic frustration, a situation that is worsened by the lifestyles and comments of top government officials who have lost touch with the people's aspirations.<sup>330</sup>

In order to weaken the popular unity which the anti-SAP uprising generated, and break the unity and solidarity of Nigerian students, along regional and ethnic lines, the government ordered the closure of the Universities of Benin, Lagos, Ibadan, Nigeria, Bendel State, Lagos State, Imo State for nine months and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (including its Enugu Campus) and the Ondo State University for three months. The closure, according to the then Minister of Education, Professor Jibril Aminu, became necessary because of the “intolerable

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<sup>326</sup> *The Guardian*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1989, p. 28.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, p.

<sup>328</sup> Quoted from *National Concord*, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1989, p. 9.

<sup>329</sup> See, *African Concord*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1989.

<sup>330</sup> Quoted from *African Guardian*, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1989, p. 28.

lawlessness displayed by their students with widespread riots, arson and rampage spreading into surrounding city areas”.<sup>331</sup>

The shutting down of these institutions, all based in the South of Nigeria, did not go well, especially with the people from that area. This is understandable, considering the fact the leadership of the military junta were predominantly from the North of Nigeria. The action, besides, was meant to portray the anti-SAP protest as a “Southern” and not “Northern” affair. Nevertheless, the selective closures came under sharp criticism across the country and sparked up street protest. In Warri, for instance, primary and secondary school children, as well as students from the School of Nursing and other tertiary institutions of learning blocked all the major streets in the town. In addition:

... Government vehicles were set ablaze and shops and markets were ransacked while demonstrators chanted “re-open shut Universities and release Gani Fawehinmi”... Motorists tied green leaves to their vehicle as a sign of solidarity with the demonstrators before they were allowed free passage.<sup>332</sup>

As a result of the protest, the army, navy and police were immediately mobilised to guard “strategic places in the town” like the Aladja Steel Plant, the Refinery, the Petro-Chemical Plants and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) Zonal Office.<sup>333</sup> The demonstration spread from Warri to Agbarho and Ughelli, where protesters made bonfires on the roads, vandalised the New Nigerian Bank building, and burned down post offices. In Ughelli, the building housing the Ministry of Education and the High Court were also burnt.<sup>334</sup> In Benin, a protest was averted when policemen “intercepted students carrying a mock-coffin and were heading for the heart of the city.”<sup>335</sup> In Oyo State, students of the Polytechnic, Ibadan, requested the school authorities to close their institution “as a mark of solidarity with the students of the six universities that had been put under lock and key by the Federal Government”.<sup>336</sup>

Appeals for the re-opening of the universities came from “traditional rulers and eminent citizens”, who presented the students as “our children” who were instigated to riot by external, non-students forces. In the course of appealing for the re-opening of these institutions, ethno-

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<sup>331</sup> Quoted from *The African Guardian*, p. 28

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

regional sentiments were brought to play. Thus, the “Southern Traditional Rulers”- from where the closed institutions were located – met at Owerri to “present a united view-point” to General Babangida to re-open the institutions. On the other hand, some Northern politicians alleged that the anti-SAP uprising was an attempt by “Southerners” to destroy General Babangida’s administration, and that “Northerners” would not sit down and see it happen.<sup>337</sup>

The appeals from the “traditional rulers and eminent citizens”, it must be underscored, did not raise the basic issues, which led to the anti-SAP uprising, namely: hunger, poverty, inflation, unemployment and the lack of democratic rights. Nor did they even raise the demands of the students. Instead, they condemned the students as “spoilt children” who were suffering from youthful exuberance. In addition, they tried to separate the student struggles and demands from those of the working and other oppressed people, who they described as “vandals”, hooligans” and “rascals,” who exploited the students protests to loot and destroy public and private properties. It was, therefore, not surprising that these “traditional rulers and eminent citizens” came under sharp criticism from NANS, because their appeals:

...betray a most revolting fraudulence on the part of this group of people who have not said one word to the Government on how to urgently tackle the festering and enduring campus cancer eating away our University system.<sup>338</sup>

Coupled with the above, was the nation-wide arrest and detention of student leaders and activists, as well as pro-democracy activists by the SSS, under the State Security Decree No.2. Some of the arrested students practically spent two months in detention without trial.<sup>339</sup>

Finally, the FMG sponsored some right-wing students organisations like the Students’ Peace Movement of Nigeria (SPMN), the Gamji Memorial Club (GMC), and Students’ Action Committee for Peace (SACP) to campaign against the anti-SAP uprising and for peace in the campuses in particular and the society at large, no matter the social and political situation. The University of Lagos’ Students Action Committee for Peace, for instance, stated that “Our aim is to ensure that academic calendar years are no longer interrupted by demonstrations and our universities no longer theatre of violence and death.”<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> See, *Newswatch*, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1989, p. 10.

<sup>338</sup> Quoted from *Vanguard*, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1989, pp. 8 & 16.

<sup>339</sup> *Victims: CDHR Newsletter*, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 1989.

<sup>340</sup> Quoted from *The Democrat*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1989, p. 3.

Yet, all these propaganda did not win sympathy for the government as newspaper articles and editorials called on the military junta to concretely address the issues raised by NANS and the protesters. For instance, a Lagos-based daily, *The Guardian*, editorialised thus:

The authorities must come to term with the fact that our students even in the absence of an officially recognized apex organisation have been acting nationally. The ban on NANS should therefore, be lifted. Only by doing so will the Government be able to discuss with Nigerian students as social group.<sup>341</sup>

### **Conclusion: The Significance of the 1989 Great Anti-SAP Uprising**

The 1989 anti-SAP uprising did not lead to the termination of SAP. Rather, the military regime expressed its commitment and determination to consolidate the “gains” of SAP. Nevertheless, the May- June anti-SAP uprising was the most significant confrontation between the state and the popular masses, led by NANS. This is so despite the fact that the NLC did not in any way support or participate in the protest. For sure, the 1989 anti-SAP protest was not the first popular protest against SAP. Between 1986 and 1987, women, led by the Market Women Association, were constantly demonstrating in Benin-City and Abeokuta against inflation, hunger, the increase in school fees and the introduction of different types of levies. In 1988, students, led by NANS, organised a nation-wide protest against the withdrawal of subsidies in petroleum products. This protest was followed by wide-cat strikes by labour unions throughout the country. But these protests were only directed at aspect(s) of SAP. The May-June 1989 anti-SAP uprising was, however, the first nation-wide mass protest- against SAP in its totality, the hardship it brought on the majority of Nigerians, as well as the IMF, World Bank and their Nigerian allies. It was an uprising on the offensive, not on the defensive.

The May-June 1989 anti-SAP uprising shattered the government’s propaganda on the “gains of SAP”. For it showed the massive disenchantment of the people against SAP, the hardship that followed its imposition and its Nigerian executors. But equally important, it showed that no amount of repression, cooptation and cooperation of labour leaders, radical academicians and social critics, as well as other corrupting influences like bribery, which the regime was notoriously known for, were capable of stopping the popular masses from fighting against an adjustment programme that threatened their very existence. In fact, the:

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<sup>341</sup> *The Guardian*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1989.

...widespread nature of the May 1989 Anti-SAP uprising shows once again that the Nigerian people are tired of the *Violence of SAP*... Following massive violent repression of the Anti-SAP uprisings, various mass organisations, professional groups, market women, students' movement and individual have called for the SCRAPPING OF SAP.<sup>342</sup>

That the FMG came out with what it called "SAP Relief Package," immediately following the uprising, in itself, was an admittance that SAP was highly unpopular and had failed the nation, because of the severe hardship it brought on the working and other vulnerable people. Therefore, the anti-SAP uprising was a justified and patriotic act; a fact which compelled the military junta to embark on projects and programme to give SAP a "human face." This, in turn, belied the various propaganda by the government which stated that the uprising was instigated by discredited and disgruntled politicians and extremists, using students and "vandals", "hooligans" and other "undesirables in the society" "to ruin our fatherland."

The May-June 1989 uprising brought greater respect and honour to Nigerian students as a social group. With the uprising in particular and the refusal of the NLC to in any way support the protest, Nigerians, both elites and non-elites, came to see the students as: the conscience of the nation; as the only incorruptible and irrepressible social group in the society; and therefore, as their allies and spokespersons. It was, therefore, not surprising that prisoners, including hardened criminals, happily gave arrested and detained student leaders and activists V.I.P (Very Important Personality) treatments in cells and prisons and lectured them on how to overcome police and SSS tricks of extracting information. As a result of this, some detained student leaders and activists were kept away from hardened criminals.<sup>343</sup>

The May-June 1989 anti-SAP uprising provided the basis for Nigerians to vent their sentiments and energy against military rule and entrench their desire for popular democracy. The songs, slogans and placards of the protesters nation-wide reflected the desire of the people for popular democracy, good governance and democratic rule, in which their interests, welfare and wellbeing were as central as their human, civil and democratic rights. By extension, therefore, the uprising showed the masses' hatred of military rule. For instance:

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<sup>342</sup> *The Alternative: Organ for the Struggle against Exploitation and Oppression*, July 1989, p. 2.

<sup>343</sup> Interview with Salihu Mohammed Lukman and Gbenga Olawepo.

Right, left and centre, the military as an institution is coming under increasing attacks. Its leadership is being suspected of not being above board, and its integrity and honesty are being openly questioned. Soldiers in the rank and file are being accused openly of constituting a privileged class, living a life immune from the suffering of their civilian brethren. Some of these charges ... may be exaggerations. But there is no denying the groundswell of cynicism and distrust civilians now harbour against the military, and their mounting readiness to defy military authorities, and confront soldiers eyeball to eyeball. It appears the military uniform that used to make civilians hold soldiers in awe has lost its mystique. Civilians don't any more run scared when they see soldiers or even their emissaries.<sup>344</sup>

In fact, during the uprising, with the exception of Lagos, the police were sympathetic to the protesters, and in places like Ibadan and Zaria, they even urged students to carry on with the protest, as they too were also victims of the hardship of SAP. This significantly explains why soldiers were put on red alert all over the country and in some cases, were drafted to maintain "law and order". Hence, General Babangida's appeal to the armed forces not to allow the "the military as an institution be humiliated or disgraced out of office."<sup>345</sup>

The May-June 1989 uprising, by extension, intensified the struggle for democracy and the defence of human rights. It, more than any issue, brought to the limelight human rights organisations like Committee for the Defence of Human Rights and Civil Liberty Organisation, as they increasingly intensified the struggle for the release of anti-SAP detainees, political prisoners, etc. The uprising, according to NANS, led to the:

- ❖ Release of 3,000 political detainees.
- ❖ Creation of People's Bank.
- ❖ "SAP Relief" buses for higher institutions.
- ❖ "Amendment" of the obnoxious Decree No. 2.
- ❖ "SAP Relief" packages for Nigerian workers.
- ❖ 62,000 jobs for the unemployed.
- ❖ Abrogation of the backward "Wandering" law.
- ❖ Release of Chief Gani Fawehinmi, Balarabe Musa and other prisoners of conscience.
- ❖ 20 Million Naira "grant" to Federal Universities.<sup>346</sup>

Although, the first claim can be described as an exaggeration, and the gains criticised as limited, the fact remains that they were borne out of sorrow, tears and blood.

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<sup>344</sup> *African Concord*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1989, p. 10.

<sup>345</sup> Quoted from *The Guardian*, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1989; also see *African Concord*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1989.

<sup>346</sup> NANS' Poster titled, "Greater Nigerian Students: Remember the Great Anti-SAP Protest." 1990.

**Labour Movement and the Struggle for Freedom, Social Justice  
and Democratic Governance in Nigeria**

**Comrade Martin Adekunle Egbanubi\***

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**Abstract**

The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or oppressive authority of another man, but to have collective power established by popular consent, in the commonwealth, not under the dominion of any will, or restraint of any law, but as expressed in the constitution and international treaties or covenants. Without doubt, freedom is a basic value that is shared by virtually all political actors. Philosophers such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and Karl Marx, as well as representatives of Critical Theory, have, at various historical moments, thought through and described how freedom might be realised.<sup>347</sup> The global advocate of social justice is the International Labour Organisation (ILO). It functions in a democratic way by taking interest in the protection of working class throughout the world. Fundamental principles of labour rights and human rights are set out in the ILO's Constitution of 1919 and in the Declaration of Philadelphia of 1944 (appended to the Constitution). In particular, the Preamble to the Constitution refers to the "recognition of the principle of freedom of association" to confront injustice, hardship and privation. The Declaration of Philadelphia reaffirms that "freedom of expression and association are essential to sustained progress" and that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, ... birth or other status."

The labour movement in Nigeria, in strong collaboration with the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other social movements, has waged a significant struggle to ensure social justice in the country. The solidarity exhibited by these movements has brought about

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<sup>347</sup> See, for instance, J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Cambridge University Press, London, 1988.

collective actions in the struggle against all forms of anti-people and neo-liberal policies of the state over the years. The Labour and Civil Society Coalition (LASCO) platform was used at different times in the history of Nigeria to champion the course of the workers and masses, promoting human rights and democratic values. This paper seeks to x-ray the dialectical concept of economic and socio-political struggle of the Nigerian Labour Movement.

## **Introduction**

The working class in Nigeria just like its counterpart anywhere in the world, is represented by the trade unions and working class struggle is epitomised by the ideology of trade unionism. The struggle of the Labour Movement in Nigeria is driven by the collective aspirations of the working class from colonial to post-colonial or neo-liberal era. The Nigerian labour is a forerunner of socio-economic and pro-democracy struggles in Nigeria, providing the foundation for efflorescence civil society. The labour movement is often described as the ‘veteran’ of democratic struggles in the country. It spearheaded the struggles, and endured stiff repression from the state, particularly in the early days of the struggle (1970s-1990s), when the state was under military control. Indeed, the history of trade union movement in Nigeria and elsewhere is closely knit with the struggles for democratic values such as human rights, welfare, wage, and equal franchise.<sup>348</sup>

Trades unions have become key components of most modern societies. The nature and practice of trade unionism are, however, quite different, even in otherwise similar societies. The United Kingdom and the United States, for example, could be considered as similar as societies could be (being the leading “liberal market economies” in the world), but they have quite different types of trade unions and approaches to trade unionism. Similarly, France and Germany, two leading “coordinated market economies” in the West, have clearly different trade union characteristics, while China and India, with socialist market economy model, do not have the same trade union structure and practice. From the African trade union perspectives, there are distinct traits that mark the industrial relations systems and trade union practices as heritage of our colonial past; that is, along English-speaking and French-speaking Africa lines. On the other hand, there are specific features of trade unionism and trades unions even in the closest of systems. The labour movement is a broad category which covers the various efforts of working

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<sup>348</sup> U. A. Tar, “Organized Labour and Democratic Struggles in Nigeria,” *Journal of Information Society and Justice*, Vol. 2 No 2, June 2009, P. 165.

people, at combining their forces, by building collective organisations and solidarity. Labour regime buttresses the notion of formal and informal rules that govern the relationship between labour and capital.

The nature of the state, to a greater extent, determines its relationship with labour and wider civil society. Labour regime also implies an area of state - civil society relations. In the era of neo-liberal globalisation, this often tends to reduce the power of the state to mere enforcer of policies or decisions which emerge from the world market. Series of contestation and agitation arose; trade unions and generally labour movement represent the aspiration of the popular demands for social justice and fairer globalisation. This shows how labour goes beyond its traditional role of protecting wages and working conditions, but often embedded with issues of power relations and democracy.<sup>349</sup>

The new global development agenda, enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, has since the early days of its negotiation been accompanied by the slogan and ambition to "leave no one behind". For workers and the union movement, this means recognising and taking appropriate action on the ever increasing inequalities and social injustices people face in the world of work, within and between countries is inevitable. It is based on this background that this paper seeks to examine the role of Nigerian working class movement in the struggle for freedom, social justice and democratic governance.

### **Historical Perspective of Working Class Movement and Class Struggle in Nigeria**

In the early colonial period, the major employer of African labour was the state, and the earliest experience of organised class struggle in sub-Saharan Africa, whether in the form of popular protest or workers' action, was among public sector workers (notably dockers and railway men). One of the earliest strikes in Africa took place in Freetown harbour, Sierra Leone, in 1874. This was only two years after the congress of the International Workingmen's Association in The Hague, the culminating point in the development of the First International, which considered economic struggle to be a prerequisite (the 'lever') for the struggle of the working class against the political power of its exploiters.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> G. Williams, *Democracy, Labour and Politics in Africa and Asia: Essays in Honour of Bjorn Beckman*. Centre for Research and Documentation. CRD, Kano, Nigeria, 2004.

<sup>350</sup> D. Seddon, "Popular Protest and Class Struggle in Africa: An Historical Overview" in *Class Struggle and Resistance in Africa*, Cheltenham GL 54 5HG, England.

The historic abolition of slave trade and the introduction of wage labour brought a new dimension to the struggle for freedom, socio-economic and political rights in Nigeria. The early workers' collective action in Nigeria was the Lagos strike of 1897. In April of that year, the governor of Lagos decided to cut wage rate of public sector workers and to increase productivity by altering the structure of the working day and came up with new terms and conditions of employment. This action triggered off a major strike by workers, especially in the Public Works Department (PWD).<sup>351</sup> This strike, which was the first major attempts made by Nigerian workers to assert their rights, was by Artisan Workmen in the Public Works Department (PWD) who went on a 3 day strike in 1897.<sup>352</sup> Gradually, across Africa, more developed forms of resistance to exploitation and oppression were adopted as the numbers and self-consciousness of the working class grew. However, in Nigeria the first organisation that is known to have had interest in trade union activities was the Mechanics Mutual Aid Provident and Mutual Improvement Association formed in July 1883.

The first attempt at union formation was first noticed in Nigeria early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 1912, the first trade union, known as the Southern Nigeria Civil Service Union (SNCSU), was formed in Nigeria. The union later changed its name to the Nigeria Civil Service Union (NCSU), after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1914. The working class struggle, using the platform of Nigeria Civil Service Union, assumed a classical dimension from 1912 to 1919 when the main preoccupation was the agitation for 'war bonuses', which was some sort of relief payment to reduce the hardships arising out of the First World War. This led to the implementation of 30% of the pre-war salary as war bonus to African staff in addition to prevailing salaries. The period of the great depression from 1929 also witnessed another agitation by workers to agitate for increased wages and the demand for Africanisation of various posts some of which had been grudgingly granted, opened the flood-gate for the emergence of other unions.<sup>353</sup> Other unions subsequently formed

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<sup>351</sup> A. G. Hopkins, "The Lagos Strike of 1897: An Exploration in Nigerian Labour History," *Past and Present*, No. 35, 1966.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>353</sup> See, T. M. Yesufu, *An Introduction to Industrial Relations in Nigeria*, Ibadan and London: Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research and Oxford University, 1962; W. Ananaba, *The Trade Union Movement in Nigeria*, Africana Publishing Corporation, New York, 1970; and F. Adewumi, *Trade Unionism in Nigeria: Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Lagos, Nigeria, 1997.

included the Nigerian Railway Native Staff Union which was formed in 1919<sup>354</sup> and the Nigeria Union of Teachers in 1931.<sup>355</sup>

The colonial administration in 1938 enacted the Trade Union Ordinance which marked the formal recognition of trade unionism in Nigeria. The ordinance laid down mode of registration of trade unions and prescribed the rights and obligations of unions in the employer-employee relationships. By 1975, during the Military regime of General Murtala Mohammed, trade unions in the country had risen astronomically, thus necessitating in 1976, the government's establishment of a Commission of inquiry into the activities of the various unions and appointment of an administrator to administer the unions and come up with a structure for the proper administration of the unions. This became necessary as the unions were polarised into ideological divide (the east and west bloc) which was creating problems and industrial crises in the country. Towards the end of 1977, these unions were restructured into 42 along industrial lines. The government also insisted on the formation of a Labour Centre as there were various multiple centres. In February 1978, under the Military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) was formed and inaugurated. The then 42 industrial unions became affiliates of the Nigeria Labour Congress with a legal backing of Trade Union (Amendment) Decree 22 of 1978. In 1989, the trade unions were again further restructured to become 29 affiliate unions to the Nigeria Labour Congress making it the only labour centre in the country.<sup>356</sup>

However, the Obasanjo's administration in 2004 sent a bill to the National Assembly for the amendment of the Trade Union Act 1990. The bill was eventually passed into law as Trade Union Amendment Act 2005, the Act led to the democratisation of labour centres, leading to the birth of Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUCN), thus, breaking the monopoly of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) as the only labour centre since 1978. The Trade Union Congress of Nigeria has existed before without official recognition under different names; first as Federation of Senior Staff Associations of Nigeria (FESSAN), then as Senior Staff Consultative Association

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<sup>354</sup> L. M. E. Emejulu, *A Brief History of the Railway Workers Union*, Yaba - Lagos, Nigeria: Chuks, Undated.

<sup>355</sup> See, E. E. Uvieghara, *Trade Union Law in Nigeria*, Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1976.

<sup>356</sup> See, M. A. Tokunboh, *Labour Movement in Nigeria: Past & Present*, Ikeja-Lagos, Nigeria: Lantern Books, 1985; D. Otobo, *Foreign Interests and Nigerian Trade Unions*, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Ltd., 1986; D. Otobo, *The Role of Trade Unions in Industrial Relations*, Oxford: Malthouse Press, 1987; D. Otobo, *State and Industrial Relations in Nigeria*, Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1988; D. Otobo *The Trades Union Movement in Nigeria*, Lagos, Benin, Ibadan, Jos Oxford: Malthouse Press Ltd., 1995; and Y. Bangura, "Nationalism, Accumulation and Labour Subordination in Nigeria", paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria, May 1985.

of Nigeria (SESCAN) and, finally, it was registered as a labour centre with the name, Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUCN) on 8th of August, 2005. The history of working class movement will be incomplete without the mention of the struggle for the official declaration of International Workers' Day as a work-free day in Nigeria. The labour movement in Nigeria, after a long period of agitations, was able to achieve the declaration of May First as a national public holiday during the second republic to celebrate International Workers Day. The first official declaration of May Day holiday was made by a pro-worker political party, the Peoples' Redemption Party led government in Kano State. On 1<sup>st</sup> May 1980, the then Executive Governor of the State, Late Alhaji Abubakar Rimi, declared that:

... Today, May 1,1980, is being celebrated in Kano State as a work-free day in recognition of the contribution of the Nigerian working class to the material, social and political progress in Nigeria. I am proud to say that my government in Kano State is the first to declare May 1 a work-free day in honour of the working class the world over.<sup>357</sup>

A major victory was subsequently won when May 1, 1981 was declared as a national public holiday by former President Shehu Shagari of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

### **Social Movements, Collective Struggle and Working Class Solidarity against Dominance of State Power in Nigeria**

The emergence of a unipolar world economic order, in which the might of capital has been strengthened tremendously, constitutes a major threat to the well-being of workers and other vulnerable groups in society. Nigerian workers must come to terms with this grim reality, which demands unity and solidarity among workers, as well as between workers and other vulnerable group in the larger society as a whole.<sup>358</sup>

Trade union is the most obvious foundation of workers' collective actions. It is an organisation of the labouring masses to overcome the adversities they face and to protect workers and improve their conditions of work. The working class solidarity across the world draws its strength fundamentally from the famous final phrase of *Manifesto of the Communist Party*,

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<sup>357</sup>M. A. Rimi, *Struggle for Redemption: Selected Speeches of Mohammad Abubakar Rimi*, Northern Nigerian Publishing Company Limited, Zaria, 1981.

<sup>358</sup>F. Adewumi, "Unity and Division: The Dialectics of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement," *African Journal of Business Management*, 2007, pp. 055-063, June 2007 Available online <http://www.academicjournals.org/ajbm> ISSN 1993-8233 ©2007 Academic Journals

“*Working Men of All Countries, Unite!*”<sup>359</sup> which in the original German means “*Proletarier aller Länder, vereinigt euch!*” Thus, a more correct translation would be “Proletarians of all countries, Unite!” or “Workers of the World, Unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains!” That was the clarion call of Karl Marx and his comrade, Friedrich Engels, in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* of 1848. That call was based on the enormity of the task before workers in the struggle between labour and capital, not just within the workplace but also in the general class struggle to overthrow the yoke of capital. Because capital is concentrated social power, in a context in which the worker has only his or her individual labour power, it is considered imperative for workers to be united in confronting the enormous power of capital. The unity of workers makes the trade union a complete organisation and constitutes the foundation of the union’s strength. The concept of collectivity or social character of trade unions means that, to a great extent, union’s power rest upon the willingness of members to unite. For Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the working class are the only revolutionary class confronting the capitalist class. In the *Manifesto of the Communist Manifesto* they declared that:

... Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.”

In the struggle against all forms of oppression and dominance of state power, the working class movements in Nigeria have, over the years, formed a formidable alliance with other social movements. Indeed, Nigeria has had a vibrant civil society in which the mass media, trade and professional unions, students associations, human and civil rights groups have been able to act as an effective counterweight against the state. The Labour Civil Society Coalition (LASCO) provided a platform for these social movements to work together and wage a collective struggle against anti-people policies of the state and imperialist exploitative agenda.

Bratton, in a broader African context, lends voice not only to the historic existence of civil society in Africa before independence, but also acknowledges its capacity to mobilise popular support, when he avers that far from being stunted in sub-Saharan Africa, it is often vibrant. While many pre-colonial cultures may have lacked states, they certainly did not lack

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<sup>359</sup> K. Marx, and F. Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party” in *Marx and Engels Selected Works*, Vol. 1, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977.

civil society, in broad sense of a bevy of institutions protecting collective interests. Africans invented forms of voluntary associations during the colonial period as a response to the disruptive impact of urbanisation and commercialisation. They gave collective shape to new occupational identities (peaceful movements, labour unions, professional associations). Many of these voluntary associations became explicitly political by giving voice, first to protest the indignities of colonial rule, and later, to the call for independence.<sup>360</sup>

Thus, the struggle by civil society in Nigeria for democracy clearly predates the upheavals in Eastern Europe and third wave of democracy in the late 1980s and 1990s. The struggle for popular empowerment had been a continuing phenomenon since the immediate independence years and the struggle of Nigeria's popular civil society organisations is influenced and engendered by the exploitative, hegemonic and dominant character of the state.<sup>361</sup> Following a more general African experience, but one that resonates in Nigeria, that it had been civil society that had actually overthrown the colonial state. Associational activity, trade unions, professional societies and community organisations had all contributed to making the nationalist movements the powerful forces that they were.

Colonialism induced labour and youth activism in Nigeria, leading to the formation of the labour union, Nigerian Youth Movement, and the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS), now National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), to mention but a few. The colonial exploitation of Nigerians was the catalyst for activism "as a component of the larger Nigerian anti-colonial freedom movement".<sup>362</sup> These social movements in strong alliance with the Nigerian Labour Movement also engaged in Pan-African liberation struggle and participated in various class struggle and resistance movements across Africa, such as class struggle against apartheid in South Africa, colonial rules in Angola, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Namibia, Guinea Bissau, and so on.

The establishment of the modern state by the British colonialists led to new social class formations including the new modern labour force used for the development of the capitalist system in Nigeria. This created segregation and engendered contradictions in the colonial economy that nurtured associational life among the exploited working class to challenge the

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<sup>360</sup> M. Bratton, M "Beyond the State: Civil Society and Associational Life in Africa", *World Politics*, Vol. 41, No.3, April, 1989, p. 411.

<sup>361</sup> O. Osiki, "Personalities and Labour Activism in Nigeria: The Contributions of Michael Imuodu and Adams Oshiomhole", *Information, Society and Justice*, Vol.2, No.2, June 2009, pp.156.

<sup>362</sup> E. Iweriebor, "Radicalism and the National Liberation Struggles, 1930-1950", in A. Oyebade (ed.), *The Foundations of Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Toyin Falola*, Africa World Press, Inc., Trenton, NJ, 2003, p. 113.

obnoxious policies of the colonial state, including forced labour, taxation, imposed agricultural development programmes, etc.<sup>363</sup> So, “a domain of resistance populated by several indigenous groups often led by urban professional and wage labourers” emerged “to challenge the colonial state.”<sup>364</sup> Civil society activism was a consequence of an anti-state struggle of indigenous people trapped by the contradictions of the developing capitalist system in Nigeria.<sup>365</sup>

Marxism holds that the state is an instrument, an organ, for the domination of one class by another. In capitalist societies, thus, state is but an Executive Committee for managing the entire affairs of the bourgeoisie.<sup>366</sup> The history of state formation in Nigeria, dating from the colonial period, portrays the state as an arena of power struggle among various interest groups. The Nigerian State is, thus, “an agency in the hands of the ruling class who manipulate it in achieving desired objective.”<sup>367</sup>

According to Grant, the Marxian theory of surplus value explains the price of production of commodities in that capitalist only gets the cost of production of his commodity plus the average rate of profit. Thus, some capitalists will be paid below the actual rate, others above. Because of the different organic composition of different capitals, only in this complicated fashion does the law of value reveal itself. Marx posited that surplus value must necessarily be produced in order to develop industry to the point where the state, money, and the proletariat itself and all the other survivals of capitalism will have disappeared. So long as the working class exists as a class, surplus value will be produced.<sup>368</sup> The negotiation of a contract, formal or informal, between capital and workers, wherein workers sell their labour power, by no means guarantees, that labour power will actually be converted into work. And this is true of both sides of the question both of work as the production of use values and of work as the production of surplus value. The working day, Marx shows, is one in which each side has certain aims about how long, how intensely and under what conditions, the work will be performed. The capitalist

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<sup>363</sup> Ake, C., *A Political Economy of Africa*, Longman, Lagos, 1981.

<sup>364</sup> Tar, “*Organized Labour and Democratic Struggles in Nigeria*”

<sup>365</sup> Williams, G. (2004), *Democracy, Labour and Politics in Africa and Asia: Essays in Honour of Bjorn Beckman*, p.12

<sup>366</sup> See, Marx, and F. Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”. Also, see, V. I. Lenin, “The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution” in *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 25, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977); and T. Grant, *The Marxist Theory of the State: A Militant Pamphlet* Cambridge Heath Press Limited, London E8 3PN. August 1980.

<sup>367</sup> Tar, “*Organized Labour and Democratic Struggles in Nigeria*,” p. 2

<sup>368</sup> Grant, *The Marxist Theory of the State: A Militant Pamphlet*

seeks more work, while the workers seek less work. There is, thus, a struggle that takes many forms.<sup>369</sup>

Against capital's techniques of control such as the wage hierarchy, despotic oversight, and piece wages, the working class pits absenteeism, sabotage, loafing on the job, strikes, and so on. As in the question of whether the working class can be forced to sell its labour-power at all, we see that "predisposition" to crisis means the predisposition of the working class to struggle against capital's domination and exploitation. This phenomenon as expressed in Marx's concept of *The Capital* clearly x-rays class struggle against the dominance of the state and capitalist exploitation in Nigeria. Currently, the working class at various levels is agitating for payment of unpaid wages for months by some states and local governments. This unfair labour practice has led to series of protests by trade unions. It is this manipulation of the ruling class expressed in terms of denying the society public goods through alienation that raise the consciousness of civil society to contest and articulate the national question. National question, represent the actual inequalities in the society, relations of ethnic domination and perceptions arising from these.<sup>370</sup> National question here refers to the existing dominance of capital over labour and the consequent subjection of the working people into acute poverty due to neo-liberal policies and the way the civil society articulates to change it.

The attitude of the state further changes to respond to the yearning of neo-liberal globalisation, the changes are outcome of marketisation of the economy, which redefines the way the civil society and the labour movement relate with the state. In the new society, the state in particular is "rolled back", as state duties or responsibilities toward citizens and civil society becomes "dull and sluggish". On the other hand, the state becomes hostile and undemocratic in order to attain its goal.<sup>371</sup> This process of globalisation has affected the role of the state in terms of welfare provision, leading to economic hardship which erodes the basis of the state's authority and capacity to protect the social and economic wellbeing of its citizenry. With the deepening of neo-liberal globalisation (a product of Washington Consensus), via the integration of national economies, national borders have diminished, while national sovereignty have become a highly

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<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>370</sup> D. Seteolu, *Whose Question is the National Question: the Civil Society and National Question in Nigeria*, Centre for Research and Documentation, Kano, Nigeria, 2010

<sup>371</sup> M. M. Yusif, "Human Right in Nigeria Old and New," in Jibrin Ibrahim & Y. Z Yau (eds.) *The Left and the Human Rights Struggles in Nigeria*, Centre for Research and Documentation, Kano, Nigeria, 2010.

contested term. Government macro-economic policies have been geared towards neo-liberal reforms such as; currency devaluation, deregulation, privatisation, market fundamentalism, withdrawal of subsidies on basic human needs, downsizing, amongst others. The process of economic integration in Nigeria has been deepened with the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). SAP marks a significant period in the state-labour- civil society engagement on policy issues, as informed by privatisation, commercialisation and the withdrawal of subsidy. Pro-democracy groups and trade union have protested its implementation. SAP, more than any austerity measure in the history of Nigeria, severely affected the living and working conditions of Nigeria, including their welfare and wellbeing.

The strategy, which was a blueprint of International Monetary Fund and World Bank, had as its core strategy, promoting free markets, including retrenchment of workers, wage and salary cuts, etc., from November 1985 to September 1986. This policy was unpopular with the Nigeria Labour Congress, as it saw the policy as nothing but “gloom for the workers” and it was met with serious resistance.<sup>372</sup> The politics of labour, especially in the twenty first century, is engendered by growing challenges of the market forces, the growth of information technology, flexibility in the working condition and the rolling back of the state from economic activities. However, this trend has engendered the weakening of labour unions. The state was able to amend legislation so as to demobilise and contain the labour militancy as well as to ensure the primacy of capital over labour. The 2005 amendment of trade union act in Nigeria is a case in point; it weakened the capacity of the trade unions to embark on industrial action such as strike and sought to undermine the collective bargaining rights of trade union.

### **Labour Movement Struggle for Workers’ Rights and Social Justice in Nigeria**

Fundamentally, the International Labour Organisation declaration of Philadelphia in 1944 and its principle of promoting social justice gave birth to numerous international testaments and labour legislations for the protection of workers’ and people’s rights globally, such as expressed in:

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<sup>372</sup> NLC, Bulletin No. 1 of the Nigerian Labour Congress, 1985, cited in Nwoke, K (2009) “Trade Unionism and Governance in Nigeria: A Paradigm Shift from Labour Activism to Political Opposition” *Journal of information, Society and Justice*, Vol. 2, No. 2, June 2009, p. 146.

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948: Promotes right to life and freedom, right to equality, right to desirable work and to join trade unions, freedom of information and association, right of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of opinion and information.
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966: Embodies some of the most significant international legal provisions establishing economic, social and cultural rights, including, inter alia, rights relating to work in just and favourable conditions; to social protection; to an adequate standard of living including clothing, food and housing; to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as amended, and the Nigerian labour Laws contain provisions for the protection of rights of workers in Nigeria. For instance, the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides in Section 17(3)(a)(b)(e) that the state shall direct its policy towards ensuring that:

- All citizens, .....have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment.
- Conditions of work are just and humane.
- There is equal pay for equal work without discrimination on account of sex, or on any other ground whatsoever (In consonance with ILO Convention 111).

Also, the Labour Act CAP.198 L1 LFN 2004 and Trade Union Act CAP T14 LFN 2004 contain general provisions for the protection of workers' rights, most especially in terms of freedom to organise and collective bargaining, wages, contracts of employment and terms and conditions of employment, etc.

Reflecting the normative coherence of human rights, our constitutional structure and lived human experience, it is possible to identify four inter-dependent clusters of human rights. The first are life and livelihood rights, such as the rights to life, liberty and movement, freedom from torture, health and labour protections. The second would be capability and community (civic) rights, including freedoms of information, expression, association, assembly, nationality, civic and social rights, and the rights to education. These rights facilitate our existence as social and civic beings. The third cluster would be guarantees of protection and remedies, including due process rights, equality and non-discrimination, safety and security guarantees (including the

right to an effective and humane police service). A final cluster would be rights of humane survival, extending to green, environmental and natural resources guarantees.<sup>373</sup>

Social justice provides fair and just relationship between the individual and society. This is measured by the explicit and tacit terms for the distribution of wealth, opportunities for personal activity and social privileges. In most advanced societies, the concept of social justice has often referred to the process of ensuring that individuals fulfill their societal roles and receive what was their due from society. In the current global grassroots movements for social justice, the emphasis has been on breaking barriers for social mobility, the creation of safety net and economic justice. Social justice assigns rights and duties in the institution of society, which enables people to receive the basic benefits and burdens of cooperation.

The Nigerian Labour Movement has over the years, in line with the principle of the International Labour Organisation and the Declaration of Philadelphia, been committed to the struggle for social justice, freedom and respect for fundamental rights. Through strong collaborations with the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other social movements, the Nigerian Trade Union Movement has waged significant struggles to ensure equal opportunity and social justice. The solidarity exhibited by these movements has brought about collective actions in the struggle against all forms of anti-people and neo-liberal policies of the state over the years. Coalition platforms like Labour and Civil Society Coalition (LASCO), United Actions for Democracy, Joint Action Front and Occupy Nigeria Movement have been used at different times in the history of Nigeria to champion the course of the workers and masses.

The British colonial era in Nigeria was characterised with different forms of resistance by the labour movement and other social movements. Labour leaders like Comrade Michael Imoudu and nationalist politicians like Herbert Macaulay, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, amongst others, were at the forefront of the struggle for independence, which was attained in 1960, after a prolonged period of agitations and mass protests. The contributions of Nigerian workers to the independence and economic and social development of Nigeria cannot be over-emphasised. The trade unions' contributions to national development have been recorded for posterity. The General Strike of 1945 for the increase in the cost of living allowance (COLA)

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<sup>373</sup> C. A. Odinkalu, "Lawyering for a Cause: the Femi Falana Story and the Imperative of Justiciability of Socio Economic Rights in Nigeria", in B. Aborishade (ed.), *The Imperative of Justiciability of Socio-Economic Rights in Nigeria: Lecture in Honour of Femi Falana*, SAN, AIMP Publicity, Ibadan, Nigeria, 2013.

and led by Nigeria's foremost Labour Leader, Comrade Michael Imoudu of the Railway Workers Union, significantly triggered the nationalist struggle for the independence of Nigeria.<sup>374</sup> In the same vein, the slaughter of 21 Enugu coalmine martyrs in 1949 was the whistle that blew the start of the race for the demand for independence.<sup>375</sup> After independence from British colonial rule, the role of trade unions was now to educate, promote, and protect the interests of their members in the independent Nigerian nation. In 1942, a government order, the General Defence Regulations outlawed strikes and lockouts. Workers considered this an affront and an attempt to suppress their new and fragile organisations.<sup>376</sup>

The struggle later took a different dimension when the military truncated the civil rule under the leadership of Alhaji Tafawa Balewa in 1966 as labour movement had to contend with the brutal forces of the military. The unfortunate bloody coup d'état led by Major Kaduna Nzogwu, which took the life of the Prime Minister and some notable political leaders, was a great set back to the structural and regional balance hitherto enjoyed in the country. This led the country to a civil war that is still threatening her corporate existence till date. The return to civilian rule in 1979 was a milestone in the struggle against the military when General Olusegun Obasanjo, as military Head of State, handed over power to the first civilian President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Alhaji Shehu Shagari. The civilian rule again was terminated in 1983 by General Muhammadu Buhari, leading to another round of agitations by the labour movement and other pro-democracy groups, demanding for return to democratic governance.

The democratic struggle was heightened when the military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential election, which was adjudged locally

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<sup>374</sup> See, for instance, Cohen, R., "NIGERIA'S LABOUR No. 1: Notes for a Biographical Study of M. A. O. Imoudu," *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1970; W. Oyemankinde, "Michael Imoudu and the Emergence of Militant Trade Unionism in Nigeria, 1940 – 1942", *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 7, No., 3, 1974; W. Oyemankinde, "The Nigeria General Strike of 1945," *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 7, No. 4, June 1975; G. G. Darah, "Imoudu and the Labour Movement", *Journal of African Marxist*, No., 9, 1982; L. A. Lindsay, "Domesticity and Difference: Male Breadwinners, Working Women, and Colonial Citizenship in the 1945 General Strike," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 3, June 1999; E. Iweriebor, "Radicalism and the National Liberation Struggles, 1930-1950", in A. Oyebade (ed.), *The Foundations of Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Toyin Falola*, Africa World Press, Inc., Trenton, NJ, 2003; and A. A. Yusuf, "The Working Class, The 1945 General Strike and the Independence Struggle in Colonial Nigeria: A PhD Research Proposal", Department of History, Queen's University, Kingston-Ontario, Canada, 2005.

<sup>375</sup> See, A. Akpala, *The Prospects of Small Trade Unions in Nigeria*, Enugu: 1963; and A. Akpala, *Managing Industrial Relations in Nigeria (Case Study of Nigerian Coal Industry.)* Lagos: Modern Graphics System Ltd., 1984; Agwu Akpala, "The Background to the Enugu Colliery Shooting Incident in 1949" ", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1965; and Carolyn A. Brown, "*We Were All Slaves*": *African Miners, Culture and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003

<sup>376</sup> Adewumi, *Trade Unionism in Nigeria: Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

and internationally to be free and fair and won by Chief Moshood Abiola. This development triggered a lot of protests and the most mass actions ever witness in the annals of the country's history. Labour leaders, human rights and political activists operated under the umbrella of National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) to wage series of agitations against General Babangida and later General Sanni Abacha administration respectively. Many labour leaders and rights activists such as Chief Alfred Rilwanu, Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, Comrade Hassan Sunmonu, Comrade Frank Kokori, Comrade Pascal Bafyau, Professor Wole Soyinka, Chief Gani Fawehinmi, Dr. Beko Ransom-Kuti, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, Mr. Femi Falana, and environmental activist like Ken Saro-Wiwa just to mention but a few were either assassinated, brutally assaulted, jailed, or forced to go on exile. The struggle came to a logical end in 1999 after a general election that ushered in the Fourth Republic with Chief Olusegun Obasanjo emerging as the democratically elected president.

The return to civil rule in 1999 has opened the democratic space in the country which resulted into a new form of labour regime. With the widening of the political space, labour politics was engendered by new form of alliances that sort to engage the state. The neo-liberal posture of the state under the current democratic regime since 1999 has been duly challenged by these social movements. Major issues at the front burner of their agitations and campaigns are: wage review (upward review of national minimum wage), payment of arrears of salaries, pensions and allowances, electoral and political or constitutional reforms, fighting against privatisation of critical public enterprises and the deregulation of the downstream sector, protection of workers and human rights, curbing unfair labour practices, transparency and accountability in government, and other critical socio-economic issues.

The incessant hike in the prices of petroleum products, massive looting of treasury through corrupt practices, subversion of democratic procedures, election rigging, poor working condition, nepotism, the selling out of national patrimonies through privatisation, and lack of ideological posture in political parties, have negatively affected good democratic governance in the country over the years, and have subsequently dashed the hope of the citizenry on nation building. As the Nigeria Labour Congress was revived in 1999, having been banned by the General Sanni Abacha military junta, it pushed a broad based labour-civil society coalition through Joint action with other civil society organisations to resist recurring attempts to raise the local price of petroleum products, giving rise to the formation of Labour Civil Society Coalition (LASCO).

Strong unions are central to both social and economic progress, but without governments that share their values, unions cannot construct or sustain a more equal world where rights, opportunities and social justice are guaranteed. This alliance becomes inevitable because labour and civil societies “jointly provide[s] an ideological alternative to the hegemonic pretensions of the neo-liberal positions and hold an alternative vision of national development.”<sup>377</sup> There is a debate as to whether trade unions should go beyond its narrow mandate of economic struggles.<sup>378</sup> However, the limit of narrow economic struggles has dawned on trade unions and they have come to the realisation that it is better to struggle at the political level, where fundamental economic decisions are taken. This was clearly articulated by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) in its memorandum of 1986 to the Political Bureau of military president Babangida, which stated that the numerous problems facing Nigerian workers, rural and urban, have their origin in politics.<sup>379</sup> Thus, it is clear that the problems of Nigerian workers have become multi-dimensional and as such cannot be resolved within the framework of industrial relations practice.

### **Clarion call to Nigerian Labour Movement**

The call for a more united labour movement remains valid today than as it was then, because of a number of factors both internal and external to the trade union movement. Unity is central to the survival of trade unions; in fact the enormity of the task confronting Nigerian workers today is perhaps greater than those confronted by the workers of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Fundamentally, the issue of unity should not be taken for granted in a trade union organisation. This is because for people to agree to come together in any organisation, particularly a trade union, there must be a unity of purpose and subscription to a set of ideals, which brings and binds them together. The fact that the question remains topical is an indication that it is a central problem. Otherwise, trade union unity either at the level of the individual union or that of the trade union movement, as a whole should not be difficult to attain.

Nigerian labour movement should embark on immediate soul searching struggle to

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<sup>377</sup> Beckman, “*Alliance politics in Nigeria's civil society*”. Session: African governments, Civil Society and Democracy, 2010. {online} Available from <http://www.csduppsala.uu.se/devne/CivilSociety/2010/PP/BeckmanBjörn.pdf>

<sup>378</sup>P. Akinyanju, “Trade Unions and Democratic Struggle” in *Non Governmental Organizations and Democracy*. CDHR, Lagos, 1987.

<sup>379</sup> O. Olorode, “Building a New Nigeria: The Role of the Working Class in National Transformation,” Speech at the 10<sup>th</sup> Delegates’ Conference of the Nigeria Labour Congress, Abuja, Nigeria, 2011.

restore its lost core values and ideology. Labour leaders and aspiring labour leaders should be schooled in trade union ideology, which focuses on unity and solidarity, selfless service, defense of workers and human rights, struggle for social justice, sustainable development, equity and fairness. The principle of “a people united can never be defeated”, “an injury to one is an injury to all”, “united we stand, divided we fall”, “solidarity forever, for the union makes us strong” and numerous other slogans are the foundation and catalyst for collective struggle and therein lies the trade union ideology.

Labour veterans and leaders should also work out a strategy to synergise the activities of the labour centres; examples of labour solidarity and unity can be drawn from the partnership between American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) in the United States America. The international labour movement today has strong advocacy and consensus for a global order of unionism that is ideologically driven, which is referred to as ‘social movement unionism’. The classical concept of social movement implies the creation of an entirely new socio-economic and political order, especially as it concerns the institutions of property, wealth creation and the distribution of wealth and power.

Nigerian labour movement must; therefore, be united and embark on trust and confidence building with civil society organisations and other traditional allies who feel betrayed by the conformists’ tendencies and businesslike activities of some labour leaders who hobnob with the establishment and oppressive forces, thereby shortchanging workers and the masses. Revitalisation of Labour and Civil Society Coalition (LASCO) platform is, thus, imperative to achieve this revolutionary objective. Building strong partnership and alliances with pro-left civil society organisations and other social movements in a well-coordinated manner is a *sine qua non* to a virile social movement trade unionism in Nigeria.

Finally, the labour movement in Nigeria must, as part of the strategy to re-invent its ideology, address the public perception on the issues of transparency and accountability. The perceived corruption within the labour movement’s leadership structure and the oligarchic tendencies as evident in the luxurious lives and ostentatious display of wealth similar to those of the bourgeoisies, have placed a moral burden on the class struggle against corrupt political and ruling elites at all levels. The legal maxim says that "he who comes into equity must come with clean hands", class struggle must, thus, be waged with a lot of responsibility, modesty, transparency and accountability.

## Conclusion

The organised labour in Nigeria has for a long time developed a reputation for radical and militant defense of workers' rights and advocacy on issues that concern the working population and ordinary Nigerians.<sup>380</sup> This radicalism reached its crescendo under the military with its marshal decrees, imposed hardship occasioned by SAP, pathological corruption, misrule and insincerity of the military leadership towards genuine democratisation. However, the collective struggle of the social movements has always been visited with state repression and brutal force. Despite this, however, these organisations have remained consistent, undaunted, resilient and resolute in the struggle against anti-people economic policies of the state.<sup>381</sup> Indeed, this is replicated in the contemporary era of neoliberal orthodoxy.

Trade union movement and other social movements in Nigeria have played vital roles in the vanguard for freedom, better working conditions, social justice, and democratic governance. Their roles could be traced to the various struggles during the colonial era, and even after independence. Most importantly, the several years of military dictatorship and despotic rules witnessed unprecedented challenges from the trade union and social movements. Working class movement in Nigeria has continued to pursue the need for good governance, accountability and transparency in government and adherence to the rule of law since the return to democratic rule on May 29, 1999.

In the Nigerian environment and the world over today, trade unionism as with many aspects of the industrial relations system is now being subjected to what may be called external pressures, especially the globalisation and the internationalisation of labour. These are profoundly changing the image of the unions and more broadly the kind of industrial relations that the country has. These contemporary changes pose a great challenge to trade union movement in Nigeria, thereby requiring the adoption of new strategy to champion collective

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<sup>380</sup> J. Adesina, "Adjustment and the Transformation of Labour Identity: What's New and Does it Matter", in A. Jega (ed.), *Identity Transformation and Identity Politics Under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria*, pp.134-160, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet and Centre for Research and Documentation, 2000; A. Adesoji, "The Subversion of Labour Militancy in Nigeria: A Case Study of Nigeria Labour Congress", *NJEH*, (NJEH – In full, please) Nos.5 & 6, 2003; and N. Yusuf, "Trade Union and the Political Process in Nigeria: A Critical Study", *LAPAI Journal of Humanities*, 2009, pp. 151-160.

<sup>381</sup> D. Obono, "Trade Unions as Social Movements and Political Actors in Nigeria (1994-2004)", *Stichproben, Wiener Zeitschrift für Kritische Afrikastudien* Nr, 2011, pp.95-113.

struggle in terms of defending the rights of their members to better working conditions, freedom of association, collective bargaining and social justice.

## THE TRAJECTORY OF DEMOCRACY AND THE CONTINUED SEARCH FOR DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA

**Professor Tunde BABAWALE\***

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### Introduction

Nigeria has invested heavily in democratic governance, and therefore, deserves to obtain returns on its investment. Our experience with democracy in the immediate post-independence era before the advent of the military has remained a point of reference for political observers, intellectuals and even practitioners. Politics in the First Republic (1<sup>st</sup> October 1960 – 15<sup>th</sup> January 1966) was concerned more about the delivery of the public good, observance of the rule of law, participation by the citizens, respect for civil liberties, healthy competition among the nation's constituent units etc. The result was the arrival of Nigeria as Africa's leading nation and one of the world's promising democracies. It was precisely the point at which those rules and tenets of democracy began to be violated that the Republic ran into troubled waters and eventually got overthrown by the military. This chapter is aimed at examining our journey through democracy, how we have fared thus far and whether we can realistically hope for democratic consolidation in the foreseeable future.

Democracy has been described by some as a “slippery term”,<sup>382</sup> open to a number of interpretations. The term has evolved from the conventional town meeting style of government in which all citizens are present and have equal participatory power; through the Athenian assembly whose members are selected and serve in rotation, to a representative form of government in which delegates are chosen by any of a variety of electoral processes.<sup>383</sup>

Although conditions for successful democratic practices differ across systems, it is generally believed that citizens' participation and consensus are at the heart of the fundamentals

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<sup>382</sup> Cited in T. Babawale, *Thirteen Years on: The Travails and Triumphs of Democracy in Nigeria*, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Leadership Institute, Akungba - Akoko, 2012 p. 2.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid*

of democracy. To underscore this position, one of America's founding fathers, Abraham Lincoln, defines democracy as "the government of the people by the people and for the people."<sup>384</sup> Even if a consensus on a precise definition of democracy has proven elusive, most observers today will agree that, at a minimum, the fundamental features of democracy include: government based on majority rule and the consent of the governed; the existence of free and fair elections; the protection of minority rights; and respect for basic human rights. Democracy also presumes equality of all before the law, respect for due process and political pluralism.<sup>385</sup>

Respect for civil liberties is also known to be a vital component of what is often called "liberal democracy". Basic human rights include the freedom of speech, expression and the press; freedom of religion; freedom of assembly and association; and the right to due judicial process. All democracies are systems in which citizens freely make political decisions by majority rule. But rule by the majority is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the guarantee of democracy. In a democracy, majority rule must be combined with respect for individual human rights and the rights of minorities. Democracy survives only when there is a functioning government. If democratically based decisions cannot or are not implemented, then the concept of democracy is not very meaningful or it becomes an empty shell. A democratic political culture is also crucial for the legitimacy, smooth functioning and ultimate sustenance of democracy. A culture of passivity and apathy, or docility is antithetical to democracy. The electoral process periodically divides the political contestants into winners and losers. A successful democratic political culture implies that the losing parties and their supporters accept the judgment of the voters, and allow for the peaceful transfer of power.<sup>386</sup>

One of the strongest characteristics of a true democracy is the uncertainty of electoral outcomes. Uncertainty of outcomes remains the most predictable characteristic of democratic elections. It presupposes that today's losers may become tomorrow's winners or vice versa. This is a fact of political life that Nigerian politicians hardly want to accept, leading inevitably to the degeneration of political contestations into warfare. Democracy cannot be strengthened by mere pious wishes or hypocritical declarations, but by the active participation of the citizenry

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<sup>384</sup> Cited in G. Keith, *The Battle for Democracy*, Wheatsheaf Books Ltd, Brighton, 1986, p. 13

<sup>385</sup> Babawale, *Thirteen Years on: The Travails and Triumphs of Democracy in Nigeria*, p. 3.

<sup>386</sup> *The Economist*. Democracy index 2010 (Democracy in retreat: A report from the Economist Intelligence Unit, pp1-46), [www.eiu.com](http://www.eiu.com)

and the entrenchment of an institutional order, exemplified in the strengthening of political institutions such as the different organs of government – the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary.

In a democracy, government is only one element in a social fabric of many and varied institutions, political organisations, and associations. A healthy democracy requires the active participation of citizens in public life. Democracies flourish when citizens are willing to participate in public debate, elect representatives and join political parties. Without participation, democracy begins to wither and becomes the preserve of a small, select group.

### **The Trouble with Democracy in Nigeria**

Nigeria's democratic journey of the last 18 years has not been in any way a smooth ride. Although some breakthroughs have been recorded, especially in the area of a fairly seamless civilian to civilian transition and the delivery of some democratic dividends in some parts of the federation, it is not yet *uhuru* for democratic consolidation in our country.

The truth of the matter is that elected officials across the country, with a few exceptions, have generally performed below expectations. The nature of our politics has hardly changed from what it used to be in the past, characterised largely by an obvious lack of ideological focus or vision by political parties and politicians, a near total absence of internal democracy within political parties and the continued domination of the power structure by political godfathers and moneybags.

It is more worrisome that the political class has found it convenient to sustain the Nigerian state in its original form – a predatory structure that politicians exploit to acquire political power and gain unfair access to the control of the nation's vast resources. The state in the process loses its relative autonomy and becomes alienated from the generality of the people, who in turn relate to it as an alien institution, which is to be cheated, exploited and abused at will.

The failure of the state to mediate political contestations encourages the violation of rules of engagement by the political elite, and consequently, turns the state into an arena of zero-sum competition for power and the resources that go with it. This absence of the moderating influence of the state, coupled with the erosion of the ethical foundation for political contests, renders Nigerian politics uniquely Hobbesian.

A major problem confronting our society today is the character of our political parties. There is a total breakdown of discipline and a lack of focus in many of the parties. Indeed, we

can say that many of the political parties lack the essential attributes of political parties. They neither articulate the interest of the populace nor do they possess the wherewithal to curb the excesses of their members.

Indiscipline within the parties has turned them into war machines defending the “fortresses” of warlords, masquerading as political leaders. Party leaders attack one another on all fronts over all manner of issues. Members insult the leadership of their parties without restraint and they viciously attack their parties on issues they themselves should help resolve. Party gate-keepers/godfathers determine which candidates would run for elective offices after fleecing potential contestants of huge sums of money. This practice inevitably breeds a new crop of looting and thieving politicians who need to recoup their “investment” at all cost. These parties have a fixation for capturing power, while totally neglecting the non-power aspects of political contestation. Under the scenario enacted above, meaningful political competition cannot take place. There is an urgent need for the nation’s politicians to develop a code of conduct, which would guide their activities and the action of their representatives in government. The government of the day needs to spend more time to reform the nation’s politics. Unfortunately, the political process is the hub that drives the economy. Our political problems have been compounded by the dearth of transformational leadership in several segments of our political life as well as the increasing weakness of political institutions.

Since political institutions were created to overcome the philosophical speculations concerning the dilemma of freedom and order, when those institutions fail to live up to expectations, what emerges is the triumph of anarchy of ambitions. This anarchy stares us in the face today. The earlier we revived our institutions to perform their constitutionally assigned functions, the better for all of us. By institutions here, I am more concerned with political institutions, especially the three organs of government; namely, the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary.

Many of the explanations for the failure of democracy and the kleptocratic and predatory economic governance system rampant on much of the African continent have invariably placed emphasis on the absence of institutions. The argument is often posited that improved institutions would ultimately tame the predatory instincts of the political elite. To this extent, institutional reform is crucial in the following areas:

- a) Regulatory and legal institutions for setting and enforcing rules of economic, social and political interaction.
- b) Technical institutions that give the state specialised abilities to manage, for example, macro-economic and trade policy.
- c) Taxation and revenue collection institutions that allow the state to pay for conducting its business.
- d) Administrative institutions that encompass the civil service, and government departments that provide social and public services.

Most states in Nigeria have historically had in place one form or another of such institutions. Yet there is no evidence that these institutions have had any democratising effect on the political elite. Nor has the existence of technical institutions stopped the same political elites from violating the very same institutions with impunity.<sup>387</sup>

### **Democracy and the Crisis in Nigerian Federalism**

The Nigerian State, as it is presently constituted, is a child of compromise and circumstance. In 1960, it was evident that the state did not represent the interests of the various nationalities that were brought together by fiat. The structural imperfections were such that emphasised the many areas of division, rivalry, suspicion and even hostility among the disparate ethnicities that make up the Nigerian State. The emergence of a foster elite and intensity of their intra-class conflicts in which ethnicity became the cheapest weapon put paid to the life of the First Republic in 1966.

Sub-nationalism or ethnicity constitutes a major plank in any discussion about the Nigerian State and the character of its politics. The various ethnic groups brought together by the force of arms at the inception of colonial rule have yet to resolve their mutually suspicious relationship, largely as a result of the inability of the system and its practitioners to develop means, strategies and modalities for equitable distribution of resources. Political opportunism of a criminally decadent and corrupt power elite has no doubt distorted the political structure of the

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<sup>387</sup> R. Ajulu, "Rethinking the Challenges off Democratic Consolidation in Kenya and South Africa: A Conceptual Overview" in Rok Ajulu (ed.) *Two Countries One Dream: The Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Kenya and South Africa*, KMM Review Publishing Company Johannesburg, 2009, p. 7-8

Nigerian State and perverted its political culture, leading to the destruction of progressive political values. This combination of factors became the albatross hanging over the neck of the state and consequently its inability to resolve and arbitrate the differences among the many sub nationalities.<sup>388</sup>

The restoration of democracy in 1999 raised high hopes among many Nigerians for a speedy and peaceful resolution of the national question. However, the ability of the new democratic government to address these issues was largely constrained by its institutional weakness, which was a fall out of decades of military dictatorships. For example, the party-structures and the legislatures that were nonexistent during military rule turned out to be too weak and inexperienced to respond to the challenges of post-transitional conflicts. Also, the police and the judiciary had been greatly enfeebled and subjected to government manipulation during the military era, thereby lacking the credibility and popular confidence to arbitrate on conflictual issues. In addition, most governmental institutions have been infected with the virus of corruption.

The inadequacy of the constitution to address the national question, define the nature and sphere of political authority and power, provide for the autonomy of the constituents units of the federation, and guarantee the rights of citizens in the context of a larger democratic framework, resulted in numerous conflicts and crises at the socio-economic, religious and political levels. Consequently, with such expectations not being met, the people resorted to venting their disappointment through violence.

As a result of the lack of commitment to principle or a specific ideology by the Nigerian elite, it constantly “acts ad hoc, in considerable confusion. It remains incapable of moving the country by its vision and stuck on exploiting parochial concerns and loyalties.”<sup>389</sup>

The exploitation of primordial differences exacerbates tension and instigates intractable conflicts in different parts of the country. Ironically, the political elite tries to camouflage the conflicts of interests within its ranks as a contest of principles, but the discerning Nigerian public knows better. This situation ensures that politics no longer plays its historic role of organising society or defining and actualising the common purpose. Within the last 18 years of democratic rule, Nigeria has almost literally been turned into a theatre of war and self-destructive conflicts.

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<sup>388</sup> A. Alao (ed.), *The Nigerian State: Language of its Politics*, Rex Charles & Collins Publishers, Nigeria, 2006

<sup>389</sup> C. Ake, “Points of Departure” in O. F. Onoge (ed.) *Nigeria: The Way Forward*, Spectrum Books Ltd, Lagos, 1993, p. 21

It has been estimated that between 1999 and 2005 alone, over fifty ethno-religious conflicts were recorded in Nigeria in which more than twenty-five thousand lives were lost and property worth billions of Naira destroyed.<sup>390</sup> A chronicle of some of the conflicts portrayed danger for Nigeria's nascent democracy. Some of the most notable of these conflicts were: the Yoruba/ Fulani conflict in Sagamu in 1999; the Hausa/Fulani retaliatory strike against the Yoruba in Kano in October/November, 1999; the destruction of Odi in Balyesa State by the Army in retaliation for the murder of twelve policemen by a local militia in November 1991; the Kaduna ethno-religious conflict in 2001; the Jos ethnic crisis beginning from 2001 to date; the Tiv-Jukun conflict in 2001; and the 'Miss World' riots in Kaduna and Abuja in November/December 2002.<sup>391</sup> In 2010, four days of blood-letting, in the clashes between Muslim and Christian gangs in Jos, Plateau State, led to the loss of over 460 lives.<sup>392</sup> As at June 2017, Boko Haram alone has been responsible for the death of more than 20,000 people and the displacement of over 2 million Nigerian citizens.

Nigeria has followed a chequered trajectory in its democratic journey. The first 56 years of Nigeria's political independence has been characterised largely by an epileptic democratisation process, authoritarian rule and a reprehensible centralisation of power. Predatory deployment of state power and resources for personal gains continued as the dominant political culture. However, the incorporation of the identified liberal ideals of freedom, justice, equity, fairly vibrant political institutions and an enduring democratic culture, a culture of democratic accountability, broad democratic space and robust institutions in support of democracy as well as press freedom are the necessary requirements for a viable nation.

After independence in 1960, the political elites saw the pursuit of power as the dominant objective of politics. Consequently, as one scholar noted, the ethics of business penetrated politics, the ethics of politics penetrated business and the ethics of the gangster penetrated both. Under this scenario, politics became the equivalent of warfare. This, added to the fact that Nigeria obtained political and not economic independence, compounded problems for the nation. The pursuit of power became an easy access to wealth and fame. Politics becomes a dirty business, its practitioners, scheming and crafty. Access to resources including opportunities for profit-making, requires the favour of those who control the private and public institutions which allocate them.

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<sup>390</sup> *The Guardian Newspaper*, Lagos, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2001.

<sup>391</sup> *Vanguard Newspaper*, Lagos, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2001.

<sup>392</sup> *Daily Champion Newspaper*, Lagos. 21<sup>st</sup> January 2010.

Politics, thus, affords the opportunity to acquire wealth and prestige to be able to distribute benefits in the form of jobs, contracts, scholarships and gifts of money and so on to relatives and political allies. The use of the state to champion private courses has fueled politics of bitterness, which in turn erodes confidence in the Nigerian nation by the citizenry and dampens nationalist spirit among Nigerians. The differences among regions and ethnic groups are further accentuated by the fact that the power equation discriminates in favour of particular groups, where access to office and its spoils is the object of politics. The resultant effect of this is that there is an absence of a coherent working agreement among political leaders and key actors in the governance process. Rather, what we have is an intense contest for power, blackmail and general instability.<sup>393</sup>

There is no denying the fact that political parties in Nigeria lack internal democracy, a factor that has adversely affected the country's march towards true democracy. Politicians are yet to understand that democracy is all about the delivery of the public good. This is closely related to the breakdown in family values. Democratic values and principles, which have been missing at the family level, are also missing in the national political space. Internal democracy is the foundation of any successful democracy where peace, progress, prosperity and unity are the pillars that hold the country firmly, whereas a lack of internal party democracy can only breed bad governance and incompetence and endanger peaceful coexistence of the nation. Leaderships of most political parties hardly emerged through a democratic process; hence political violence and assassinations have become a common feature of political contestation. The founders and funders of parties have formed parasitic and blood-sucking cabals. Since they are the financiers of the parties, they often dictate the pace of whatever goes on within those parties.

Godfatherism has brought about cracks in most of the political parties. The exodus of politicians and their supporters to other political parties following disagreement with the leadership of their parties has become a normal feature of party politics in Nigeria. Politically motivated killings have also become rampant. Some of the causes of these killings were traced to undemocratic practices that were perpetrated by some party leaders in particular political parties. Even the dreaded Boko Haram phenomenon has been linked to the crisis of political party competition in Borno State. To stem the tide of political killings, INEC should no longer honour any election where party candidates did not emerge through a proper democratic process. Every

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<sup>393</sup> B. Tunde *Nigeria in the Crises of Governance and Development* Vol. 1, Concept Publishers, Lagos, 2006.

member should have a say in the day to day running of the party, thereby, making it difficult for a handful of individuals to impose candidates on the people.<sup>394</sup>

Re-federalisation and the necessity for urgent review of modalities for inter-group interaction are crucial for the sustenance of the Nigerian nation. The distortions that characterised the country's so called federalism have called into question the very basis of our existence as a nation. For quite a while now, concerned Nigerians have been advocating for specific steps to be taken in order to stem the country's slide into disaster, which seemed to have been accentuated by the grievances of many frustrated groups and individuals. The activities of militant organisations, such as the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Avengers, Boko Haram and lately Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), have all brought to the fore the necessity for drastic action to be taken in order to save Nigeria. It is against this background that we shall advocate once more for a return to proper federalism. One view that virtually all federalists have in common is allegiance to the notion of *federalism as a bifurcation of political power within a polity such that the central or federal government has its area of authority well-defined in the constitution vis-à-vis that of the constituent units, with each level possessing the wherewithal for its sustenance under some form of fiscal autonomy*. In other words, *we are speaking of two levels of equal, separate, independent but co-ordinate authorities, possessing legislative and enforcement jurisdiction within their respective spheres*. While the federalist idea could be said to have had a chequered history, it has become the only way out for any nation comprising heterogeneous populations and nationalities with multiple cultures, but wishing to co-habit peacefully and profitably in the collective interest of the entire polity.

Where and when full reign is not given to this notion of unity in diversity, more often than not, the consequence has been chaos and an unholy matrimony among the various communities comprising the federation. Within such a scenario, disintegration and collapse of the nation become a dangerous possibility. There seemed to have been a general consensus among the people themselves regarding the adoption of the federal idea which had formed the basis of both the Macpherson and Independence Constitutions. It was only after the military incursion into the country's political space that federalism was jettisoned on account of its incompatibility with the unitary command structure of the military. It is for this reason, more

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<sup>394</sup> *Daily Triumph*, 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2012 (Gabriel Ewepu) [www.focusnigeria.com](http://www.focusnigeria.com)

than anything else, that the long, dictatorial rule of the military has been characterised by centralising trends in Nigerian federalism.<sup>395</sup>

### **The Labour of our Heroes' Past Must Not Be in Vain**

Having put the architecture of democracy in place, in spite of the political accident of 1966, our nation's heroes laid a foundation for democracy that subsequent generations ought to have built upon and possibly perfected. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. Nigeria will stand the risk of being dismembered unless it changes the paradigms of governance, management of the economy, management of its diversity and its tackling of corruption.

There is no doubt that the Jonathan administration wasted a golden opportunity to use Nigeria's God-given resources to launch Nigeria on the path of modernity through unbridled corruption and mindless wastage of the nation's resources. The fuel subsidy scandal of the period is still fresh in our memories. It remains unimaginable to witness the ballooning of petrol subsidy from a budgeted sum of N248billion to N2.53trillion in 2011.

That a government signed away a total sum of N603billion in dubious import duty waivers should simply be described as criminal.<sup>396</sup> The recent discovery of millions of naira and foreign currency notes hoarded in private apartments remains mind-bugling and can only be a sad reminder of the era of the locusts over which former President Jonathan presided.

It is, however, to Jonathan's credit that he successfully midwived a constitutional conference to address the problems of inter-group relations and perennial agitations by the minorities and even majority groups in the country.

Unfortunately, since the Buhari administration assumed office, the nation has waited almost endlessly for the positive change that the people yearned for. To compound the nation's woes, the President even claimed that he has consigned the report of the 2014 National Conference to the archives. Thankfully, the Senate recently passed a resolution demanding that the conference report be officially submitted to it by the Executive so that it can be used as a roadmap to address the recent agitations for restructuring and the threats to the continued existence of Nigeria as a united entity emblematised in the hate speeches being made across the country, underscored by the renewed agitation for a state of Biafra led by IPOB (Indigenous Peoples of Biafra) and the recent ultimatum issued by a coalition of Arewa Youths to all Igbos to

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<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2012 (Professor Akin Oyeboode)

<sup>396</sup> *The Punch Newspaper*, Lagos, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2017, p. 18.

vacate every part of Northern Nigeria before October 1, 2017.

Although the Buhari administration scores some pass marks in the battle against Boko Haram and the fight against corruption, it is lamentable that reversals are becoming noticeable on these two fronts. It appears that Boko Haram has recently regained some confidence, while the EFCC has recorded setbacks in a number of its corruption cases in court. Indeed, one is yet to understand why no high profile individual has been convicted for corruption till date.

The current federal arrangement is faulty as it allocates too much of the powers over the federation to the central government. Fiscal centralism which was inherited from the military ought to give way to fiscal federalism. The expropriation of nearly all powers belonging to the states, to the central government is a recipe for disaster.

The 1999 Constitution because of its military antecedents arrogated 68 items to the federal government in the Exclusive legislative list, while the 1960 constitution had only 44 items. The current practice of allocating 52.68% of all allocatable revenues to the federal government leaving the states with 26.70% and the Local Governments 20.60% is against the practice of federalism.

It is worth recalling that the 1963 Constitution granted the regions 50% of the proceeds from the resources from those regions. Unless justice, equity and fairness governs inter-group relations and the distribution of powers and resources, Nigeria may end up with an implosion akin to what happened during the civil war.

For the labour of our heroes' past not to be in vain, Nigeria needs to re-negotiate a proper federal structure that must be seen to be addressing the grievances of all its component units. Otherwise, the agitation for autonomy, self-determination or even secession will intensify. It hardly makes sense that issues pertaining to policing, railways, prisons, criminal records, etc. are still on the Exclusive legislative list in our 1999 Constitution. In places like the United States and Canada, such matters reside in the Concurrent list.

The attempt to drive our multinationality underground has markedly reduced the prospect of our collective identity and national stability. This is evident in the usual government refrain that "our unity is not negotiable". It only equals the attempt to homogenise us by colonialism, which was done through the use of force. Under democracy, ethno-nationalism allows us to express our humanity and to claim a cultural environment that we feel comfortable with.

To lack a sense of self amounts to being non-human, while being locked in a cultural void. People consciously yearn for cultural identity and self-determination which fidelity to genuine federalism can guarantee in a multinational entity like Nigeria. We must not attempt to judge the agitations for self-determination. Rather we must try to understand the disturbing phenomenon and put in place measures and strategies by which Nigeria can be held together “by negotiated consensus, not force”<sup>397</sup>

Only few situations can be worse than a nation finding itself in a debt trap. This is usually a vicious circle from which nations that are victims are hardly able to escape. The Buhari administration must do all it can to halt its present disposition towards unrestrained borrowing because the nation’s debt portfolio is becoming scary. In May 2017, the National Bureau of Statistics reported that as at December 2016, the Federal Government and the 36 States of the Federation already owed N18trn (\$11.4billion foreign and N14.02 trillion domestic debts). Yet, the 2017 Budget has devoted about N2trillion to debt servicing which is over 50% of anticipated revenue. The situation is disturbing and needs to be urgently reversed if we do not intend to leave a heavy albatross on the necks of on-coming generations. As we seem to be overcoming the threat from Boko Haram, the phenomenon of brutal and pervasive attacks all over the country by so-called herdsmen seems to be our new nightmare. In spite of government’s denunciation of this new brand of terrorism, it has done very little to confront it in practical terms. Hardly any arrests are being made and hardly are perpetrators being prosecuted. Villages and towns are attacked and razed to the ground, while thousands of people are hacked to death in broad daylight. This has to be confronted with as much force by government as was used to subdue Boko Haram.

### **What is to be Done?**

In order to restore purpose to governance and sanity to our nation, the following steps ought to be taken by government:

- (i) Establishment of an institutional order that enhances the performance of government institutions like the Civil Service, the Police, the Judiciary, the Legislature and the Executive. These institutions need to undergo reforms for efficiency and need to have their legitimacy enhanced by making them incorruptible.

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<sup>397</sup> C. Ake, “Points of Departure”

- (ii) Need for proper devolution of power in order to make the Federal government less powerful and the Centre less attractive. This would also require the introduction of a new revenue allocation formula that will favour states where resources are produced.
- (iii) There should be greater emphasis on governance than politicking, which seems to be the usual preoccupation of the political class.
- (iv) Government should show evidence of prudence and sacrifice before calling on the people to do same.
- (v) Education has not received the required attention from our governments. There is a need for curricular review, reorientation and adequate funding of educational institutions. No nation progresses without an educated and enlightened citizenry.

More significantly, this government needs to show greater commitment than it has shown so far in implementing change. *It needs to develop agriculture, diversify the economy and develop industries through textiles, light manufacturing, electronics and services. It must also take seriously the question of power generation and the provision of empowerment for the nation's teeming youths.*

All of these sectors are being undermined by attacks on farmers by herdsmen and a foreign exchange policy which is leading to disinvestment and the closure of factories. No employment can be generated in an environment where there is de-industrialisation.

A nation that is battling with the depreciation in its earnings on account of the collapse of oil prices in the international market, cannot deliver the public good when it is also distracted on several fronts by insurgency, militancy, agitations for self-determination and acts of criminality like kidnapping for ransom.

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria is at the moment in a quagmire. It embraced a system of government that is designed to deliver the public good and yet failed to deliver. The problem, from all indications, is multi-dimensional. It can be located in our history and of course in the failure of leadership that we seem to be experiencing as a nation. The political parties, the politicians, the electorate, the media must all take their own share of the blame for the nation's present pathetic circumstance.

I propose that we collectively decide to sanitise and disinfect our electoral process of parasites, leaches and vampires who masquerade as politicians. Our electoral bodies at the state and federal levels must be made to be truly independent in their funding and daily activities. It is in our collective interest to insulate the electoral umpire from partisan politics through a more inclusive method of appointing people into those electoral bodies. Steps must also be taken to dispose of all election litigations before the assumption of office of elected officials, especially the President and Governors.

One critical observation that needs to be made is the lack of originality in our quest to construct conceptually sound and culturally relevant developmental strategies for our country and continent. For instance, have we asked ourselves how we can exploit the extended family system as a form of social insurance and unit of accumulation? Have we tried to endogenise ideas and knowledge borrowed from other cultures as the Asians have done? We can use the platform of our cultures to turn African economies into advanced economies without losing the foundational element of those cultures.

We must not fail to make the point that democracy is not alien to African cultures and that there are existing traditional practices among our people that approximate to democratic governance. Such practices as the Igbo village democracy and our cross-cultural extended family tradition can be rejuvenated to entrench sustainable democratic governance. Our traditional sentiment abhors privatisation of communal resources as well as authoritarianism and the lack of accountability on the part of political office holders as power was shared vertically and everyone had a say in how society was governed. Abuse of power was curtailed by the various structures put in place to effectively check the powers of the ruler. We, therefore, need a kind of cultural renaissance to enable us face the challenges of governance and democracy in our country.

It is lamentable that even though development is now back on the African agenda, our development policies do not place sufficient premium on the cultural dimension to development. Our development plans in Africa are strong on economic ambitions, but weak in their cultural content.

Time has come for us to stop treating culture as a residual category in development. In developed societies, culture is seen as part of economics and economics part of culture. Scholars like Jean-Francois Revel have even suggested (and I think correctly) that cultural development is

inseparably bound with industrial development and that “development is first and foremost cultural”.

In advocating for a return to our culture, we are not also unmindful of the historical fact that cultures do borrow from one another. However, those cultures that are able to hold their own and promote development are those that borrow from others selectively and in the process do not compromise their fundamental elements.<sup>398</sup>

This is the case with Asia where countries like Japan, China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc. have benefited tremendously from western influences and cultural practices without compromising the basis of their own cultural identity. These Asian countries have become advanced to such a point that some scholars have predicted that within the next decade, the centre of gravity of the world’s technological prowess will shift from the West to the East.<sup>399</sup>

We can re-enact the Asian experience if we retrieve and recreate the vital elements of our culture as a form of renaissance. We must also promote and develop our indigenous languages by harmonising and standardising their orthographies, developing their terminological competences and also scientificating them so that they can become languages of technology. I commend the Federal government on its recent decision to allow the teaching of science in indigenous languages.

We must admit that, a way out of our socio-economic and political crisis is the adoption of what Adebayo Adedeji describes as “a social economy paradigm of development which assumes the launching of a development process that is *socially just, economically productive, ecologically sustainable, politically stable and participatory and culturally vibrant.*”<sup>400</sup>

All of us must make up our minds that we want democracy in our country and must consciously and collectively work towards its institutionalisation. If we fail in this mission, we may end up wondering in a few years to come why “so big a country, filled with so many well-educated people, manages to spend so much time getting nowhere.”<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> K. Kwaa Prah, “2 African Languages, African Development and African Unity,” *CBAAC Occasional Monograph*, No. 14. 2009, CBAAC, Lagos, p. 21

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16.

<sup>400</sup> Quoted from Babawale, *Thirteen Years on: The Travails and Triumphs of Democracy in Nigeria*, p. 40

<sup>401</sup> *The Economist*, 1994. London, 27<sup>th</sup> August 1994.

**ORGANISED LABOUR, PARTISAN POLITICS AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF NIGERIA**

**Baba AYE\***

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**Introduction**

Organised labour has occupied a central position in the politics of mass resistance and the quest for transformative social-economic alternatives in Nigeria. The Trade Union Movement has led the working-class people in fighting for expansion of the democratic space. The dominant praxis of trade unions in this regards has included: articulation of alternative developmental agenda; demonstrations; coalition-based campaigns to influence policy; and electoral politics.

There have been moments of triumph for organised labour's political pursuit. But, it has not been able to translate the episodic spurts of its invoked or led groundswell from below (involving strikes and mass street protest), from fighting against the power of the ruling class to fighting *for* power. Nor has electoral victory in the name of "labour" resulted in any significant socio-economic transformation, where such limited electoralist forward leaps have been made. The formation of a party of labour at the beginning of the century was supposed to resolve this situation, as captured in the *Labour and Politics* policy adopted by the 8<sup>th</sup> Nigeria Labour Congress' National Delegates Conference in 2003.

The reverse has been the case. Becoming a dumping ground for mainly second eleven players from the political teams of the bosses' class since the 2007 elections, the Labour Party (LP) became riven by different shapes of dissension within, and a near total loss of connection with working-class people which it is supposed to have been representing since 2014. As at the beginning of the second half of 2017 though, organised labour is striving to reclaim and redefine the party.

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\* Baba AYE, the Health and Social Sector Officer of the Public Services International (PSI), was the National Convener of the United Action for Democracy (UAD) in Nigeria.

This is within a context of generalised crises and revolts globally, which have thrown up radical-reformist directions and movements within partisan politics. The world is at a historic conjuncture. Working-class people in Nigeria, within this wave, seek change. This is change that amounts to socio-economic transformation. Defining the contents of this requires alternatives and struggle for these. Due largely to the failures of the labour movement's hegemonic involvement in partisan politics, and taking this beyond electoralism, such definitions have been limited to contestations between different sections of the bosses' class.

This chapter is an effort at putting how we got here into perspective beyond an interpretative narrative to one which calls for action, based on a critical understanding of the current situation.

### **Organised Labour and the Politics of Winning Independence**

The 1940s was a turning point, marking the beginning of anti-colonial struggle. After the pacification of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1906 and amalgamation eight years later, the subjugated colonial subjects did not simply take their fate as given. There were uprisings, including those by women, against the Crown, especially its taxation. But there was no generalised political struggle to win a socio-economic transformation beyond the confines of colonial imperialism, until the 1940s.

With the might of the combinational power of the working-class, the trade union movement represented the surest means of entry of the masses, on a consistent basis, into the theatre of struggle for a better future. While the earliest trades unions were formed between the late 1880s and 1912, it was by the late 1930s that trade unions became generalised, leading to the establishment of the first national trade union centre in 1942 - the Trade Union Congress (TUC).<sup>402</sup> Two years later, TUC representatives attended the formation of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) by the emergent middle class nationalists. NCNC brought together a diverse array of the students' movement, neighbourhood political groups, and ethno-linguistic mutual aid associations, amongst others, as a united front to struggle for self-government and an end to British colonial domination.

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<sup>402</sup> At this founding meeting in November 1942, the centre was named Federated Trade Unions of Nigeria (FTUN). It was in July 1943 that it was changed to the TUC, which it became better known as, historically.

The following year, a 37-day General Strike marked a watershed of workers' power and the struggle for Independence, deepening the collaboration of the trade union movement with the middle-class nationalists. Attempts by some working-class activists, who had been part of the leadership of this strike from below such as F.O Coker, to establish an independent labour party were rebuffed, even with leading trade unionists like Michael Imoudu, the Labour Leader "Number One", called upon to lead the party. Under the influence of the nationalists, the dominant trend within the trade union movement stood for unity with the middle class NCNC.

But even at that, the trade union movement maintained its independence of agitation. One of the first resolutions of the TUC, in April 1943, was for an independent paper of organised labour: *The Nigerian Worker*. With an impressive circulation of 10,000 copies and well-articulated argument, the colonial authorities were compelled to put it under censorship by July 1944.

The 1945 Richards Constitution, which enthroned regionalism, was a response of the colonialists to the rising popular anti-colonial movement which had organised labour as its dynamo. This was with the intent of stealing the winds of struggle from below, from the sails of pan-Nigerian nationalism. It was not unsuccessful. It signaled the beginning of ethno-regional mobilisation by different sections of the then emerging local ruling class, as they sought to win and keep political power. As the petite-bourgeois turned inwards to primordial platforms and sentiments, the labour movement became of far less importance as a "partner".

The trade union movement, however, became factionalised in 1948. This was along the lines of those who supported continued affiliation to the NCNC and those against it. There, however, was a short-lived moment of unity in 1950 with the formation of the (first) Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) on May 26. It is quite instructive that the NLC that same year formed what was called the "Demo-Labour Alliance" with the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) to contest the municipality elections in Lagos. This alliance, driven by organised labour won eighteen out of the twenty-four seats in the Lagos Town Council.

But, this turned out to be the height of organised labour's independent intervention in the sphere of partisan politics in the period leading to independence. Marred by splits on one hand and a stagist perspective of the revolutionary transformation of society,<sup>403</sup> the trade unions stood aside as the once radical nationalists became more moderate would-be founding fathers

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<sup>403</sup> This perspective essentially limits the working class in economically backward countries to first support the supposedly progressive sections of the bosses' class in a national democratic revolution (in this case against the British colonialists), before in some later future, considering taking power in its own name, in what would then be a socialist revolution.

hobnobbed with their colonial masters in Lancaster to fashion out the constitution of a flag-independent Nigeria.

There were, however, efforts by radical and revolutionary forces within the labour movement to form left parties which included the Convention Peoples Party, Nigeria Peoples Party, United Working Peoples Party and the Nigerian Communist Party between 1949 and the advent of Independence on October 1, 1960. All of these floundered without the political fulcrum of the trade union movement for a radical mass-based partisan politics.

### **Post-colonial Nigeria in the 20th Century**

Organised labour remained disunited at the dawn of independence. Several efforts at forging unity failed. But this did not stop collaboration; for example, in organising a series of General Strikes in 1964, under a Joint Action Committee platform. Meanwhile, earlier in April 1963, the Nigeria Youth Congress (NYC) and the Nigeria Trade Union Congress (NTUC) midwived the formation of the Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (SWAFP). With about 5,000 members spread across the three regions as at that time, this Marxist-Leninist party has been the largest and most significant party with an explicitly socialist programme in the history of Nigeria. The party also published *Advance*, a weekly newspaper, with support from Moscow.

There were contentions within the ranks of labour activists even when SWAFP was being formed. One of the issues at stake was on leadership of the party. Cadres such as Ola Oni, Eskor Toyo and Baba Omojola argued that Michael Imoudu should automatically be the leader of the party. But the dominant trend, represented by Wahab Goodluck, Ibidapo Fatiogun, S.U. Bassej and Tunji Otegbeye, insisted that the leadership of the party should be composed of militants with clarity on the theory of Marxism-Leninism, and they had their way. Theoretical clarity on Marxism-Leninism was prioritised along with organising capacity-building for the SWAFP cadres. The Patrice Lumumba Labour College served the NTUC and SWAFP for this purpose. But, by 1964, there was a breakaway from the SWAFP to form Nigeria Labour Party (NLP). Michael Imoudu was its Chairman and Eskor Toyo the General Secretary.

Wars put the labour movement to the test. World War I, for example, saw the mass of the working-class in Europe and unfortunately their parties queue up behind “their” own bosses as they marched to the killing fields of fratricidal battles. The situation with the 30-month Nigerian

Civil War of 1967-70 was quite similar. Organised labour was split along Federalist-Nigerian and Secessionist-Biafran lines.

SWAFP and the NLP no less than the NTUC and the newly formed Labour Unity Front (LUF) (with affiliation to the NLP) supported the Federal Military Government, whilst a significant proportion of trade union activists of Igbo extraction moved back home to the enclave of Biafra at the time, and equally gave support to the secessionist government. It was radical democrats like Wole Soyinka that stood firmly for unity of working-class people, for which he was detained without trial for twenty-two months. One thing organised labour must say “never again” to is queuing behind different sections of the bosses’ class with guns in our hands to kill brothers and sisters from working-class backgrounds like us, in or out of military uniforms.

With the reconstruction that came after the Nigerian-Biafran War, which was buoyed with the soaring prices oil in the international market, there was an upsurge of employment in both the public and private sector of the economy. This contributed significantly to expansion in the size and numbers of trade unions. With the enhanced influence of the trade unions at the beginning of the 1970s, Comrade Wahab Goodluck repeatedly stated that it was the turn of the working-class to constitute government when the military returned to the barracks. Comrade Goodluck was detained for fifteen months, by the Gowon government which reneged on its earlier promise of the military stepping aside.

SWAFP continued to operate underground after all parties were banned by the military in the wake of the 1966 military putsches. But by this time, it had begun to fall apart, torn asunder by in-fighting within its ranks and increasing influence of activists hitherto organised around the Nigeria Labour Party that had gone comatose shortly after its formation, but whom had crystallised around the emergent peace and solidarity movement.

These two trends i.e. SWAFP and NLP emerged yet again, albeit in different circumstances, in the run-up to the inauguration of the Second Republic. When the ban on politics was lifted, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> All-Nigeria Socialist Conferences were organised in 1977/78 in Zaria, with the intent of forging unity of the Left for popular struggle in the then forthcoming bourgeois democratic era. In this regard, it was not at all successful. There were two major contending perspectives at the conference.

On one hand were those who, resting on a two-stage theory, opined that the country was on the verge of a National Democratic Revolution and socialists had to ally with the progressive

national bourgeoisie. At the fore of this was S.G. Ikoku who had been the General Secretary of the Action Group. On the other hand was the dominant view, which called for an independent party of the working class that would be involved in, but not limited to electioneering politics.

While still standing by the NDR thesis, it averred that the different sections of the bourgeoisie had in 17 years of Independence demonstrated the inability of the bourgeoisie as a whole to provide leadership for the NDR. Ikoku and his acolytes walked out of the conference. But despite the congruity of perspectives, the conference was not successful in its aim: *uniting the revolutionary Left in a socialist party*. In the aftermath of the conferences, two parties emerged: the Socialist Working People's Party (SWPP), with roots in the SWAFP traditions and the Socialist Party of Workers, Farmers and Youth, which later became known simply as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Colloquially, its leading lights were from the NLP formation.

However, the military government introduced the registration of parties as a prerequisite for partisan engagement. It registered only five parties: Unity Party of Nigeria (a reincarnation of the Action Group), National Party of Nigeria (a new improved pan-Nigerian version of the Northern Peoples Congress), Nigeria People's Party (NPP) (not unlike the NCNC), Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) (a breakaway from the NPP during its formative stage) and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) (a rebirth of Northern Elements Progressive Union). The two Marxist-Leninist parties were shut out and operated in the 1980s as clandestine bodies.

Entryism was pursued, mainly by the SWP for a brief period when it entered the UPN. A number of non-aligned socialists like Ebenezer Babatope also threw in their lot with the UPN. Mallam Aminu Kano's PRP was, however, the party of choice for most labour activists. These included Michael Imoudu, Eskor Toyo, Eddie Madunagu and Bene Madunagu. The party won control of two states in the North before splintering as its right-wing won influence. It was that faction which secured the electoral umpire's recognition for the 1983 elections.

As a whole, the electoral politics of the Second Republic was, in so many ways, like that of the First, repackaged and worse. The old tales of corruption, electoral malfeasance and violence, took on added vengeance. Religion-as-politics had also been added to the earlier gamut of ethno-regional identity politics of the 1960s. As in 1966, the military stepped in again on December 31, 1983 in the wake of the August 1983 disputed elections where the ruling NPN claimed a "landslide" victory.

The Nigeria Labour Congress, now surreptitiously led by the SWPP, raised the tempo of struggle against austerity measures introduced by the NPN government with its Economic Stabilisation Act of 1981. It had earlier issued the *Workers Charter of Demands* in February 1980. One of the key demands of the Charter was for the institutionalisation of national minimum wage legislation. NLC also specifically demanded a N3000 minimum wage, based on a cost of living analysis. After barely two days of a General Strike in May 1981, the Federal Government reached a compromise with the unions. A N150 minimum wage was signed.

Organised labour's political influence soared, but it could not intervene in partisan politics in its own name, strictly speaking – particularly as this appeared to be restricted to electoralism. Such would be the case until the end of the 1980s, when there was a window of opportunity for forming a labour party once again.

When the General Ibrahim Babangida-led military junta called for party formations in 1989, socialists including Eskor Toyo and Ola Oni mobilised around the country for the formation of the Nigeria Labour Party (NLP). This was the first time that the trade union movement *as a whole* was forming a political party and it was actually a *pan-Nigerian* party. When the state would assess the parties formed, NLP was adjudged as being one of the two most organised with presence across the length and breadth of the country. But it all came to naught. The military government decreed the 13 provisionally registered parties and set up the “a little to the right” National Republican Party (NRP) and the “a little to the left” Social Democratic Party (SDP). Fractions of the Left and the trade unions threw in their lots with the SDP, warts and all. The All Nigerian Socialist Alliance, which was supposed to have coordinated Left intervention within the NLP and beyond atrophied.

Organised labour entered the SDP, which of the two parties created by the junta was deemed to be “a little to the left”, as a bloc. The inability of Pascal Bafyau, NLC's president, to secure the vice-presidential ticket to MKO Abiola did, however, dampen the morale of the trade union movement in the SDP. More importantly though, dissolving the NLP as it did showed a political mistake, even for the movement's entryist foray. None of the other major groupings formed when the party formation processes were thrown up dissolved, even as they entered the SDP and the NRC at the behest of the military government.

## **Labour and Partisan Politics in the Fourth Republic**

The Fourth Republic, as it is called, is the longest stretch of the bourgeoisie's rule through its civilian arm. This is due to a number of reasons, and not just because the military became more genteel or that the civilian politicians had learnt lessons from the past. First, the international situation which helped foster Bonapartist-capitalism in the neo-colonial world had changed. The liberal market ideology of "globalism" required an ideology of "freedom". Civilian rule, thus, became the norm. Second, despite its faults, and they are legion, Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) did succeed where earlier bourgeois parties had failed; building a genuinely pan-Nigerian party of the bosses.

The end of military rule in 1999 marked an opening up of the democratic space, despite the limitations of the post-military regime. With the proscription order of the Abacha junta lifted, NLC organised its 7<sup>th</sup> National Delegates Conference in January 1999, commencing what was dubbed "a new beginning". There was an agenda-setting process to define the contents of this new beginning.

One of the mechanisms initiated for this process was the Civil Society-Labour Prodemocracy Network (CSPN). It held three meetings between 2000 and 2001. Its most significant resolution was for organised labour to provide leadership for the establishment of a *Working People's Party* (WPP), which would involve the radical civil society movement. A Steering Committee for the proposed party was constituted, led by Comrade Ali Chiroma, and a manifesto drafting committee, as well.

Even at that time, there were leading figures in the trade unions who disparaged the very idea of a unions-driven party project. Some of these threw in their lot with other efforts at party building by "progressive professionals" such as the People's Liberation Party (PLP), taunting the CSPN and its resolution for a WPP.

Ironically, when the NLC at its Bauchi NEC meeting in 2002 formally resolved on the party formation question, it was those who were against trade unions leading a party formation process (by then it had become clear that parties like the PLP were leading nowhere, really) on one hand, and those who for different reasons were keen on having the unions serve as midwife for a party, *but with radical civil society (i.e. the socialist left) shut out of it*, who were more influential in the National Executive Council. They were to serve as the founding fathers of what was then called the Party for Social Democracy (PSD).

This resulted in a chasm within the budding political relationship between the NLC and the radical civil society movement. The latter felt betrayed, as the CSPN process was unceremoniously ended, without any notice to our civil society partners. Meanwhile, within the NLC, a policy on “Labour and Politics” was formulated and adopted by the 8<sup>th</sup> National Delegates Conference in February 2003.

The policy was quite explicit on what the “primary goal of workers’ involvement in politics, as an organised group” ought to be. This is “to promote the radical restructuring of the unequal economic relations through deliberate actions aimed at changing the production system”. With the focus of such a party being “to raise working class consciousness”, it was to forge alliances with other exploited and oppressed segments of the pauperised majority of Nigerians, on the basis of a socialist programme.

But, the Labour Party (LP) (as it would be called from its Founding Convention held on February 28, 2004) came up with a social-democratic programme to the right of the NLC policy, in the elusive search for the progressive entrepreneurs and intellectuals that were to be courted at all costs. This did not dampen the enthusiasm of rank and file workers. Between December 2002 when the PSD was registered and its Founding Convention fourteen months later, over 200,000 workers took up membership across the country.

Dan Nwuanyanwu, the smooth-talking former president of the National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Employees (NUBIFIE) emerged as National Chairman at the Founding Convention. As he had time and again mentioned, his coming on board was because he ran into Adams Oshiomhole, the then NLC President at the Presidential Hotel, Port Harcourt, where the latter convinced him to come over and take the position. What is often left unsaid could very well be that Adams Oshiomhole believed Dan could be instrumental in getting moneybags into the party to finance its activities, *including Adams’ bid for the governorship of Edo State*.

When Dan’s proposition to bring in “some people with money” whom he knew was rebuffed at the first National Working Committee meeting, barely two weeks after the Founding Convention, he refused to call another meeting for over a year. I literally had to write to him and the National Secretary, threatening to summon other members of the National Working Committee to Abuja subsequent to which we would invoke the constitutional provision that a third of the NWC could summon a meeting, if the right thing was not immediately done. This worked, but a downturn had commenced in the life of the party.

In a number of states across the country where there used to be vibrant party life at the branches, bringing together working-class activists, enthusiasm was dampened by the absence of a functioning centre for almost two years. In Lagos where civil society activists wanted to make an inroad into the party, some leading party members did everything possible to frustrate this. Adams lost faith in the possibility of Dan securing him a war chest for his gubernatorial ambitions and started looking elsewhere. A concomitant consequence of this was his stunted commitment to building the LP, helping to define a gulf between the NLC and LP.

However, whilst Dan on his part was successful in presenting the party as an “electoral platform” for members of the establishment who lost out in the traditional parties of the bosses to contest in the 2007 elections, the diamond in this diadem of cash-for-platform was brought in, not by Dan, but by the former Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Gas Workers (NUPENG) General Secretary, Chief Joseph Akinlaja. This was Dr. Olusegun Mimiko.

With Mimiko’s emergence as Governor of Ondo State in 2009, *and the continued distance of the movement from the party*, the stage was set for the consolidation of the party’s right wing. In the period leading to the 2007 elections, the entry of strange bedfellows as electoral contestants on the party’s platform had also resulted in some changes within the party’s organisation. Gradually, ties to the trade union bureaucracy, not to talk yet of the rank and file, were whittled down. This process was taken to new heights in the process leading to the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Convention in 2009.

The December 19, 2009 Convention was a watershed in several ways that were not clear to most people at the time. It was an opportunity to reclaim the party which was frittered away by NLC. The Festus Iyayi-Report for reorganisation had just been wrapped up, and radical elements within and outside the trade unions had also built up a *Campaign for a Mass-based Labour Party*. Instead of building on the leverage this scenario presented, the NLC Secretariat merely assured all of a “Special Convention” to be held sometime in an undefined future, to decide the fate of the party. But, Dan grasped the moment much better, with the authority (and material support) of Governor Mimiko, and the bulk of delegates on his side, he passed a constitution which vested near absolute powers in the office of the Chairman. He also expanded the NWC, populating it with an absolute majority of those that would ensure his will subsists.

This might have set the stage for the five years that ended with the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Convention of October 11, 2014. But, we must also state that, Dan did not and could not have

got away with running the party as a second eleven team for the bosses' side without the acquiescence, if not outright collaboration of a number of ex-trade unionists and ex-socialists that were on that NWC who now scream blue murder. On several occasions, I was shocked to find myself in a minority of one, even on issues that one would have considered as straight forward as opposition to an LP support for Goodluck Jonathan and the PDP in 2011 or against humungous amounts being charged for party members to pay as nomination fees before they could run for party offices. For now, I would want to skip a lot that went on and get straight to the melodramatic “split” of October 2014

The dominant narrative has been that the October 11, 2014 National Convention held at Akure was illegal, or at least illegitimate and the “factional” leadership that came out of it lacks any authority because it had been disowned by the NLC and TUC, which constituted a Caretaker Committee. Central to this argument is the perspective that the Convention was sponsored by the PDP (since Governor Mimiko crossed over to the PDP 9 days earlier). But, however convincing it might seem, this narrative is factually incorrect.

And this distortion presents a problem for drawing the correct lessons from what actually transpired. Dr Mimiko’s “cross-carpeting” was actually a case of thunder and lightning rendering a helping hand to an already installed bomb. Shortly before Mimiko announced his decamping, Joe Ajaero had issued a statement calling for postponement of the Convention. He claimed to speak as Chairman of the Political Commission. But the Commission never met to arrive at this decision. In fact, Ajaero was at the time in the United States, and acted on the basis of discussions with a few individuals, on the possible outcomes of the Convention.

Meanwhile, it is instructive that the National Executive Council which summoned the Convention was the first ever that the Presidents and General Secretaries of both the NLC and TUC took part in. One of the arguments raised in the Ajaero statement was that the NEC fixed the Convention for October 4 and the NWC unilaterally moved the date to October 11. But this amounts to playing smart without being clever by taking that decision out of context. It was after the NEC meeting that it was realised that October 4 would fall on the Eid al-Adha.

On the eve of the Convention, NLC and TUC called a meeting where the position was taken to boycott the Convention. Subsequently, it constituted a Caretaker Committee. The same Dan Nwuanyanwu that had refused to hand over the LP certificate for nine years after the NLC NEC requested it be deposited in a safe within Labour House, and who had said unprintable things about the trade unions in relation to the LP, suddenly appeared at Labour House with the

certificate, after he had fallen out with Alhaji A. A. Salam, the Chair elected at Akure. This was just a scene, within the first act of a drama of the absurd regarding the way forward.

At the October 10, 2014 meeting, I pointed out that after years of complacency, any opportunity to reclaim the LP might have been lost, as boycotting the Convention would in itself be ineffectual. Had the Caretaker Committee that was set up (and which I was nominally a member of) was ready to work as a fighting platform, it could have served as an alternative pole around which a new party of labour could be built. But three years on, it has shown itself incapable of playing that role, to say the very least.

It is largely because there is crisis within the Labour Party, which an opportunity might be presenting itself to organised labour for “reclaiming” the party it established and (almost?) lost. But, this opportunity must be handled with caution and deep thinking that brings the lessons learnt from the 15-year experience of the current LP to bear within the broader context of past histories of working-class party-building in Nigeria, and the abundant possibilities for a working-class party which actually represents and is peopled by working-class people, as we can see with the Corbyn moment in Britain, for example. It is in this light that I have brought up highlights of the route we took to where we are now, and that I now turn to recommendations, which I hereby submit for your kind attention.

### **In Lieu of A Conclusion: What Is To Be Done?**

Organised labour has to go back to the founding principles resolved upon by NLC as the basis for party-formation, i.e. the NLC Labour and Politics Policy. This is an extant resolution of the Congress-in-session. The fact that this has been put in abeyance all these years is itself a flouting of the principles of internal democracy.

If, as it seems clear now, the pathway forward by Congress’ perspective is to reclaim the LP, there is definitely need for a Special Convention which will bring “all parties” together. All parties in this sense would be inclusive of not only the three different strands of interests/factions that could be attributable to the Labour Party as it were. The broad spectrum of pro-working people parties and radical civil society organisations should be involved in a process that could bring about the new Labour Party, or by whatsoever name called, at such a Convention.

The deepening collaboration between NLC and TUC since the early 2000s, including on LP, should be consolidated upon. An important aspect of this could be re-constituting the

Political Commissions of both centres into one Labour Political Commission. This would not be something new, in the pre-June 12 period, the Labour Political Commission, included NLC and Senior Staff Consultative Association Nigeria (SESCAN) as well as radical intelligentsia (which both Centre's commissions usually include, separately).

Commencement, as soon as possible, of mass rank and file mobilisation into the party, at the grassroots of workplaces and communities. The possibilities of setting up newspaper(s) and community radio(s) of the (emerging new or "reclaimed") party could be considered. And party schools (which could draw from the NLC Schools experiences) as well could be constituted. A manifesto presenting a socio-economic alternative framework that could draw from the NLC's Alternative National Development Agenda (ANDA) work should be developed and popularised.

The goals of a party of labour as eloquently presented by the Policy document cannot be met through electoralism. If we get our acts right, the party of labour has what it takes for a good showing at the polls in 2019 and beyond. But, that in itself will not lead to fundamental change or working-class people's self-emancipation. Extra-electoral politics of demonstrations, and other forms of mass action and mass education are of utmost importance for building the party as much as for attaining its primary objective. Taking forward the set goal of creatively building the Labour Civil Society Coalition (LASCO) should be done concurrently with that of building the labour party for our time, by NLC and TUC.

And finally, it is important for Congress to take a stance of *NEVER AGAIN* would we allow the rains that beat us the way they did with PSD/LP beat us again. Breathing life into that stance requires learning from our (immediate) past, and quite importantly being ready to seize the bull by the horns and go forward by returning to our founding.

**THE POLITICIAN IS THE PEOPLE’S PROBLEM: AN  
ASSESSMENT OF THE INTELLECTUAL LEGACY OF PROFESSOR  
FUNMI ADEWUMI**

**Femi Aborisade\***

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**Introduction**

In discussing the devastating deaths of a few comrades and friends in recent time, including our own Funmi Adewumi and Abubakar Momoh; a friend, Professor Rotimi Olatunji of Lagos State University (LASU) gave me his own definition of life. He said life is about memories. Whatever we are going to say and write on Funmi Adewumi since his death is all about the impact he was able to make on us individually and collectively, as a people. I have, therefore, decided to attempt a summary of the intellectual contributions and legacy of Funmi Adewumi in industrial relations and conscientisation of workers, as far as a thesis that tends to run through his writings is concerned.

I can only do this from his written words, which I have consulted. The title of this contribution is the summary of my reflection as to the indelible memory I have of Funmi Adewumi’s intellectual contributions. His life’s concern was that: *the politician is the people’s problem. The politician is the source of the problems of the people. Though they seek power on the promises of solving societal problems, they actually end up being the problem, the stumbling block against which the people must struggle and mobilise; the group of people that the masses must defeat in order to survive is the elitist politicians, the bourgeois ruling class. Having defined the bourgeois ruling class as the problem of the people, Funmi Adewumi also defined his*

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\* Femi ABORISHADE, Leading Human Rights lawyer, was Senior Lecturer in the Department of Business Administration, The Polytechnic, Ibadan, Nigeria and former National Secretary of the National Conscience Party (NCP).

*relationship to that ruling class: he had a disdain for the bourgeois politicians. He socially and politically cut off himself from them. He did all he could to write, speak and organise against the bourgeois ruling class, nationally and internationally, and particularly the politicians in the Nigerian locale.*

In terms of *ideological political affiliation*, Funmi Adewumi took up membership of Socialist Workers League (SWL), of which I am a member. He attended a few meetings that his work and living circumstances permitted him to attend. He made financial contributions too. In terms of *practical political affiliation*, Funmi Adewumi was a member of the anti-privatisation political party, the National Conscience Party (NCP) and worked actively in the bid of Femi Falana, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, to become the Governor of Ekiti State in 2003. Till he died, he kept advocating that the NCP should be rebuilt (in alliance with other parties and organisations that share similar programmes) for the goal of capturing political power – that the NCP remained the only platform for genuine political efforts to change the socio-economic conditions of Nigeria in the interests of the downtrodden.

At the level of ensuring reproduction of *emancipatory literature*, Funmi Adewunmi was in the forefront of establishing the “Working Class and Trade Union Studies Association of Nigeria”, aimed at publishing essays and research findings informed by Marxian analysis, which the formal industrial relations academic bodies may not accept as “publishable”. Not less than two national conferences were organised by the Working Class and Trade Union Studies Association of Nigeria (WCTUSAN), under his leadership, promptings and initiatives.

### **The Greatness of Funmi Adewumi**

I think the greatness of Funmi Adewumi lies in the fact that he was not an opportunistic professor. Even in his difficult state or condition of unemployment, shortly before he died, he refused to give up his life’s convictions to, as they say, “join them”, or serve the ruling class in any capacity. This, in spite of having personal friends in the ruling political party at the level of the Federal Government and in a few states of the federation. Rather, he resorted to consulting for trade unions and organising education/training programmes for unions as a way to eke out a living after University of Ibadan, Ibadan, humiliated and constructively discouraged him from renewing his teaching contract. The humiliation consisted in making him to write, applying for his monthly salary after every month’s work. His letter would be passed, bureaucratically, from

table to table, before approval would then be granted for his payment. He felt he could not continue that experience and he abandoned his contract teaching career in University of Ibadan.

Many others could have conveniently rationalised having to join the ruling class in such harrowing economic conditions, coupled with the inability to access his pension contributions from one of the Pension Fund Administrators (PFAs). I know there are many of his friends in positions of power in several sectors of the economy and society. But he did not make overtures to them to be absolved in the rotten governance system with a view to abolishing his own personal poverty, which is the aim of the average Nigerian politician. Rather, Funmi Adewumi remained principled until he breathed his last. This is the enduring legacy of Funmi Adewumi, borne out of his intellectual work, which governed his life.

### **The Source of the People's Problems**

In the abstract of one of his papers, “Rethinking Organised Labour’s Engagement with the Political Process in Nigeria: Issues in Alliance Building and Popular Participation,” Funmi Adewumi clearly states that: “...members of the political elite are the source of the people’s problems.”<sup>404</sup> This paper is limited to assessing the works of Funmi Adewumi as far as demonstrating how the bourgeois ruling class constitutes *the problem*, rather than the solution, for the larger society. The works of Funmi Adewumi along this identified limited area are enriched and/or updated by highlighting the key elements of the All Progressive Congress (APC’s) Federal Government’s *Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP)*<sup>405</sup> in order to validate the concerns of Funmi Adewumi and show how by its economic programme, the ruling APC, which describes itself as a “change” or “progressive” party, represents, in reality, *the problem* or the break on the path of societal development. The way forward to solving the problems created by the political elite is also proffered, from the standpoint of Funmi Adewumi as can be found in some of his academic writings and papers presented at trade union training or education workshops.

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<sup>404</sup> Accessed online at <http://fightinginequality.org/?p=329> on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017

<sup>405</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Economic Recovery & Growth Plan: 2017-2020*, Ministry of Budget and Planning (February), 2017.

## **The Character of the State: Whose Interests Does It Serve?**

It is perhaps helpful to situate Funmi Adewumi's thoughts within his conceptualisation of the character of the state (which in popular parlance is called "government"), in terms of the interests it serves. Funmi Adewumi opines that state apparatus is a tool for repressing the weaker or marginalised classes by the economically and politically powerful classes. In other words, the existing state structure (or governments) within the context of the existing social structure, is not for the purpose of protecting and promoting the interests of the downtrodden, but an apparatus for holding down the masses, with a view to protecting and promoting the interests of the ruling class. In his words:

... The state is an instrument of class rule, an instrument for the domination and exploitation of other groups and social formations, including the weaker elements of the ruling class. Karl Marx puts it this way: *'The state is an organ of class rule, an organ of oppression of one class by another, it is the creation of "order", which legalizes and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between the classes.'* Given the above and in view of the fact that the weaker classes would not readily submit to the wishes of the dominating class, the state apparatus cannot but be repressive.<sup>406</sup>

## **The Roots of Current Societal Crises**

Funmi Adewumi explains that the roots of the crises that confront society are systemic and that the ultimate solution lies in system change. According to him, the "current phase of the crisis of capitalism is a reflection of the crisis that is inherent in the capitalist system."<sup>407</sup> In other words, unlike the popular misconception that corruption is the main problem of Nigeria, he recognises that corruption is an element of the capitalist system in the periphery Nigerian situation within the international imperialist scheme. To him, the fundamental character of the capitalist system is to be traced to the phenomenon in which a few people in the society monopolise the wealth that belongs to all, and that all attempts by the capitalist ruling class to overcome the social problems created by the nature of their system can only result in compounding the problems. He emphasised this point, when he wrote that:

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<sup>406</sup> F. Adewumi, "Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development Agenda: A Labour Movement's Perspective" in *Nigeria Labor Factsheet*, July – September 2016.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*

Essentially, the fundamental contradiction of capitalist production is based on social production which is privately appropriated. This contradiction between the social productive forces and capitalist production relations finds vent in crises which occur periodically in a law-governed way. The bourgeoisie can overcome them by preparing the way for new, deeper and more comprehensive crises.<sup>408</sup>

Relying on the insights offered by Lance Taylor, who opines that “income (re) distribution *against* labour and the poor is implicit in stabilization attempts”, Funmi Adewumi stresses that the socioeconomic policies advanced by the capitalist ruling class to address current social problems tend to end up in “double jeopardy” for the working people, thus compounding the problems they declare they are interested in solving. To him:

One major implication of the political class response to the crisis is that components of reform programmes such as removal of alleged subsidy and the imposition of user charges on services such as education, health and public transportation have succeeded in putting additional burdens on workers and other disadvantaged groups thus further impoverishing them. In the final analysis, they find it difficult to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, clothing and healthy living. Members of the Nigerian working class are confronted by a zero-sum situation. They are sent out of jobs prematurely (often without getting their terminal benefits) and yet are expected to pay for a whole range of social services. It, thus, becomes a case of double jeopardy!!!<sup>409</sup>

In another work, *Victims as Sacrificial Lambs: A Critique of Public Service Reforms in Nigeria*,<sup>410</sup> Funmi Adewumi analyses each of the key components of reforms in the public service and argues that the reform measures “are mere excuses to justify the punishment of largely innocent workers.”<sup>411</sup> One of the recurrent reform measures examined in the work is the claim that the public service is “over-bloated” and that there is a need for “right-sizing” or “down-sizing”. This, he argues, is nothing but an excuse to cut costs by making workers the scapegoat. Relying on the data provided by Adegoroye<sup>412</sup>, he avers that it is ridiculous for

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<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>410</sup> F. Adewumi, “*Victims As Sacrificial Lambs: A Critique of Public Service Reforms in Nigeria*” in Adewumi F. & Idowu, W. (eds.) *Public Sector Reforms in Africa*, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, Dakar, 2012

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>412</sup> G. Adegoroye, ‘Public Service Reform For Sustainable Development: The Nigerian Experience,’ Keynote Address Presented at the Commonwealth Advanced Seminar, 2006 Wellington New Zealand, 20 February- 3 March, 2006.

government to argue that “it is too much for a government to employ directly less than 2 per cent of its total population.” He goes further:

In all, there are 2, 267,492 persons employed at all the three tiers of government in Nigeria. With a population of about 140 million, the total number of persons employed in the entire public service in Nigeria (Federal, State and Local Governments) [as at early 2006] represents only 1.61 per cent.”<sup>413</sup>

Another interconnected reform measure assessed by Funmi Adewumi in the same work is the claim of “excessive wage bill” in the public service. On this issue, he urges labour leaders/activists not to be hoodwinked by such claims, but to rather undertake a comparative analysis by comparing and contrasting the total wage bill of the bulk of employees outside the directorate cadre to the earnings of the few political office holders. He undertook this comparative analysis, using the official statistics as found in the work of Adegoroye. He established that, whilst the bulk of the employees outside the directorate cadre as at 2005 (i.e. 178,445 employees) earned on the whole about N5billion per month, 472 political office holders, who constituted the Federal Executive arm of Government, earned a figure of about N65billion.<sup>414</sup> In other words, on the average, per head, the ordinary employee earned about N28,000 per month, whilst on the average, per head, a member of the Federal Executive arm of government earned N137m per month. This is a ratio of 1:4,893, a wide gap in income inequality. This ratio must be much higher in the realities of today.

Privatisation of public enterprises is another reform issue on which Funmi Adewumi takes a position. He first establishes the rationale for privatisation from government’s point of view, as follows: “The major case against these enterprises by the apostles of privatization is that they constitute a drain on public funds and, thus by privatizing them, money would be released to provide social services and infrastructures. ...”<sup>415</sup> But to him:

Privatization would appear more political than economic. Otherwise, there are other options for addressing the so called shortcomings of these enterprises. If privatization were just an economic policy, then there is no justification for selling companies that are self-financing to generate additional funds for government. These include organizations such as, the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Nigerian Telecommunications (NITEL) and some of the government-owned financial institutions. The fall-out of privatization is that many workers

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<sup>413</sup> Adewumi, “*Victims as Sacrificial Lambs: A Critique of Public Service Reforms in Nigeria*,” pp. 116-117.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

have lost their jobs. Figures available indicate that 8,000 workers lost their jobs in NITEL, 8,991 from the NPA, 4800 from the Nigerian Postal Service (NIPOST), and 1,800 from the Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria (FAAN). From the core civil service, a total of 45,000 senior civil servants have been laid off due to the reforms.<sup>416</sup>

The negative consequences of the measures adopted by the capitalist political class are not limited to workers in the public sector as employers in the private sector take a cue from the policies and practices of governments in the public sector. He underscores the concrete reality on the ground by pointing out that:

The situation in the private sector is not any better. As part of their coping/survival strategies, workers are dealt a heavy blow. Job losses are routine as companies are choked by inappropriate policies. The textile industry is virtually non-existent today because of flooding of the market by foreign products and the inability of local textile factories to compete as well as the collapse of supporting infrastructures. In the oil and gas sector, casualisation and abuse of expatriate quota keep denying Nigerians access to decent work. Of course, in the banking sector workers are being made to bear the brunt of bad management of their work places. Many jobs have been lost in the sector and many more are still likely to go in the nearest future, unless there is a desperate response from the unions/workers being threatened. Even in the much celebrated telecommunications sector, workers are virtually at the mercy of management as there is practically no unionism. This is a fallout of the Nigerian government's obsession with foreign direct investment and the attendant capitulation to the demands of the investors. Across sectors managements have resorted to a union-avoidance strategy of managing employee relations as embedded in the strategic human resource management approach.<sup>417</sup>

### **The Influence of Imperialism**

Funmi Adewumi also establishes a linkage between the state of the economy in a neo-colonial country like Nigeria and the imperialist structure of international relationships.

Essentially, what we are confronted with is the quest of world capitalism for survival. In this context, firms are more interested in discovering, around the world, "cheap but efficient production locations that offer them the largest and most secure and profitable return on competitive success (Hirst and Thompson). This is largely a response to the crises of capitalism, which unfold periodically with the consequences visited on developing countries that are extremely vulnerable in the emerging new international economic order. Haggard (1995:15) puts it thus, "sluggish and erratic growth in the advanced industrial states matched by sharp fluctuations in import demand contributed to the economic difficulties of

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<sup>416</sup> *Ibid*, p.119

<sup>417</sup> Adewumi, "Economic Recovery and sustainable Development Agenda: A Labour Movement's Perspective."

the less developed countries (LDCs), especially in the early 1980s and again in the early 1990s”. To then think that the solution to these problems would come from, or lie in the source of the problems is incredible. The problems of the developing countries are then compounded by the gross mismanagement of their economies by ill-prepared leaders who are satisfied with the commissions and kick-backs they receive from the imperialist mentors.”<sup>418</sup>

However, it is pertinent to point out that *some* of the economically and politically powerful members of the ruling class in developing countries are no longer just satisfied with taking commissions and kick-backs from their imperialist mentors. They have constituted themselves also as strong partakers in the world capitalist system. For example, Aliko Dangote, is now richer than any British capitalist and easily one of the 100 most wealthy and powerful individuals in the world. Thus, the masses would have to rise up, not only against imperialist forces; they also have to rise up against the class of the local, powerful capitalists and their representatives in the ruling parties, if their striving for a decent life for themselves and their children would be attained.

### **The Class Structure of Nigeria and Dependency Nature of the Nigerian Economy**

In his work, “The Role of Labour In Nation Building: An Internationalist Perspective,”<sup>419</sup> Funmi Adewumi traces the precarious existence of the masses to the class character of the Nigerian society. To him, Nigeria is a class society, consisting of two broad classes - the ruling and the oppressed classes or the rich and the poor classes. He argues that the ruling class runs Nigeria in the interest of its members and at the expense of workers and other poor classes who are condemned to squalor and pauperised existence. In his words:

... it is important to have a better understanding of the Nigerian society in order to appreciate the need for and the content of a labour agenda. The starting point is that Nigeria is an exploitative *class society*, a society being run in the interest of a parasitic few to the detriment of the over exploited, abused and maligned majority. The major classes are the ruling class made up of those who own big property and the means of production, distribution and exchange either on behalf of their foreign masters or themselves and the oppressed class made up of workers (those who depend on non-exploitative income) who are condemned to urban squalor and the peasants who are doomed to rural pauperisation.

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<sup>418</sup> Adewumi, “Victims as Sacrificial Lambs: A Critique of Public Service Reforms in Nigeria.”

<sup>419</sup> F. Adewumi, “The Role of Labour in Nation Building: An Internationalist Perspective” in *Nigeria Labor Factsheet*, Oct –Dec 2012, pp. 32-39. The paper was originally presented at the “Workshop On Setting Agenda For Labour In A Democratic Dispensation: Emerging Issues” organised by Food, Beverage & Tobacco Senior Staff Association (FOBTOS); held at Ijebu Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria between 9<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> November 2012.

... By the logic of a society based on class division, it is the few which constitutes the ruling class that usually corner the bulk of the commonwealth for their own exclusive use. This explains the lopsidedness in the distribution of the national wealth as reflected in the living styles of both the rich and the poor - one extreme living in obscene affluence and the other in abject poverty and deprivation.

### **Nigeria as a Dependent Capitalist Society and Its Implications**

In his studies on the role of labour in nation building, Funmi Adewumi explains that Nigeria is not just a capitalist society, it is a capitalist society with a special feature, a *dependent* capitalist society. He explains that the dependency relationship consists in the Nigerian economy and society being run in the interests of European capitalists. The European capitalists have formed a cabal with Nigerian capitalists cutting across all the major ethnic groups, but especially amongst the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Igbos. Regardless of their ethnic backgrounds and regime type, military or civilian regimes, the Nigerian capitalists have entered into an unholy alliance with the European capitalists in running Nigeria in the interests of capitalists, whether foreign or domestic. In other words, to Funmi Adewumi, regardless of ethnicity or colour, capitalists of all ethnic groups and races are in a conspiracy against the poor of all ethnic groups in Nigeria and internationally. Funmi Adewumi was neither nationalist nor racist in perspective. He was neither an ethnic jingoist nor a racist. He stood for working class solidarity on an international scale. He was a working class internationalist intellectual. His message is for the poor, nationally and internationally, to unite against local and international capitalists. The reference to Europeans in the quotations that follow, in his endeavour to explain the dependency nature of the Nigerian society (and the implications of that relationship) should be understood within his passion for international working class philosophy and struggle.

To Funmi Adewumi's conceptualisation of the dependency theory and its implications for the masses we now turn. According to him:

It is equally important to note that Nigeria is not a typical class society. It is not a full-fledged capitalist society but what can be referred to as a dependent capitalist society whose ruling class takes instructions on how to direct the affairs of the society from their masters based in Europe and American capitals and institutions dominated by them (this is clearly manifested in the way in which policies of successive administrations have been designed to suit foreign interests). This is the direct result of our colonial experience and years of crude exploitation by, and enslavement to, the Europeans [i.e. European capitalists]. Since our first contact with the Europeans, as far back as the 15th century, they have been interested in

the unrestricted exploitation of both our human and material resources. This explains the centuries of crude exploitation and the resultant impoverishment to which we have been subjected. All along the Europeans have identified some Nigerian collaborators in their efforts to exploit us as a people. On the attainment of the token flag and anthem independence, it was this group of collaborators that took over the reins of political power and unfortunately for Nigerians members of this group have remained in government and power ever since. They come in various shades and sizes, in khaki or the ever flowing *babanriga*, as Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba or Igbo or some other ethnic nationality. This is the group that is referred to as the comprador bourgeoisie or commission agents since they rely mainly on the commissions they receive for serving as stooges and puppets of their imperialist masters.

... However, it is not only members of the Nigerian ruling class that are exploiting the masses of our people. Their imperialist masters also participate actively in the naked exploitation of Nigeria and her people. This is because as a dependent capitalist country, Nigeria's economic bloodline is tied closely to those of the advanced capitalist countries of Europe and America. One important fact to note in this context is that the bulk of capital investments in Nigeria is foreign owned, a situation that is being compounded by the mindless privatisation of public enterprises by a visionless ruling class under the prompting of their foreign masters. Take a look at any sector of the economy; from distributive trade through the oil industry, communication, aviation, manufacturing to heavy construction, there is the all pervading presence of transnational corporations representing the interests of the international capitalist system. It would interest you to know that the oil industry which is supposed to be the mainstay of the Nigerian economy is under the firm control of foreigners to the extent that the Nigerian government cannot tell you the volume of crude oil being lifted from the bowel of the earth in Nigeria (the controversy between the NNPC on the one hand and the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission as well as the National Assembly on the other, about the actual accruals from the sales of crude illustrates this).

It is these corporations that carry out the unbridled exploitation of the country's resources, both human and material. In order to protect their own interests, these corporations become interested in the politics of the country since there is the need to have people who will collaborate with them in power. As such when the representatives of these countries and companies talk of a conducive climate for investment, they are talking of a government that will allow them exploit the country without let or hindrance. The overall effect of this is that the Nigerian ruling class has ensured, through a number of policies, that the country is firmly entrenched within the orbit of world capitalism as a subservient partner. ...

It is important to note that *most* members of the ruling class are not engaged in any productive activity. They are mainly involved in the distributive trade as importers and exporters (this also partly explains why the Nigerian state would rather import petroleum products than engage in local refining), and manufacturers' representatives. These elements act as the middlemen between their foreign masters and their colleagues in government to secure utmost

advantage. This has in turn resulted in a number of unwholesome practices such as inflation of contracts, over invoicing, importation of sub-standard products, kickbacks, and other unethical practices all in a bid to get maximum returns. At the end of the day, through a combination of factors such as their control of the economy and unbridled corruption, members of the ruling elite have accumulated for themselves a substantial part of the country's wealth leaving only a negligible few for the rest of the populace and this is usually not enough to cater for the needs of this vast majority. In practical terms, the majority of our people are impoverished in the same dialectical process in which the minority, who constitute the ruling elite, unjustly enriches itself. The masses of our people do not only suffer economic injustice, they also suffer social injustice. They are almost always at the receiving end of various obnoxious policies and are subjected to a lot of deprivations - education is out of their reach, they have no access to good health care, they don't live in decent houses and they cannot eat two decent meals a day. *It is a society where very many people are suffering, where very many people have got nothing, where too few people have got everything, in fact far more than they need and would ever need.* This is the Nigerian society in which workers and other disadvantaged social groups are located. It is a society in which the rascality and irresponsibility of the political class are threatening the fragile existence of the country.”<sup>420</sup>

### **Funmi Adewumi: The Intellectual As A Prophet**

The concept ‘prophet’ is used in this paper, not in the Biblical or spiritual sense, but in the sense of being able to predict the future in a broad sense, based on the capacity to theoretically explain phenomena and draw generalised lessons. To this extent, his thesis that the politician is the problem or break on societal development, which underlines his writings, is applicable to the APC, as a party, in terms of its programme at the Federal Government's level as encapsulated in the *Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP)*.<sup>421</sup>

I argue in this paper that Funmi Adewumi's thesis is borne out in the economic programme of the APC-led Federal Government because the *ERGP* is nothing but a programme to use public power to dispossess the public of the commonwealth in the interest of a few who have hijacked power, in a conspiracy against public good. The *ERGP* is the economic blueprint of the Federal Government, which was launched in February 2017, to cover the period 2017-2020. The *ERGP* is an economic programme predicated on the policy of privatisation, which Funmi Adewumi perceives as a political rather than an economic agenda. The Plan declares

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<sup>420</sup> Adewumi, “The Role of Labour In Nation Building: An Internationalist Perspective”

<sup>421</sup> FRN, *Economic Recovery and Growth Plan: 2017-2020*

unequivocally that it is an initiative to privatise selected public enterprises.<sup>422</sup> The Plan goes further to declare that it is meant to ‘support the private sector to become *the engine of national growth and development*’.<sup>423</sup> In other words, the APC-led Federal Government has shifted the responsibility of the public sector (i.e. the state) as the engine of economic growth to the private sector. The Plan also contains measures to galvanise the state governments “towards the same goals”.<sup>424</sup> In short, the Plan is a market fundamentalist approach to economic development. According to the Plan, it will:

*... allow markets to function. The EGRP recognizes the power of markets to drive optimal behavior among market participants. The Plan prioritises the use of the market as a means of resource allocation, where appropriate. However, the Plan also recognizes the need to strengthen regulatory oversight to minimize market abuse.*<sup>425</sup>

In essence, as far as the APC-led Federal Government is concerned, its responsibility is to provide regulatory oversight and allow the private sector to play the role of the engine of economic growth. Some specific policy statements in the Plan, re-affirming privatisation of production and distribution of public goods include the following:

- ❖ In the **oil** sector: To “reduce the Federal Government’s stake in JV oil ventures” and “significantly reduce Federal Government stakes in other oil and non-oil assets.”<sup>426</sup>
- ❖ In the **infrastructural** sector: “...the private sector is expected to play a key role in providing critical infrastructure, either directly or in collaboration with the Government under public private partnership (PPP) arrangements.”<sup>427</sup>
- ❖ The Plan, on pages 128-129, serial No. 29, sets out Government intention more elaborately by stating that it would “establish a robust capital project development framework to encourage and increase PPPs to deliver critical projects, such as roads, rail, seaports and airports”. In order to facilitate the privatization agenda in this regard, the Plan declares further that Government would “review the infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission Act ... so as to “strengthen the Commission’s regulatory mandate to facilitate private investment.”

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<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, page 10, last paragraph).

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, p 11, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11, paragraph 5.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12, paragraph 2.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.* p. 47 and 116.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph.

- ❖ **Healthcare:** Government is to “partner with the private sector to develop at least one mega-health centre in each State to provide high quality preventive and curative healthcare.”<sup>428</sup>
- ❖ **Education:** Government is to “develop incentive programmes to encourage **private sector** and state investment in model technical and vocational education institutes...”<sup>429</sup>
- ❖ **Job creation through the private sector:** The Plan aims at generating 3.75 million jobs per annum but this is to be attained through “**support of the private sector to maximize job creation potential** and complement Government direct job creation.”<sup>430</sup>
- ❖ **Temporary job creation by the public sector:** while the Plan cedes responsibility for the creation of presumably permanent jobs to the private sector, it expressly assigns to the Federal Government, the creation, mainly of temporary jobs. The Plan sets to “scale up the N-power volunteer corps to provide **temporary employment** for 500,000 graduates annually in education, agriculture and health.”<sup>431</sup>
- ❖ **Job creation through housing construction of housing units:** The Plan sets out to create 105,000 jobs through construction of 2,700 housing units in the short term (which is not defined) and to increase housing units to 10,000 by 2020.<sup>432</sup>

However, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in the first quarter of 2016 alone, more than 500,000 jobs were lost in circumstances of government’s harsh economic policies. By the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter of 2016, the difficulties posed by high cost of living attributable to increase in the price of petrol from N96.50 per litre to N145/litre as from 11<sup>th</sup> May 2016 contributed to astronomical rise in job losses. By the NBS official reports, that not less than 3.67 million Nigerians had lost their jobs.<sup>433</sup> It would be recalled that on May 11<sup>th</sup> 2016, the Federal Government officially and fully deregulated the pricing of petroleum products and pegged official rates to between N135 and N145 per litre as against the previous rate of N96.50/litre. It was also officially declared that anyone, individuals and private companies, could import PMS and determine the price based on the black market exchange rate, provided the selling price does not exceed the maximum range of between N135 and N145 per litre. This was against the pre-

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<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.* p. 86, serial No. 34.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88, serial No. 36).

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93, the last subsection).

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94, serial No. 44.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94, serial No. 44.

<sup>433</sup> <https://m.guardian.ng/business-services/3-7-million-nigerians-lost-jobs-in2016-says-nbs/> accessed online on 4/9/2017.

election promise made by President Muhammadu Buhari that the APC government would not increase the price of petroleum products.

- ❖ Indeed, the Plan declares that Government would “liberalise the exchange rate” and “liberalise the downstream sector by deregulating prices for premium motor spirit (PMS).”<sup>434</sup>
- ❖ **Mines and Steel subsector:** The goal of the Plan in this subsector is also to “create an enabling environment to enhance private investment, targeting energy minerals, iron/steel and gold/gemstones.”<sup>435</sup>
- ❖ **Electricity subsector:** The goal here is to “improve the commercial viability of GENCOs [i.e. electricity generation companies] and DISCOs [i.e. electricity distribution companies]” and “introduce cost-reflective electricity tariffs.”<sup>436</sup>

The *ERGP* can best be described as a declaration of war against ordinary people. The Plan is nothing but a programme meant to dispossess the people of their common patrimony, commercialise or commodify public goods such as education and healthcare and raise prices of critical goods such as petroleum products with the attendant rise in cost of living without corresponding increases in salaries and wages and without any income guarantee for vulnerable groups, such as children, women and the aged. But, as Funmi Adewumi teaches us, the ERGP is a neo-liberal policy agenda, which is hinged on making the private sector “the driving force” of the economy. In his words:

There is also the political component of economic reforms with its insistence on ‘reduced state participation in the economy with the private sector being the driving force with market forces determining process (Mwanza 1992:3)<sup>437</sup>. What is called private-sector driven development is one of the underlying philosophies of neo-liberal economic policies.”<sup>438</sup>

To Funmi Adewumi, neo-liberalism cannot solve the problems of the economy; it can only aggravate them. To him, “those who created the problems facing the Nigerian economy and polity cannot be genuinely interested in solving them.”<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> FRN, *Economic Recovery and Growth Plan: 2017-2020*, p. 24, Box 1.1: The Strategic Implementation Plan.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62, serial No. 14.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, (p. 77, Serial No 28.

<sup>437</sup> A. M. Mwanza, (ed.), *Structural Adjustment Programme in SADC*, SAPES Books, Harare, 1992

<sup>438</sup> Adewumi, “*Victims as sacrificial lambs: A Critique of Public Service Reforms in Nigeria*,” p. 124.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

## **The Need for Organised Labour to Re-Position Itself in Order to Protect and Advance the Interests of its Members<sup>440</sup>**

To Funmi Adewumi, the bourgeois conventional politicians should not be considered to solve the challenge of development. According to him, the failure of the neo-colonial state to meet the aspirations and expectations of the Nigerian working class necessitates a labour agenda for nation building. Only the labour movement, he argues, can take the Nigerian society forward because:

In the first instance, the emergent indigenous political class inherited all the privileges of the British colonialist thereby perpetuating the colonial situation, characterized by oppression and repression. That was why the new political class reacted to the demands of labour that the colonial salary structure be modernised with arrogance and contempt. The mood of frustration within the rank of labour was best captured by Gogo Chu Nzeribe a former General Secretary of the Labour Unity Front, when he said that: *The only real action for independence came from the trade union movement and that people (politicians) who had done nothing took over the country and the workers were relegated to background (quoted in Offiong, 1983:154)*. Of course, the situation has not changed since. It is against this background that we argue that there is the need for organised labour to re-position itself in order to protect and advance the interests of its members within both the polity and economy. Of course, given the class nature of the Nigerian society, organised labour would have to contend with other entrenched interests...<sup>441</sup>

### **Who Sets the Agenda?**

Funmi Adewumi does not believe that trade union leaders should impose a development agenda on the working class. He advocates a bottom-up approach in the agenda setting, involving conscientisation and mobilisation of the rank and file membership. On an emancipatory agenda setting, he opines that:

This is a fairly straight forward question. A labour agenda can only be set by labour itself. By this I mean members of the trade union movement with the guidance of union leaders. This is the least that is expected in a membership organisation. We should concede that members of the unions know what their own needs are, they experience the grim realities of work life and the challenges they face as members of the larger Nigerian society. As the saying goes; s/he who wears the shoes knows where they pinch. Union members must own the agenda.

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<sup>440</sup> See, Adewumi, "The Role of Labour in Nation Building: An Internationalist Perspective.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-39

For this purpose trade union leaders and officials should reach out to their members across branches and collate their views. Embedded in this approach is a subtle sensitisation and mobilisation of union members. We can then help them put these in the proper perspective and couch them in elegant language.”

He argues further that:

As argued elsewhere (Adewumi, 2008), union programmes and strategies should be jointly determined by the members and leaders and should not just be the imposition of the leaders, no matter how altruistic. A membership organisation such as the trade union thrives on internal democracy, with popular consultation and participation in the affairs of the union, constituting major components. Once private employers and governments are aware that the members are actively involved in union matters and that union leaders are prosecuting the agenda of their members, they are not likely to treat them with levity ...  
... The first step is membership engagement. There is the need to take the unions back to the members. This is necessary for any membership organisation, as the members constitute the strength.”<sup>442</sup>

### **What Should be the Agenda Items?**

Funmi Adewumi avers that labour’s development agenda should basically consist of addressing “the well-being and welfare of workers and how best to protect and advance their interests, as worker-citizens within the context of a class society.”<sup>443</sup>

### **The Need to Ideologise Labour Struggles**

Funmi Adewumi does not believe that trade unions should be neutral as far as the ideology that guides their struggles is concerned. He, therefore, advocates socialism, which is the counter ideology to capitalism. According to him:

In pursuing the labour agenda, there is also the need to re-ideologise trade union struggles in Nigeria. The circumstances that prompted the formation of unions make it impossible for them to be ideologically neutral. The problems workers are contending with today are created by capitalism. As such, confronting them requires a counter-ideology, which cannot be the same capitalist ideology. The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) confirms this reality thus;  
*“Our times are characterised by the barbarity of capital at the expense of the working class and the imperialist barbarity at the expense of nations who resist. These two elements comprise capitalist globalisation. The results are: huge*

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<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-39.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*,

*profits for the few, poverty for many and new phenomena of colonialism, racism and neo-fascism” (WFTU, 2008).*

The position of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) also buttresses the need for trade unions to be ideological. Part of the Pre-ambule to the IWW Constitution reads:

*The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organise as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth (cited in Thompson & Bekken, 2006:iv).*

In other words, ideological undertones cannot be removed from trade union activities, if they are to be meaningful. In the context of a neo-colonial dependent satellite economy, in so far as the capitalist relations of production prevail, ideology would still be relevant in defining the responses and programmes of trade unions to developments not just within the employment relationship but also within the polity as a whole. Class interests dictate most government policies. As such, workers “should realise the political and class character of the various economic policies of government and respond appropriately”<sup>444</sup>

## **The Need for Trade Unions to Build Political Forces**

Funmi Adewumi advocates that trade unions have no discretion but to build political forces. In his words:

In pursuing the labour agenda there is the need to address the political side of trade union struggles. To be sure, there is no way trade unions can be apolitical as this would be a negation of not only the essence of trade unionism but also the very circumstances of their emergence. Unions arose as alternative locus of power to contest workplace relations with the employers, and this in itself is political. It is to this extent that it is correct to describe trade unions as political organisations operating in the economic terrain of industry.”<sup>445</sup>

However, Funmi adewumi urges that trade union involvement in political formations should be carefully managed such that it does not end up serving the opportunistic interests of the leaders alone. He submits that:

The real issue is *how to manage the political involvement of the trade union movement for the benefit of workers* and not just to serve the interest of leaders who may not be more than political jobbers. That was what was achieved with the involvement of labour leaders in the Babangida circus show that was nicknamed

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<sup>444</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 32-39.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid*.

political transition. How can a self-respecting trade union movement be represented in two political parties with opposing political orientations at the same time? It was just a case of crass opportunism.”<sup>446</sup>

Indeed, in another work “Rethinking Organised Labour’s Engagement with the Political Process in Nigeria: Issues in Alliance Building and Popular Participation”, Funmi Adewumi expresses utter displeasure at the findings he made from a seminal study on the role of trade union leadership in trade union involvement in politics. In his own words:

Ambivalence, opportunism and betrayal are three words that best describe organised labour’s engagement with the political process in Nigeria. Although there appears no consensus on the issue of political engagement and how best to go about it, the organised labour movement in Nigeria has been involved in the political process. Political parties have been formed; alliances have been struck while numerous political actions have been undertaken by, and in the name of, the trade union movement. It would appear that the involvement has not really yielded desired results. Rather only a few labour leaders and their paymasters/collaborators have succeeded in using the platform of organised labour to pursue personal interests.”<sup>447</sup>

Therefore, against the background of his findings, Funmi argues that there is an urgent need to re-think the mode of engagement of trade unions in politics such that “the overriding interests of all members of the movement would determine what to do and the appropriate structures to use.” He then recommends that:

...for a rewarding involvement in, or engagement with, the political process, members of the movement cannot leave the initiative to opportunistic labour leaders who feel at home with members of the political elite who are the very source of the people’s problems.<sup>448</sup>

### **The Need for Alliance Building**

Funmi Adewumi advocates an alliance between trade unions, other disadvantaged social groups and pro-labour forces in driving the labour agenda. According to him:

I also realise and appreciate that there are genuine allies of organised labour who may make inputs into the labour agenda. Here we have in mind members of the broader labour movement and civil society organisations that are well disposed

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<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>447</sup> **F. Adewumi**, “Rethinking Organised Labour’s Engagement with the Political Process in Nigeria: Issues in Alliance Building and Popular Participation”, Not Dated. accessed online at <http://fightinginequality.org/?p=329>

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*

towards labour issues... the labour movement should organize itself in order to be able to influence the process of policy formulation and the content in the country. This should be done *in conjunction with other disadvantaged social groups* in the country.<sup>449</sup>

## **Struggle from Below**

Funmi Adewumi places premium on the role of the rank and file in ensuring that labour's development agenda is pursued to a logical end rather than looking up to employers or government. In the work, "The Global Economy, Trade Unions and the Protection of Workers' Rights in Nigeria",<sup>450</sup> Adewumi posits as follows:

If it is realised that the rights being enjoyed today are the outcomes/products of popular struggles then there is the need for renewed struggles to maintain, and expand the frontiers of rights, particularly in the face of the rampaging onslaught of the world capitalist system...<sup>451</sup>

To Funmi Adewumi, existence of favourable laws or international instruments are useful to the extent that they may strengthen the resolve of workers to fight for what the law already recognises, but those laws tend to be myths unless workers actually struggle to claim the rights. According to him:

...From the findings of this study, our conclusion is that the provisions of labour laws and international labour standards of the ILO, in and by themselves, are not enough guarantees for the protection of workers' rights and as such there is the need to look beyond these instruments in protecting the rights of workers. Workers, their organisations and allies within the labour movement may need to adopt extra-judicial means, including political and social actions to defend workers' rights....<sup>452</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This paper is an attempt to assess the intellectual legacy of Professor Funmi Adewumi from the standpoint of a thesis that tends to permeate some of his writings, academic papers and papers presented at trade union training and education programmes. The thesis is: *the bourgeois politician is the problem of the people*. This thesis has been validated and enriched by examining

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<sup>449</sup> Adewumi, "The Role of Labour in Nation Building: An Internationalist Perspective."

<sup>450</sup> F. Adewumi, Extracts from "The Global Economy, Trade Unions and the Protection of Workers' Rights in Nigeria", accessed online as at 5/9/2017 at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/wusa.12003/pdf>

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*

the *Economic Recovery and Growth Plan: 2017-2020* of the Federal Government, led by the APC. But Funmi Adewumi was not just concerned about explaining the source of the socioeconomic problems facing the working class and its marginalised allies, he was also concerned with proffering solutions. The way forward and the likely challenges, all from the standpoint of Funmi Adewumi, are discussed in this paper.

**THE CENTRALITY OF CLASS STRUGGLE UNIONISM TO THE  
FUTURE OF NIGERIA**

**Comrade Abiodun AREMU\***

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**Introduction**

My intellectual encounters with Professor Funmi Adewumi started in 1996, when he encouraged me, despite my reluctance, to contribute my first ever published paper in a book he edited.<sup>453</sup> However, we have been long standing comrades as far back as the late 1980s. In that publication, one's 'official' pseudonym was A. A. Abiodun, concealing the "Aremu", because of my various responsibilities, overt and covert, in the struggle for the termination of military dictatorship in Nigeria in the 1990s. Our approach to discussion and writings on labour issues always proceed from the profound perspective of Marxist political economy because it affords us the leverage to have a proper understanding of the totality of forces at play in production relations.

This paper examines three of Funmi Adewumi's publications<sup>454</sup> and two of his papers published in the *Nigeria Labour Factsheet*<sup>455</sup> to underscore his contribution to the growth and development of the Nigerian trade unions and the larger struggle of the labour movement from the point of view of class analysis. We substantiate the rationale for the choice of this topic - *The*

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<sup>453</sup> A.A. Abiodun, "The Role of Labor in the Political/ Democratic Process in Nigeria" in F. Adewumi (ed.) *Trade Unionism in Nigeria: Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Lagos-Nigeria, 1997, pp. 113 - 148.

<sup>454</sup> The publications are: F. Adewumi, *Trade Unionism in Nigeria and the Challenges for the 21st Century*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Lagos, Nigeria, 1997; F. Adewumi, *Ideological Posturing and Trade Union Leadership in Nigeria: the Story of Comrade Ali Chiroma*, Hure Prints, Ibadan, Nigeria, 2004; and F. Adewumi, *Prospects and Challenges of Trade Union Unity in Nigeria*, Kolagbodi Memorial Foundation & Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Lagos, Nigeria, 2010.

<sup>455</sup> The papers are: F. Adewumi, "The Role of Labour in Nation Building: An Internationalist Perspective" in Abiodun Aremu (ed.), *Nigeria Labour Factsheet*, October – December 2012, pp. 32-39; and F. Adewumi, "Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development Agenda: A Labour Movement's Perspective" in A. Aremu (ed.), *Nigeria Labour Factsheet*, July - September 2016, pages 32-40. The *Nigeria Labour Factsheet* is a quarterly publication of the Kolagbodi Foundation, dating back to 2004

*Centrality of Class Struggle Unionism to the Future of Nigeria* - using Funmi Adewumi's apt contributions as the reference baseline of our discourse, because his submissions resonate in the conclusion reached for over three decades and which are consistently cited in the various discourses we have participated on issues in the Nigerian labour movement.

This paper, therefore, underscores the importance of class struggle's perception to understanding the challenge of the Nigerian trade unions as a basis for working class education, effective mass organisation and mass mobilisation. It is also to assert that, from the over 500 years political history of the working people's struggles in Nigeria – dating to the slave labour and wage workers from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade to the era of colonial and imperialism stages of wage labour and to the already rooted stage of neoliberalism - *the Nigerian trade unions started from the position of a labour movement and not the other way round, because workers' agitation and formation of trade unions preceded and subsisted for more than four decades, before the formal legal registration and recognition of trade unions by the British Colonial authority in 1939.*<sup>456</sup>

The paper equally argues that there is nothing that the trade unions and the larger Nigerian society have benefitted throughout the glorious periods in its history, without struggles that were based on class interest. It should, therefore, never be expected that in the current context of neoliberal hegemony, that the trade unions will achieve any meaningful socio-economic gains for the working people and oppressed classes in Nigeria, from its present state of ambivalence to issues of ideological contestation and its subservient partnership with the Nigerian State. Our conclusion, as we have posited elsewhere in the past and present, is that since *the 1999 New Beginning Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC)* capitulated ideologically and officially abandoned the principles and ethics of class interest unionism, notwithstanding the fact that it occasionally indulges in *ideological posturing*, defined international affiliation with the global unions driven by capitalist neoliberalism at the expense of the World Federation of Trade Unions. A trade unionism that is sustained on a methodology of mainstreaming and integration with capitalist-statist agenda cannot be beneficial to the present and future generations of the working class, the trade union movement and the larger Nigerian society. *The future is to seek alternatives to capitalist neoliberalism through class unionism and class struggle for a new*

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<sup>456</sup> See, for instance, T. M. Yesufu, *An Introduction to Industrial Relations in Nigeria*, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research and Oxford University, Ibadan and London, 1962; W. Ananaba, *The Trade Union Movement in Nigeria*, Africana Publishing Corp., New York: 1970; and A. A. Yusuf, "Discipline and Control, Coping and Resistance: The Working Class And The Making of The Trade Union Movement in Nigeria, 1861-1942" and "Development By Contradictions: The State, Labour Reforms, And The Making of The Trade Union Movement In Nigeria" Mimeo., Queen's University, Kingston, Canada, Undated.

*socio-economic order, where the class interests of the working people and oppressed classes should prevail.*

### **Over 500 Years of Continuous Exploitation: The Basis for Class Struggle Unionism**

Our argument is that trade unionism began in Nigeria, like in other African countries, at the colonial and imperial stage of capitalism in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> Century to early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>457</sup> Prior to wage labour, there was the commoditisation of human beings as slave labour as was occasioned with the Trans–Atlantic Slave Trade, that lasted over 350 years from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, and which coincided with the emergence of mercantile-imperialism.<sup>458</sup> Primitive accumulation in Nigeria and Africa for the development of global capital occurred in the context of slave labour, partitioning of African territories into trade territories and colonies.<sup>459</sup> This gave the colonial exploiters the powers for the control of land and resources, which were later redistributed through the instrument of *Treaties to the local colonial surrogates and collaborators*, whose remnants, manifest in the present day kinship and traditional institutions as subsisting agencies and agents of exploitation and oppression.

In his “*Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development Agenda: A Labour Movement’s Perspective*,” Funmi Adewumi offers a succinct class analysis of the character of the Nigerian State and society, which gives credence to our submissions in the preceding paragraphs. He posits that:

In conception, the state is an instrument of class rule, an instrument for the domination and exploitation of other groups and social formations, including the weaker elements of the ruling class and in view of the fact that the weaker classes would not readily submit to the wishes of the dominating class, the state apparatus cannot but be repressive. The foundation of what is presently described as the neo-colonial state was laid during the period of formal colonialism. All the apparatuses and structures of state that are now being used to the advantage of the post-independence ruling class were put in place then. The colonial state in

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<sup>457</sup> See, for instance, T. M. Yesufu, *An Introduction to Industrial Relations in Nigeria*, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research and Oxford University, Ibadan and London, 1962; and W. Ananaba, *The Trade Union Movement in Nigeria*, Africana Publishing Corp., New York: 1970.

<sup>458</sup> See, W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982; and B. Onimode, *Imperialism and Underdevelopment in Nigeria: The Dialectics of Mass Poverty*, Zed Press, London, 1982.

<sup>459</sup> See, Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*; and B. Onimode, *Imperialism and Underdevelopment in Nigeria: The Dialectics of Mass Poverty*.

Nigeria itself was the imposition of imperialism for the protection and reproduction of the interests of the metropolitan bourgeoisie based in Britain.

The attainment of political independence only ensured the transfer of state power and authority into indigenous hands that were properly groomed for the purpose of protecting the interests of the departing colonial masters. This is why the Nigerian state would do everything to please the interests of the international capitalist system and their financial institutions to the detriment of their own people. This largely explains the feverish haste with which the Nigerian government is embracing globalisation, notwithstanding its debilitating consequences for the generality of the people.

The indigenous elements that took over control of the state apparatus inherited a neo-colonial dependent economy. The situation was such that at independence, the indigenous entrepreneurs could not compete favourably with the expatriates, who dominated the economy largely through the multinational corporations. Expatriates had better access to credits, supplies and technological as well as managerial skills (Williams, 1981). The situation has not really changed as reflected in the inability of indigenous enterprises to compete favourably with the foreign counterparts in the privatization of public enterprises, which is a major component of economic reform programmes of the present government in Nigeria.

This is the profile of the state, which superintends over our common affairs. It is a state that is not autonomous; it is a state that must do the bidding of its foreign masters. One simple implication of this is that the other social formations have to contend with the inadequacies and shortcomings of both the domestic economy as well as those of the metropolitan (global) economy.<sup>460</sup>

Also, in his *Ideological Posturing and Trade Union Leadership in Nigeria: The Story of Comrade Ali Chiroma*, Funmi Adewunmi re-asserts his position on the character of the Nigerian state, which remains essentially the same throughout all histories of the modes of production relationship between Nigeria and the foreign powers. Since 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960, when Nigeria attained its independence from the British imperialist forces, to date, all the various administrations, whether led by civil or military “leaders”, irrespective of the religious, ethnic and regional affiliation of these leaders, and notwithstanding whether any of the administration was popular or unpopular, *the history of the working class has been essentially a history of anti-labour policies, state repression of strikes and dissenting views, disregard for collective*

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<sup>460</sup> Adewunmi, Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development Agenda: A Labour Movement’s Perspective.

*agreements and imposition of local and international policies and programmes that put workers on the receiving ends.*

No one who is a student of Marxist political economy should ignore the writings of Amilcar Cabral on the modes of production, which has become the most fundamental thesis on the development of Marxism in the understanding of the concrete African realities in the struggles between labour and capital. The proper dialectal lesson for trade unions leadership in Nigeria and Africa from the assertion of Cabral and the philosophy of Marxism is that “*nothing happens by chance*” and that “*the totality of all things and processes, is constant.*” This means that the capitalist exploitation of Africa and by extension, of labour (workers, oppressed classes and their organisations) was and is a *conscious decision and act of the exploiting/ dominant/ oppressing class*. The point being underscored here is that racism, colonialism and imperialism were/are instruments of the global ruling class to facilitate capitalist exploitation. The constant element here is *exploitation*. When the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade occurred in Africa, who profited? Few White people and few Black people who collaborated as a class of rulers (foreign and local)! What was their goal? Exploitation! It was and is the same goal with colonialism and imperialism. Now that religion and ethnic divisiveness have become major instruments of collaboration in sustaining neoliberalism in Nigeria, they are used to undermine the class unity and solidarity of the oppressed classes.

The trade union movement in Nigeria, therefore, will need to learn a proper lesson on why trade unions education, leadership, organisation, mobilisation and struggle must be anchored on class understanding. This is the import of Cabral’s message. This is also the import of “*Workers of All Countries Unite!*” as stated in the *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.<sup>461</sup> The working people and oppressed classes cannot be experiencing disunity within their class interest, while class interest and forces of exploitation are united, and expect to defeat capitalism.

### **The Essence of Class Analysis to Understanding the Challenge of the Nigerian Trade Unions**

The trade union struggle from inception in Nigeria operated from the approach of a larger movement, hence the central role of the labour movement in the decolonisation and

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<sup>461</sup> Karl Marx, and F. Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party” in *Marx and Engels Selected Works*, Vol. 1, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977

independence movements.<sup>462</sup> Ideological contestations permeated workers' struggles all through the 1940s to the late-80s, despite the attempts by successive regimes to insulate trade unions from politics and ideology.<sup>463</sup> All the gains of the Nigerian trade union movement were won through a clearly ideological, class-conscious unionism. The Nigerian trade unions, given the historical realities of their emergence and the concrete socio-economic realities of their existence, from colonialism to neoliberalism must operate against the interest of capitalism. To do otherwise, is suicidal, and would mean complete irrelevance and degeneration into oblivion. Globalised unionism, an extension of capitalist globalisation, through the vehicle of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), has succeeded in de-radicalising the Nigerian trade unions. Its ideology and recommended strategies of engagement with employers and the state, have become a virus that would always make the trade unions weak, incapacitated, apologetic and subservient to capitalist and state interests and, therefore, consciously and unconsciously indulge in accommodation and rotten compromises.<sup>464</sup>

Class struggle unionism ensures that trade unions are political and are utilising the principles of class commitment, working class solidarity, legitimacy and mass struggle for political power. Class unionism equally posits and insists that trade unions should stand firm in concrete actions in defense of the oppressed classes at all times.<sup>465</sup> Funmi Adewumi consistently made the point of class conscious unionism. In his lecture as the 8<sup>th</sup> Guest Speaker of the Annual Kolagbodi Memorial Lecture in 2004, he submitted thus:

The bottom line is that, Nigerian workers should realize that they can improve their lot in society when they appreciate the need to operate as a class for itself. At every point in time what should be uppermost in the mind of union members and

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<sup>462</sup> See, for instance, J. Woddies, *Africa, the Roots of Revolt*, and his *New Theories of Revolution: A Commentary on the views of Frantz Fanon, Rgis Debray and Herbert Marcuse*, pp. 114-175; Kazah Toure, "The Struggles of the Working People in Northern Zaria: 1939 - 1960", Paper presented to The Centenary Conference of Frederick Engels (1820 – 1895) on the Theme Marxism in Africa, organized by the Mahmoud Tukur Memorial Committee (MTMC), Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, Nigeria, August 5 – 8, 1995; and A. A. Yusuf, *The Working Class, the 1945 General Strike and the Struggle for Nigeria's Independence*, Ph.D (Research Proposal) Mimeo, Queen's University, Kingston – Ontario, Canada, 2005,

<sup>463</sup> See, for instance, Y. Bangura, "Nationalism, Accumulation and Labour Subordination in Nigeria", paper presented at the annual conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. May 1985.

<sup>464</sup> See, E. O. Egbob, "The Nigerian Trade Union Movement & its Relations with World Trade Union Internationals", *Presence Africaine*, No. 75, 1970; and "Trade Union Education in Nigeria, 1940-1964", *African Studies Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1970; and D. Otobo, *Foreign Interests and Nigerian Trade Unions*, Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Ltd., Ibadan, 1986.

<sup>465</sup> See, Richard Hyman, *Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism*, London: Pluto Press Limited, 1971, for the role and place of trade unions in societal transformation.

operatives is what can be done to strengthen the trade union organization and re-position the trade union movement in the overall interest of the working class. Nigerian workers should embrace the popular slogan adopted by the early union organizers that “an injury to one is an injury to all”. This underscores the essence of solidarity as the foundation on which to build trade union unity. Along this line it is suggested that a labour summit should be convened by members of the labour movement to discuss the plight of the working people in Nigeria today and this should be with a view to drawing up a pan-working class agenda to secure a fair deal for the masses of the Nigerian people. We should take this as the beginning of the process of re-birth of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement.

Furthermore, Funmi Adewumi posited and emphasised the essence of class analysis, using Ali Chiroma as his reference of an ideological unionist, who, as the 2<sup>nd</sup> President elected in 1984, after Comrade Hassan Sunmonu, sustained the ideological orientation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> NLC<sup>466</sup> (1978 – 1988), when he wrote:

It is just enough to say for now that ideological inclinations were more evident in the activities and positions taken by the trade union federations than those of individual unions. This is largely due to the fact that trade unions are organized on the basis of where workers work or on the basis of what they do. There was little room for the individual worker’s preference. In the case of trade union federations or centers, affiliation is usually voluntary and consciously done on the basis of political and an ideological compatibility, however roughly defined. In actual fact, one of the reasons for the ban imposed on the four Labour centers in 1976 and the legislation of a single Labour centre was to ensure ideologically neutral trade unions (as if that were possible).

It was earlier argued that the circumstances that prompted the formation of unions, made it impossible for trade unions to be ideological neutral. The reality of the colonial project made it more compelling for trade unions to be ideological. The colonial project was in furtherance of Capitalism and as such, anti-colonial struggles must be based on a counter ideology in order to effectively mobilize those under colonial subjugation, including workers and their organizations. In other words, ideological undertones cannot be removed from trade union activities. In the first place, the imposition of colonial rule facilitated by the

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<sup>466</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC was formed in 1950 with Imoudu – Labour Leader No.1 as the President). The 2<sup>nd</sup> NLC was in 1975 with Wahab Goodluck as the President. Both were the independent initiatives of the workers and the trade unions. The 3<sup>rd</sup> NLC was the creation of the Military regime of Obasanjo via Decree 22 of 1978, but the Socialist ideological tendency triumphed at the February 1978 Delegates Conference with the emergence of Hassan Sunmonu as President 1978 – 83) and the ideological tradition continued with Ali Chiroma (1984 – 88).

development of wage employment with all its inadequacies and attendant deprivations suffered by the workers. Even in a post-Colonial situation, in so far as the capitalist relations of production prevail, ideology would still be relevant in defining the response and programmes of trade unions to developments, not just within the employment relationship but in the polity as a whole.<sup>467</sup>

On the challenge of African trade unions in the politics of international federations of trade unions, Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* is very instructive to understanding the quest for alternatives to capitalism.<sup>468</sup> As stated previously, Nigeria as a part of the African realities had encountered capitalism at its mercantile inception through the long period of Trans-Atlantic Slave labour. The origin of the underdevelopment of Africa and the exploitation of its labour, which has been intensified by neoliberal capitalist exploitation at its globalisation stage using the instruments of the IMF, WTO and World Bank, was captured by Walter Rodney in the following paragraphs:

In a way, underdevelopment is a paradox. Many parts of the world that are naturally rich are actually poor and parts that are not so well off in wealth of soil and sub-soil are enjoying the highest standards of living. When the capitalists from the developed parts of the world try to explain this paradox, they often make it sound as though there is something 'God-given' about the situation. One bourgeois economist, in a book on development, accepted that the comparative statistics of the world today show a gap that is much larger than it was before. By his own admission, the gap between the developed and the underdeveloped countries has increased by at least 15 to 20 times over the last 150 years. However, the bourgeois economist in question does not give a historical explanation, nor does he consider that there is a relationship of exploitation which allowed capitalist parasites to grow fat and impoverished the dependencies.

The interpretation that underdevelopment is somehow ordained by God is emphasised because of the racist trend in European scholarship. It is in line with racist prejudice to say openly or to imply that their countries are more developed because their people are innately superior, and that the responsibility for the economic backwardness of Africa lies in the generic backwardness of the race of Black Africans. An even bigger problem is that the people of Africa and other parts of the colonised world have gone through a cultural and psychological crisis and have accepted at least partially the European version of things. That means that the African himself has doubts about his capacity to transform and develop his natural environment. With such doubts, he even challenges those of his

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<sup>467</sup>F. Adewumi, *Ideological Posturing and Trade Union Leadership in Nigeria: the Story of Comrade Ali Chiroma*

<sup>468</sup>W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*

brothers who say that Africa can and will develop through the efforts of its own people. If we can determine when underdevelopment came about, it would dismiss the lingering suspicion that it is racially or otherwise predetermined and that we can do little about it.

When the ‘experts’ from capitalist countries do not give a racist explanation, they nevertheless confuse the issue by giving as causes of underdevelopment the things which really are consequences. For example, they would argue that Africa is in a state of backwardness as a result of lacking skilled personnel to develop. It is true that because of lack of engineers Africa cannot on its own build more roads, bridges and hydroelectric stations. But that is not a cause of underdevelopment, except in the sense that causes and effects come together and reinforce each other. The fact of the matter is that the most profound reasons for the economic backwardness of a given African nation are not to be found outside that nation. All that we can find inside are the symptoms of underdevelopment and the secondary factors that make for poverty.

Mistaken interpretations of the causes of underdevelopment usually stem either from prejudiced thinking or from the error of believing that one can learn the answers by looking inside the underdeveloped economy. The true explanation lies in seeking out the relationship between Africa and certain developed countries and in recognising that it is a relationship of exploitation.<sup>469</sup>

To ignore these analyses in understanding the challenges of the trade union movement in any African country is to sink deeper into the traps of underdevelopment, debts enslavement, and all the paradigms of global neoliberalism.

Also, in *The Role of Labour in Nation Building: An Internationalist Perspective*, Funmi Adewumi was emphatic on ideological contestations. He wrote:

The circumstances that prompted the formation of unions make it impossible for them to be ideologically neutral. The problems workers are contending with today are created by capitalism. As such, confronting them requires a counter-ideology, which cannot be the same capitalist ideology. The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) confirms this reality thus:

“Our times are characterised by the barbarity of capital at the expense of the working class and the imperialist barbarity at the expense of nations who resist. These two elements comprise capitalist globalisation. The results are: huge profits

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<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*

for the few, poverty for many and new phenomena of colonialism, racism and neo-fascism” (WFTU, 2008).

The position of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) also buttresses the need for trade unions to be ideological. Part of the Pre-ambule to the IWW Constitution reads:

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organise as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth (cited in Thompson & Bekken, 2006:iv).

In other words, ideological undertones cannot be removed from trade union activities, if they are to be meaningful. In the context of a neo-colonial dependent satellite economy, in so far as the capitalist relations of production prevail, ideology would still be relevant in defining the responses and programmes of trade unions to developments not just within the employment relationship but also within the polity as a whole. Class interests dictate most government policies. As such, workers “should realise the political and class character of the various economic policies of government and respond appropriately.”<sup>470</sup>

### **The Nexus between Class Struggle Unionism and Chapter 16 of the Nigerian Constitution**

Is there a nexus between Class Struggle Unionism and the Chapter 16 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria? Certainly there is because Law, Constitution and its operative principles are instruments of class rule, and the Nigerian State operates in contradiction to the political and economic demands of the working people and oppressed classes. In the Nigerian Constitution, the provisions on socio-economic objectives are at variance with the operating modes of production relations defined by successive regimes that are hooked to global capitalist agenda. Section 16 of the 1999 Constitution defines the Economic Objectives of Government. Government shall in:

Section 16 (1) (b) – control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity.

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<sup>470</sup> F. Adewumi, *The Role of Labour in Nation Building: An Internationalist Perspective*

Section 16 (1) (c) – manage and operate major sectors of the economy.

Section 16 (1) (d) – protect the right of every citizen to engage in any economic activities outside the major sectors of the economy.

Section 16 (2) (c) – direct its policy towards ensuring that the economic system is not operated in such manner as to permit the concentration of wealth; or means of production; and exchange in the hands of few individuals or of a group.

Section 16 (2)(d): provide Suitable and adequate shelter, Suitable and adequate food, Reasonable national minimum living wage, Old age care and pension, Unemployment benefit, Sick benefits, and Welfare of the disabled.

What has been the experience with the extant civilian dispensation that operates on the 1999 Constitution since May 29, 1999? Concentration of wealth in few hands, privatisation and deregulation of major sectors of the economy, slave wages and indecent work conditions, high rate of pensioners' death as a result of months of arrears of unpaid pensions, neglect of the aged, high rate of unemployment, abandonment of social welfare responsibility of the Nigerian State to the people, demolition of people's homes, majority of the population living in poor shelters and subhuman conditions, all these, amongst others, are just part of what the neoliberal economic order has afflicted on the working people and the poor, contrary to the spirit and letters of the 1999 Constitution. When voices of resistance are raised to demand that government should respect those provisions in the Constitution, the Nigerian State's reaction would be that those provisions are not justiciable; they cannot be enforced. Our argument is that the *justiciable* issue is a contest of the balance of forces between the neoliberal forces and the working people. Gains and losses in struggle are depended on the measures of struggle waged or unwaged, in any given time or space. The inherent essence of exploitation for "greed, private accumulation and profits" is constant all through the existence of exploitative systems. The logic for resistance by labour against exploitation must find a bearing on this understanding, hence the inevitability of class struggle in exploitative modes of production.

The Rule of Law does not exist for workers in an exploitative system. Why was the labour centre able to resist the Black market injunction in 2005,<sup>471</sup> when Adams Oshiomhole was the President of the NLC? The balance of forces was in favour of labour because the mass movement was strong and was under the leadership of the Labour and Civil Society Coalition (LASCO), which was beyond the trade unions. Why 10 years after, in 2015, was the APC ruling Government, with the same Adams Oshiomhole on its side as a central factor, able to crush the resistance of labour with state violence? The answer lies in the inability of the trade union leadership to define its class line for the struggle against the fuel subsidy removal, and therefore, it succumbed to the manipulation of Adams Oshiomhole, who was then fully on the side of the ruling Government, which was against the class interest of labour. And as such, the required balance of forces could not be mobilised for the resistance because of the personality of Adams Oshiomhole, instead of class loyalty, which would have strengthened the trade unions and the larger society to resist and defeat the Adams' connection and the APC ruling Government's IMF agenda.

The lesson for trade unions from the 2015 struggle is that workers' interest must be constant at all times and that unions are weakened by the gradual erosion of its principles and values because their decisions and activities are not based on class line. Suffice to emphasise that principles and values are nurtured by conscious class ideological line. There is no soothsaying in this that if the trade unions continue on their current ideological ambivalent path of unequalled partnership, accommodation and collaboration with state interest, it is only evident that workers would be on the receiving end perpetually. As long as the Nigerian State operates on the neoliberal economic paradigms, the economic crises would deepened and the worsening conditions of the working people would require the unions to act. We should commend Funmi Adewumi's exposition to the trade unions, what successive regimes in Nigeria peddle as their "*response to economic crisis*" to further underscore the unavoidable necessity for class analysis. Here we will quote Funmi Adewumi as follows:

Beginning with the Austerity Measures imposed by the Shagari government, through the Structural Adjustment Programme of the Babangida administration, to the various economic reform programmes of different governments since the inception of the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic, the Nigerian State has responded one way or the

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<sup>471</sup> Black market injunction refers to manipulative Court Order obtained by Government overnight outside the official working hours, compelling a Judge to issue such, with intent to outlaw Strike/ Mass Protest declared by the Trade Unions. In 2005, the Obasanjo civilian dictatorship obtained such order when Adams Oshiomhole was the President of the NLC.

other to address the crisis. In spite of these efforts, the lot of the working class in Nigeria has worsened and yet there is no end in sight. Massive job losses, job insecurity, decline in real wages in a context of rising inflation and rising cost of basic services are some of the problems Nigerian workers have had to contend with.

Over the years, since the embrace of neo-liberalism, the following have emerged clearly as key elements of the Nigerian State's response to the economic crisis:

- ✓ Massive devaluation of the national currency.
- ✓ Loss of jobs resulting from the privatisation and commercialisation of public enterprises and low capacity utilisation.
- ✓ Growing unemployment which arose out of the embargo on new appointments.
- ✓ Removal of subsidies on social services including education, health, housing and agriculture and petroleum products.
- ✓ Liberalization of finance and trade, including high interest rates.
- ✓ Flexibility (actually lowering) in standards and conditions of employment.

Apart from the fact of massive job losses, those who remain in employment are not guaranteed a security of tenure while they are forced to work under less than favourable conditions including lower wages and irregular payment of salaries. Workers are thus forced to bear the brunt of the crisis of capitalist development.

The adoption of these policies by Government was not the only option left to it, as people have always come up with alternative policies positions.

The choices of successive governments were consciously made to reflect class interests.

One major implication of the political class response to the crisis is that components of reform programmes such as removal of alleged subsidy and the imposition of user charges on services such as education, health and public transportation have succeeded in putting additional burdens on workers and other disadvantaged groups thus further impoverishing them. In the final analysis, they find it difficult to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, clothing and healthy living. Members of the Nigerian working class are confronted by a zero-sum situation. They are sent out of jobs prematurely (often without getting their terminal benefits) and yet are expected to pay for a whole range of social services. It thus becomes a case of double jeopardy!!! This conclusion is in with the position of Lance Taylor that "income (re) distribution against labour and the poor is implicit in stabilization attempts" (cited by Helleiner, 1989).

### **The Nigeria Labour and the Future of Nigeria**

We submit as follows:

- i. The inherent weakness of the NLC and the TUC can be explained by two fears: fear of being drawn into ideological contestation, and fear of the consequences of mass struggle.
- ii. The leaning by the Nigerian trade union movement in particular, its integration into the ITUC at the instance of the WFTU are essentially the agenda of the hegemonic capitalist order to redirect workers from popular class struggles, and to integrate and compromise their organisations as accomplice-partner on neoliberal agenda.
- iii. The essence of ideological line in defining responses to Government policy issues, the need for sustained struggle of resistance, based on class interest, and the necessity to struggle for political power through Radical and Working Class politics, should be the primary considerations of the Nigerian trade union movement.

We shall reinforce our submission in this paper, quoting Funmi Adewumi extensively, as he wrote in “The Role of Labour in Nation Building: An Internationalist Perspective”:

By the logic of a society based on class division, it is the few which constitutes the ruling class that usually corner the bulk of the commonwealth for their own exclusive use. This explains the lopsidedness in the distribution of the national wealth as reflected in the living styles of both the rich and the poor - one extreme living in obscene affluence and the other in abject poverty and deprivation. However, it is not only members of the Nigerian ruling class that are exploiting the masses of our people. Their imperialist masters also participate actively in the naked exploitation of Nigeria and her people. This is because as a dependent capitalist country, Nigeria’s economic bloodline is tied closely to those of the advanced capitalist countries of Europe and America.

One important fact to note in this context is that the bulk of capital investments in Nigeria is foreign owned, a situation that is being compounded by the mindless privatisation of public enterprises by a visionless ruling class under the prompting of their foreign masters. Take a look at any sector of the economy; from distributive trade through the oil industry, communication, aviation, manufacturing to heavy construction, there is the all-pervading presence of transnational corporations representing the interests of the international capitalist system. It would interest you to know that the oil industry which is supposed to be the mainstay of the Nigerian economy is under the firm control of foreigners to the extent that the Nigerian government cannot tell you the volume of crude oil being lifted from the bowel of the earth in Nigeria (the controversy between the NNPC on the one hand and the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission as well as the National Assembly on the other, about the actual accruals from the sales of crude illustrates this).

It is these corporations that carry out the unbridled exploitation of the country's resources, both human and material. In order to protect their own interests, these corporations become interested in the politics of the country since there is the need to have people who will collaborate with them in power. As such when the representatives of these countries and companies talk of a conducive climate for investment, they are talking of a government that will allow them exploit the country without let or hindrance. The overall effect of this is that the Nigerian ruling class has ensured through a number of policies that the country is firmly entrenched within the orbit of world capitalism as a subservient partner. The latest of such policy move is what is mischievously referred to as globalisation, the components of which the present administration is feverishly implementing.

It is important to note that most members of the ruling class are not engaged in any productive activity. They are mainly involved in the distributive trade as importers and exporters (this also partly explains why the Nigerian state would rather import petroleum products than engage in local refining), and manufacturers' representatives. These elements act as the middlemen between their foreign masters and their colleagues in government to secure utmost advantage. This has in turn resulted in a number of unwholesome practices such as inflation of contracts, over invoicing, importation of sub-standard products, kickbacks, and other unethical practices all in a bid to get maximum returns.

At the end of the day, through a combination of factors such as their control of the economy and unbridled corruption, members of the ruling elite have accumulated for themselves a substantial part of the country's wealth leaving only a negligible few for the rest of the populace and this is usually not enough to cater for the needs of this vast majority. In practical terms, the majority of our people are impoverished in the same dialectical process in which the minority, who constitute the ruling elite, unjustly enriches itself. The masses of our people do not only suffer economic injustice, they also suffer social injustice. They are almost always at the receiving end of various obnoxious policies and are subjected to a lot of deprivations - education is out of their reach, they have no access to good health care, they don't live in decent houses and they cannot eat two decent meals a day. It is a society where very many people are suffering, where very many people have got nothing, where too few people have got everything, in fact far more than they need and would ever need. This is the Nigerian society in which workers and other disadvantaged social groups are located. It is a society in which the rascality and irresponsibility of the political class are threatening the fragile existence of the country.

The picture painted in the preceding paragraphs, is that of a society that is in need of rescue before it destroys itself. Since the inception of the 4th Republic, Nigeria, just like many newly "democratising" countries, has witnessed "a continuing process of violence, corruption, human rights abuses, skewed allocation of resources, harassment of social activists and academics, and subservience to

foreign determined and dictated ideas especially from the multilaterals...the shameless mortgaging of Africa's future to imperialist agents and agencies in the name of "political reform", structural adjustment, or globalisation"(Ihonvbere, 2001).

All the factors that led to the collapse of the previous republics are very much present. These include rabid intolerance of opposition (even within the ruling party); corruption and abuse of office and manipulation of the electoral process by the incumbent parties in government. This is apart from the fact that the much touted dividends of democratic governance remain a mirage. Basic necessities of life remain luxuries for the vast majority of Nigerians while the state of infrastructures which should make life worthwhile is simply appalling.

Right from the inception of the 4th Republic, members of the political class did not leave anyone in doubt that a major preoccupation is to exploit their involvement in the political process to corner as much of the commonwealth as possible. It was business as usual with political office holders who are mostly idle, enjoying undeserved compensation packages in the same dispensation in which it took a number of strike actions for the federal government to agree to a new minimum wage for its employees.

It goes without saying that each social class strives to improve the lot of its members. In spite of its disadvantaged position, the working class is still part of the Nigerian social structure and this means that it owes itself the duty to do all within its power to protect and advance the interests of its members. Put differently, organised labour must not just exist as a class in itself but as a class for itself. As has been demonstrated over and over again, no other group would really go out of its way to advance the interests of workers. By and large, terms and conditions of employment, including wages and salaries are determined almost unilaterally by state officials who act at the behest of big business as well as private employers.

The real value of the worker's income depends to a large extent on the fiscal policies as well as the welfare package put in place by governments. Ordinarily, governments in neo-colonies like most countries of Africa (controlled by irresponsible and thieving elite) do not really bother about the welfare of workers and other disadvantaged groups in society, except such groups agitate and contest the development agenda.

In essence, the failure of the neo-colonial state to meet the aspirations and expectations of the Nigerian working class necessitates a labour agenda for nation building (see Adewumi, 1993).

In pursuing the labour agenda there is the need to address the political side of trade union struggles. To be sure, there is no way trade unions can be apolitical as this would be a negation of not only the essence of trade unionism but also the very circumstances of their emergence. Unions arose as alternative locus of power

to contest workplace relations with the employers, and this in itself is political. It is to this extent that it is correct to describe trade unions as political organisations operating in the economic terrain of industry.

In the circumstance in which the unions are today, a non-partisan involvement in the political process may be more rewarding. By this I mean the unions should not align wholesale with any political party but rather address political issues from the perspective of how such would profit the workers. In the same vein, political causes or candidates seeking elective offices can be supported based on negotiated benefits for workers. In the period between elections, organised labour should be willing to strike strategic alliances with other organisations in the interests of members. Given the low level of consciousness (both trade and political) among workers and the absence of a massive programme of workers' education targeted at the rank-and-file members, a wholesale union political involvement may be disastrous or end up benefiting only union officials. The critical issue is how the political involvement is managed in the overall interest of union members. The suggestion here is that the unions should embrace, at least for now, the idea of social movement unionism, which is not totally strange to the trade union movement in Nigeria (Adewumi, 2010).

Given the inherent weakness of individual unions, it is imperative for the Nigerian Trade Union Movement to respond collectively to developments within the polity and economy. This calls for inter-sectoral alliances in order to address economic problems facing workers. Essentially, the strategic placing of strong unions should be used to mitigate the vulnerability of weaker unions. That is the essence of trade union solidarity.

The hostility of government that is rabidly intolerant of dissenting views and opinions has also compounded an already bad situation. Nigerian workers must come to terms with this grim reality. This reality demands solidarity among workers, it demands collective action and it demands a united front from the labouring masses if they are to overcome the adversities they face not just in the world of work but within the larger society as a whole. It is a fact that workers individually or isolated in their respective unions cannot single-handedly confront the might of employers (Adewumi, 2007).

This reality makes it expedient for the trade unions to look for allies within the larger society in order to secure a fairer deal for their members. The fact that the majority of Nigerians are badly affected by sundry government policies makes this a viable option. They all have a common enemy in the Nigerian state managed by a ruling class that is totally subservient to the operators of what is mischievously referred to as "a global economy" (Adewumi, 2010). As argued by Saul (2005) disadvantaged social groups in the Southern hemisphere have to contend with "global structures and domestic elites that have come to inherit

much of the power and privileges of the erstwhile beneficiaries of the old colonial and settler dominated orders”.

The engagement of the trade union movement with other civil society actors, at any point in time, must be based on a well thought out programme which takes into consideration the interest of the members of trade unions. Of course this should take into consideration the multiple identities of union members as workers, as citizens, as parents and guardians, as tax and rate payers, as ethnic minorities, etc.

Based on the programme drawn up, it becomes easier to identify other civil society groups and stakeholders with similar interests and aspirations. Joint and collaborative actions, which can take varying and diverse forms, can be undertaken. Such actions can be issue-specific (such as the need to amend the constitution) and without the collaborating groups losing their identities. Collaborating with others in mass actions means that group members must be mobilised around such issues identified in the charter of demands drawn up as well as the need for joint actions with other stakeholders. It is important to stress that trade unions should only strike strategic alliances and partnership that would add value to their work. Such alliances and networks may ultimately form the basis for the emergence of new political formations, depending on the assessment of the collaborating groups. Alliance with a ruling party comes in a fairly different category. While such alliances are not out of place, they should be based on the strategic interests of labour and should provide the options of influencing the content and direction of government policies from both within and without. What this means is that if government should pander too much to some narrow and parochial interests from both within and outside the polity, then labour should not be encumbered from using other platforms available to mobilise against such moves. This is one way of dealing with opportunistic politicians who are only interested in using labour for their own convenience.

The plight of organised labour as well as other disadvantaged groups in Nigeria today, flows from the logic of class rule and the realities of a dependent satellite economy. As argued elsewhere (Adewumi, 1993:51), “until a new path of development which gives pride of place to those whose labour creates societal wealth is charted, society would continue to be run in the interests of the few who constitute the ruling class and their imperialist masters”.

The labour agenda which we are talking about here should be the ‘road map’ to navigate the Nigerian polity while the agenda items should constitute a “shopping list” with which to bargain with other contending political forces as well as a barometer with which to measure the performance and relevance of any government in power. It should provide the basis of a holistic and coherent response of organised labour to various government policies. It should equally also provide the tool for a robust contestation of, and engagement with, development issues by organised labour as was the case in the pre-1988 era which have disappeared.

It is, therefore, necessary to re-invent trade unionism in Nigeria as a necessary step in actualising the labour agenda within the Nigerian social formation. *The process of re-invention cannot be entrusted into the hands of the present leadership of the trade union movement in Nigeria. The larger labour movement must drive the process. This should be done out of enlightened self-interest at least. This is because the trade unions are the “organising centres of the working class” (Lozovsky, 1972). A virile labour movement may make up for the shortcomings and inadequacies of the trade union movement and possibly save the trade unions from themselves and their official leaders.*

Finally, a labour summit should be convened by members of the labour movement to discuss the plight of the working people in Nigeria today and this should be with a view to drawing up a pan-working class agenda to secure a fair deal for the masses of the Nigerian people. We should take this as the beginning of the process of re-birth of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement. The trade union movement remains the only hope of the working people and all those who live on non-exploitative income.<sup>472</sup>

And from a previous paper in 2005,<sup>473</sup> in which we made reference to Karl Marx, comes our *final word*, with which we prefer to end a paper on class analysis:

The motive or driving force of history is the conflict between the productive forces and the relations of production, thereby leading to class struggle. Hence, Marx famous quotation that *“the philosophers have only interpreted the world, their various ways, the point however is to change it”*. Class struggle has occurred all through the history of human society but Marx and Engels were able to analyse the role class struggle plays in historical changes and give its revolutionary contents.

From the materialist conception of history, the ultimate determinant element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. It is this approach that brings out the role of class struggle in the development and changing of society. Marx has stated in one of his numerous writings: *“men make their own history, but they did not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past”*. We cannot change the laws of nature but only to influence it and expand our knowledge of it and make nature serve the human society.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> F. Adewumi, *The Role of Labour in Nation Building: An Internationalist Perspective*

<sup>473</sup> A. Aremu, “Historical Development of Societies,” Discussion Paper to Cadres of the Amilcar Cabral Ideological School (ACIS), July 23, 2005, Lagos, Nigeria.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid*

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**17**  
**FREE ECONOMY AND DEMOCRATIC POSSIBILITIES IN NIGERIA:  
CHALLENGES FOR LABOUR**

Oluranti AFOWOWE\*

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**Abstract**

This study posits that the historical dynamics of political economy of the Nigerian State makes democratisation an inevitable phenomenon at the contemporary historical epoch, when Nigeria became a full-fledged free economy through the instrumentality of Structural Adjustment Programme. The paper also posits that the inherent contradictions within the free economy makes democracy (however, deformed) a safety valve for the political elite. Free economy, at the same time, has the potential of undermining the sustainability of the said democracy. Arguments were led to show that the democratisation process must necessarily have social democratic inclination, an inclination which conflicts with the hegemonistic project of the free economy advocates. This study posits that organised labour has crucial roles to play for sustainability of the democratic project through mobilisation of the critical mass (the down-trodden) to defend the erosion of economic and social rights of the Nigerian people.

**Introduction**

Democracy and difficulties seems to be synonymous. At the level of conceptualisation, it suffers from definitional plurality. At the level of practice, discerning what constitute authentic democracy becomes problematic. For some, democracy is synonymous with Aristotelian mobocracy, while some others saw it as an institutional framework for political deception. Yet, there are people who believe that democracy is an epitome of political representation perfection that mankind should continually strive to achieve.<sup>475</sup> Much more difficult is the process of

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<sup>475</sup> See, R. J. Pennock, *Liberal Democracy: Its Merits and Prospects*, Rinehart & Co Ltd., New York, 1950, pp. 9-13; D. Ricci, *Community Power and Democratic Theory: The Logic of Political Analysis* New York: Random

democratisation of any political system. It is, therefore, quite understandable, if these difficulties translate to apprehensions, doubts and misgivings of people about the efficacy of democracy as an instrument of authoritative allocation of values and objective machinery for crisis management and resolution in a society, especially in Nigeria with a pluralistic political power base and tendencies for ethno-religious chauvinism. It is within this preliminary contemplative position that Nigeria's democratisation experience and the diverse responses that it has elicited from political actors, intellectuals and the general populace can be situated.

### **Theoretical Trends in the Debate on Democracy in Nigeria**

Some people have become so disenchanted with the practice of democracy in Nigeria that they have called for the establishment of Garrison-Managerial State system, which will institutionalise military dictatorship in Nigeria.<sup>476</sup> To these people, Nigeria's political culture is not congruent to democratic practices. Besides, Nigeria lacks democratic institutions and ethos that can make democracy plausible. While it is not our intention in this treatise to specifically address the heretical postulations of this position, it suffices to say that the protagonists of this school assume that political culture and ethos are stagnant. This is a position that can hardly be justified in political history.<sup>477</sup>

However, others argue that the endemic problem of political (or is it government?)<sup>478</sup> instability can best be addressed within the context of a diarchical political arrangement. The advocates of the school argue that the supreme political authority should be vested in a military political class that will co-opt the civil population either through selection or election. An exponent of this view is Alhaji Michika (Ex-Governor of Adamawa State of Nigeria).<sup>479</sup> They contend that diarchy will forestall incessant military putsches that tend to undermine the stability of the political process in Nigeria. This is a defeatist position. In the first instance, Nigeria has had this form of diarchy for the most part of her tortuous post-independence history. That democracy remains topical on Nigeria political agenda is a testimony to the fact that diarchy

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House, Inc., New York, 1971, pp. 10-27; J. W. Ceaser, *Liberal Democracy & Political Science*, The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1990, pp. 5-25; and P. W. Shively, *Power & Choice: An Introduction to Political Science*, McGraw-Hill Education, New York, 2014, pp. 28-39.

<sup>476</sup> J. Ibrahim, "The Political Debate and the Struggle for Democracy in Nigeria", *Review of African Political Economy* No. 37, Dec. 1986, pp. 8-11.

<sup>477</sup> D. Thomson, *Europe Since Napoleon*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1966; and M. Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*, Simon & Schuster UK Ltd., London, 2006, pp. 378-408.

<sup>478</sup> C. Ake, "Government Instability in Nigeria," *Nigerian Forum*, Vol. 8, Nos 1, 2 & 3, January-March 1988, pp. 28-33.

<sup>479</sup> *Sunday Tribune* 16<sup>th</sup> August 1992, p. 5

cannot satisfy Nigeria's desire for democracy. Again, that the military class dominates a political process does not automatically give the political system immunity to military putsch. Indeed, studies have shown that incidence of military coup d'état seems to be more frequent in countries where the military have remained dominant in the political process for an appreciable period.<sup>480</sup> Besides, the diarchy school naively saw military coup d'état as a mono-causal event rather than multi-causal complex political phenomenon which empirical studies have amply demonstrated.<sup>481</sup>

Equally important are those who argue that within the context of Nigeria's contemporary politico-economic ideological arrangement, democracy will continue to be a mirage, which will endlessly continue to gulp resources without being able to remain a permanent and domineering feature of Nigeria's political process.<sup>482</sup> They premise their thesis on the followings:

- i. That by virtue of Nigeria's colonial experience, Nigeria has been integrated into the capitalist economic formation, an arrangement which has been adroitly rigged against Nigeria's socio-economic interest because it drains Nigeria resources for the benefits of Nigeria imperialist masters.
- ii. That Nigeria's political (ruling) class is a parasitic economic class whose interest is more allied with imperialists than with the interest of Nigerians (majority).
- iii. That the capitalist arrangement, unlike the situation in Western Europe and United States of America (USA) has undermined the ability of Nigeria to fully discover and develop its economic potentials for its citizenry.
- iv. Arising from this, is the inability of the political system to meet the minimal demands of people for housing, clothing and food.
- v. The inability of the state to meet these material demands of the people leads to political struggle by the people against economic deprivation and political suppression. A struggle which dictatorship of the bourgeois (liberal democracy) cannot tolerate. Hence, the people have to be violently suppressed. Of course, military dictatorship provides the most efficacious framework for such political suppression and economic annihilation.

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<sup>480</sup> L. Dare, "The Praetorian Trap: The Problems and Prospects of Military Disengagement" An Inaugural lecture delivered at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife on April 18th, 1989, pp. 6-7.

<sup>481</sup> C. E. Welch Jr, *Soldier And State in Africa*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970, pp. 1-34; and O. Afowowe, "Trends in the Nigerian Military Political Engagements (1966- 1998)", *AAU: African Studies Review*, Vol. 11, June, 2012, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba pp.101-126

<sup>482</sup> A. Okolo, *Foreign Capital in Nigeria: Roots of Underdevelopment*, Heartland Publishing House, Lagos, 1987; and E. Toyo, "Socio-Economic Inequality and the Stability of the Third Republic" in T. Borha (Chairman) et al, (eds.) *Stability of The Third Republic* , Concord Group of Publications, 1988, pp. 94-101

While this school's postulations are quite well articulated and historically defensible,<sup>483</sup> it is equally a truism that some of the postulations and proffered solutions are not only dogmatic but insidiously obscurantist.

The inadequacies or omissions in these theoretical frameworks for understanding the basis, necessity and efficacy of democracy institutionalisation in Nigeria's political process remain perennial. This study, therefore, posits that the historical dynamics of political economy of the Nigerian State makes democratisation an inevitable phenomenon at this juncture. It is our position that inherent contradictions within the free economy makes democracy (however, deformed) a safety valve for the political class. Free economy, at the same time, has the potential of undermining the sustainability of the said democracy. Again, we intend to lead arguments to show that the democratisation process must necessarily have social democratic inclination, an inclination which conflicts with the hegemonistic project of the free economy advocates.

### **Nigeria's Economic Antecedents**

Our present concerns here are the salient attributes of pre-1986 Nigeria's economy that are very instructive on the dynamics of Nigeria political history.<sup>484</sup> First, it was a state dominated economy. This attribute was not peculiar to Nigeria. Most African and Eastern European economies were state dominated, even after the momentous reforms of the 1990s.<sup>485</sup> The commanding heights of the economy such as oil, major manufacturing concerns, etc., were owned by governments. What is instructive about this domination is that while elsewhere the few that dominated had ideological (socialism) and organisational (communist parties, nationalist parties) bases for the exercise of the bureaucratic control of the economy, the same was not true for Nigeria. The implication of this is that, while the other economies had a dynamic moral basis for mobilising their peoples for socio-economic development, the Nigerian State lacked this base. This was because there were no national ideals and goals that were futuristic around which

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<sup>483</sup> W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Bogle - L. Ouverture Publications, London, 1972, pp. 103-165 and 223-260.

<sup>484</sup> P. Okigbo, "Crisis or Catastrophe: Any Exit for African Economies in the 1960's" Nigerian National Merit Award Lecture, 1989 (The Board of Trustees of The Nigerian National Merit Award, Lagos, 1989).

<sup>485</sup> J. D. Sachs, *Accelerating Privatisation in Eastern Europe: The Case of Poland*, Builder Publications, Helsinki, 1991, pp. 2-5.

the mystification of political leadership could be done for the purpose of perpetuating political elites in power, hence, government instability.

Also, while Nigeria's economy suffered the handicaps of regimentation associated with state dominated economies, the economy at the same time failed to enjoy the advantages of accelerated economic growth and political stability that state dominated economies tend to enjoy at its infancy.<sup>486</sup>

Another insidious effect of the above attribute of pre-1986 Nigeria's economy is that corruption became inherent and endemic. Political power was conceived as an avenue for financial self-aggrandisement. The pervasiveness of corruption among Nigerians distorted the wage system. The import of this for our present discussion is that corruption makes economic planning problematic. It may be very difficult to determine the amount of unearned income that corruption injects into the Nigerian economy annually. This has implication for consumptive propensity of the economy.<sup>487</sup> The value system that corruption engenders tends to undermine the productive sector of the economy. First, reward system is no longer dependent on hard work, innovativeness, creativity, skills and experience; but on influence and greed. Second, investment in industrial sectors has become unattractive. In the final analysis, the productive sector of the economy is grossly incapacitated. For instance, between 1983 and 1985, about fifty percent of factories in Nigeria collapsed.<sup>488</sup>

Another salient attribute of the economy is that it was highly regulated. Government was not only the largest single employer of labour, but also exercised bureaucratic control over the emerging private sector. The unfortunate thing about this regulation is that policies often emanate from people who are novices in economic management. This is because untrained and inexperienced people often get appointed into managerial positions as a result of political patronage. Furthermore, the economy was de-secularised. Ethnicity and religious affiliations were bases for acquiring economic power. This has been formalised in the federal character/quota principle which stipulates that government civil, military and political appointments should be shared on porata basis among all the ethnic groups constituting Nigeria,

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<sup>486</sup> Y. Polyakov,(ed.), *A Short History of Soviet Society*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, pp. 154-165.

<sup>487</sup> I. Williams, *Can Our Culture and Traditions Overcome Corruptions?* CBAAC Occasional Monograph No1, Malthouse Press Limited, Lagos, 2007, pp. 25-39.

<sup>488</sup> A. Olukoshi, "The Performance of Nigerian Industry under the Structural Adjustment Programme: A Critical Assessment" in A. Olukoshi (ed.) *Crisis and Adjustment in the Nigerian Economy*, Jad Publishers, Lagos, 1991, p. 93.

irrespective of whether all ethnic groups have educationally qualified people or not. It is apposite for our purpose here to say that political elites deliberately defend and/or oppose federal character principle (depending on the side they find themselves) because of the economic advantages the principle portends for them.<sup>489</sup> For instance, Babangida averred that:

... I venture to suggest that it is the nature of the competition amongst us, the so called elite, our far-sightedness and breadth of vision or lack of it, and our disparate definition of our genuine self-interests - narrow or enlightened - which have been at the root of our national problem. We mobilize others to fight our individual causes, individual beliefs, and interests as if those were their causes, beliefs and interests, etc.<sup>490</sup>

The overall effect of these features is that there is acrimonious competition for resources among and between ethnic and religious interests.<sup>491</sup> There was catastrophic looting of the economy,<sup>492</sup> with resultant economic stagnation, if not backwardness. The state of the economy is such that continually engenders political instability. For one, it stirs the annoyance of the people to an extent that credibility and consequent legitimacy of regimes do not endure for long among the people. This condition usually provides excuse for military political adventurers to seize state power. Again, the economic struggle sometimes leads to incitement or encouragement of a section of the military to take over government by the group or people that perceived themselves as being marginalised.<sup>493</sup> The introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP (free economy) by Babangida's regime seemed to have been informed by the nature and dynamics of the post-independence economy of Nigeria. Whether the regime's policy choice was right, is a question for history to answer. This is because any attempt at answering this question now, can only at best be polemical.

### **Democracy and the Free Economy Regime**

The history, rationale and policy instruments of free economy have elicited appreciable quantity of literature from different perspectives, depending on socio-economic and ideological

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<sup>489</sup> M. H. Kukah, *Witness to Justice: An Insiders Account of Nigeria's Truth Commission*, Bookcraft, Ibadan, 2012, pp. 341-378.

<sup>490</sup> I. B. Babangida, "The Nigerian Elite and the Challenges of the Future" (Text of lecture to members of Oxford-Cambridge Club in Lagos on March 3, 1989) in *The Man IBB* Oyo State Ministry of Information, Ibadan, 1992. p.15

<sup>491</sup> O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Fourth Dimension Publishers, Enugu, 1978, pp. 140-206.

<sup>492</sup> *Saturday Tribune*, Ibadan, 2016, p. 3

<sup>493</sup> M. C. Alli, *The Federal Republic of Nigerian Army*, Malthouse Press Ltd, Ikeja, 2001, p. 208-284.

inclinations of the author(s).<sup>494</sup> Suffice it to say, SAP is an epitome of ideological revival of capitalism. It is ironical that free economy (*laissez faire*) that is today a very popular economic ideology was, for sometimes in nineteenth century, used as a term of abuse, or as a rationalisation for policy of inaction.<sup>495</sup> The fundamental tenet of which is institutionalisation of free economy framework for political and economic activities of the people. Free economy advocates have consistently argued that the best governed economies are the least governed. The protagonists of free economy eulogise the altruistic-ness of the invisible hand of market forces. It is their contention that:

If the state makes the protection of the free economy its priority then it creates the basis for its own legitimacy. Once all illegitimate functions and responsibilities are stripped from it, the state is no longer the weak state of social democracy, overburdened by ever-widening responsibilities and infested by special interests which seek to use the political process to portray their sectional interest as the public interest. It can concentrate on defending what is the true public interest-upholding impartially the rules of the market order.<sup>496</sup>

In other words, SAP can help make the autonomy of the Nigerian State possible. Lack of autonomy of the state has been said to be responsible for the acrimonious political struggle among political elites in Nigeria.<sup>497</sup>

### **Democratic Potentials of Free Economy**

A free economy suggests liberal democracy as a natural correlate.<sup>498</sup> However, within the context of the Nigerian State this goes beyond mere correlation. At the level of polemics, it will be policy inconsistency for a regime to argue for the efficacy of individuals' wisdom as ultimate managers of the economy to turn round and argue for political dictatorship which will invariably engender state domination of the economy.

Also, the incessant military coup d'état had broadened the bourgeois base through political patronage to such an extent that there is now a formidable private economic interest that

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<sup>494</sup> S. O. Ogundipe, *SFEM in Nigeria*, Heineman Educational Books, Ibadan, 1987.

<sup>495</sup> D. Winch, *Economics and Policy: A Historical Survey*, Fontana, London, 1972, p. 21.

<sup>496</sup> A. Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State: The Politics of Thatcherism*, Macmillan Education Ltd, London, 1988, pp. 31-32

<sup>497</sup> C. Ake, *The Political Economy of Crisis and Underdevelopment in Africa*, (ed.) Julius Ihonvbere, Jad Publishers, Lagos, 1989, p. 45.

<sup>498</sup> J. R. Pennock, *Liberal Democracy: Its Merits and Prospects*, Rinehart & Co Ltd., New York, 1950, p. 6.

wants to protect such interest from arbitrary expropriation that continued military dictatorship may engender. The risk is higher that a new military junta that seizes power may also want to enrich its cohort, a development which may make the expropriation of earlier expropriators inevitable.

There are now more economically powerful individuals who may be pre-disposed towards seeking political power for self-actualisation or other motives.<sup>499</sup> If a less violent means for political power acquisition is not institutionalised, then the political elites may inadvertently destroy themselves. Again, political dictatorship may not be able to adjudicate the intra-class struggle for economic supremacy and dominance that introduction of free economy may entail. If the state is not perceived as an impartial arbiter and the regime that controls the state machineries is not changed periodically through a process that can be influenced within constitutional framework, the political elites that may be disadvantaged may consciously work to undermine the system.

The marginalisation of the people (especially low income earners) facilitated by free economy means that society becomes vulnerable to social revolution. This possibility may be mitigated by liberal democratic opportunities, which offers alternatives (however dubious these alternatives may be) to the people through competitive party politics. As Julius Nyerere aptly observed:

Had we (Africans) a better record of human rights and control by the people over their governments, our national economic problems would probably be much the same as they are now. Our nations would, however, be facing the economic problems with greater unity, and without hindrances of frequent cynicism and apathy among the people.<sup>500</sup>

The acrimonious struggle associated with politics of opposition in Nigeria, which is engendered by “winner takes all” conception of power by politicians can be undermined by free economy regime. This is because free economy creates a viable route to economic opportunities. Political power role in dispensing economic opportunities and resources is minimised by the free economy framework. Moreover, the proliferation of private economic interests has the potential of making political parties seek patronage of economic interests that may be politically diffused

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<sup>499</sup> O. Adeniyi, *Power, Politics & Death: A Front-Row Account of Nigeria under Late President Yar'Adua* Kachifo Ltd., Lagos, 2011, pp. 198-217.

<sup>500</sup> J. Nyerere, *Reflections on Africa and its Future*, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs LECTURE SERIES No. 4, 1987, p. 8.

in terms of ownership. Therefore, the parties must accommodate the diverse political interests that such support may engender. This suggests the possibility of party politics becoming less acrimonious.

Another dimension to the discussion of our present theme is the phenomenal globalisation of liberal democratic ideals. The political demise of the Eastern European bureaucratised economies has denied the United States of America (USA) her usual excuse (communist threat) for supporting dictatorial regimes. Besides, the hegemonistic project of the USA is such that can only be advanced if other countries are made to up its economic and political ideals.<sup>501</sup> It is, therefore, understandable that the USA actively supports the institutionalisation of liberal democracy in Nigeria. This position of United States cannot be ignored by any regime in Nigeria given the influence that it is capable of exercising, especially through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank framework.<sup>502</sup>

### **Limitations Imposed by Free Economy on Practice of Democracy**

Paradoxically, free economy equally has the potential of undermining democracy. For one, the engine of liberal democracy (middle class) has been dangerously undermined under the free economy regime. Privatisation has meant unemployment for many middle income earners. Reduced role of bureaucracy in economic management has meant that the middle class control of the economy (middle class dominates bureaucracy) is limited and benefits associated with such control is curtailed. The erosion of social welfare programmes has meant higher cost of living for the middle class. This is compounded by the inflationary pressures of SAP on the economy.

It is equally important to note that SAP curtails or changes the pattern of elite recruitment in the society. Educational certificates, which hitherto played very crucial roles in elite upward mobility, no longer plays such decisive role. This is not to suggest that only the middle class suffers under the free economy regime. The low-income earners, especially farmers, are equally affected. But the effect of free economy on low-income earners is mitigated by two factors. First, poverty has been its lot even under state controlled economy. They cannot complain of excessive electricity bills when they have not even enjoyed electricity before. Second, being in the main subsistence farmers, the effect of increased prices of goods, especially food, has not

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<sup>501</sup> Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State: The Politics of Thatcherism*, pp. 1-26

<sup>502</sup> C. Akabogu, "Can the UN be Democratized?" in *Sunday Concord* Oct. 20, 1991, p. 22.

been too drastic on them since they produce their own food. Even in the boom years (1970 - 1982), they were not privileged enough to afford manufactured commodities such as canned milk, beef, butter etc.

Thus, the middle class that is mostly dependent on government for its income and the market for regular supply of its needs is evidently the class that suffers more under the free economy regime. This development portends a not too good possibility for democratic practice when it is realised that middle class is a potent force for destabilisation of any democratic structure. This can be done by the middle class either by providing leadership and intellectual bases for socialist revolutionary parties or by providing support for fascist dictatorship.<sup>503</sup> It is equally worthy of note that the marginalisation of people coupled with the intra class struggle for economic opportunities that the introduction of free economy entails has led to increase in the use of religion for political ends.<sup>504</sup> In addition, the craze for foreign currency has led many religious interests to ally with foreign religious organisations. Either to attract the sympathy of these patronising foreign religious organisations or due to diabolical instigation engineered by these international religious organisations, religious crisis has been intensified.<sup>505</sup> The result is that Nigeria has witnessed more fratricidal religious crisis under the free economy regime, a condition that does not augur well for democracy.

In spite of the above identified democracy inhibiting tendencies associated with free economy, it is still our position that free economy makes liberal democracy the only avenue for the stability of the Nigerian State in the immediate future and for perpetuation of the prevalent politico-economic relations. Whether the political elites may be able to practice this democracy in such a way that it will be enduring depends on idiosyncratic factors which we may not be able to predict.

### **Democratic Inhibitions in Nigeria**

Will democracy survive in Nigeria? In spite of the assurance given by General Ibrahim Babangida that his regime will be the last military regime in Nigeria,<sup>506</sup> this was not so. A prominent military officer (Col. B. Marwa) has made insinuations that the military may still

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<sup>503</sup> D. Acemoglu & J. A. Robinson (2013) *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty* London: Profile Books Ltd., pp. 182-212

<sup>504</sup> C. Achebe, "More Troubles with Nigeria" in *The African Guardian*, Vol. 3, No. 46, Nov. 28, 1988, p. 24.

<sup>505</sup> *Newswatch* Vol. 15, No. 13, March 30, 1992, p. 27; and *The African Guardian*, Vol. 7, No. 23, June 29, 1992, p. 13.

<sup>506</sup> I. B. Babangida, "The Nigerian Elite and the Challenges of the Future" (Text of lecture to members of Oxford-Cambridge Club in Lagos on March 3, 1989) in *The Man IBB*, Oyo State Ministry of Information, Ibadan, 1992. p. 33

come back to the political scene. Although he admitted that for any military coup d'état to be successful, it has to enjoy reasonable support of the people.<sup>507</sup> Interestingly too, Gen. Babangida (a coup d'état veteran) has confessed the indispensability of people's support for any military coup d'état to be successful. It is important to stress that the military alone does not organise and carry out coups. Coups are generally preceded by mobilisation of public opinion, by circles outside the military, against the government of the day and its policies.<sup>508</sup> It is reasonable to conclude that the ultimate answer to the possibility of an enduring democracy in Nigeria lies with the people. It is, therefore, apposite to consider issues that may invariably determine the extent of people's support for democratic regimes in Nigeria. To begin with, the democratic regime in Nigeria is most likely to have social democratic ideological orientation.<sup>509</sup> The reason is not farfetched.

First, the penurious poverty, which permeates the rank and file of the majority of Nigerians, tends to reduce politics to welfarism. Conservatism becomes un-attractive. Even Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) alternative to SAP, adopted a social democratic framework.<sup>510</sup> Second, the historical precedents of party politics in Nigeria generally tend to suggest the inclinations of parties towards social democratic programmes. Lastly, the SAP of the disengaged regimes has become unpopular with the people. Any political party seeking popular mandate must necessarily propose an alternative programme of social welfare.

In other words, the popularity of democratic regimes in Nigeria depends largely on the extent to which social democratic programmes can be successfully implemented. This is because citizens are basically concerned with what they are able to get from government in terms of improved standard of living, especially in situation of generalised poverty such as is the case in Nigeria.<sup>511</sup> Of course, mobilising human and material resources to implement such a programme will be a Herculean task. The debt ridden economy is a major inhibitory factor.<sup>512</sup> This is not helped by the price fluctuations in the international oil market. Also, the privatisation programme

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<sup>507</sup> *African Concord*, Vol 6, No. 31, (Dec. 2, 1991). pp. 30-31.

<sup>508</sup> I. B. Babangida, "The Nigerian Elite and the Challenges of the Future" (Text of lecture to members of Oxford-Cambridge Club in Lagos on March 3, 1989) in *The Man IBB*, Oyo State Ministry of Information, Ibadan, 1992. p.16

<sup>509</sup> T. Benn, *Arguments for Democracy*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1981, pp. 123-141.

<sup>510</sup> ECA, *African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-economic Recovery and Transformation: A Popular Version*, UNECA, Addis Ababa, 1991.

<sup>511</sup> O. Awolowo, *Voice of Reason*, Fagbamigbe Publishers, Akure, 1981, p. 133.

<sup>512</sup> M. I. Obadan, "Development In Nigeria's External Debts" in A. Phillips and E. C. Ndekwe (eds.) *Economic Policy and Development in Nigeria*, NISER, Ibadan, 1988, pp. 7-28

of the free economy regime limits the alternative source of revenue for government on the long run. This is because profitable government investments in banking, insurance, oil companies, etc. have been privatised. Again, the tax evaluation and collection instruments in Nigeria are grossly inefficient. Unfortunately, government in a privatised economy will have to rely on tax revenue.

Also, the contraction of the bloated bureaucracy<sup>513</sup> that would have been necessary to free resources for social democratic programmes may not be possible, especially by a government that professes social democratic reforms. This is further compounded by the proliferation of socio-political institutions. In addition, the perennial problem of corruption among political elites and the various manifestations which suggest its continuity may most likely limit the prudent financial managerial ability of the political leaders.<sup>514</sup> While we acknowledge the enormous implications of the above identified inhibitory factors for democracy in Nigeria, there are still remedies that can reasonably mitigate the situation.

### **The Nigerian Labour and the Democratic Project**

The Nigerian labour has a historic role to play to sustain democratic governance in Nigeria. In the first instance, democratic rule in Nigeria came into being as a result of struggles of people for democratic rights. In this struggle, Nigerian labour played indispensable roles. Arguably, the Nigerian labour is the only visible association in Nigeria that possess the organisational capacity to mobilise the Nigerian people against ideological revival of classical capitalism, which continually reverses the gains of social democracy as epitomised in free-education, free-health services, minimum living wage that guarantees minimal quality of life regimes.

In this struggle, the Nigerian labour has to demystify the philosophical falsehood of classical capitalism. It is apposite to cite some of the philosophical falsehoods. First, government has no business in business. The economy is best handled by private individuals. This is absolutely false. There is no free economy anywhere in the world. The truth is that every government is necessarily an extension of economic interests of the ruling elite. The mechanism engaged by governments to intervene only differs according to the exigencies of historic circumstances. Let me illustrate with examples from the citadel of capitalism, USA. When there was financial meltdown (economic depression) in 2008, the then President, Barak Obama,

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<sup>513</sup> A. M. Babu, "Into Second Gear" in *Africa Events*, Vol. 6. No. 7, July 1990, pp. 21-22.

<sup>514</sup> *Sunday Sketch*, August 30, 1992, pp. 1-2.

injected \$270 billion into USA banks from public funds. In June 2017, when there was no economic crisis, President Donald Trump was in Saudi Arabia, where he negotiated \$132 billion arms deals for USA private companies. The point is made. Government is actively involved in economies of state protagonists of capitalism.

Second, education and health is not free anywhere. This is another lie. There exist many states in the world, particularly in some European and Middle East countries, where education and health are fully funded by the states. Education and health are critical issues that ultimately determine the productive capability of any political community economy. Ultimately, free education and health improves capabilities of every state to discover and develop human resources for sustainable development. Capitalism thrives on greed and myopic interests, which undermine collective capability of society to provide education to discover the best intellectual potentials. The Nigerian labour must defend this crucial democratic right.

Third, increased minimum wage will cause inflation. This is another lie. Time and space will not permit me to discuss this issue exhaustively. It suffices here to ask polemic questions. Nigeria government gave trillions of naira to private banks and electricity distribution companies (DISCOs), why did this not cause inflation? Why is it that trillions of naira appropriated to the political class does not cause inflation? The last minimum wage law was enacted and implemented some seven years ago, why is it that Nigerian inflation rate grew astronomically in the last three years? The point is that minimum wage does not ordinarily lead to inflation. Money is an artificial medium of resource allocation. Monetary policies and nature economic planning are the real issues that cause inflation.

In any case, studies pioneered by M. Keynes have shown conclusively that states can stimulate economic development by increasing public spending as exemplified in increased minimum wage regimes. The Nigerian labour has the historic responsibility to mobilise not just for increased minimum wage regime, free education and health services, but more importantly, for sustainable development and democratic rule in Nigeria.

## **Recommendations and Conclusion**

The survival of democracy may in the final analysis depend on attitudinal changes in Nigerians. It is worthy of note that Babangida regime founded the Mass Mobilisation for Self Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) and Centre for Democratic Studies

(CDS) as principal agents for facilitating attitudinal changes. However, it is our opinion that the effect of these organisations on democratic attitude of people is most likely to be tangential. The organisations at best played complementary roles.

As educational theorists have proffered, people learn more by doing.<sup>515</sup> In other words, the best way of effecting changes in democratic attitudes of the people is by acculturating the people to ethics of democracy in every facet of life. Democracy has to be introduced and defended at every level of society. Trade unions must be freed from bureaucratic and government manipulations. The press must be made to be more versatile. These are democracy-reinforcing institutions. They are the breeding grounds for political elites. It is the ethics that these people inherit, imbibe and defend these institutions, as well as the philosophy and values underpinning them. This will ultimately manifest in their leadership style in future.

Towards getting an economic base for government under the free economy regime, political elites must be made to fund government. Tax is the main financial engine of governance in most countries. It is, therefore, necessary that efforts should be intensified to collect taxes. Towards this end, we recommend the adoption of the following policy initiatives:

- i. Assessment of private individuals should take into cognisance their consumptive propensity. For instance, a person that rides a Mercedes Benz and lives in a mansion (irrespective of his self-declared assets) can be made to pay a pre-determined minimum tax based on the worth of his visible assets.
- ii. There should be a law which will make under-declaration of assets a criminal offence attracting a mandatory prison term and confiscation of the under declared assets.
- iii. Goods and services that are not produced within the economy and which are not directly relevant to enhancing the productive capacity of the economy should attract heavy taxes both at the port of entry and subsequently every year.
- iv. For instance, elitist cars (e.g. Rolls Royce car) can be made to attract one thousand percent import duties and the owner should pay mandatory tax on the regular annual licensing fee.
- v. Goods and services that are produced within the economy but have detrimental effects on health and moral values of people should equally attract heavy indirect taxes. For example, alcoholic drinks, cigarette, pools betting, etc. should attract heavy indirect taxes than hitherto.

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<sup>515</sup> P. Freire, *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* (trans.) Myra Bergman Ramos Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1972, pp. 60-65; and J. I. Nwankwo, *Management in Education: Modern Approaches in Education Management*, Giraffe Books, Ibadan, 2014, pp. 37-40.

- vi. Local governments should be made to invest a given percentage of their revenue in labour intensive industries with high quantity of domestic inputs. Here, investments in agro-allied industries will be appropriate. Apart from providing job opportunities for the people, over time local governments can develop independent base for revenue generation and hence less dependency on federally collected revenue.

There are constitutional structural changes that are still necessary if democracy is to endure for long in Nigeria. In this regard, we wish to recommend De-Gaullian constitutional political structure<sup>516</sup> for Nigeria. Under this system, there will be a popularly elected executive president and legislators. A prime-minister who enjoys the confidence of the parliament and responsible to the president should be chosen by the president. The prime minister continues to hold office if only he enjoys the confidence of the presidency and the parliament.

The President and the Prime-Minister by convention should come from different religious affiliations. While the term of office of the President should be made longer than that of Parliament (e.g. President for six years, Parliamentarians for three years) the election should be held at different times. This is to ensure stability and continuity of governmental process. The Prime-Minister should be held responsible for policy formulation and implementation. If and when the government (executive) is unpopular because of its policy, the Prime-Minister should voluntarily resign or be dismissed by the President. This recommendation is premised on the following grounds.

- i. This arrangement will most likely reduce ethnic and religious tensions since at all times, two people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds will hold vital position of authority. Unlike now where vice-president is seen as a stooge, the prime-minister will be seen as a responsible office holder.
- ii. It has the potential of enhancing the popularity of the presidency. A popular president will undoubtedly serve as a unifying figure for Nigerians.
- iii. The rapid turn-over of prime ministers that such a system will engender is most likely to satisfy Nigerians' impatience with non-performing regimes.

In a nutshell, we conceive the Office of the President as that of a General, who charts the course of governance and whose integrity must be protected at all times, while the Prime-

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<sup>516</sup> A. Appadorai, *The Substance of Politics*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 294-315; and Shively, *Power & Choice: An Introduction to Political Science*, pp. 356-358.

Minister as that of a loyal field commander, who must be ready to take all battering and insults, associated with political exigencies of sometimes ill-informed electorates.

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**THE NIGERIAN ECONOMIC CRISIS, SNOWBALLING INFORMAL ECONOMY  
AND THE IMPERATIVE OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM IN NIGERIA**

Comrade Gbenga KOMOLAFE\*

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The Nigerian economy is characterised by endemic crisis. Apart from being subject to the traditional boom and burst nature of capitalism, it has distinct peculiarities that make it prone to instability and crisis. It is linked to the global capitalist system in a subordinate, peripheral and dependent manner, which ensures its backwardness. Its colonial heritage guarantees that it continues to export raw commodities for meager incomes, while it imports finished industrial products at a more expensive rate. Its corrupt, prebendal and clientelist elite is historically incapable of allocating resources in a rational, fair and efficient manner that could facilitate development. Thus, its industrial production capacity remains rudimentary, with the manufacturing sector constituting a mere 4% of the GDP, with the backward informal economy making up close to 60% of the national economy, absorbing over 80% of the working population.<sup>517</sup>

The dominant role of the state in managing the economy and allocating resources, which provided a large public social service sector in education, healthcare, public infrastructure provisioning, came under serious attack from 1986, when the administration of former military dictator, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, imposed the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which ensured, promoted and entrenched a fully blown free market capitalism in Nigeria. SAP led to massive job losses in the public sector as the neo-liberal policies of privatisation and commercialisation of social services

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<sup>517</sup>See, Industrial Development and Growth in Nigeria, Issues and Challenges, Chete N. et al, in African Growth Initiatives, Brookings Institute, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/.../L2C\\_WP8\\_Chete-et-al-L.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/.../L2C_WP8_Chete-et-al-L.pdf); and "The Informal Sector, Growth, Employment and Sustainable Development, Discussion note, G20, Australia, 2014"[https://www.francophonie.org/IMG/pdf/secteur\\_informel\\_emplois\\_et\\_transformation\\_structurale\\_english\\_pdf](https://www.francophonie.org/IMG/pdf/secteur_informel_emplois_et_transformation_structurale_english_pdf))

were relentlessly pursued. Successive military and civilian administrations continued with the neoliberal policies to the extent that some state governors attempted to privatise public schools, while the more affluent Lagos State refused to invest in tertiary education. This has meant that the only available jobs are in the chaotic, heavily competitive informal economy for vast population of Nigerians.

The latest international capitalist crisis, which erupted in 2008 in the United States of America (USA), caused largely by the speculative sub-prime mortgage lending and subsequent failure of the investment banking industry in the United States of America (USA), notably Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, Morgan Stanley and JP Morgan-Chase, as well as government-backed mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, are widely recognised to be at the root of the current global financial meltdown. At first, its effects were not seriously felt in dependent capitalist countries like Nigeria because they were not major players in the global economy and their banking sectors were less integrated with the global financial market. However, the contagion spread to other counterparts, such as insurance companies, hedge funds, finance companies, and mutual and pension funds that invested heavily in the structured products. The crisis became globalised because the investors were not only USA's companies. European banks, and emerging market institutions, in particular, bought just about as many as USA banks, which led to contagion around the globe.

The undiversified nature of the Nigerian economy and the high dependence on exports of crude oil and foreign capital inflows compounded the impact of the external shock arising from the crisis. In specific terms, Nigeria experienced low demand for its oil export due to recession in the economies of her major trading partners. The Nigeria's Bonny Light Crude Oil Spot Price FOB, (Free on Board), which was \$95.16 per barrel in January 2008 rose to \$146.15 in July 2008, before declining to \$76.24 per barrel by October 17, 2008. Thus, within four months, it had lost 50% of its peak price. The development of shale oil in the USA also introduced a new dynamic to the Nigerian crisis, with Nigerian crude oil exports to the US declining from over a million barrels per day in 2010 to zero in July 2015. The general global economic recession also ensured that the pricing of crude oil declined from a recent peak of \$112 in June 2014 to the

most recent low of \$28 in 15<sup>th</sup> January 2016<sup>518</sup> - almost 78% decline in just over one year! It should be noted too that India, the next big importer from Nigeria, and China are currently furiously developing their own shale oil as well! Nigeria earns over 80% of its budgetary income and over 90% of its foreign earnings from oil. With the aggressive search for new markets and the intense competition from new oil/gas exporting countries like the USA, which are putting significant pressure on the international price of oil, the prospects for the Nigerian economy obviously remains dismal.

### **Pressure on the Informal Economy and Intensified Labour Precarity**

Perhaps, it is best to discuss the informal economy by what it is not. The informal economy in several economics literature is often described as the shadow, hidden, irregular, underground or invisible economy. Obviously, such descriptions, which suggest some elements of criminality and conscious opacity, are simply not true, especially in developing African countries like Nigeria, as well as those of Asia and South America. People do not operate in the informal economy because they have some criminal intent, want to dodge taxes or play some truancy. Most often, they simply have no choice! Of course, they operate very much in the open, perhaps too much dangerously in the open. As a matter of fact, the challenge is how to get most street and market vendors, waste pickers, artisans and petty manufacturers and fabricators, such as carpenters, mechanics, and welders etc., to operate under some shade, with some modicum of standardisation and in less open spaces!

Also, it is not true that informal workers and operators do not pay taxes. Especially in urban areas like Lagos, informal workers pay multiple taxes and charges to a wide range of government establishments such as the Departments of Inland Revenue (personal income charges), Ministries of Transport (MOT charges, hackney permits etc), Local Governments (lock up shop, radio and TV levies, land use or ground rent charges, market rates, etc), Ministries of Environment, etc. Even local roughnecks, often with the tacit support and in collusion with the police, also collect their own unofficial levies and ‘charges’!

The informal economy can be more usefully defined as the diversified set of economic activities, enterprises, jobs, and workers that are not regulated or protected by the state. The concept originally applied to self-employment in small unregistered enterprises. It has

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<sup>518</sup> See, D. Santabarbars “The Oil Market: Recent Developments and Outlooks,” August 2017. Accessed <https://www.bde.es/f/webbde/SES/Secciones/Publicaciones/InformesBoletinesRevistas/ArticulosAnaliticos/2017/T3/files/beaa1703-art24e.pdf>

been expanded to include wage employment in unprotected jobs.<sup>519</sup> The informal economy is characterised by:

... reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership of enterprises, small-scale operations, labor-intensive and adapted technology skills acquisition outside the formal school system, low wages, longer working hours, and unregulated competitive markets ...Its persistence is driven by number of factors including unemployment, poverty, and migration.<sup>520</sup>

Employment in the informal sector can generally be broken down into the following categories: self-employment, single-person operations, employers of informal businesses, wage employment (usually workers without employment benefits), employees of informal businesses, and employees in formal enterprises, not entitled to employment benefits, domestic workers, unregistered workers, some temporary workers, and home workers and so on.

The informal economy in Nigeria which, "...accounts for 80 per cent of non-agricultural employment, 60 per cent of urban employment and over 90 per cent of new jobs in Nigeria,"<sup>521</sup> is estimated to account for 57.9% of Nigeria's rebased GDP, consists of over 17 million businesses and enterprises, and contributes significantly to job creation. A recent study by the Small & Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN) revealed that micro enterprises comprise 98% of all Medium Small and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs) in Nigeria, whereas Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) constitute only 2%.<sup>522</sup>

### **Precarious Nature of Work in the Informal Economy**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines working conditions as the combination of compensation, nonfinancial incentives, and workplace safety. In precarious work, however, employment is not standardised in the first place, and even so, it is poorly paid, insecure, unprotected, and insufficient to support a household.<sup>523</sup> This undesirable working conditions significantly emanates from: underemployment, ambiguous employment relationship, lack of

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3 Women in the Informal Economy, Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO); *About the Informal Economy*, <http://www.wiego.org/informal-economy/about-informal-economy>.

<sup>520</sup>See Akinwale, "Precarious Working Conditions and Exploitation of Workers in the Nigerian Informal Economy," *Social Science Diliman* Vol. 10, No. 1, January-June 2014, University of Lagos

<sup>521</sup>See *Vanguard Newspaper*, September 15, 2008.

<sup>522</sup> See [http://nigerianstat.gov.ng/pdfuploads/SMEDAN%202013\\_Selected%20Tables.pdf](http://nigerianstat.gov.ng/pdfuploads/SMEDAN%202013_Selected%20Tables.pdf)

<sup>523</sup>ILO, "Precarious Employment and Small Business Sustainability, ILO, Geneva 2011, [www.internationalpolicybrief.org/images/2016/SSLPR/ARTICLE15.pdf](http://www.internationalpolicybrief.org/images/2016/SSLPR/ARTICLE15.pdf).

access to social protection, low pay, and insufficient or even a total absence of trade union rights. In addition, the scope of precarious employment includes different forms of employment relations, such as temporary work, casual work, outsourced work, part-time work, seasonal work, home working, teleworking, Sunday work, and job sharing. Workers in the informal economy are more frequently affected by precarious working conditions compared to their counterparts in the formal sector.<sup>524</sup>

Labour precarity can be pernicious, as the frustration of young people, who lack decent jobs and with little optimism for the future, leads to flaming riots.<sup>525</sup> General frustration occasioned by the prevalence of precarious working conditions has provided a motivation, among other factors, for an unprecedented increase in the tempo of youth-led social uprisings in different regions, especially in Northern Africa, the Middle East, Ecuador, Chile, Spain, Italy, Greece, the United Kingdom and Israel.<sup>526</sup> The menace of precarious working conditions provides a basis for the Nigerian case of Boko Haram militancy. The astronomical increase in the spate of terrorist attacks in Nigeria is linked to a clandestine group of irate youths known as “Boko Haram Militants,” whose activities have resulted in monumental destruction of lives and properties, including several churches, mosques and the United Nations Office in Abuja, Nigeria.

Available records show that precarious work has become a norm in Africa, especially when it is analysed from a high degree of uncertainty of employment, erosion of trade union rights, virtual absence of regulatory protection, and low level of income.<sup>527</sup> Precarious work is associated with poor health conditions of workers, accounts for low level of unionisation, threatens trade union membership and it is responsible for low level of workers involvement and participation in union affairs and struggles. This is so because only a few workers feel confident enough to organise and bargain collectively due to their unstable positions.<sup>528</sup> Besides, as job insecurity increases and social benefits decrease, workers face increasing pressure to accept job offers that put their health and safety at risk.

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<sup>524</sup> ILO, “From Precarious Work to Decent Work,” ILO, Geneva 2012, [www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_dialogue/@actrav/.../wcms\\_179787.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_dialogue/@actrav/.../wcms_179787.pdf)

<sup>525</sup> See, J. Mansel, & W. Heitmeyer, “Precarity, Segregation, and Poverty in the Social Space: Overview of the Research Status, 2010. Retrieved December 20, 2013, from [http:// www.difu.de/publikationen/precarity-segregationand](http://www.difu.de/publikationen/precarity-segregationand)

<sup>526</sup> ILO, “From Precarious Work to Decent Work,” ILO, Geneva 2012 [www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_dialogue/@actrav/.../wcms\\_179787.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_dialogue/@actrav/.../wcms_179787.pdf)

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>528</sup> E. Brophy “Labour Precarity and Collective Organizing,” Queens University, 2006, <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1767/1885>.

## **Towards a Social Movement Unionism**

Labour precarity and reduction in formal employment labour density, mostly arising from government neoliberal policies and practices, have contributed considerably in reducing the membership, organised power and influence of the trade unions in Nigeria. This state of affairs is further aggravated by deepening disunity in the Nigerian trade union movement, as epitomised in the open split of the NLC into two factions in the aftermath of the 2014 Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) National Delegates' Conference. The April 2015 botched strike over the latest round of increases in the pricing of petroleum products, also, underscores this reality. Yet the necessity for labour unity in the face of escalating economic and social crisis is never more relevant than now.

The failure of the Nigerian government to maximise the last oil boom, through strategic investments in the critical energy sectors of the economy, especially in electricity and transportation infrastructures and transformation of the nation's crude oil refining capacity, has meant that Nigeria has become engulfed in a deep and hopeless trajectory of underdevelopment and an ever deepening social crisis. This crisis is further compounded by the failure of the Nigerian State to articulate coherent and sustainable measures to rescue the national economy from its deepening crisis. What is being continuously imposed on Nigerians since 1986 is a rehash of Bretton Woods Institutions' neo-liberal policies of privatisation, commercialisation, deregulation, devaluation of the Naira, amongst others, etc., which have further intensified poverty, rampant corruption, unemployment and compromised leadership recruitment and the succession of morally bankrupted leaders, criminals and thugs in public offices.

In the face of this reality, it has become an absolute necessity for working people, who are the direct victims of the present crisis, to work assiduously for unity and a clear progressive programme, capable of providing an alternative vision of development. Professor Funmi Adewumi, indeed, underscored the importance of trade union unity in building workers' power, promoting their interests and influencing societal development, when he wrote:

... Workers of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains. That was the clarion call of Karl Marx and his comrade and collaborator, Friedrich Engels in ending the Communist Manifesto of 1848. That call was based on the enormity of the task before workers in the struggle between labour and capital, not just within the work place but also in the general class struggle to overthrow the yoke of capital. Because capital is concentrated social power, in a context in which the worker has only his individual labour power, it is considered imperative for workers to be united in confronting the enormous power of capital. According to Lozovsky (1972), "the only social force possessed by the workers is their

numerical strength. This force, however, is impaired by the absence of unity". It is in the same vein that Allan Flanders (1972) argues that the unity of workers makes the trade union a complete organisation and constitutes the foundation of the union's strength.

The difficulty in having unity within the trade union movement arises in part from the inherent strength of the trade union organisation. In order to weaken the unions, efforts are usually made by those who feel threatened by this strength to undermine the union organisation. This is made more problematic because of the collaboration of elements within the trade union movement with enemies of the workers to ensure that the movement remains disunited. Since the formation of the first trade union in Nigeria almost a century ago, 1912, the history of the trade union movement has been a mixture of triumphs, intrigues, manipulations and tribulations.

The logic of trade unionism would appear to be that irrespective of their placing within the work hierarchy, lack of ownership of the means of production puts all employees at a disadvantage within the employment relationship. In the employment relationship, the employer enjoys a lot of power, which is reinforced by a number of legal instruments limiting the control, which the individual employee can exercise within the work situation. Since workers constitute the largest single force in industry, it is only through their combined strength that they can conveniently challenge the dominance of capital. Through such a challenge, workers would be promoting their own interests, which are basically economic. In this regard, issues such as wages, overtime rates, hours of work, holiday and sundry conditions of work attract the attention of unions. The fact that workers have to struggle over these issues is a reflection of the inherent contradictions within capitalist industry and society at large.

These contradictions are the products of the antagonistic interests of labour and capital as epitomized in the continuous accumulation on the part of the employers at the expense of the workers. It is in the context of this accumulation that the interests of workers are subordinated to those of capital. Herein lies the necessity for a united front on the part of workers if they are to improve their lot.<sup>529</sup>

### **The Working People's World.**

Apart from informal workers discussed at some length above, other categories of workers include are:

- ❖ Wage earners or formal labour: These workers fall within the ambit of labor-capital or wage relations. In such relations, the employee-employer relationship is clear and formal.

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<sup>529</sup> F. Adewumi, "Unity and Division: The Dialectics of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement," *African Journal of Business Management*, Vol. 1, No. 3, June 2007. Available online @<http://www.academicjournals.org/abjbm>.

Workers in this classification can be further classified into: private sector employees who work for privately owned industrial or manufacturing firms and service companies and public sector employees who work for national and local government agencies or government-owned corporations.

- ❖ Farm labourers in small-scale agricultural businesses and the plantation agricultural workers.
- ❖ Middle rank executives of service institutions.
- ❖ Women workers, who as wage earners, are continually exposed to discriminatory and harsh working conditions. Most women workers are also found in the informal sector. They are usually not bound by the labour relations framework and thereby are not protected by labour laws.
- ❖ Flexible and temporary labour: These are people who are willing to do temporary work and accept lower (i.e. lower than the minimum wage) wages. Flexible labour includes the contractual workers, casual workers, and the swelling ranks of the unemployed, particularly those from peasant families who have been uprooted from rural farm production.

### **What are the Different Types of Unions?**

All organisations formed by workers to protect and promote their interests are considered unions. This include the followings.

- ❖ **Trade unions:** These are unions that are formed by wage earners. They are formed to represent workers in collective bargaining negotiations with employers for increased workers' benefits and better working conditions. Trade unions at the enterprise level are called "local unions". National labour centres are organisations that bring federations or alliances together for the purpose of expanding workers' representation in social movement unionism. At the international level, unions from different countries and territories operating in particular industries are called International Trade Secretariats or ITSs. In response to the challenges of today's global realities, different ITSs are slowly merging with each other. Now they are better known as Global Unions. Furthermore, National Trade Union Centres from different countries bond together to form International Labour Centers.
- ❖ **Informal Workers' Organisations:** These are formed by working people in the informal economy to help set some standards of operation, determine fair prices and wages, represent informal workers with governments and organised private sector, mobilise resources for training of members and organise some form of mutual aid and social solidarity. Recently, efforts have been made to represent them centrally through a federation called FIWON which has tried to draw attention to the absence of social protection in the informal economy, occupational health and safety, training and retraining etc., while also trying to establish a framework for financial inclusion through mobile banking.

- ❖ **Workers’ Cooperatives:** Cooperatives are usually considered the “economic arm “of unionism. In cooperatives, workers pool in resources to create products or services that they themselves can avail of at lower prices.
- ❖ **Workers’ Community Organisations:** These are the territorial-based organisations usually found among the informal labour sector. As community organisations, they not only concern themselves with “work matters” such as employment and wages but “community “or “living” matters such as livelihood, housing, child care and education, and health.
- ❖ **Women Workers’ Organisations:** Women workers usually organise as a group to promote their interests as women. They can be found within or outside unions. Within trade unions, for instance, women workers usually form committees to ensure that women’s concerns are integrated in collective bargaining. Women workers are also organised within community organisations. Other groups cut across companies and communities and do lobbying or advocacy work to promote women workers’ issues at all possible levels.
- ❖ **Workers’ Education Associations:** These associations are focused on building the capability of workers particularly in the area of consciousness raising and skills training. Workers’ education associations may be formed within and across unions.
- ❖ **Migrant Workers’ Organisations:** These organisations are formed primarily to promote the interest of migrant workers. They can be found in the country of origin (i.e. to protect and help migrants before they leave to work abroad) or in host countries (i.e. to protect and help migrants once they arrive in the countries where they work). Most of these organisations, therefore, are cross-national in nature. This form of workers’ organisation is not very well developed in Nigeria.

### **What is Social Movement Unionism?**

Social movement unionism is a strategy directed at recognising, organising and mobilising all types of workers and unions for engagements in different areas of struggle. This strategy is not limited to “trade union” organising and has been developed precisely to respond to new work arrangements, where employee-employer relationships do not exist or are not clear. Social movement unionism, then, seeks to protect the rights of all workers, not just the wage earners. It is “social” because it does not deal only with economic rights and political rights, which trade unions usually deal with. Rather, social movement unionism seeks to address even the “social costs” of oppressive economic and political systems. It recognises the broadness of workers’ interests and the diversity and complexity of work arrangements. As such, it is geared towards the struggle for workers’ rights in all aspects — economic, political and socio-cultural—

and at all levels— local, national, global. In short, the strategic objective of social movement unionism is nothing less than social transformation.

### **What are the Different Arenas of Workers’ Struggle?**

The workers’ struggle for social transformation can be waged in different arenas and should not be limited to engagements with employers at the enterprise or industry level:

- a. **Mass movement arena:** This arena essentially involves “pressure politics”. In this arena, “mass” numbers are needed and actually used to engage employers, governments and even the agents of neoliberal globalisation to gain for the working people the rights due them. In the mass movement arena, workers are better-placed to struggle for their rights on their own terms – on the basis of their strength and positioning. In this arena, the working people, through assertion and negotiation, can greatly influence, if not actually participate in, decision-making processes where rules have been previously set. Unions, in all its varied forms, are the perfect instruments for the working people’s intervention in this arena of struggle. For the unions to remain effective, it must therefore constantly accumulate forces not only in terms of quantity (recruit more members) but more so in quality (develop effective mass leaders). Tragically, most unions in Nigeria are not investing sufficient resources to develop the knowledge base of local leaders resulting in very confused responses by this class of union leaders in moments of struggles.
- b. **Electoral arena:** In this arena, there are certain pre-set rules and laws and is thus usually called the “legal” arena. It is an arena where the objective is to elect or recall/impeach people in government positions and to make sure that they truly represent worker’s interests. Historically, this arena has been a most exclusive playground of the elites. It is through their electoral victories that they perpetuate their control of economic and political power. Thus, to gain power for itself as a class, the working people must challenge the elites in this arena. The task of unions, therefore, is to engage this arena to change the rules in favour of workers’ interests. Concretely, workers have to work to elect fellow workers and labour-friendly people into public office. As of today, majority of public officials are anti-labour because workers have yet to show a “labour vote”, that is, workers voting for workers or pro-labour candidates. Workers’ issues are, therefore, made into electoral or governance issues. With a strong labour vote, a politician will not be elected into public office if he/she were tagged as anti-labour. To do so, the working people need a different instrument. It needs to build its own political party. The success of unions in the electoral/ parliamentary arena means better labour laws and more workers’ participation in formal societal decision-making processes.
- c. **Development arena:** This arena usually involves the spaces where unions can enhance workers’ conditions in the “material” sense. Hence, the development arena usually entails the formation of cooperatives or other such groups and strategies that help the workers economically. This also extends to the delivery of social services such as health and education that should be provided by government. In this arena, workers learn to provide these services and develop their capacities. This is where labour-related non-

governmental organisations (NGOs) come in. These NGOs are important union partners in capacity- building. Their assistance usually takes the form of education-formation programmes, information dissemination, research and advocacy, and, even organising assistance.

- d. **Ideological and Cultural arena:** Unions have to win the minds and hearts of workers and the public at large. As mentioned in earlier, neo-liberal globalisation is now the dominant ideology. To combat it, therefore, requires for people to understand why this set-up must be changed and how they can help unions change it. In this arena, unions work for cultural transformation, for changing people's consciousness. Such new consciousness in turn leads to actions that actually change the lives of workers for the better. Transformation, after all, becomes possible only when they come from real understanding and commitment.<sup>530</sup>

### **Labour Unity and Movement Building must have a Programme**

Prof. Adewumi has argued that the:

... major challenge is for Nigerian workers to overcome the divisive factors that have been holding them down. In addressing this, it is necessary to develop a programme base for building a united trade union movement. This would be a response to the question: unity for what? Unity in any organization must be geared towards certain ends. Even when it appears obvious that people should come together, conscious efforts still need to be made to bring them together. As such in building a united labour front, a programme of action should be developed around the needs and aspirations of workers and this should address all facets of national life and should constitute the minimum shopping list for Nigerian workers. A “**Workers’ Charter of Demands**”, similar to what was put together by the NLC in the early 1980s, would be appropriate. Such a package should flow from the members of the unions and should not just be the imposition of union officials, no matter the temptation to the contrary. The beauty of this approach is that a stop would be put to a situation in which “policies to be adopted or agreements (are) signed without any involvement of the mass of union membership or perhaps without their knowledge” (Hyman, 1975). Such a package should cut across the political, ideological and occupational divides and be regarded as a mobilization document. Irrespective of whether one belongs to an industrial union, a senior staff association of any of the existing labour centres, this minimum labour charter should be seen as a rallying point for the protection, defence and promotion of the interests of workers as stakeholders in what is fancifully described as the Nigerian project. The charter should address issues as well as strategies and tactics to be adopted by the trade union movement in

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<sup>530</sup> Adapted from a Filipino Workers’ Education Primer, [http://www.apl.org.ph/APLPrimer/aplprimer\\_part4.pdf](http://www.apl.org.ph/APLPrimer/aplprimer_part4.pdf)

confronting its plight in the scheme of things. Such an approach allows issues to be seen in their proper perspective while it also encourages a holistic and comprehensive view of the challenges confronting the trade union movement and the complexity of the struggle for a better society.

In other words, there can be no unity without a coherent programme, drawn up with the full involvement, participation and direct inputs of the various segments of the working people's movement across gender, formal/informal, local, national and international lines. When are we going to set on this journey in Nigeria?

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### **Interview**

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***FUNMI ADEWUMI***

*Unions Without Unionism, Government Without Governance: Essays in Honour of Funmi Adewumi*, written by academics, trade unionists, activists, researchers, journalists and a public servant, raised and answered five major questions; namely:

- i. Who was Late Professor Funmi Adewumi? What did he stand for? And why did he stand for what he stood for?
- ii. What is the state? Why has the state in Nigeria been implementing policies and programmes that are outrightly undemocratic, nondemocratic and anti-democracy, as well as against national development, national interest and generally against the interests of the vast majority of Nigerians? A clear example being the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and the successive neoliberal policies that were implemented after SAP, under different and various names.
- iii. But, what is Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)? Why has SAP continued to remain an issue of serious discourse in Nigeria, thirty-two years after it was officially introduced? If it is because of its impacts on the state, the economy and the society, what are these impacts? Specifically, how did SAP affect the lives, welfare, wellbeing and struggles of the working class and other vulnerable people in Nigeria, especially the working class and students?
- iv. What role has trade unions been playing to defend, promote and advance the interests of the working class? What has been the reactions of the trade unions to the increasing miserable, terrible and disastrous conditions of working classes? Why has the state been able to confidently implement its neoliberal policies, despite series of struggles by workers and their unions? And how can the neoliberal policies of the state be confronted, reversed and replaced with people-centred, driven, propelled and sustained development policies?
- v. What is to be done to move Nigeria on the path of development, democracy and social justice? What is the role of the working class and other vulnerable people in bringing and sustaining this path of development?

This book is in honour, memory and celebration of Funmi Adewumi (1960-2017); an analysis of the state in Nigeria, the interests it serves and its hostilities towards vast majority of Nigerians; a criticism against neoliberalism, especially the severe, miserable and terrible hardship it brought against the vast majority of Nigerians, on working and other vulnerable people; a disapproval of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement's leadership deviation from the tradition, philosophy, ideology, values and practice of trade unionism, a call on leadership to reconnect with the rank-and-file members and to primarily and basically serve their interests, as well as an appeal for the working class to return their unions back to unionism; and a general message to Nigerians, irrespective of their ethnic, religious and regional background, to actively participate in the struggle for national development, democracy and social justice; *a development, democracy and justice that tackles the people's problems, as well as defend, protect, promote and advance their progress, welfare, and wellbeing.*