

Marxism and the Challenge of Development in Contemporary Nigeria; A Historical – Philosophical Reflection

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Abstract

One of the major problems the Nigeria state has faced since the attainment of political independence in October 1960 is the disparity in the economic fortunes of the 'have' and 'have nots'. The gap between the two classes seems to widen with subsequent regimes in Nigeria. This paper examines the place of Marxian philosophy and the Nigerian state. Drawing largely from secondary data, the paper posits that the Nigerian state lacks the necessary productive base on which social relations could be anchored. The consequence of this lacuna is the escalation of youth restiveness which has impacted negatively on the transformation of the Nigerian society. In the conclusion, the paper draws attention to the need to have an institutional framework of policies that would address this malaise and extricate the country from the tag of 'failed state'.

Keywords: Contemporary Nigeria, Development, Challenge, Reflection.

Introduction

Marx theory has continued to be a source of hypothesis to many theorists in the world, and has created a theorizing 'puzzle' in the realm of social reality. The quest to solve the puzzle has led to divergent paradigms of Marxism. The reasons for these are two-fold; first, is ideology, which according to George Ritzer (2000, p.22) and Mihaly Vajda (1981) who shall be continuously referred to, in this paper, was the nature of the ideology and not the existence of ideology as such that made many social theorists to have a strand on Marxism; Second, is that Marx radical ideas and the social changes professed at the early time did not fit into the social order and reality of earlier times, because they were conservative to the disruptions of Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The capitalist 'West' has been uncomfortable with Marx theory as it hinged on the oppressiveness and emancipation of the masses (proletariats), in



the emerging modern capitalist system that was brought about by the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century in Europe. The capitalist (bourgeoisie), sought therefore, to develop counter theories that would demystify Marx paradigms. In view of the above, Marx prepositions were too dangerous and stood in contrast to western bourgeois' ideology and the interest it represented that professed conservative reforms and orderly social change in the system, hence the need to re-examine the theory.

For the Nigerian state, the question is: how has the Marxian philosophy helped to re-package and positively impact on Nigerian leaders and the citizens? This paper undertakes a historical – philosophical insight into the relevance of the Marxist theory and its appropriateness to the Nigerian state since the attainment of political independence from Britain in October 1, 1960.

Karl Marx and Development

Karl Marx (1818-1883), propounded a theory of modern capitalist society that provides models on economic growth and societal development. He further highlighted the social and political context under which this can function. Within this premise, historical and dialectical materialism comes under review. This Marxist methodological approach, premised that it was the entire social world and the economy in particular that needed to be analyzed because of its dialectical social relations which are inherently contradictory within the material world. Marx argued that the problem of modern society is traceable to real materials success for life, for example, the structures of capitalism, and that the solution to this therefore, would be in the overturning and dismantling of these structures by mass action of the people through class consciousness that came about by long time exploitation by the dominant class in the society due to their ownership of the means of production, from which they derived their economic and socio- political relations.

Capitalism therefore, is the economic system in which the bourgeoisie owned the means of production and the proletariat must sell its labour time to the capitalist in order to survive. The proletariat was the centre of Marx theory that would bring about the concerted radical social change in the society by mass agitation that emanates through self consciousness that later manifests into class consciousness. This class consciousness, continued Marxian line of reasoning, has certain objective conditions it had to undergo before it could achieve its aim. One of such was that the proletariat has to act at the appropriate times and in the appropriate ways. This means that the conditions created by the productive forces and social relations of production must be exploited by the proletariats. Marxism therefore, is a social process. In the Eighteenth Century, it was posited that: "men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered from the past" (Marx,1852\1963:15).



Marxism as a social process based on the principle of dialectics was to study the past and present in order to understand and predict future social phenomenon of inherent historic-social realities. From the Marxian view point, the only way man could act freely and express himself and potentials is in a classless society where the interest of all would be entrenched and enforced by the rule of the proletariat which is the real democracy that is power-free in social relations. However, this process of democracy is simply a question of enlarging the opportunities for each particular group with common needs and objectives that would serve as a determinant for societal transformation and social change. However, one thing is sure of this premise, as Mihaly Vajda (1981, p.10) argued in his *Political Essays* that “democracy is a social movement, just as Marxian Communism wanted to be, and not a social state of affairs”. It maintains that there is no perfect democracy due to dynamism of the system (social change), and without leverage of freedom in human society, no social democracy is able to function. This paper strongly aligns with the view of Vajda because it is only when such group interest are not being abused and used as an instrument of the state would the proletariat rule be justified as was experienced in the Defunct USSR. The State in Africa ever since its existence has played an active role in the distribution and redistribution of resources. This pivotal role has stripped it of its necessary democratic principles in some cases. It was so because, the productive forces had not matured before it was integrated into the World Capitalist economy. It was therefore, difficult for it to perform the functions of distribution of resources through the market mechanism. Therefore, the intended forces of production and the social relations of production were weak, and this has hampered the development of a class-conscious proletariat that would result into social change. Marxists profess that the totality of the consciousness of the people determines the direction of the state and its attendant structures,

In Nigeria, the state is a key factor in the political economy because it determines the direction of production, distribution and allocation of resources. The fragile production base and the resultant social forces of production have not been able to support any socio-political transformation that would engineer collective ‘mass action’ of an active society. Additionally, the state has been a factor that not only helped in preserving the private bourgeois structures by this act, but perhaps also helped in modifying them (Vajda, 1981, p.73). This indicates that the ‘Social Contract’ within the Nigerian state has failed because it works and entrenches the interest of elite class. As Marx pointed out, "the state is but the management of the common affairs of the bourgeoisie". As state institutions are part of the super-structure determined by the interests of the dominant class, the state then is an instrument of the ruling class as defined in terms of control over the means of production. In Nigeria, according to John Campbell, a former American Ambassador to Nigeria (1998-2000), “those that hold power do not want it to change. They wanted to hold on to it to impoverish the people so as to determine and define the waves and directions of politics, since they do not have jobs, factory or industry it is the only job they can do best”.



The State, Social Class, Class-Consciousness and Dialectical Materialism: An Overview

According to Marx, "the state is but a committee for managing the affairs of bourgeoisie..., the form in which the individuals of a .ruling class asserts their common interest" (Engels, 1919). The state is used by the dominant class as an instrument to dominate the other class. This dominance is expressed through laws and policies that are made by the state which represent the interest of the dominant group. The dominant class uses instruments of power like executive instruments, legislature and the judiciary to maintain this set up. This dominance by capitalists (bourgeoisie), does not necessarily mean that the bourgeois exercise direct power via the state apparatus. Domination is secured at the level of the social organization of production which defines basic rules governing what the state can do or not do. Governments in capitalist state may in fact be in the hands of other classes or group, including workers, bureaucrats and petty accumulation of the system. Such groups can only be allowed to participate in government, as long as they "respect" the rules of the games as laid down by the dominant class, as relations of power at the level of production. This exploitation of one class by another as Marx argued arises as a result of the emergence of the states. Political power is therefore, the organized power of one class for oppressing another,. Within the Marxian paradigm, the state is essentially a class issue, to continue strengthening the state as a powerful apparatus isolated and apparently existing above people under the guise of it being the state of the 'whole people' is really to gloss over some real contradictions, even class contradictions, existing in the society.

On the Other hand, Marx interest in social structure was social class (the bourgeoisie and proletariat). Ollimer (1976) contended that social class is "the relation between men that have taken on an independent existence". Class, therefore are large groups of people differing from each other according to their place in the historically determined system of social production, according to their relations to the means of production, their role in social labour and consequently, the mode by which they acquire their share of social wealth and the size of that share, The difference in the place occupied by class in social production emphasized one class to appropriate the labour of another. For example, feudal lords appropriate the labour of the serfs, wage workers (proletariat) etc. This would lead to antagonism and class struggle in the system. According to Marx, the collapse of the primitive accumulation of production gave rise to the emergence of class. To Marx, there are two major classes within the capitalist society, the bourgeoisie (also called capitalist) and the proletariat (the worker). The bourgeoisie is defined by the fact that it owns the means of production; factories, machinery, tools etc. while the proletariat sells its labour time to the bourgeoisie in order to earn a wage that allows it to survive. However, class relations are essentially social relations with the control of the state by dominating class being one of the most decisive elements.

Furthermore, class consciousness, are shared beliefs of members of a social unit. Durkheim (1893/1964) regards it as the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average members of the same society that forms a determinant system which has its own life, one that can be realized only through them". This was what August Comte called "the glue of the society", that the collective consciousness keeps society together for functioning and harmony. Marx termed this "class consciousness".



Dialectical Materialism, on its part, is a materialistic conception of ideology that was clearly and jointly articulated in the works of Marx and Engels. They both criticized Hegels conception of dialectics. To them, the concept is grounded in the material conception of history-dialectical and historical materialism which is linked to the material base of the society. As Marx contend, "it is not consciousness that determines life (man's existence), but material life that determines consciousness", (Marx and Engels, 1976). Marx believed that it was the entire social World, and the economy in particular that need to be analyzed because this focuses on dialectical relations within the material world. This social process of dynamism rooted in the Marx orientation explains how change is brought about in the society through reciprocal relationships among social phenomenon. It is a view that the social World is made up not of static structures, but of processes, relationships, dynamics, conflicts, and contradictions Lukacs (1975). From the Marxian orientation, historical materialism is "the self-knowledge of capitalist society". Lukacs equated its true content with classical political economy within a specific social production system. Marx economic determinists, tracing all historical developments to economic base which posit that ideas are the reflections of material (especially economic) interests, that material interest determines ideology.

Theoretical Paradigm of Marxism

Marx propounded an economic theory based on capitalist society. He argued that every society, whatever its stage of historical development rest on economic foundation; the mode of production, which entails two elements: -the forces of production and the social relations of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of the society. The theory maintains that at a certain stage of its development, the material forces of production in the society come into conflict with the property relations. He further maintained that this antagonism and conflict is inevitable between these two classes, and would result as class consciousness and militant class action develop in the overthrow of the existing system, in the *Communist Manifesto of 1848*, Marx averred that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle...without conflict, no progress, this is the law which civilization has followed to the present day".

Marx also contended that the source of power in the society lay in the economic infrastructure and that the forces of production are owned and controlled by a minority, the ruling class. The relationship to the forces of production produces the bases of its domination and exploitation in the society, and the state plays an historic important role in maintaining this social structure. Consequently, he asserts, that "the state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of whole bourgeoisie..." (Engels, 1919).

The Nigerian state appears to be one without a production base where the forces of production and social relations of production are embedded. As a result of this, the objective conditions necessary to create social mechanisms for a productive economy that would usher a class struggle between the two classes professed by Marx is lacking. Class-consciousness seems



weak in the Nigerian society because of the relative nature of the economy that is mostly peasantry in nature as it depends on rents from mainly oil exploit to run the state. As such, the totality of the consciousness of the people in Nigeria is determined and geared towards the state for survival. Alan Gelb *et al* (2002) in their analysis of the state and rentier economy strongly emphasized how oil rents are collected, allocated and used, to sustain a policy regime. To these scholars, concentrated rent source in national income could mould the social and political institutions of a producing country which some have termed 'rentier state'.

However, the structure as described above had its root from the colonial era. It was a deliberate policy of the colonialists to debase their colonial states from productive capacities in order to export and entrench capitalism. The productive forces were weakening because it did not give room for productive activities which led to clientele patronage on government and political positions (Soludo 2000, p.5). "In Nigeria, the excessive dependence on oil was compounded by the concentration of the commanding heights of the economy in the hands of Government. Government then became the fastest and cheapest means of making quick money, A 'rentier' state thus emerged, he further asserted that majority of Nigerian elite do nothing for living other than government patronage and this has led to distortion of the value system. Though, Marx was very critical of modern capitalist system, capitalism was seen by Marx as an important stage of development in society because it developed the productive forces and the capacity of the capitalist to introduce technological innovation into production processes which could assist massive advancement in human societies. Such mechanism of social dialectics is important in producing 'class-conscious' proletariat.

This scenario has shown the need for an adequate understanding of the state and its relations to the process of capitalist production and accumulation. Based on this, Claude Ake (1996) contends: "therefore politics is warfare and governance spoils of war..." The state, in this light, appears to be the private resources of the dominant faction of the political class, which defend its power by every means against other faction also seeking state power by all means, Marx and Engels view endorsed the view of Ake when they averred that, "circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances". It could be argued too, that the capitalist world' has not depraved or corrupted man, but has made him a social being whose needs or desires are not given or determined by birth. What is needed is the creation of a power structure which would provide for the articulation of ideal values and needs for all social groups. For the Nigerian state to perform, these needs, sound and clear ideological concept are needed.

The Nigeria State and the Economics of Production

Marx theory emphasized economic production of goods and services. It contended that production brings wealth and prosperity to a nation. The state here, is supposed to be the architect of any planned social change because it has the power to enact a synergy with cybernetic functions in transforming the society. The emphasis by Marxist on the economies of production is that if the economy does not function, there will be no production, wealth would not be generated and there would be no jobs for the masses while the welfare and standard of living of generality of the people would be 'undermined. The fair distribution of this societal



wealth is of importance in the case of Nigeria since it lacks the basic tenets of production. The entrepreneur and industrial base becomes lopsided.

It is important to note that the majority of the masses of Nigeria have been left out in this 'scramble' and incapacitated in contributing to the economic production of the country. The only opportunity for them is the informal sector of the economy where 'black market' thrives. The nature of the Nigerian state holding power for the dominant class is decisive in categorizing a particular mechanism of production in respect of the federal structure that has been in operation since independence but it seems, the dominance of unitary system (ideology) has been glaring in the nature of the attendant social relations. The institutional framework that made the federating state to rely on the centre (Abuja) for monthly subvention to run their governments and sustain development contributes to the alarming height of a rentier state and clientship structure in the Nigerian State. As Joseph Garba (1995) has succinctly opined:

" In a country like Nigeria where the prizes are so few, and the stakes so high, the fight for booty or 'national cake' is fierce and often vicious. It has at times led to a debilitating corruption in the arena of public policy making and implementation, who gains, who loses in these federal state and local policy arenas is rarely an accident more often than not, the distributional consequences of public policies are the intended result of the private interests which have been instrumental in their design, passage, and implementation. For the entire country, the manipulation of public policy for private purposes comprises yet another disjunction in our fractured history. Not every public policy fails, and not every public programme or project is redundant. But when once in a while a policy succeeds, it is often not because of government per se, but in spite of it".

The first opportunity for Nigerians to overturn this order of social structure came in 1987 Anti-SAP riot. The Ibrahim Babangida Administration then, introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). It was a macro-economic programme designed to stabilize the economy and restructure the economic base with emphasis on diversification away from petroleum (oil sector), which was expected, to create foreign exchange to service foreign debt and balance of payment deficit it was also intended encourage high agricultural productivity. It was also to enhance private sector role in production (from the supply side) and as a tool for discipline in consumption and stimulation of production in the Nigerian economy,

The economic policy tools employed included; devaluation of the Naira, as I have pointed, however, the Nigerian economy was non-productive, it was wrong to devalue the currency and nothing was being produced for sale but for consumption only. This weakened the



value of the Naira seriously and the purchasing power of Nigerians. Tight uncoordinated, non-transparent, insincere result was that the Nigerian economy was brought to its knees. Continued devaluation of the Naira which recently went as low as one hundred and ninety six naira to a dollar (*The Punch* 2015, p.11) not only led to high level of falling standard of living, elimination of the middle class and serious dislocation in the social system but has also shown how impoverished Nigerians have become.

For the Nigerian State, the idea of class-consciousness is still seen to be lacking because of naivety. This lack of awareness by the leaders and the vacuum created has led to the failure of an uprising that could have ushered in a Socialist State. With regards to the anti-SAP regime not of 1987, the state brought some incentives to ameliorate the suffering and dislocations accessioned by the SAP regime. The economy was opened, state jobs created and Peoples Bank formed to enable people have direct loan without collaterals. Such “Greek gift” were some of the essence of capitalism in diverting peoples’ attention against any further form of agitations. The extent to which this measure then, assuaged the plight of the Nigerian people seems debatable.

Another of such indications was the "June 12" saga that followed the annulment of the Presidential Elections of 1993. This incident as it were, was trivialized and another opportunity was lost in upturning the unproductive Nigerian state system. The saga was an ‘epoch cutting edge’ for power struggle within intra class that has continued in the psycho of Nigerians. The winner of the election, Chief MKO Abiola, was never allowed to rule because the "pseudo guerilla" tactics used against him paid off when the then, Head of State, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida stepped aside from power and his colleague Gen. Sanni Abacha died in office due to sustained pressure and organized agitations by pro-democratic coalition and organized civil societies. The continued struggle was what ushered in the present democracy Nigeria now practice. As Marxist would assert, "any zigzag turn in history is a compromise, a compromise of the new which is not strong enough to negate the old, and the old which is not strong enough to negate the new" It could be argued further that due to the unsustainability of the Nigerian system, militant groups like Delta Militants, Oodua People’s Congress (OPC) and Boko-Haram Group took advantage of the situation to find relevance. The production system has placed money in the hands of few elite who do not produce but only consume the wealth of the State. For the Nigerian state, it seems that the only issue government listens to, is violence to address public outcry and form policies in recent times. The amount of fund that has been spent in curtailing restiveness in different parts of Nigeria has been enormous without addressing the basic infrastructural decay. These crises have brought to light not only the limits of the state activity, but equally the remarkable inability of the state to manage crises. Even though, anarchy and terrorism are not mechanisms of Marxism; it is an aberration to it. Lewis Coser (1956) from the Marxian orientation asserts that “conflict serves dual purposes in the society, positive and negative”. Coser contended that conflict is part of the socialization process and it's inevitable in human society. He stated further that conflict could be constructive and destructive because it frequently revolves disagreements for Coser "what is important for us is the idea that conflict prevents the ossification of the social system by extending pressure for innovation and creativity". He argued also that conflict could



lead to change in number of ways, including the establishment of new social groups and the development of more complex group structures to deal with goals and objectives of societal transformation. In the Marxian orientation, total social system undergoes transformation through conflict. Therefore, conflict is a creative force that stimulates change in the society within the structural functionalist paradigm, Robert Merton (1968) distinguished the concepts of manifest and latent functions of a social system; the obvious and intended function. The tendency to have these functions in Nigeria will be the ability of an active society and commitment of its leaders to mobilize the productive forces of the society for development.

The Nigeria State and Labour Relations

Karl Marx saw labour as the producers of wealth in the society that is appropriated by the elite (few elite who do not produce). Ironically without production, wealth cannot be generated and society would not be transformed. Labour in itself includes both mental and physical creativity. In capitalism, labour exploitation is at its peak because the state uses it as a mechanism to reduce inter-class mobility. The three factors of production are land, capital and labour. Marx regards labour as the most active purposive force in the production process. Regrettably government-labour interaction has been antithetical because the state controls production chains and use it as mechanism against stubborn the wage earners so as not to undercut their appropriation bills. One result of such act is the underdevelopment of the productive forces and social relations of production. According to Beckman (1980, p.3), some measures taken by the state interest of the workers, such as regulation of working condition and wages may at one level be opposed by individual capitalists, while at a higher level, they may be beneficial to capital by eliminating undesirable forms of competition". For example, a trade union movement may be able to exact important concessions from the state for its members and may oblige the state to protect its interests via-a-vis capital. Such concession may be the necessary price which capital has to pay in order to protect other more fundamental interests. Therefore, the state does not exist for the sake of political oppression but for the sake of regulating the social totality. The state bureaucracy, that desires to maintain the existing form of political power because it is its own power, will suppress any movement that protests against his power (Vajda, 1981). The Nigerian state and labour relations are dialectical because any dynamic move by organized labour for any meaningful agitation for improved welfare and conditions of service for its members are often labeled by the state as "subversive", "extremist" and or against "national interest" Any wage increase in Nigeria, has gone further to impoverish the workers and masses because of inflation, high or double taxation etc. However, if agencies like Refinery, Railway and Seaport etc are put right by the government there would be no need for labour agitation for wage increase.

It would be recalled that in 1978, Marxist lecturers were dismissed from various Universities after the students' riots of that year. Again, in 1986, the Federal Government directed that lecturers who were "not teaching what they are paid to teach" be identified and flushed out of the university system, as well as the general persecution and expulsion of students leaders (Alubo,1990:4) The case of Dr. Patrick Wilmot and the eighteen University of Ilorin lecturers in 2002, is also instructive. The administration of Olusegun Obasanjo, then, accused



Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), of running a parallel government, when the NLC called out its members for general strike and protested against the increase in petroleum products and proposed removal of subsidies. Government reaction was decisive as threat and force were deployed as it were, to 'shut up' labour moves which were perceived by the government as against the interest of the state and masses and hindered the social transformation programmes of the state. This ideological perception as used by the state to label labour is what Claude Ake (1988) termed "defensive radicalism". The aftermath was that the then government sent a bill to the National Assembly to stream the labour law so as to emasculate organized labour. As Giddens (1979) emphasized, "in modern politics,... the need to sustain legitimacy through the claim to represent the interests of the masses has become a central feature of political discourse and class struggle" the dilemma of the Nigeria state therefore, is that not until those in power come to term with their welfarist role, the economic 'upturn' expected could be a vanishing mirage.

Conclusion

The Nigerian State lacks productive base on which the productive forces and social relations of production can be anchored to produce an economy that would transform the society and people. This is so because large numbers of the population are mainly peasants who live in the rural areas. This has weakened class consciousness and social awareness which is an imperative tool of social change within the Marxian paradigm. In Nigeria, we do not create wealth; rather we share the wealth accruing to the state from oil revenue among the political elites. Little wonder there would constantly be fight among the elites to get a share but not for production. This has made the Nigerian state a 'rentier' one based on citizenship patronage.

It is the position of this paper, therefore, that due to the inappropriate application of the ideals of Marxism in the Nigerian's system, there has been increase in youth agitations across the nation and has by extension, shaped social life. The individual as an agent of change in the society, if incapacitated by any means cannot perform the function of producing and transforming society. The state needs an institutional framework of policies to tackle the dysfunctional economic system it operates if it does not want to be among the list of failed 'States'.



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