

Nigeria and Beyond: Revolutionary Change is the Way Out

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Nigerian society has undergone various experiences in its social, economic and political history in the past one and half decades of civil rule. These experiences are situated within the context of global developments. In spite of the enormous resources in the country since independence, Nigerian society has not gone beyond the rudimentary state of nationhood.

Working people and the youth have continually been the sacrificial lamb for the failure and inability of the capitalist and pro-capitalist ruling classes before, during and after independence, to break Nigeria from the stranglehold of imperialism-orchestrated underdevelopment. The emergence of civil rule since 1999, which the capitalist class, both local and international, promised will allow for flourishing of democratic activities, and engender economic prosperity, has not changed things fundamentally. On the contrary, it has made working people and youth continue to live in misery in the midst of inexhaustible wealth.

However, working people have not accepted this fate, but have challenged the capitalist ruling class and the capitalist state that superintend over this situation. Between 1999 and 2007 alone, at least seven general strikes were called by the central labour unions, Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC), especially over incessant hike in fuel prices. This is aside several student protests, community actions and isolated workers' mass actions at local, industrial and sectorial level.

Many of these actions have won some minimal concessions from the ruling class at various levels. However, they have not changed the general course of degeneration of the Nigerian society. For instance, in spite of the mass struggles and protests as exemplified in not just the seven general strikes mentioned earlier, but more importantly the uprising against hike in fuel price in January 2012, fuel prices have not been reversed substantially; neither have they stopped other attacks on the working people. Education sector, in spite enormous struggles undertaken by students and education workers over years, has seen further decline in funding, standard and quality, while fees across tertiary institutions have been increased by an average of over 5000% since the emergence of the civil rule. Moreover, poverty rate has increased substantially since the end of the military era.

The missing link in this process is the absence of pan-national resistance platform with clear-cut anti-capitalist agenda. While there are central labour centres and national students' platform, NANS; the practical absence of a revolutionary anti-capitalist and socialist programmes for these platforms have limited the capacity of these platforms to challenge the basis of generalized misery in the country. In the real sense, these platforms have collapsed ideologically, while as a result of lack of full democracy in the running of

these platforms, inability to produce radical leadership, even in the period of rise in popular consciousness, has entrenched the ideological and structural degeneracy in these platforms.

The other aspect of this is the absence of a working class political structure to aggregate various struggles of the working and oppressed people by seeking permanent political solutions to the seemingly eternal underdevelopment of the country. This has meant that various struggles of the working class have no political expression in terms of working people translating their anger to political power. The implication of this is that various struggles of the working people have been appropriated by various sections of the rotten capitalist class in Nigeria in furtherance of their class interests.

Aside creating political confusion for working class people and disorienting them, it has also helped various ruling political class to get away with massive mismanagement and corruption. Working and young people have been made mere sideline cheering crowd for various sections of the bankrupt capitalist political class, who, while seemingly fighting over who will control the spoils, are united in their collective commitment to anti-poor capitalist policies that are detrimental to the interests of the working people. This was clearly depicted by the fact that all sections of the capitalist political class and their big business partners have been united at one time or the others, and under various platforms in defence of their united class interests.

The 2015 elections that have been touted as that of “Change” has not fundamentally and cannot fundamentally change the under-development status of the country. In the past seven months of Buhari presidency, there has not been any serious change in economic and political orientation. Mere basic transparency in terms of public declaration assets has become herculean task for the “Change” politicians. Even the president and his vice had to be pressured until late into the government’s third month before declaring their assets. Other politicians in the ‘change’ party, All Progressives Congress (APC) have refused to declare their assets. The party itself was more of a congregation of power seekers, from various political affiliations, who want to dislodge the equally bankrupt, highly corrupt and inept Jonathan presidency and the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP). There is no structural or political, not to mention ideological, alternative programme to the PDP. This is not accidental as the APC party, aside not being ideologically, politically and structurally different from PDP, is indeed a conglomeration of all sections of the corrupt ruling class, disgruntled or left out from the central privilege distribution.

While it is true that the Buhari administration is undertaking some form of fight against graft, the reality is that this is more of spasmodic and haphazard action than any serious campaign against graft and corruption. Of course, some of those involved in graft under the highly-corrupt Jonathan administration are being tried, but this seems more like a *déjà vu*. The Obasanjo administration between 1999 and 2007 also spearheaded a so-called “anti-corruption war” that saw many politicians, mostly from his ruling PDP dragged before courts.

In fact, aside the fact that Obasanjo government established the current anti-corruption agencies such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), high profile elements such as the chief of police, Tafa Balogun, were publicly humiliated. Billions of dollars were recovered. However, the Obasanjo government turned out to be the pacesetter in systematic graft and looting of public funds. Money seemingly recovered including more than a billion dollars from Abacha looted funds found their ways back to the private account political officers. Many of these political officers

are now in the ruling party. Also, the Yar'Adua government carried out bank sanitization that saw the arrest and prosecution of fraudulent bank chiefs. Interestingly, the same Yar'Adua was not only propped up by corrupt elements but was sustained by them. Elements from Obasanjo's government who mobilized votes for Yar'adua but were involved in the pilfering of public resources, held major stake in Yar'Adua government, while James Ibori, a major pillar of Yar'Adua was shielded from prosecution by the government. It took the intervention of British court to found Ibori guilty and jailed, while Nigerian courts and the anti-graft agencies were compromised.

All of these show that it is more than mere grandstanding about fighting corruption to stop graft. The whole system needs to be overhauled. For instance, why should a government be claiming to be fighting corruption while public officers' wealth are shrouded in secrecy; while no one knows the asset worth of officers supposedly fighting corruption. Yet, Nigerians are told when they complain about pro-government officials' corrupt tendencies, to produce evidence. More than this, the whole political establishment is totally corrupt. For instance, two former governors, who are now senior and super ministers under Buhari administration, Raji Fashola and Rotimi Amaechi, presided over more than N10 trillion (\$50 billion) as governors within eight years; yet there are clear evidences that most of these monies have been squandered and looted through various schemes. But these two individuals as governors provided part of the huge funds that went to the emergence of Buhari both as candidate of the ruling APC, and as president. In fact, virtually all the state governments, under the PDP and APC, are currently bankrupt. But all of these governors contributed huge funds of their resources to various party elections, including presidential elections.

Therefore, while the current so-called "anti-corruption war" may give some sense of fighting graft, the reality is that it cannot seriously or fundamentally move the country forward, inasmuch as the current neo-colonial capitalism is being practiced in the country. For instance, all those who have looted and are looting public funds, hold major stakes in Nigeria's economic and political structures. Unless these set of people are routed and the economic and political structures overhauled to take economic and political power away from these people, and democratically plan on the basis of the resources of the country and needs of the people, there cannot be any serious way out. Even on a practical basis, the anti-graft agencies cannot undertake the least fraction of anti-corruption fight, as thousands of those currently in political and economic structures in the country will be affected. In fact, the government is finding it difficult to prosecute those who stole about a \$2.1 billion of defence funds, which is just a tiny fraction of who is stolen under Jonathan administration, and a tinier fraction of what was stolen in the past four years but politicians across all structures of government.

Worse still, the government is not moving away from the past. The 2016 federal budget, aside showing the gluttonous character of politicians in power as reflected in tens of billions of naira budgeted for personal upkeep of the executives and national assembly members, is also aimed at satiating the profit-motive of the big business and political class. For instance, while government is borrowing almost two trillion to fund so-called capital projects in the budget, this money will be handed over to private contractors, many of whom have financial and political backers and investors. Also, more than a trillion naira will be handed over to private financial institutions and money class - local and international - who invested in government's debts, and are going to loan the government the money the same money. It is a known fact most of Nigerian billionaires and multibillionaires are made through government dole-outs, bailouts, waivers, contracting, tax breaks and evasion and looting.

Therefore, by just enforcing tax on these billionaires and their multibillion-dollar projects, and increasing income tax of the rich, trillions of naira will be recouped to rebuild the economy, develop the country and expand infrastructures.

Rather than do this, the Buhari government is enforcing austerity on the poor. While petrol price, at N87 is still above its 2011 price of N65, despite crude oil price falling from over \$100 in 2011 to around \$25 per barrel, kerosene, a domestic fuel for most households, has been hiked from N50 per liter to N83. Government is planning to increase Value Added Tax that will affect the poor the more and lead to further inflation. On the other hands, government in its Mid-Term Economic Framework (MTEF) has placed embargo on salary increase and pegged salaries to the current poverty wage of N18, 000 naira (\$90) per month. Interestingly, many states and private sector employers have reduced this wage, while a state like Osun is paying half salaries. These are just fractions of attacks that the government will launch on the people under the guise of revamping the economy. Interestingly, government is using anti-corruption propaganda to divert attention of the mass of people from its anti-poor, pro-rich economic policies. Meanwhile, the belt-tightening has not affected the rich few and politicians in power as explained earlier.

But, without a socialist planning and control of the economy, even such monies recouped from politicians through progressive tax on the rich will find their way back to the private pockets of these people, the same way the monies got there. Only an alternative economic agenda and paradigm through socialist programmes can stop continued and cyclical pillaging of the country's wealth. Unfortunately, the labour movement that should play the central role in this regard is lost in ideological illusion that the Buhari administration can solve the country's problems.

As said early, the development in Nigeria is linked with capitalist geopolitics and global economic system. Since the collapse of the Berlin Wall and end of the Cold War in the late 1980s to very early 1990s, capitalist ruling classes globally have been more vociferous in driving through stronger capitalist relations aimed at increasing profitability through further exploitation of the working class and reduction of labour share in global wealth. This new system of capitalism liberalizes the market for capitalist vampires to extracts more profits from the working class; take away their hard-won rights and living standard as a way of forcing them to work more. Along with this is the politics of global imperialism that gave the US and her European capitalist allies the leadership role in world politics and strategy, in the defence of capital. This has meant further militarization of society, increased weaponry and more and more wars, meant to not only conquer territories, but also salvage capitalism by destroying some section of created capitals (infrastructures, industries, etc.), as a way of rejuvenating structurally-dying global capitalist system. At the other side of this new imperialism is mass destruction of lives and waste of huge human and material potential. From Gaza to Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Africa, the imprint of post-Cold War global capitalist imperialism, through heaps of dead bodies and rivers of blood can be seen and felt.

Various countries fit into this new Global Capitalist Disorder based on their historical role in global politics and economics. Nigeria and Africa, as latecomers to the orbit of global capitalism, are tied to the apron string of global capitalism. Local ruling class in Nigeria and Africa are not prepared to challenge global capitalism and build a new future for the country, as this task is beyond them: their economic interests are tied to the running of global capitalism. Unless they are prepared to commit class suicide or undertake great sacrifice that will see them losing part or most of the current wealth, they cannot challenge imperialism. More than this, it will require a strong state, or semi-fascist, if not outright

fascist state, which aside destroying a section of capitalist class, will also annihilate working class movement, to carry this task. The other alternative is a social revolution to create a government that represents the working and oppressed people; a government that is not tied to global capitalism, and thus can create a new society. It is this social revolution and working class alternative that working class movement should be campaigning for.

While new capitalist imperialism wrought its destructive tendencies, working people and youth have not kept mum. The global economic crisis that started in late 2007 has set a new template for the global mass resistance that started in the Seattle Movement against Capitalist Globalization in 1998, and the anti-war movement of 2003 and beyond. From the Occupy Movement in US to revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa and now new mass movements that are taking political shape in Europe, US, Asia and Africa, glaringly what is lacking is not mass movement, but genuine mass revolutionary platforms with clearly socialist programmes and policies to deepen the root of these movements and transform them into real change. The globalization of politics, communication and economy has made contagiousness of uprising and mass movement against capitalism not only a reality but also a necessity.

Finally, this writer centrally argues for a socialist society premised on collective ownership of the society's wealth under democratic public control. It, on this basis, call for the rebuilding of mass working people and youth resistance platforms against capitalist rule in Nigeria and globally, and by extension call for building of mass political parties of the working people, youth and oppressed people in general, in Nigeria, Africa and globally. This should start with building and rebuilding the working class resistance platforms such as labour movement, and student/youth movements against austerity and capitalist policies.

*This essay is an edited version of the Preface to **Kola Ibrahim's** latest book, **Revolutionary Pen: Collected Essays on Nigeria and Global Political Economy**, published in November, 2015. This book seeks to serve as a repository of ideas, experience, perspectives and history for the working people, youth, working class, other resistance platforms and intellectual community)*

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