

# Social Consciousness and Resistance to State Policies in Nigeria: An Appraisal of Class Analysis Theory

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**Abstract:** Before the writing of Karl Marx the bourgeoisie recognized the existence of class struggle between the haves and have-nots: the exploiting and the exploited class. Social-consciousness therefore, is a cause and consequence of the class struggle. The struggle between classes is all part of the yearning of the dominated class for freedom, equality and justice in the process of production and distribution of material well-being of people. This struggle is a function of power and this can be understood within the context of the local situation, especially the material conditions of majority of Nigerians. The outcome of class struggle decides not only whether there is progress towards justice, equality and freedom but also how much progress. This injustice, domination, oppression, exploitation are social in character and impede social progress, and consequently generate opposition to themselves. Such opposition results in struggle to end their existence or ameliorate their consequences. In Nigeria this struggle takes the form of strikes, demonstrations and civil disobedience against perceived exploitative state economic policies. Since the State is the principal actor in the allocation of values in Nigeria, to what extent has this, awareness necessitated resistance to government policies? This paper therefore investigates how social consciousness has inspired resistance to State policies in Nigeria. Being qualitative in nature it makes use of descriptive analysis and founded on the class analysis theory. The study found out that Struggle for better economic conditions has increased class consciousness and resistance to exploitative state policies through strikes and demonstrations. They have also given credence that deprivation, alienation, exclusion and poverty seek expression. There is also the need to engage and address cries of marginalization through dialogue and visible action. Economic policies of government should also be examined and measured from their inclusiveness and sustainability.

**Key words:** Social Consciousness, State Policies.

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most obvious implications of modern state is gradual but steady polarization of the society into two main groups; one miserably poor and the other massively rich. Though this scenario is not limited only to Nigeria, but what perhaps makes her case particularly worse is the growing amount of resentment and hatred that the overwhelming majority poor feel towards the microscopic minority rich in the society. This polarization manifests itself in all situations. Class struggle as a social reality of Nigeria's economic development is here construed from three points of view.

First, the past transformation of Nigeria from communalism modes to the present neocolonial capitalist system has in fact empirically involved class struggles. Second, the current demand in the country for genuine development as opposed to

the prevailing policies of underdevelopment which the ruling group has been pursuing in active collaboration with foreign capitalists forces is manifest class struggle. The outcome of the current struggle and its future character will determine the course of Nigeria's development. Third, the nature of such class struggles is not merely incidental and epiphenomenal to economic development in Nigeria but central and decisive both to its best understanding and dialectical path. (Onimode, 1978)

The struggle among social classes for the control of state power has been the propelling force in the development of many societies. Development here is taken to mean qualitative change in the productive forces and production relations that give rise to the production of more goods, creation of needs and ways of meeting such needs. In the process of production, consumption and distribution of material values in the society, such as food, shelter, clothes etc, and people get polarized into major two contending classes over the ownership and control of the means of production. On the one hand are those who own and control the means of production are member of the bourgeois class, while on the other are those have no means of production are member of the oppressed/proletarian class (Adilieje, Igwiro, and Adagonye, 2013:1).

The basis of the struggle between the two classes is the control of the state so as to determine social policies especially, the authoritative allocation of values and scarce resources. While the oppressed class agitates for a new social order that ensure fairly equitable distribution of resources, the bourgeois class preoccupies itself with maintaining their class advantage, by extension the structural inequality. Since the ruling class does not willingly surrender power (in other words not prepared to commit class suicide), it has to be compelled to do so through intense struggle and, or violence. Such agitations and struggles result in class conflicts. This class struggle may lead to the overthrow of the ruling class or compel it to embark on reforms such as increase in wages, welfare, bonuses, political liberties, democratic participation in industrial affairs etc. (Bangura 1985:39).

It was this class conflict that transformed Nigeria from pre-colonial to colonial and the present neo-colonial capitalist modes of production. For instance, the resistance against the imposition of capitalist relations of production, the independence struggles, the Anglo- Nigeria defence pact imbroglio, the Ali-must go episode, the Anti-Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) riot, the struggle for the democratization of the state in Nigeria, the face-off between the Nigeria Labour Congress(NLC) cum the people of Nigeria and

the Nigeria ruling class over the pump price of petroleum and other aspects of bad governance are some of the conflicts occasioned by the exploitation and subordination of one class by another. The conflicts and struggles generated by the various contradictory class relations over the control of state power have led to structural transformation or changes in Nigeria social system thus propel one from of development on another. For the oppressed classes to achieve victory in the no-going struggle against capital, it is required that the politics of primordialism which has been a basis of their impoverishment and underdevelopment as well as, a divisive factor amongst them has to be rejected. This depends on the level of their consciousness and mobilizational capacity to seize power from the ruling class and make it responsive to the yearnings and aspiration of the people. The working class needs organization strength and network of solidarity if they must extricate themselves from socio-economic and political marginalization (Adilieje ,Igwiro, and Adagonye, 2013:1).

Consequently, social class has its revolutionary character. Politically, a revolution is a social phenomenon involving fast-moving fundamental changes in the social, economic, cultural and production relations in society (Nnoli, 2003: 103). According to him, these changes are associated with the coming into a position of dominance of a new ruling class. It is political in character because it is an aspect of the class struggle for control of the state power, expressing the critical aspect of that struggle during the transitional period –the seizure of state power by one ruling class from another. A successful revolution marks the beginning of a new and radically different pattern of politics, government, economics and, socio-economic relations (Nnoli, 2003).

Revolutionary pressures are the forces with which the masses press against the ruling class for better economic and political treatment. By revolutionary pressures, we mean those social and economic catalysts that have the potentials to necessitate sudden and fundamental change in any given polity. The dynamics of social forces originate from the primary contradiction of the world economic system (Ake, 1978:9). There are some dynamic factors that intrinsically and fundamentally trigger revolutionary pressures in Nigeria.

These factors together have overbearing influence in initiating and sustaining these pressures. They include domination/authoritarianism, oppression/repression, exploitation, inequality, injustice and illegitimacy. The roots of these can be traced to Nigeria's colonial past. The first groups of Nigerians to confront it were the Nigerian peasants whose struggle and resistance were crushed by the superior power of the colonial state. However, the crushing of the peasant's resistance did not stop other groups from engaging the state pertinently. In line with this was the petty bourgeois that succeeded the peasants. They replaced the colonial power, indigenized colonial repressive, authoritarian and oppressive colonial state which continued with domination, exploitation, inequality and injustice in political and economic spheres of the state.

Today, new reactions and new revolutionary pressures have emerged from the civil society organizations, representing labour unions, mass protests as well as the left wing of the petty bourgeoisie to confront the excesses of the state by demanding for remaking of the state in the form of the national question. Today, Nigeria can be regarded as a new emergent, multi-ethnic and un-integrated state and its main problem to stable democracy and economic development is located around the problem of integration of its people and good governance.

In general terms, the national question is seen as the contradictions and antagonism between the various ethnic nationalities. In a narrow sense, it is seen in terms of interethnic hostilities only. However, the national question goes beyond this for it is much more complex than imagined. In other words, it entails bigger complex interconnected areas of political, economic, cultural, historical, religious, legal and other problems that arise as a result of peoples' struggle for independence, equality for balanced development among the various groups that make up a country. In the case of Nigeria, the national question involves the contradictions in the Nigerian society that involves oppression of the nationalities in the foregoing issues that have continued to threaten Nigeria's unity and existence as an entity including power sharing and co-existence as an entity called Nigeria.

The second dimension is the class relations. Here, the focus is on the tensions and contradictions that arise from class inequalities and antagonisms between the rich and the poor in the society. This is centered on similar issues of how to remove the fear of perpetual marginalization, domination, inequality, unfairness and injustice in poor and rich class relations. However this dimension of the national question is interwoven with and indeed over shadowed by that of inter-ethnic group dimension and is inseparable from it. Indeed, many ethnic conflicts have their foundations in class conflicts but found their expression in inter ethnic group relations. The struggles in the Niger Delta by many civil society organizations are revolutionary process that keeps on unfolding themselves. The manifestations of these upheavals are more visible in the theatres of politics and movements of change. The vision and trajectory of these movements and actions are to promote a radical change in Nigeria's political configuration for better economic and political treatment.

## II. DEFINITION OF TERMS

### *Social Consciousness*

Social Consciousness has been defined as the subjective awareness of common vested interests and the need for collective political action to bring about social change. Consequently, social class has its revolutionary character. Politically, a revolution is a social phenomenon involving fast-moving fundamental changes in the social, economic, cultural and production relations in society (Nnoli, 2003).

According to Nnoli (2011), the struggle between classes is all part of the yearning of the dominated class for freedom, equality and justice in the process of production and

distribution of material well-being of people. This struggle is a function of power and this can be understood within the context of the local situation, especially the material conditions of majority of Nigerians. The outcome of class struggle decides not only whether there is progress towards justice, equality and freedom but also how much progress. This injustice, domination, oppression, exploitation are social in character and impede social progress, and consequently generate opposition to themselves. Such opposition results in struggle to end their existence or ameliorate their consequences.

#### *State Policies*

State policy set of the basic principles, norms, and activities for the implementation of state power. A government policy is a rule or principle that hopefully better guides decisions, resulting in positive outcomes that enhance the community or unit. Government policies contain the reasons things are to be done in a certain way and why.

#### *Theoretical framework of Analysis*

This paper adopted Class analysis theory. Class analysis is a theoretical approach in the social sciences. It explores the determinants and consequences of social phenomena in terms of class and class relations. Class analysis views society as being divided into hierarchical strata that have unequal access to material resources, power, and influence.

Class analysis as well is research in sociology, politics and economics from the point of view of the stratification of the society into dynamic classes. It implies that there is no universal or uniform social outlook, rather that there are fundamental conflicts that exist inherent to how society is currently organized. Most known examples are the theory of Karl Marx and Max Weber's three-component theory of stratification. Marxist approaches define class in terms of mechanisms of exploitation and domination

#### *Varieties of Concepts of Class*

- ❖ Classes are defined primarily in terms of gradations versus in terms of relations
- ❖ Under relations:
  - Class relations are analyzed primarily in terms of the market
  - Class relations are analyzed primarily in terms of production
- ❖ Under Production
  - Production is analyzed primarily in terms of the technical division of labor
  - Production is analyzed primarily in terms of authority relations
  - Production is analyzed primarily in terms of a system of exploitation

Source: Erik Olin Wright, *Class Structure and Income Determination*, New York: Academic Press, 1979, p. 5.

The attributes of individuals and material conditions of life broadly are called “classes.” The “middle class,” within this approach to the study of class, identifies people who are more or less in the broad middle of the economy and society: they have enough education and money to participate fully in some vaguely defined “mainstream” way of life. “Upper class” identifies people whose wealth, high income, social connections, and valuable talents enable them to live their lives apart from “ordinary” people. The “lower class” identifies people who lack the necessary educational and cultural resources to live securely above the poverty line. And finally, the “underclass” identifies people who live in extreme poverty, marginalized from the mainstream of the society by a lack of basic education and skills needed for stable employment.

The concept of class and class struggle is not new in Nigerian Political Economy. According to history, it had been there since the anthropological inception of Nigerian socio-economic formation and even before the arrival of colonialism. So class analysis with its attendant class struggle is as old as Nigeria herself.

Thus with a socio-historical survey, it is necessary to observe that in class analysis, the politics of the ruling class in a primitive society always aims at conserving its existing wealth and power. The greater the opportunity for accumulation from the production system, the more intense the political and socio-economic competition within the ruling class exists.

So in post-independent Nigerian Economy, politics has been the politics of crude capitalist accumulation. This is a truism when we realize and understand that all the major conflicts in Nigeria in both past and present had been occasioned by a quest for capitalist accumulation. Thus this primitive struggle for power explains more vividly Nigeria politics than the colonial dependency on which emphasis had been laid since after the Nigerian civil war of 1966-1970 (Biafra Revolution). The Nigerian bourgeois class like others in the world economy is active accumulators. They knew their interests and needs and consistently pursue them with vigour and alacrity. Hence it is these interests, aspirations and needs that govern the politics of Nigerian sovereign state at the time and even at this present Nigerian political dispensation. Therefore in the application of the primitive accumulation, three methods are applied by three exploitative groups:

- i. The expatriates who adopt the theoretical method of appropriation of surplus values of labour and institutionalization of pervasive labour commodification.
- ii. The Nigerian bureaucrats: These cooperate with the International Capital to exploit Nigerians through the instrumentality of loans from Banks, Granting of foreign Aids, the establishment of technical aid corps as well as awarding imperial scholarships as an assistance to develop education industry.
- iii. The Industrial/Merchants: These compradors are Nigerians who establish their own business with the assistance of the foreign partners. They exploit the

labour by the payment of low wages and then maximize their own personal profits. They intimidate and even anachise relationships among the working class purposely to confuse them, and thus initiate crisis among them all with the bid to sufficiently and dangerously exploit and cheat them. This group otherwise class has a neocolonial character and instills in Nigerians a sense of clientele mentality which of course is dysfunctional to Nigerian growth.

#### *Prevalence of Revolutionary Pressures in Nigeria*

In the pre-colonial Nigeria, two forms of societies existed. There were societies that had evolved a hierarchical structure of political organization. Such societies are referred to as centralized states. The centralized states included the Habe and Fulani dynasties, the Yoruba and Benin kingdoms, as well as, some Igbo chiefdoms of Onitsha and Nri (Nnoli, 1981:169, Nnoli, 2003:1). The non-centralized states included “societies such as Ibibio, Igbo, the double descent communities of the cross River and some non-Habe ethnic groups in the North. In the centralized states the ruling aristocrats generated surplus in the form of taxes, tributes and forced labour from the peasants (Nzimiro, 1985:3). In the non-centralized state the ruling class were based on age and religion status. The oppressed or non-ruling classes in both societies according to Nnoli were the hunters, peasants, warrior and sometimes slaves. It should be borne in mind that lineage; age and religion were the basis of class differentiation.

These positions conferred certain advantages with respect to control over productive forces (cited in Adilieje, Igwiro, and Adagonye, 2013:6). Under colonialism, the feudal chiefs or natural rulers like the Emirs, Obas, Obis became the agents of imperialism. They served as links between the colonial government and their subjects. In areas like Igbo land where they had no chiefs, warrant chiefs were created to achieve the economic and political interest of the colonizing power. These privileged “natives” called warrant chiefs were to help the imperialists in the process of exploiting the masses. Both natural and imposed rulers became the beneficiaries of colonialism. They used their position as tax collectors to swindle part of the tax revenue and also took the best land. The coastal aristocrats acted as agents between the imperialist firms and peasant producers thus used their position to amass wealth (Adilieje, Igwiro, and Adagonye, 2013:6).

There are two interconnected strands of analysis of class struggle and revolutionary pressures in Nigeria. The first is located around prevailing economic conditions and the struggle for better economic conditions by the masses. The second struggle, which is linked to the first, is the political struggle for democracy. The mechanism of progress within any state is the struggle between classes. The state plays important role in this struggle especially in the peripheral capitalist states. This is because the state is part and parcel of the theory of history and development of the country, be it colonial or post independence one. The Post-colonial state in Nigeria is a capitalist type of state so is class even though to some extent it is different from

the state and classes in advanced capitalist formations. Whereas the state (and classes) in the advanced capitalist formations function to maintain the economic and social relations under which bourgeois accumulation takes place, in the periphery of capitalism, factors which have to do with the level of development of the productive forces make the state (and classes) through its several institutions and apparatuses, a direct instrument for accumulation for the dominant class or its elements (Ekekwe, 1986:12). The class structure in Nigeria was the creation of colonialism where British commerce in Nigeria played prominent roles in the formation. It was at this stage also that its present class formation evolved. The dependency of the development of productive forces decisively influences social organization, culture and the level of welfare. Due to the condition, the political and economic organization styles being adopted in Nigeria ahead of the development of productive forces make mockery of development, hence street protests and rebellion that frequently turned out violent against the dominant class (Ekekwe, 1986).

In pre-colonial Nigeria, classes and class struggle were associated with slaves and feudal mode of production depending on the development of a particular society. Under the slave mode of production the social classes were freemen (slave owners) and slaves. Some slaves gained their freedom through loyal service to their masters and were absorbed into the society as freemen (Bode: 1983). However, some slaves had to fight to secure their freedom. The primary objective of class struggle in pre-colonial Nigeria under slave mode of production was therefore freedom from bondage. The desires of the slave were to participate freely in the economic and political processes, to be made members of king’s council and even successors to the throne (Adilieje, Igwiro, and Adagonye, 2013:1).

The social classes under the feudal mode consisted of the landlords and the tenants, both of whom were under the political tutelage of nobility. The class struggles under this mode of production involved the desire for personal freedom and the dismantling of numerous restrictions and obligation. The focus of the struggle was therefore principally to liquidate all forms of personal restriction and exploitative obligation (Bode: 1983). This struggle was manifested by the constant inter-ethnic war and declaration of freedom by vassals in Oyo Empire and other kingdoms. This pre-colonial feudal class struggle made it easy for the imperialists to overrun the pre-colonial societies.

### III. UNDERSTANDING CLASS STRUGGLE AND REVOLUTIONARY PRESSURES FROM COLONIAL

#### *Experience*

The history of struggle between the colonialist and the local nationalities in Nigeria goes back to the imposition and establishment of the Nigerian state by the British colonial regime. This imposition and establishment of the Nigerian state was motivated by the need to hold down a conquered people and force them to adopt a new social, economic, political, cultural, and in some cases, religious way of life (Nnoli, 2011:

30). It was through this process that it brought along with this formation of the state, domination, oppression, exploitation, and injustice. To be sure, colonialism abolished the pre-colonial states in the country and in some places subordinated them to the power of the new colonial state. Consequently, the crux of the struggles was one against colonial domination. New and alien production processes were introduced as central to this domination in subordination to the local production. Because this new production process started a new historical course and caused a sharp break with the past history of the people, resistance became an instrument to fight the new production process. However, unilateral force was used to crush and destroy such resistances. This resistance was geared towards protecting production such as mining, Iron-smithing, leather industry and the grass, brass, copper, soap, brewing, silver, pot, mat and wood – carving industries that existed in pre-colonial Nigerian states such as Naraguta district, at Arafu, south of the Benue and at Abakaliki in the East among others (Nnoli, 2011). Nnoli, (2011: 32) correctly notes that in the pre-colonial economies, iron, gold, salt and other minerals were mined locally and used directly in various manufacturing industries. Iron manufacturing industries existed in many parts of the country, including the famous ones of Awka, Bida Ilorin and Ijebu-Ode (Nnoli, 2011). However, colonial economic domination destroyed these industries and put them into extinction.

Consequently, the earliest democratic struggles in Nigeria started with the peasants. This was witnessed in numerous uprisings, revolts and violent demonstrations staged by the Nigerian peasants to engage the British colonial government. According to Nnoli, (2011: 59), the most significant of these confrontations were the Mahdi revolt of 1905, Iseyin uprising of 1916, Egba revolt of 1918, Ekumeku Movement uprising of 1925, Dancing Women Movement rampage of 1925, Calabar Market Toll uprising of 1925, Warri riots of 1927 and Aba Riots of 1929. These protests were caused by grievances against imposition of foreign leadership and opposition to colonial domination, oppression, exportation and injustice by the colonial administration. Let us illustrate one of the above mentioned struggles especially that of the Ekumeku uprising of 1925. In 1925, a rash of uprising took place in Southern Nigeria, in the South-East precisely. A movement in Asaba and its environment emerged which demanded the end of colonial rule, especially its obnoxious authoritarianism. It was named the Ekumeku Movement (Nnoli, 2011: 61). The movement mobilized the peasants to confront the British colonialists on both their presence and their policy of taxation, especially the imposition of direct taxation. In the same way, the Dancing Women Movement emerged in Igboland to protest the British Colonial presence and its currency as well as native courts. They demanded a return to the customs and institutions of the pre-colonial period (Coleman, 1958: 174). These women marched up and down the communities stretching from the area around Okigwe to Owerri and Orlu. Some of these struggles met the stiff opposition of the colonial police which in several occasions maimed and killed protesters. The aftermath of Aba woman riot of 1929 claimed over fifty lives as many numbers

were injured. These riots and protests made the colonial government to reassess its tax policies. In April, 1931, there was a general reduction of taxes up to 50 percent in some cases.

The second struggle for both economic and democratic reasons was staged by the nationalist movement, especially the petty bourgeois class. Between 1900 and 1940, the working class in Nigeria played a significant role in the struggle for economic betterment and democracy. This was because the colonialists saw that the working class, with its organized trade unions, as the greatest threat to the existence of the social order on which colonial capitalist exploitation depended. It had the potential for threatening the capitalist framework itself because its labour stood in direct contradiction to the capital of colonial enterprise. The unique existence of exploitation and alienation of both at the market place and the workplace makes the working class in Nigeria potentially the most revolutionary, bringing with it revolutionary pressures.

According to Nnoli (2011: 67), the petty bourgeoisie comprised of those in the professions, teaching, petty trading, the middle and upper echelons of the Nigerian Civil Service, the middle and upper ranks of the army, and the petty contractors, businessmen, independent artisans and large-scale cash crop farmers. However, their democratic values were not anchored in the system of production. Its members focused attention exclusively at the level of distribution and politics. The position they occupy was minimal and marginal to the production process. As a result their struggle for democracy and economic well-being at the ideological and political levels were not anchored in their demand for control of production which is the sub-structure. While the peasants sought an immediate end to the colonial order, they demanded a reform of that order (Nnoli, 2011). In pursuit of these demands, the petty bourgeoisie used various forms and methods of agitation. These include popular demonstrations, press attacks through the newspapers among others. Later, emphasis of the petty bourgeois moved from agitation over colonial oppression, domination, and obnoxious laws to a struggle against governmental illegitimacy. The bone of contention was Nigerian representation in the legislature. This agitation led to the formation of Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) as part of the democratic struggles. This was founded in 1922 under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay. A limited number of taxpayers were allowed in the colony of Lagos to elect three representatives in the Nigerian Legislative Council. It had more of its support from Lagos market women and the emergent corps of the Lagos elite, Doctors, Lawyers, prosperous businessman and traditional rulers.

However, their struggle was not to eliminate the illegitimacy of the colonial government's control of the state, but to place themselves in state posts that would enable privileged distribution of state benefits to themselves.

#### *Social Consciousness and Struggles in the Post Independence Nigeria*

After independence of Nigeria in 1960, the undemocratic colonial government activities had changed from the

subjugation of Nigeria communities to the subjugation of the masses by the petty bourgeois. However, one cannot deny, that the struggle for democracy and economic well-being during the colonial period did not make some progress in the advancement of democracy. It did of course, by enlarging the political space of the country. One of the greatest challenges in the post independence era was the struggle to end military undemocratic and authoritarian rule in Nigeria. The challenge came from popular democratic forces and the struggle by these forces for democracy shows significant improvements and advances upon the one staged during the colonial period. Most of these struggles were waged by trade unions such as National Union of Nigeria Students (NUNS), Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), Campaign for Democracy (CD) Alliance for Democratic Right (ADR), among others. The trade union militancy, fearlessness and dedication are struggles for rights, democracy and for better economic conditions. Initially, only the students were self-conscious and courageous enough to fight for their right and interests during the periods of military rule (Nnoli, 2011).

The students embarked on their struggle to change their conditions of study unilaterally and coercively by the military regime, especially that of Murtala/Obasanjo. The result was the Ali-Must-Go campaign and confrontation. Ahmadu Ali, the then Federal Minister of Education, implemented obnoxious university policies without regard to their effects on the lives and socio-economic circumstances of the students (Nnoli, 2011). Students rejected the policies and backed the rejection with demonstrations and protests. In 1978, there was a dramatic issue in the history of students' union movement. In that year, the long-drawn demand of the students for the democratization of the educational system, a demand which culminated in the 1982 Charter of Demands published by the NANS, became possible. It was a demand made by students for democratic participation in Faculty and Departmental decision-making bodies, the election and representation of students in university Senate and Governing council, the existence of independent student unions, the right to form associations, the establishment of educational policy written by representatives of students and workers in the educational sector and the funding of primary and secondary education by the Federal Government (NANS, 1982). NANS also made other demands such as the right to privacy and free movement, a free press, as well as the abrogation of the Public Order Act used to arrest individuals even on flimsy reasons. In general, and in conjunction with other pro-democracy forces, they waged a relentless struggle against the very harsh policies of military regimes in Nigeria, from Gowon's regime through Murtala/Obasanjo, Buhari, Babangida to Sani Abacha's regime.

#### *The Oil Workers Strike*

One important wave of revolutionary pressures in Nigeria in the post independence period especially during the military regimes was the agitation organized by the workers of the petroleum industry in 1994. Given Nigeria's oil economy, oil sector unions have been more assertive and stronger compare to non-oil sector unions. This was apparent in the aftermaths of

the annulment of June 12 1993 Presidential Elections, which was said to have been won by M.K.O. Abiola, when the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN) staged one of the most anti military and democratic struggles in Nigeria. These oil sector unions coordinated series of industrial actions which brought the Nigeria economy to a halt, demanding the military to withdraw from power and restore democratic system (Ihonvbere, 1997). But organized labour seemed to be a great force against the military to step out of power.

This wave of proletarian struggles, therefore, developed in Nigeria during July and August 1994. There was an almost uninterrupted succession of strikes and riots. The State finally put an end to the movement by using its usual arsenal of repression. In order to exhaust and then to smash proletarian action, the unions diverted strikes into demands for the replacement of one bourgeois faction by another whilst the police organized more and more widespread arrests. One of the canters of proletarian agitation was organized around the workers of the petroleum industry. This is because this sector is vital for the national economy, Nigeria representing the fifth largest producer in OPEC, with a production equivalent to that of Kuwait. Strengthened by a long experience of struggle which has regularly manifested itself by strikes and sabotage of production in the Nigerian delta (the main concentration of oil wells, refineries and terminals), the oil workers led a strike which had serious repercussions on the national economy. This strike constituted an important reaction by the working class to the aggressions they are subjected to. Moreover, it took place in Nigeria whose dominant ideology is considered as being underdeveloped. Repercussions of the struggle affected world market prices; the price of a barrel of oil increased astronomically due to stoppage of production of Nigerian refineries and a halt on exports. Military government was then very useful form of capitalist rule in Nigeria. Because of its access to coercive force, the military acted in a more authoritarian manner towards both working class and individual capitalists than many other types of bourgeois government.

#### *The Structural Adjustment Programme Protest*

In 1986, due to further deepening of the both international and local economic crises, the government of Ibrahim Babangida imposed the austerity measures to turn the economy around. The measures were the dictates of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to enforce a "structural adjustment programme". This was an austerity plan involving restructuring, dismissals, wage cuts, deregulation, privatization, and currency devaluation among others.

Consequently, in 1986 a further step in the deepening of the international economic crisis forced the Nigerian bourgeoisie, as everywhere else, to impose the austerity measures needed for it to withstand international competition and thus continue its petro-business businesses. Under the auspices of the IMF, the government tried to enforce a structural adjustment

programme, an austerity plan involving restructuring, dismissals, wage cuts, etc. Various concrete measures were taken in the years that followed, notably the launching of a "new industrial policy" which aimed to achieve "increased productivity and rationalization of the public sector"- in other words, ever increasing misery and sacrifice imposed on proletarians.

Proletarian resistance to these measures was such that the IMF admitted its reluctance to carry on with its loans if there were no "quick improvements". In this situation of unstable social peace, the various bourgeois factions presented a strong force to enforce the neoliberal economic policies of the IMF and the World Bank. In Nigeria this task was incumbent upon the "military" bourgeois faction. In 1988, the cumulative misery and economic hardship and in response to an increase in the price of fuel, riots broke out in Jos and Sokoto which turned out to be the beginning of more intense waves of struggle by the masses across the country. In May and June of 1988 several towns and cities such as Lagos, Ibadan Benin-City and Part Harcourt revolted against the Nigerian state and the IMF's plan. This resulted in about 100 and 200 deaths. Soldiers shot on sight to prevent a generalization and spread of the riots which were likely to challenge policies of structural adjustment programmes of the government and possible social revolution. These riots halted the increase of the price of public tariff and removal of subsidies of basic commodities.

#### *Civil Society and the 2012 General Strike/Protest*

The civil society of the colonial order was created to circumvent pressures that could create instability in the society. However, some categories within the state that were excluded from the political participation occasionally rise in challenge against the colonial state. It was this suppression and exclusion that led to the various categories in challenge against the colonial state. They came in the form of ethnic nationalities, nationalist movements, cultural groups, trade associations, development associations and labour unions. This same repression and exclusion of the populace from political participation also led to the renewed and remarkable resistance of civil society in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly during the long repressive and authoritarian regimes of General Buhari, Babangida and Abacha regimes.

The specific emergence of the civil society as a specific challenge to the Nigerian state cannot be divorced from the military authoritarian leaders such as General Buhari (1983-1985), General Babangida (1985-1993) and the Late Sani Abacha (1993-1998). Their regimes witnessed arbitrariness and mediocrity, which were consciously and unconsciously elevated to the level of general acceptance or as an axiom. Rights were trampled upon with significant instances of extra-judicial killings. The perceived and real fear of the military might and the subsequent repressive and oppressive character gave civil society organizations such as Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), Constitution Right Project (CRP), and Campaign for Democracy (CD) among others, the impetus to challenge the military authoritarian regime in Nigeria,

sometimes at a great expense. They organized themselves for more sustained resistance because of high rate of human right violation, the annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential elections purported to have been won by M.K.O Abiola and claimed to be the fairest and freest general election in Nigeria. These rights-based groups have been the most active of civil society in Nigeria in recent times.

The Nationwide general strike of January 1st 2012 was embarked upon by Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). Trade Union Congress (TUC) and other Civil Society Organizations to protest the removal of fuel subsidy and 117 percent increase in the pump price of Petroleum Motor Spirit (PMS). The strike proved a defining moment in the history of Nigeria to better the economic conditions of Nigerians. Thus, January's general strike presented the possibility of a radical change. This was the biggest and most widespread general strike in Nigeria. Millions were on the street from one end of the country to another in one of the greatest display of class unity in a country which local and foreign commentators often claim to be irrevocably divided along religious and ethnic lines.

#### *Protests over fuel price and electricity tariff hike, September, 2020*

Protests broke out in Nigeria's southwestern state of Osun in September, 2020 against the hike in electricity and petrol prices, local media reported. Demonstrations organized by the Coalition for Civil Societies kicked off from Freedom Park in the state capital Osogbo, according to local newspaper The Punch. The protesters condemned the increase in electricity and petrol prices as the "highest level of insensitivity and wickedness from the President Muhammad Buhari-led All Progressives Congress government."

Petrol prices in the oil-rich country have increased for three straight months, rising from slightly over 121 naira (\$0.32) per liter in June to over 143 naira (\$0.38) in July, 150 naira (\$0.39) in August, and 162 naira (\$0.43) in September, according to the report.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of September, the Petroleum Products Marketing Company increased the ex-depot rate of petrol – the price at which it is sold to suppliers – to over 151 naira (\$0.40) from 138 naira (\$0.36), before slashing it down to 147 naira (\$0.39), the report said. As for electricity, authorities have approved a rise in rates starting September, although a previous tariff hike slated for July 1 was halted by Nigeria's parliament. Power distribution companies had been asked to put off any tariff increase until the first quarter of 2021 due to "the current economic challenges in Nigeria," according to The Punch. However, consumers, except those receiving less than 12 hours of supply, will have to pay more for electricity starting from Sept. 1, the report said. **(Muyiwa Adeyemi, Punch Newspaper, 9<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2020)**

Scores of students, workers and civil society groups stormed the streets of Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, 2020 to express displeasure with the hike in price of petrol and increase of electricity tariff. The protesters

gathered at the Awolowo Junction, Bodija, chanting anti-government and solidarity songs before moving to the Federal Secretariat, Ikolaba, Ibadan.

They described the increment in electricity tariff and hike in fuel price as wicked and one that lacked sound judgment. They vowed to paralyse the economy if the government failed to reverse the price and tariff.

President, National Association of Polytechnic Students (NAPS), Benedict Olalere, who spoke with journalists, said: "We are giving the Federal Government a seven-day ultimatum to reverse the pump price and electricity tariff. Failure to do so, we will shut down and paralyse the economy. If they want to arrest us let them do so. I am ready to die. The masses cannot be sacrificial lambs because they want to take care of political office holders. They should cut down their expenses."

Also, Chairman, Joint Campus Committee of the National Association of Nigerian Students, (NANS), Mayowa Opakunle, emphasised that students in the state totally reject the increase.

On his part, the Convener of All Workers' Convergence (AWC) and former Chairman of Trade Union Congress (TUC) in Oyo State, Andrew Emelieze, said: "The policies of the current government are inimical to Nigerians and are making life difficult for Nigerians. By illegally increasing pump price and electricity tariff, life has become miserable for Nigerians. They promised to build refineries. Where are the refineries?"

IN the same vein, the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) and rights activists during a protest in Osogbo gave the Federal Government a three-week ultimatum to reverse the hike, saying that the policies by the current leadership have brought untold hardship to the citizens.

The protest was organised by NANS, Action Front (JAF) and Amica Ideological School Movement (ACIS-M). One of the stakeholders, Kola Ibrahim, who was the Secretary of JAF, said: "Our aim is to resist all anti-people policy of the Buhari-led government and its surrogates across the states."

A Lagos-based socio-political activist and critic, Chief Adesunbo Onitiri, urged President Muhammadu Buhari to reverse the recent hike of electricity tariff and petroleum pump prices without further delay to save the poor masses from economic strangulation. He described the development as most wicked, unfair and totally unacceptable to the Nigerian people. In a statement in Lagos, Onitiri said the anti-people's policies were ill-timed, coming at a time the COVID-19 pandemic has dealt a dastardly blow on the country. He therefore urged the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) to wake up from its slumber and save the poor masses, especially the workers. It should protect and defend the weak and feeble Nigerian masses.

Meanwhile, the Aare Onakakanfo of Yorubaland, Otunba Gani Adams, has cautioned the Federal Government against pushing Nigerians to a point where they would opt to react violently to its obnoxious and hard policies like the recent increase in the prices of fuel and electricity tariffs. The National Co-ordinator

of the Yoruba militant organisation, Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), while describing the new policies as repressive, suppressive and a demonstration of insensitivity on the part of the government and the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) to the plights of Nigerians, who are just emerging from the harsh economic consequences of the COVID-19 lockdown, said that the decision should be retracted with immediate effect.

Publicity Secretary of OPC, Mr. Yinka Oguntimehin, described the increase as an attempt to push Nigerians to the wall, saying that the Federal Government is sitting on a time bomb.

The Ikeja Electricity Distribution, Eko Electricity Distribution and Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company spokespersons, Felix Ofulue, Godwin Idemudia and Busolami Tunwase respectively, who spoke with The Guardian, said that the increase would only be for bands A-C. But the National Co-ordinator, All Electricity Consumers Protection, Adeola Ilori, said that the firms did not consider the plight of prepaid meter users before the increase.

#### IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The struggle for the democratization of the state in Nigeria, the face-off between the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) cum the people of Nigeria and the Nigeria ruling class over the pump price of petroleum, hike in electricity tariff and other aspects of bad governance are some of the conflicts occasioned by the exploitation and subordination of one class by another. The conflicts and struggles generated by the various contradictory class relations over the control of state power have led to structural transformation or changes in Nigeria social system thus propel one from of development on another. For the oppressed classes to achieve victory in the no-going struggle against capital, it is required that the politics of primordialism which has been a basis of their impoverishment and underdevelopment as well as, a divisive factor amongst them has to be rejected. This depends on the level of their consciousness and mobilization capacity to seize power from the ruling class and make it responsive to the yearnings and aspiration of the people. The working class needs organization strength and network of solidarity if they must extricate themselves from socio-economic and political marginalization. Struggle for better economic conditions has increased class consciousness and resistance to exploitative state policies through strikes and demonstrations.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

History, with all due apologies to Hegel, is a dialectics of problems. History progresses with man's attempt to solve these problems. It is the manner of solving this problem that marks the difference between one people and another. Iroegbu was right in calling Nigerians to develop mutual feelings for each other, as the beginning of the end of their problems.

Due to the unsustainability of the Nigerian system, it has led to the production of militant youth agitations across the nation that is serving as latent functions in shaping social life. The individual as an agent of change in the society, if incapacitated by any means he cannot perform its function of producing and



transforming society. The State needs an institutional framework of policies to tackle this dysfunctional economic system it operates if it does not want to be among the list of failed Nations of the world.

Vicious circle of inequality makes addressing it imperative. Inequality is the cause and consequence of the failure of the market system as well as the political system, and contributes to the instability of our economic and political systems, which in turn contributes to increased inequality. Some have argued that some level of inequality is desirable to sustain appropriate incentive structure in the economy, or simply because inequality in income reflects different talents and effort among individuals. It is expected that benefits of economic progress would with time trickle-down to the low income groups. Empirical evidence on many economies shows that this expectation is rarely met. The nature of governance in Nigeria is such that power and influence are in the hands of a tiny minority and they used this to either violently suppress the majority or through the distribution of patronage to acolytes who also serves as praise-singers or sycophants, or to garner support for the ruling party during periods of elections. The struggle to capture political power by every means possible in Nigeria has over the years caused disarticulation of the Nigerian economies and created a situation whereby the few who succeed in capturing state power used it to their advantage and to reinforced their hold on power, thereby distorting the political and economic environment that would have given the entire citizens equal opportunity to improve their living standard through equitable income and wealth distribution. These actions by the elite has place the country at the bottom of the development ladder in the world, a situation where the country scores highest in almost all the negativities in terms of poverty ratio, income inequality, mortality rate, PPP and the Gini coefficient ratio, and score lowest in almost all the positivity such as improved PPP, low mortality rate, low poverty rate, more equitable income and wealth distribution.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the foregoing findings and conclusions, the study recommends as follows:

- Unity for both Nigerians and Nigerian workers. This unity is not to carry out a revolution as proposed by Marx, but to fraternize with one another. When all Nigerians fraternize, this will imply fraternization of both the leaders of government and the led. This will again mean each seeking the interest of the other.
- The federal government should adopt a system of governance that is inclusive so that they harnessed the potentials they are endowed with. These mean embracing democratic governance that is accountable and inclusive in nature and practice, as this will lead to a proper functioning of the institutions of governance and bring about a more equitable distribution of wealth and income.
- There is also the need to engage and address cries of marginalization through dialogue and visible action. The government should listen to the people when they cry out through different organizations of suffocating living conditions.

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