

MARXISM AND THE NIGERIAN STATE

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Abstracts:

Marx theory has continued to be a source of hypothesis to many theorists in the world, and which 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 twofold; (1). Ideology: which according to George Ritzer (2000) and Mihaly Vajda(1981) whom I shall continuously refer to in this thesis; was the nature of the ideology and not the existence of ideology as such that made many social theorist to have a strand on Marxism. Marx radical ideas and the social changes it professes at the early time does not fit into the social order and reality of time, this was because conservative to the disruptions of the Enlightenment and French Revolution and its dislocations (2). The capitalist West was uncomfortable with Marx theorizing as it hinges on the oppressiveness and emancipation of the masses (proletariats), of the emerging modern capitalist system been brought about by the industrial revolution of the 19th century in Europe, and the overthrow of the system. 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 represents that professes conservative reforms and orderly social change in the system hence the urgency to tame the theory.

Keywords: Class consciousness, Marxism, Social class, The Nigerian state, The state.

Introduction

Karl Marx (1818-1883), propounded a theory of modern capitalist society that provides models and paths to 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 is the entire social world and the economy in particular that need 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 material sources of 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, where also they derived their economic and socio-political relations from.

Capitalism is the economic system in which the bourgeoisie owns the means of production and the proletariat must sell its labour time to the capitalist in order to survive. The proletariat is the centre of Marx theory that would bring about the concerted radical social change in the society by mass agitation that rises through self consciousness that would later manifest into class consciousness. This class consciousness, so continued Marx line of reasoning, has certain objective conditions it has to undergo before it can achieve its aim. One of such is 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 is a social process. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx posits “*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 is 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 can 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 proletariats which is the real democracy that which is power-free 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 (1981:10) 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. 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. I strongly aligned with this views 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 been experience 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 are weak, which has hampered the development of a class conscious proletariat that would have ushered in the form of social change Marxist professes, because 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; 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. And the state has been a factor that not only helping in preserving the private bourgeois structures by this act but perhaps also help in modifying them (Vajda,1981:73). This indicates that the social contract with the Nigerian state has failed because, it works and entrench 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 parts of the super-structure determined by the interests of the dominant class. The state then becomes 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 holds power do not want it to change they wants 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, its only politics the job they can do best.

Conceptual Clarification

The State:

According to Marx, “the state is but a committee for the managing the affairs of whole 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 setup. This dominance by capital (bourgeoisie), does not necessarily mean that the bourgeois exercise direct power via the state apparatus. Domination is secure at the level of the social organization of production which defines basic rules governing also 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 be seen as only 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 state. 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.

Social Class

Marx interest in social structure was social class (the bourgeoisie and proletariat). Ollimer (1976) social class is “*reified social relations*” or the relation between men (that) have taken on an independent existence. Class 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, according to their role in social labour and consequently, according to 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 emphasizes one class to appropriate the labour of another, for example, feudal lords appropriate the labour of the serfs,

capitalist appropriate the labour of 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. And the proletariat by the fact that it must sell 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.

Class Consciousness

Are shared beliefs of members of a social unit. Durkheim (1893/1964) conceptualizes class consciousness 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. This is what Marx called class consciousness.

Dialectical Materialism

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 was wrong, that is grounded in the material conception of history-dialectical and historical materialism which is linked to the material base of the society. As Marx world 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. Negation of negations; 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 defined historical materialism as “*the self-knowledge of capitalist society*”. He equated its true content with classical political economy, within a specific social production system. Marx economic determinists, tracing all historical developments to economic base, that

idea are simply the reflections of material (especially economic) interests that material interest determines ideology (ideas as simple reflections of economic factors).

Theoretical Paradigm

Marx propounded an economic theory based on capitalist society. That every society, whatever its stage of historical development rest on economic foundation; the mode of production, this in turn has 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. That at a certain stage of its development, the material forces of production in the society comes into conflict with the property relations. 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 posits, *“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 contend that the source of power in the society lays in the economic infrastructure, that the forces of production are owned and controlled by a minority, the ruling class. That 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. That is while he asserts, *“the state is but a committee for the managing of the common affairs of whole bourgeoisie...”* (Engels, 1919).

The Nigerian state is a rentier state without a production base where the forces of production and social relations of production are embedded. Hence the objective conditions to create social mechanisms for a productive economy that will usher a class struggle between the two class professed by Marx is lacking. Class consciousness is weak in the Nigerian society, because of the relative nature of the economy that is mostly peasantry in nature and 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 hence the emergence of a rentier economy without a production base to create class consciousness which is a basic within the Marxian paradigm for societal transformation. Alan Gelb, et al(2002) in their analysis of the state and rentier economy strongly emphasized how oil rents are collected, allocated and used, including often to sustain a policy regime like that of Nigeria. And that a large

concentrated rent source in national income can mould the social and political institutions of a producing country, in what some have termed ‘rentier state’.

However, this structure had its root from the colonial era, which was a deliberate policy by the colonialist to debase their colonial states from productive capacities in order to export and entrenched capitalism. The productive forces were weakening given no room for productive activities which led to clientele patronage on government and political positions. Soludo (2000:5) has placed this into a proper perspective when he opined that “*in Nigeria, the excessive dependence on oil has 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 emerged, intensifying the politics of ‘sharing’ rather than ‘production’.* This created a horde of ‘rent-entrepreneur’, that is ‘Big men’ without any productive source of livelihood except proximity to state power”. 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, in the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, 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 has led to massive advancement in human societies. Such mechanism of social dialectics is important in producing class-conscious proletariat which is the main thrust of Marxist strands.

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) argued, “*therefore politics is warfare and governance spoils of war...*” The state becomes 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 were explicit on the views of Ake when they posit, “*circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances*”. However, I believe that the capitalist World has not depraved or corrupted man, it has simply made him a social being whose needs or desires are not given or determined by birth. Its only one has to create a power structure which would provide for the articulation of ideal values of needs for all social groups. For the Nigerian state to perform these needs, sound and clear ideological concepts are needed. To Marx, the state is exactly just an appendage of the bourgeois society, it’s a wholly definable political power

structure which makes possible the domination of the bourgeois over the proletariat, but it is neither identical with it nor determined by it.

The Nigerian State and the Economies of Production

Marx theory laid emphasis on economic production of goods and services, that production brings wealth and prosperity to a nation. The state here is seen as the architect of any planned social change, because it has the power to enact a synergy with cybernetic functions in transforming a 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 will 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, by estimation, only 3% of the Nigerian population drives the economy. The control of the means of production is the base of its power, and patronage to it means struggling for a share among contending classes but not for productive purpose.

However, the majority of the masses are 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 it is operating which is defective, but however, the dominance of unitary system (ideology) is glaring in the nature of the attendant social relations. This institutional frame work that saw the federating state relying on the centre (Abuja) for monthly subvention to run their governments and sustain development has contributed to the alarming height of a rentier state and clientship structure that determines and define the waves and direction of politics and power and state distribution network.

As Joseph Garba (1995) has succinctly analyzed, *“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 inspite of it”.

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

The economic policy tools employed included; devaluation of the Naira (currency), as I have pointed out earlier, the Nigerian economy is non productive, because it’s not producing, so it was wrong to devalue the currency when you are not producing anything for sale but for consumption only. This weakened the value of the Naira seriously and the purchasing power of Nigerians. Others are privatization and deregulation, liberalization of foreign trade, elimination of subsidies on petroleum related products, rationalization, tight monetary and fiscal policies. However, these tools were employed in the strongest and most perverse ways. The implementation was half-heated, uncoordinated, non-transparent, insincere and downward dishonest that brought the Nigerian economy to its knees. Continued devaluation of the Naira not only led to high level of falling standard of living, elimination of the middle class and serious dislocation in the social system.

This economic and socio-political tension led to an uprising that was swift and spontaneous, the awareness was great across the federation, and Nigerians spoke with one voice to determine their future and to fight against oppression by the state and the exigencies that affects them. For Marx has said people have to act at the appropriate time and in the appropriate ways to change a particular social order. But this has to be by a class conscious masses that are well informed and has engaged in protracted agitation for mass struggle and emancipation. This social concept is lacking in Nigeria, where it is present, it’s naive, because of the naivety, the leaders of the uprising and revolt fails to understand the dynamics that they have already taking and seized power from the state (dominant class). This lack of awareness by the leaders of the

revolt and the vacuum created inter-alia led to the failure of the uprising which would have ushered in a Socialist State. The state capitalized on the naivety and crushed the rebellion using state machinery at their disposal. To placate the restive masses, the state brought some incentives to ameliorate suffering and dislocations accessioned by the SAP regime. The economy was opened, state jobs created and Peoples Bank formed for access to the poor masses to have direct loan without collateral. Such Greek gifts are some of the essence of capitalism in diverting the people's attention against any further form of agitations. But how far this went is a discussion for another day in another paper.

Another of such indications was the “June 12” saga that followed the annulment of the presidential elections of 1993, this issue was trivialized and was another opportunity 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 psyche of Nigerians and also acting as a stabilizing factor for the State. The winner of the election, Chief MKO Abiola, an ally of the West and the Nigerian military was never allowed to rule because his views on politics and development has changed overtime. The “pseudo guerilla” tactics used 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 we are now practicing. 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”*.

Due to the unsustainability of the Nigeria system, it has led to the production of Niger Delta militants, Oodua People's Congress (OPC), a militant youth wing of the Yoruba nation and Boko Haram group. The production system has placed money in the hands of few elites who does not produce but only consume the wealth of the State. In line with the above, these agitations are drawn from the consciousness of individuals that something is wrong somewhere that has to be put right in the system, because public opinion informed public policies. In Nigeria, the only issues government listens to is violence to address public and form policies in recent times. Billions of Naira now goes into the Niger Delta region unaccounted for without addressing the basic infrastructural decay. These crises have brought to the fore not only the limits of the state activity, but equally the remarkable inability of the state to weather crises.

However, anarchy and terrorism are not mechanisms of Marxism; it's an aberration to it. Such actions are condemnable. Lewis Coser (1956) from the Marxian orientation asserts that conflict serves dual purposes in the society, positive and negative. Coser contends that conflict is part of the socialization process and it's inevitable in human society. That conflict can be constructive and destructive because it frequently revolves disagreements that lead eventually to unit and harmonization of "social groups". In view of the above, conflict functions as a means of promoting social change. Coser further posited "*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 seen as a creative force that stimulates change in the society.

Within the structural functionalist paradigm, Robert Merton (1968) distinguish this concepts of manifest and latent functions of a social system; the obvious and intended functions we expected a phenomenon to perform is the manifest, while the unintended and often unrecognized functions it also provides. Thus these social forces have been a latent function in shaping the Nigerian society in a democratic direction. The tendency to have these functions in Nigeria will be the ability of an active society and commitment of their leaders to mobilize the productive forces of the society for development.

The Nigeria State and Labour Relations

Marx saw labour as the producers of wealth in the society which is been appropriated by the elite few who does not produce. And without production, wealth cannot be generated and society would not be transformed. Labour include both mental and physical creativity, in capitalism, labour is not been rewarded according to its share in the chains of production and distribution and also been alienated both from their products and themselves. This exploitation is at its peak in capitalism because the state wants to use it as a mechanism to reduce interclass mobility. Within the three factors of production; land, capital and labour, Marx aligned with labour as the most active purposive force in the production process.

Government and labour interactions has been at anti thesis due to the fact that since it is the state that controls production chains, they use it as mechanism to stubborn the wage earners

so as not to undercut their appropriation bills. One of such consequences is the underdevelopment of the productive forces and social relations of production. According to Beckman (1980) some measures taken by the state in the 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 vis-a-vis capital, such concession may be the necessary price which capitalist has to pay in order to protect other more fundamental interests.

Therefore, the state is not present for the sake of political oppression but for the sake of regulating the social totality and yet is an organ of political oppression. The state bureaucracy, who wants 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. But if the infrastructure; National Electric Power Authority (now Power Holding Company of Nigeria), Refinery, Railway and seaports, etc., are put right by the government there would be no need for labour agitation for wage increase.

In 1978, Marxist lecturers were dismissed from various Nigerian universities after the student riots that took place that year, and in 1986, the federal government directed that lecturers who are “*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 Unillorin lecturers also comes to mind. In 2002, The Obasanjo’s regime accused organized labour under the umbrella of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), of running a parallel government, when the NLC called out its members for general strike and protest against the increase in petroleum products and proposed removal of subsidies. This the NLC and civil society groups saw as machinery to further impoverish the masses. They challenged government to come out with their statistics with the

cost to produce a barrel of crude oil and they would follow suit. This was to ascertain whether there was any subsidy in petroleum matters in Nigeria as the government purported.

Government reaction was decisive as threat and force were deployed as labour moves were seen as against the interest of the state and masses and were hindering the social transformation programmes of the state. This ideological concepts been used by the state to label labour is what Claude Ake (1988) termed “*defensive radicalism*”. The aftermath was that the Obasanjo’s government then sent a bill to the national assembly to streamline the labour law so as to disorganized 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*”.

Conclusion

The Nigerian State lack a 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. Large numbers of the population are peasants who live in the rural areas; this has weakened class conscious and social awareness which is an imperative tool of social change within the Marxian paradigm. In Nigeria, we do not create wealth, we share the wealth been accrued to the state from oil revenue among the political elites who are constantly fighting among themselves to get a share but not for production, for appropriation and consumption which has made the State a rentier one based on clientship patronage.

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 frame work 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.

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