

**BEING A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE LENIN CENTENARY INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE HELD AT TOP RANK HOTEL GALAXY UTAKO, ABUJA, NIGERIA
JANUARY 22-23, 2024**

TOPIC: GLOBALIZATION, IMPERIALISM AND FATE OF THE NIGERIAN

WORKING CLASS

BY

DR. SALEH MARI MAINA

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, BAYERO UNIVERSITY, KANO

“Philosophers have only interpreted the world. The point, however, is to change it”

-Karl Marx

ABSTRACT

Since its emergence into sovereign nationhood, the contemporary Nigerian state has been characterized by policies and programmes pursued by successive administrations aimed at subjugating the Nigerian working class to the dictates of capitalism and imperialism. This tendency is the inevitable outcome of the incorporation of Nigeria into the mainstream of global capitalist economy which has necessitated the adoption of the capitalist path of development by the ruling class and their international collaborators. Thus, since its emergence as a sovereign nation, the ruling class has toyed with one type of strategy for capitalist development or another ranging from liberal, Keynesian to neo-liberal economic systems all of which are founded on the ideals of exploitation, oppression and marginalization of the working and other oppressed peoples. The purpose of this paper is to critically examine the condition of the Nigerian working class in the past, present and future in the context of the neo - imperialist concept of globalization,

a development that is designed to further entrench Nigeria into the network of the global capitalist system. Using the class theory as the paradigm of analysis and content analysis as the methodology for data collection, the paper contends that globalization is another face of imperialism which poses grave dangers to the interests of the working and other oppressed peoples. The paper recommends a fundamental change with socialist transformation as the most viable way out of the exploitative and oppressive conditions imposed by imperialism.

Key words: Globalization, imperialism, Neo-Liberalism, exploitation, socialist transformation.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Imperialism, as a global phenomenon that has obviously reshaped the world economic order, is not exactly a new development. Scholars like Karl Marx and later, V.I Lenin have conducted intensive studies on its origins, nature and implication on the world economy and society. Lenin (1916) in his work titled *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* is one scholar that conceptualized Imperialism in the most comprehensive and logical manner. Lenin's thesis is founded on the idea that capitalism as a mode of production has undergone changes as reflected in its development in stages, from free competition down to the rise of monopolies, oligarchs and, most importantly, the division of the world among capitalist enterprises and, later, the division of the world among the global powers. The implication of this later development of capitalism is the incorporation of the world into the international capitalist system marking a further stage in the plunder of the human and material resources and subsequent under development of the economies of nations, mostly African Countries including Nigeria (Cohen and Daniel,1980).

For the avoidance of any doubt, it must be stated that Lenin was not the only author who conceived the phenomenon of imperialism, which refers to the range of theoretical approaches to the understanding of the expansion of capitalism resulting in the unequal development of different countries and economic systems that resulted in the dominance of some countries over others. Scholars like Kaustky (1916), Hobson (1902), Trotsky (1906), Hilferding (1910) Luxemburg (1913) and others have each in their various ways advanced theories of imperialism that viewed it as distinct policies of some countries. However, Lenin stood out as the foremost scholar who gave imperialism its true character as a product of progression of capitalist development. The progression, according to Lenin (1916) consisted of the following developments which ultimately climaxed with the rise of imperialism. These stages are as follows:

1. The concentration of production and capital to such a high stage that it has created monopolies.
2. The merging of financial and industrial capital and the creation of financial oligarchies.
3. The export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquired exceptional importance.
4. The formation of international monopolist capitalist combines which shared the world among themselves, and
5. The territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed

It must be pointed out that the last two stages of capitalist development into imperialism remains, as real today as it was in the 19th and 20th centuries as an important stage that led to the incorporation of countries colonized by the dominant capitalist nation into the main stream of the

global capitalist system. As the strangle hold mounted by imperialism on colonized nations continues, the dominant capitalist nations have come up with a new imperialist agenda known as globalization which seek to unify the world under the universal economic order controlled, conditioned and manipulated by the major capitalist nations to promote their imperialist interests. Scholars like Obillo, Eugene, Augwara, Aremu and Okeke, Alabi and Aruna, Mijah and Joshua-Udey (Tar, et al ,2016) have each conceptualized Globalization in its various dimensions. The bottom line of globalization, however, translated into the conversion of the world into a kind of global village where events in one part necessarily impact on all other parts of the world. Seen in an ideological context, however, globalization is merely another face of imperialism in its bid to capture the whole world and subdue it to the whims and caprices of imperialist nations of the world. To this extent, globalization and imperialism are two sides of the same coin in the context of the consolidation of the dominance of undeveloped nations by the major capitalist nations. Closely related to imperialism is neocolonialism which scholars like Nkrumah (1966) likened it to the granting of flag independence to ex-colonies by their metropolitan overlords who retained the control of the economies of the under developed nations. Under the neocolonial dispensation, the states of newly independent ex-colonies have been tailored to facilitate primitive capital accumulation by way of the exploitation of the working class, as well as through looting and embezzlement of state resources, corruption and other dubious methods of capital accumulation. Thus, Imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism and globalization are all products of the same historical process of the various manifestations of capitalist exploitation and marginalization of the working and other oppressed peoples in the sharing of social wealth.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the purpose of the analysis of this paper, the class theory is considered as the most viable paradigm for explaining the place of the working class under imperialism and globalization. The class theory is one of Marx's major contributions to the materialist conception of history. In his work titled "The Communist Manifesto" (1848), Marx stated that the history of all hitherto existing societies was the history of class struggle. Using the theories of dialectical and, particularly, historical materialism, Marx was able to demonstrate how the economic foundations of society has evolved from one mode of production to another from first, the communal mode of production which is a classless society down to class societies such as slave, feudal and capitalist modes of production under which society was stratified into classes or groups depending on the proximity to the ownership of means of a production. A fundamental character of these societies is the issue of opposed interests of the major contending classes, leading to class conflict and class struggle. The result of which was either destruction and reconstitution or the revolutionary transformation of society into a new and more qualitative mode of production. The current era of the world is that of capitalism. Society is divided into a class of capitalists as the dominant class and the dominated, exploited and oppressed classes of workers, artisans, craftsmen, farmers, peasants and other downtrodden elements. These two major contending classes are locked in a conscious or unconscious clash of opposed interests defined by class conflict and class struggle. The inevitable result of this is either the revolutionary transformation of society into socialism or the descent into barbarism. Class theory will, thus, serve as the theoretical frame work for analyzing the fate of Nigerian working class in the era of imperialism and globalization.

AN OVER VIEW OF THE CONDITIONS OF THE WORKING CLASS IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF NIGERIA

The contemporary Nigerian state is a legacy of imperialism. Like the majority of African states, Nigeria came into being as a consequence of the division of the world among the major capitalist nations of western Europe following the colonization of most of the African continent due to the internationalization of finance capital otherwise called imperialism. After nearly a century of being in the orbit of the expansionist tendencies of the major Capitalist nations that started with the devilish slave trade, followed by colonialism, an era characterized by the plunder of the human and material resources that were shipped to Europe to assist in the development of capitalist oriented industrial revolution. What is now known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria assumed sovereign status in October 1960. Since then, successive administrations have operated one version of capitalist oriented economic strategy or the other. Between 1960 and 1970, Nigeria operated a liberal economic system based on the role of private enterprises with limited Government participation. However, after 1970, Nigeria toyed with the Keynesian economic development strategy based on the massive involvement of the state in regulating the economy and participation in the establishment of business organizations popularly called public enterprises. This Keynesian approach was facilitated by the discovery of crude petroleum resources in commercial quantities. The export of crude petroleum earned the country billions of petro-dollars which were used in the establishment of government owned industries involved in the manufacturing of a variety of products and the provision of services.

However, due to the inherent contradictions that bedeviled the operations of the Keynesian economic development strategy, the Nigerian government under ex-military dictator, General

Ibrahim Babangida, abandoned the Keynesian model in favour of neo-liberalism under the auspices of what it described as the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), which has been sustained by successive regimes from 1986 to date.

Since its creation and birth into nationhood, the political economy of the contemporary Nigerian State has been going in and out of an ever deepening crisis. Politically, Nigeria practiced the Parliamentary Democratic system between 1960 and 1966 which fell apart following the first military coup which terminated the life of the first Republic. The irreconcilable contradictions that came after the military coup led the country into a 30 months' civil war following the decision of south East to secede from the Federation of Nigeria. After the war, which ended in 1970, Nigerian politics continued under the rule by a consortium of military generals until 1979 when the country reverted to civil rule using the American Presidential system of Government which gave birth to the Second Republic. The republic fell apart after another military coup in December 1983, thus marking the beginning of another 16 years of military rule that ended in 1999 giving birth to the Fourth Republic which has survived till date, despite the political crisis characterized by the intra-class struggle for power among the various factions of the ruling class.

Economically, the introduction of the neo-liberal Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) led to the further entrenchment of Nigeria into the capitalist path of development through whole sale liberalization and deregulation of the economy, privatization of public enterprises and the floatation of the national currency for determination of its value by faceless market forces.

Thus, Since the introduction of SAP, the political economy of Nigeria has been crises ridden, characterized by the uncontrollable hike in the prices of commodities and services. With the ever dwindling value of the national currency in relation to the U.S Dollar, in the midst of a

deregulated economy, Nigerians have been surviving in hell on earth as the cost of living keeps getting higher and higher without a compensating increase in the minimum wage. The problems facing the economy were further compounded by the monumental looting of public funds by the ruling class, embezzlement, economic mismanagement and corruption all of which undermined the capacity of the state to meet its obligations to the Nigerian people. In recent times, the country has been embroiled in acts of banditry, kidnapping for ransom in North Western Nigeria, a violent insurgency by a group known as Boko Haram in the North East and a seemingly endless communal conflicts in North central Nigeria and the resurgence of secessionist actions in the South East which have continued to make life more and more difficult for the common people.

In the midst of these deepening crises in the political economy, Nigerian workers have been the major victims of the deplorable situation. Faced by very low wages, with a paltry 30, 000 naira as minimum wage, workers have been living in penury, lacking in the capacity to feed well, educate their children or provide medical facilities to their families improve their standard of living. The situation has gotten worse in recent times with the withdrawal of the so-called fuel subsidy by the Bola Ahmad Tinubu regime which has caused the price of commodities to hit the roof. This is not to mention the massive retrenchments workers faced following the privatization of public enterprises as part of the regime of deregulation and liberalization introduced by SAP. Precisely, workers have been at the receiving end of the crisis ridden political economy of the contemporary Nigerian State since it came into being in 1960. Nigerian workers are indeed facing a bleak future, torn between the proverbial devil and the deep blue sea, with the advent of globalization.

FATE OF NIGERIAN WORKERS UNDER GLOBALIZATION

In the preceding analysis of this paper, an inherent assumption so far made is that imperialism and globalization are two sides of the same coin or, to put it in other words, product of the same historical process. To the extent that the essence of imperialism is the total capture and dedication of the global economy to the services of the major capitalist companies, it is safe to assume that globalization, a process being championed by the major capitalist nations, should be conceptualized in the context of the overall agenda of imperialism namely, the total unification of the world under the auspices of capitalism as the dominant economy across the globe, The question, therefore is, what is the fate of the Nigerian Working Class in the era of globalization? Mijah and Joshua Udey (Tar et al, 2016) have observed that neo-liberal economic policies operated in Nigeria have failed to support the cause of workers as it relates to the issue of inequality and State Failure to meet the basic need of the labour force. This situation is further reflected in the dwindling principles of collective bargaining and breach of international labour standards. This condition is further compounded by the difficulties the Trade Unions have been facing in achieving the provision of decent welfare for its members (Yusuf, 1982 as cited in Tar et al, 2016).

It was further observed:

"Given the introduction of economic liberalism which promotes private ownership, the negotiating power of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress has drastically reduced. " (Tar: 2016, 579)

And since globalization promotes privatization and places the state as the principal regulator in the relationship between labour and capital (Mijah and Joshua Udey op, cit) it is logical to suggest that the fate of Nigerian Workers under globalization will not be any different from what it has been under the neo-liberal economic policies the Nigerian neo-colonial state has been pursuing before the current cacophony about globalization.

As further argued by scholars,

“Globalization has had a great impact on employment and labour processes in Nigeria. The non-standard work arrangements of casual and contract labour have become increasingly more common in the face of privatization of public enterprises in Nigeria”. (Tar, 2016: 582).

Chisala (2006 as cited in Tar, 2016) condemned this capitalist cost reduction measure of hiring and keeping workers on temporary appointments for several years without permanent employment as predatory and anti-human rights. It is worth noting here that the International Labour Organization conventions and recommendations on a broad range of workers’ rights are hardly respected in Nigeria and cannot be any different under globalization. Indeed, there is also the tendency of private enterprises to view organized labour as a threat to their profiteering objectives by forcing employers to pay wages that are commensurate to the efforts workers put in to productive activities of the industries. Incidentally, even the state behaves in the same way. A case in point is the disdain with which successive administrations in Nigeria treated workers’ demands for improved conditions of services. Despite the billions of petro-dollars coming into the country as revenue, the state has been reluctant to fix a viable minimum wage particularly after withdrawal of fuel subsidy by the Tinubu administration. The point being made, as far as this paper is concerned is that, the condition of the Nigeria workers and other oppressed people

will not fare any better under the current wave of globalization. Given the character of capitalist development upon which globalization is founded, such as trade liberalization, economic deregulation, privatization and other worn out, fake, out dated and obsolete neo-liberal economic policies, Nigerian workers should brace up for harder times that lie ahead unless their trade unions can lead an effective fight back. Globalization is bad news for Nigerian workers as it promises to consolidate their exploitation as well as further marginalizing and alienating them from enjoying the fruit of their labour.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

This is the fundamental questions facing Nigerian workers, particularly the labour leadership and the progressive forces in Nigeria. It is a universal consensus that everything is wrong with Nigeria. Indeed, even some elements among the bourgeois ruling class tend to agree that Nigeria is becoming a failed project which necessitates proactive measures to save workers and other oppressed classes from the jaws of Imperialism and Globalization.

For an answer to this fundamental question, we need to refer to the saying of the greatest Philosopher of all time, Karl Marx, who said "Philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point, however, is to change it". The solution as far as Nigerian workers are concerned is the initiation of fundamental change, as conceived by Marx in his theory of historical materialism, namely, the need to transform capitalism into a higher mode of production. This mode is the Socialist system of production. In other words what workers and other common people need is a Socialist transformation as the only solution to the bear hug it is suffering under Imperialism and its sister evil, Globalization.

Nigeria is ripe for a Socialist revolution. The revolutionary situation exists as exhibited in the level of State failure to meet its obligations to the citizenry and the excruciating conditions of life facing the common populace. The task before working and other oppressed people and their class allies is to work toward engineering a Socialist revolution in Nigeria

The starting point of a genuine socialist transformation is the establishment of a vanguard party that will lead Nigerian workers, Peasants and other oppressed people in the struggle against capitalism, imperialism and globalization and the class of people perpetuating these evils. What is currently lacking is this revolutionary Vanguard Party. Thus it remains our hope that the Lenin Centenary conference will provide the platform for the establishment of the revolutionary party to provide the required leadership in the struggle for Socialist transformation of Nigeria.

May I conclude this paper by quoting the sayings of Franz Fanon, the Algerian revolutionary who stated that, “Every generation, out of relative obscurity, discovers its historical mission which it fulfils or betrays.”

The progressive forces in Nigeria cannot afford to betray the aspirations of Nigerian working and other oppressed peoples for Socialist transformation of Nigeria.

Fraternal Greeting to all Comrades

Nigeria Workers, Unite. You have Nothing to lose but Your Chains.

REFERENCE

Cohen, D.L. and Daniel J. (1980), *The Political Economy of Africa*, Longmans, UK

Lenin V.I (1916), *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Progress Publishers, Moscow

Tar U.A., Tedheke M.E.U and Mijah E.B (2016), *Readings on Globalization in Africa*, Nigerian Defense Academy Press, Kaduna.