

**BEING THE TEXT OF MY PRESENTATION AT THE ACADEMIC
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2024 ON “NIGERIA IN A STATE OF GENERAL CRISIS: THE
SEARCH FOR A NEW PATH TO DEVELOPMENT.**

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**TOPIC: CLASS CONFLICTS, EGALITARIANISM
AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

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Introduction

In the fuller text, this paper explores the corresponding impacts and benefits of egalitarian conditions within a class society. The ultimate object being the attainment of social justice for all in which the barriers and hurdles of social stratifications (as dominant features of class society) are broken and eliminated fostering harmonious human co-existence based on acceptable principles of equality and self respect for each other regardless of status, influence or power.

Class struggle or conflict is as old as human existence. It is a function of the continuous strives of man for comfort and fulfilment amidst limited resources arising the failure of leadership to make the resources available or due to the constraints of its distribution. In the event, notable scholars of political science have referred to class conflict or struggle as:

“The economic antagonism and political tension that exist among socio classes because of clashing interest competition for limited resources and inequality in the socio economic hierarchy”¹

Term clarifications and analysis of the operative key words justified further interrogation of the issues. They provided illuminating insights necessary for such “gate keeping” efforts vis-a-vis the discussions of subject itself. The approach was therefore to provide a background on the nature of classes and class relation and the mutative dynamism of its progression in relation to different societies and times. Conversely, egalitarianism poses an alternative to all known conditions of class conflict when negates class distinctions in ways that seek to restore equality and fairness to citizens of any given entity. Social justice on the other hand provides both the template and mechanism for an egalitarian State.

The sustained debate by non African scholars that there are no classes in Nigeria necessitated a robust and empirical rebuttal that vigorously contested that notion and effectively dislodged the viewpoint that Nigeria is a classless society. It is understandable that proponents of this narrative are non African and thus couldn't easily relate with the actual provenance and evolution of medieval and contemporary African society than the much they gathered from history books and oral narrations. In questioning the veracity of their claim, a legion of Pro-African scholars generally referred to as "Third World Scholars" including² articulated a serious pushback by which they argued that Africa and Nigeria inclusive has always been a class society and dominated through control of means of production such that while Europe exploited African's raw materials, they built industrial hobs around Europe thereby perpetuating their strategies of dependency and control.

To be sure, erudite Prof. Bode Onimode identified pre-existing intra class and subset of classes in colonial Nigeria besides the imperialist colonial masters to include:

- ▶ Indigenous petty bourgeoisies
- ▶ Feudal chiefs
- ▶ Natural rulers e.g Emirs, Obas, Obongs, Onis
- ▶ Indigenous coastal aristocrats of Lagos, Bras, Calabar, Bonny etc

They were generally known as colonial intermediaries.

The paper concludes with an admonition that the society at large would be better off if the crises of class conflict is amicably resolved by promoting egalitarian societies through the principles and standards of social justice.

Operative Key Words and Analyses:

Class Conflicts, Egalitarianism and Social Justice



Term clarifications

i) **Class Conflict** also known as class struggle or class warfare⁴ is synonymous with society itself.

- ▶ It has largely defined human existence and survival but has mutated according to the socio-economic forces prevalent at any material time.
- ▶ *“Any city however small is, in fact, divided into two; one, the city of the poor and the other the city of the rich; these (cities) are at war with one another”⁵*
- ▶ In its barest form, class conflict refer to the on-going battle between the rich and the poor⁶.
- ▶ When extreme leftist like Bakunin reference class struggle, they refer to it in terms of a broader definition of “social class’ which include the “notion of domination and privilege” in political, cultural and economic spheres⁷.
- ▶ Marxists discuss class struggle primarily in economic terms and in relation to the means of production. This is very relevant and instructive to the topic under review. We shall return to this in a moment and at the point of analysis.

At the moment, let us consider the concept of **Egalitarianism**:

ii) **Egalitarianism**

It is a hotly contested concept of political philosophy and not particularly amenable to any fixed pattern or forms of engagement. It is generally referred to as a school of thought that recognizes the equality of humans as creations of the Almighty and ought to be given and treated equally. It is sometimes referred to as 'equalitarianism' in some quarters

- Egalitarian doctrine therefore rests on a background notion that all human persons are equal in fundamental worth or moral status⁸
- people should be treated as equals, should treat one another as equals, should relate as equals and enjoy equality of social status. It sounds very idealistic, somewhat utopian but is it realistic, obtainable and practicable?

- However, further normative conditions of equality disputes the application of equality when UNEQUALS are treated equally. Thus, to what extent would you justify that a well trained and resourced professional expert with multiple post graduate degrees would have to compete with a secondary school dropout for a job or contract bordering on an area of his expertise?
- How fair and equal will it be for the mass distribution of natural resources or proceeds of the resources across board, groups of persons or demography without first satisfying the condition for resource control and derivation principles? Hence, the principle of instrumental and non instrumental egalitarianism.
- Both Walzer (1983) and Thomas Scanlon provided adequate answers to the foregoing

concerns in the respective senses that “everyone, at all times and places has an equal moral entitlement to be treated according to the shared norms and cultural understanding of one’s people or group” and “that all people every where equally have the moral rights to be treated according to the outcome of a procedure.”⁹

- Essentially promoting the principles of standards of processes, procedures and systems. Thus, rather than dwell on the conditions and variables of egalitarianism including, but not limited to: equality of opportunity, equality of conditions, incomes and wealth, capabilities, relational equality, Marx focused on the end game and argued that when the communist society crystalizes, the economy will distribute goods according to the principle that emphasis, “to each according to his labour contribution” but more,

importantly to envisioned the ideal society in which the norm will be:

“from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs¹⁰”

iii) Social Justice:

- Closely related to egalitarianism is social justice generally referred as fair and equitable treatment of all individuals and social groups within a state or society. But better appreciated in some quarters as the fair and equitable division of resources, opportunities and privileges in society for which reason it's understood to approximate or equate “**distributive justice**”.
- Originally, social justice which derived largely from moral obligations of the State focused on the provision and distribution of social infrastructures like roads, hospitals, schools, railways and other social amenities but, later expanded to include socio-economic rights, fundamental rights and job creation etc.
- Social justice is actually the valid and authentic measure of an egalitarian society. The incorporation of social justice under the Fundamental Objectives And Directives Principles of State Policy in the Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is instructive.

Constitutional Contradictions in The Administration of Social Justice in Nigeria

- ▶ In Nigeria, there are inherent structural and systemic contradictions in the administration of social justice. However, the Nigerian Constitution is most complicit for this absurdity. The elaborate provisions of socio economic and cultural rights relating to; adequate shelter; right to food and food security; **reasonable minimum living wage**; old age care and pensions; unemployment; sick benefits and welfare of the disable¹¹.
- ▶ Citizens also have the rights to equality of opportunities within the state¹²; rights to the exploitation of human and natural resources¹³ adequate right and opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as opposed to adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment; just and conducive condition of works; adequate medical and health facilities; equal pay for equal work¹⁴; equality of educational opportunities and eradication of literacy including provision of free and compulsory education at all levels¹⁴. The foregoing characterizations and categorization of rights in Nigeria is projected to be smokescreen by the ruling elite, it is non-existent but largely ideological in the sense that liberal democracy itself adopts the concept of rights (whether human or fundamental) more as a legitimizing factor than a measure for improving the quality of human life. A Senior Advocate of Nigeria and a leading advocate of citizen's rights in Nigeria had observed that:

“The fundamental objectives enshrined in Chapter II of the 1999 Constitution include socio-economic rights which have been made non justiciable by the ruling class¹⁵”.

Similarly, Prof. Chidi Odinkalu made the following profound statements:

“We cannot negotiate among these different clusters of rights. We need all of them as full members of the human race.....”

Continuing, he said:

“In Nigerian context, it is safe to say that human rights provisions are contained in both Chapter II and IV of the Constitution. There is no dispute that the rights contained in the Chapter IV are judicially enforceable. The distinction between Chapters II and IV of the Nigerian Constitution is essentially ideological¹⁶”

The Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy under Chapter II of the 1999 Constitution remain ideas towards which the Nigerian State aspires to attain. To the extent that they remain ideals of state policies, it is believed that the jurisdiction of the courts to hear and determine them are ousted pursuant to the 1999 Constitution¹⁷.

To be sure, S. 6(6)(C) of the 1999 Constitution provides thus:

S. 6(6)(C) “The Judicial power vested in accordance with the foregoing provisions of this section (c) shall not, except as otherwise provided by this constitution, extend to any issue or question as to whether any act or omission by any authority or person or as to whether any law or any judicial decision is in conformity with the Fundamental Objective and Directive Principles of State Policy set out in Chapter II of this Constitution”. *Emphasis mine*

On the surface and without a rigorous interrogation, it would seem that it represents what it simply communicates. In fact, a foremost Constitutional Lawyer, Senior Advocate of Nigeria and Chairman of the Committee of the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) on the Fundamental Objective and Directives Principles of State Policy in 1978 lent credence to this viewpoint when he argued in the first instance that:

“Chapter II provisions do not confer on any individual a corresponding entitlement to demand the amenities as a right and no machinery is provided by the Constitution for ensuring such compliance, the use of the courts for the purpose being explicitly excluded¹⁸”

He contended further that:

“.....a Constitution operating as a law and imposing judicially enforceable restraints upon government should not abandon its other functions as a source of legitimacy for those political concepts and governmental powers and relations that are, by their very nature, non-justiciable. Nor should it renounce its roles in the affirmation of fundamental objectives and ideas or directive principles of governmental actions along desirable line”.

It is without doubt that the erudite Prof. Ben Nwabueze (SAN) was a leading constitutional scholar around the globe. Yet, on this particular score, his postulation has been vigorously contested in order to test its validity and accuracy. I am afraid that the verdict weighed heavily against his views but in favour of the justiciability of socio-economic rights. (19).

Conclusion

It has gone beyond prevarication that Class exist in every society in which capital industries remain the source of social stratification including Nigeria. According to Marx, it is this social segregation that lead to class conflict. For him, members of the bourgeoisie become aware through class consciousness while the workers usually become aware through their exploitations by the employers.

Noam Chomsky posited as follow;

Well, there's always a class war going on. The United States, to am usual extent, is a business run, more so than others. The business classes are very class - conscious - they're constantly fighting a bitter class war to improve their powers and diminish opposition. Occasionally this is recognized..... The enormous benefits given to the very wealthy, the privilege, the very wealth, are way beyond those of other comparable societies and are part of the on-going class war"(20)

Since the capital class in global political economy has also graduated to monopoly capital attaining the height capital transformation as imperialism which Marx warned was the highest form of capitalism

defined by merging bank capital with industrial capital to create “Finance Capital” and export same instead of commodities and perpetuate the mindless exploitation of the workers.

Today the economic sabotage is orchestrated at global scale and against third world countries through global financial arrangements and institutions like the multinational corporations, foreign aid, foreign direct investment, debt financing etc with serious collaboration of petty local bourgeoisie.

Therefore, the only options left are strict adherence to the foregoing conditions of social justice as articulated above for an egalitarian order.

Thank you

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