

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC FORMATION OF SOCIETY: A PHILOSOPHICAL SURVEY OF  
THE MARXISTS' DIALECTICAL CONCEPTION OF SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT  
VIS-À-VIS THE NIGERIAN STATE**

By

**Zaato Matthew Nor, Ph. D**

Department of Philosophy  
Faculty of Arts  
Benue State University, Makurdi  
&

**Ikechukwu Bartholomew Ekemezie, Ph. D**

Department of Philosophy  
Faculty of Arts  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

**Abstract**

Historically, Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism have been employed by the Marxists to explain the scientific and historical processes, respectively, of societal development from the primitive stage to the advanced stage. Scientifically, societal development/transformation follows inherent natural laws which spark development from within through a dialectical process and in the same light, historically, society evolved as a result of inherent internal contradictions in a socio-economic formation (which are also dialectical), leading to a new social formation or socio-economic formation. The Nigerian nation state's socio-economic formation situation is not the exact replica of what was obtainable in the pre-capitalist and full-blown bourgeoisie system of the era of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels where the key means of production were in control of the capitalists. The capitalists' control of means of production made it possible for labour of the proletariat or the workers to be exploited. The Nigerian capitalist system is an admixture of industry owners, the petty-bourgeoisie; executives, politicians and bureaucrats. For the industrialists as owners of the means of production, their stock in trade is to exploit the workers while the petty-bourgeoisie elected or appointed into offices to preside over the affairs of the state, employ the instruments of state coercion to suppress the masses by inventing policies that inhibit their well-being. Like the traditional bourgeoisie, the Nigerian industry owners and the petty-bourgeoisie exhibit the same attitude of the capitalists of the time Marx and Engels wrote. On the whole, they have turned themselves into 'Lords of the Manor' as they institute obnoxious policies and corrupt practices against the well-being of the masses leading to alienation, exploitation, pain/misery, frustration, disillusionment, hardship, hunger, deprivation, injustice and hopelessness, etc. This situation like what was obtainable in the capitalist systems of the time Marx and Engels wrote, has created a class consciousness of the poor and the rich (the haves-not and the haves). It is this class consciousness that constitutes the internal contradiction which the Marxists insist culminates into the dialectical transformation of all societies; the exploited and the oppressed, etc. having attained a certain level of consciousness, would rise up even violently to enforce revolution in the society. This leads to what the Marxists call societal transformation. Employing expository highlights, the study reflects on the Marxian laws of societal development/transformation in the light of the Nigerian situation and argues in conclusion that the Nigerian situation is a

potentiality of a violent revolution that would bring about dialectical change. The study is thus, analytically informed based on Marxian Dialectics.

**Keywords:** *Marxism, Dialectics, Socio-Economic Formation, Society, Societal Development, Class Consciousness, Nigerian State*

## **Introduction**

The Protagorean declaration in the ancient Greek philosophical era that 'man is the measure of all things...', (*Homo mensura est...*) had been long corroborated. The inundated scientific and technological advancements and attainments in the world today culminating into the taming of nature in certain respects, readily give credence to Protagoras' proclamation in 500 BCE. Corroborating this view, T. I. Oizerman and A. S. Bogomolov in their book: *Principles of the Theory of the Historical Process in Philosophy* aptly note that "Science is discovering new, previously unknown phenomena, disclosing the relations between them, and finding the patterns that determine these relations and enable us to foresee the course of events."<sup>1</sup> Science like Philosophy, are human intellectual and practical activities. Thus, philosophical, scientific and even socio-political thoughts have never ceased to recognize man as the determinant of all things.

Man, as a rational, thinking and creative being, has not only the potentials of discovering new ideas, defining their relationship but more importantly, putting those ideas into praxis. The Nigerian nation state, in view of the prevailing situation (inherent contradictions; extreme poverty for the poor and extreme luxury for the rich especially the executives, politicians, government appointees and bureaucrats; the petty-bourgeoisie (based mostly on corruption/ill-gotten wealth), poor remuneration of workers, lack of social security and jobs for the youths complemented with inequality and insecurity in the society), desperately needs rational and creative ideas that would bring about positive transformation of the country. Often times, in the history of human existence, individuals with critical thinking and creative minds are prodded by circumstances to assess the past, review the present and more so, predict the future for the benefit of mankind. Predicated on the foregoing, this study projects the philosophical ideas of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Frederick Engels (1820-1895), the co-founders of Marxism and later Marxists like V. I. Lenin. Marx and Engels in their philosophy, reviewed the society in the era they lived, in order to determine its socio-economic formation and the future of humanity and the society at large. This informed their development of a Materialist Dialectics which is better known as Dialectics. In *Dialectics is the Soul of Marxism*, V. I. Lenin writes that:

Dialectics is concerned with those relationships of a real world which are manifest in everything, and which are therefore of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Oizerman, T. I & A. S. Bogomolov, *Principles of the Theory of the Historical Process in Philosophy*, (trans.) by H. Campbell Creighton, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1983, P. 9.

universal character; it is concerned with the universal laws of the development of nature, society and thought. It is a doctrine of the most general laws which govern all kinds of development.<sup>2</sup>

Put in other words, Dialectics is a process, the totality of principles and laws which enhance humanity's cognition of and the attainment of the solutions to the tasks and challenges of development facing humanity universally. Marxists' Dialectics consists of three basic laws:

✓ The law of unity and conflict of opposites; it is sometimes referred to as the law of identity and conflict. According to Zaato Matthew Nor and Augustine Terhide Maashin "The law basically explains why and how development takes place rationally from within the objects, processes and phenomena."<sup>3</sup> The law scientifically explains transformation or change in all things.

✓ The law of reciprocal passage of quantity and quality. The law functions based on certain factors; Quantity is taken, for example, as the beginning of development. While Qualitative changes occur when the quantitative change attains a certain permissible limit in the development process or system. Having attained a particular limit, quantitative measure becomes disrupted leading to objects or phenomena change. For instance, under normal condition, at the temperature of 0°C, water freezes to ice which is a solid state while at 100°C, water becomes gaseous and evaporates due to heating.

✓ The law of negation of the negation; like the other laws, is concerned with the relationship of two opposing qualities or two contradictory phenomena. Dialectical negation is a self-negation phenomenon which gives rise to a new measure or quality which more importantly, is higher than the former. It is a discourse on change and permanence.

Following an insight into the nature, character and function of the concept of Dialectics, Marx and Engels explain the process of societal progression scientifically and historically by employing Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism as its two pillars, respectively. The doctrine of Historical Materialism according to Lenin "examines the causes and prospects of the historical process and the feasibility of the society achieving a state in which man would truly become the end in itself of society's functioning."<sup>4</sup> For the society to achieve this for humanity, there are identified conditions necessary for the social functioning of the society. These include

---

<sup>2</sup> Lenin, V. I, *Dialectics is the Soul of Marxism: A Short Philosophical Essay*, (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Press House), 1989, p.9.

<sup>3</sup> Nor, Zaato Matthew & Augustine Terhide Maashin, "Marxism: From Humanism to a Metaphysico-Epistemic Enlightenment of the Proletariat - II" in Zaato M. Nor (ed), *Or-Che-Uma: African Journal of Existential Philosophy (AJEP)*, Vol. 10 No. 2, a journal of the Department of philosophy, Benue State University, Makurdi, March/April, 2022), P.46.

<sup>4</sup> Lenin, V. I, Op. Cit., P. 7.

institutions (religion, culture/belief, judiciary/legal system, etc), ideologies, system of government, production relations and labour, etc. The development of one implies the development of the other and vice versa. Lenin emphasizes that “This means we are talking of social conditions which can ensure all-round development of the human personality, of a society in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, Historical Materialism is a principle which recognizes that the historical process of societal formation consists of causes and prospects of the society attaining the level whereby humans are regarded as the ultimate goal of the functioning of society. It therefore, studies the inherent causes and the feasibilities that underlie the social conditions of the society leading to the holistic development of the people.

The Marxian conception of the features of society is such that humankind would not only attain by discovering the objective laws of social development which determine these features but more so, rest largely on human consciousness and morality. The application of these objective laws is necessary to explain the entire past history of humankind and deduce its future development through the phenomenon of social life. Consequently, these objective laws became evidently evaluative in the society due to the qualitative changes they introduced leading to societal transformation. Zoya Berbeshkina, Lyudmila Yakovleva and Dimitry Zerkin patently explain this in their work: *What is Historical Materialism?* saying that "Major historical periods in social evolution, characterized by a qualitative fixed system of economic, socio-political and ideological relations including definite laws of an epoch is what Marx calls socio-economic formation."<sup>6</sup> Put differently, socio-economic formation in the Marxian view is the observable qualitative and quantitative activities in the forms of economics, social, cultural, religious, political and legal ideologies, etc obtainable in a particular era in space and time. Socio-economic formation and social conditions being one and the same, are the architectonics for the dialectical functioning of the society.

Dialectical Materialism on the other hand is scientific in nature. Lenin explains that “it is the science of the general laws of motion both of the external world and human thought.”<sup>7</sup> Elaborating the nature and function of dialectical philosophy, Lenin stresses that ‘nothing is final, absolute and sacred. It reveals the transitory character of everything; nothing can endure before it except the uninterrupted process of becoming and passing away, of endless ascendancy from the lower to the higher.’<sup>8</sup> That is, all things are in a state of perpetual flux under the dialectical

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Berbeshkina, Zoya, Lyudmila Yakovleva & Dimitry Zerkin, *What is Historical Materialism?* (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1988, p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> Lenin, V. I, *Karl Marx and His Teachings*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p.21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

operation of philosophy which culminates into the Marxists conception of development. The dialectical conception of development is viewed by the Marxists, according to Oizerman and Bogomolov, as “contradiction, a struggle of opposites, and negation, concrete (of course) and positive.”<sup>9</sup> That is, for development to occur, there must be opposing phenomena which one of them must be negated as this brings about a new phenomenon.

The Marxian idea of development is better captured based on the conviction that there are necessarily inhering opposing sides in all processes or realities. Hence, there is always a jostle in order for the superior one to assert itself over the inferior one. This is to say that a clash of the opposites leads to a synthesis. This, in a less technical presentation, is what is called development in the Marxists’ thought. In the capitalist society based on socio-economic formation, with its inherent contradictions; opposites and negations, it means societies can never be static but mobile. That is, change and transformation will always occur in the society and Nigeria is no exception. The implication is that the Nigerian society with its enduring contradictions is a potentiality for a violent revolution or transformation. The situation in Nigeria clearly shows that there are classes in the Nigerian nation state and as the Marxian Dialectics points out unambiguously, where there are inherent contradictions, there is bound to be change or societal transformation either naturally or violently.

### **Marxian Conception of Socio-Economic Formation**

The nature of a society is identified by the social aspects of life which include socio-economic formation. The aspect of socio-economic formation states clearly the peculiarities of the distinct periods of social development. Berbeshkina, Yakovleva and Zerkin while quoting Marx and Engels explain that socio-economic formation is “a society at a definite stage of historical development, a society with a peculiar distinctive character.”<sup>10</sup> That is, socio-economic formation gives rise to a society as could be identified by its features. The notion of socio-economic formation is a reflection on one or another phase of humankind’s development from the most primitive society to the ultimate society where humankind would be regarded as an end in itself; where alienation, exploitation and other forms of inequalities are regarded as taboos. Buttressing this, K. Zarodov maintains that:

Socio-economic formation allows us to understand a definite society as a concrete community, as a totality of economic, social, political and ideological relations and institutions, as a totality with its own laws of development.... One system replaces another as a result of a social revolution.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Oizerman & Bogomolov, Op. Cit., P.12.

<sup>10</sup> Berbeshkina, Yakovleva & Zerkin, Op. Cit., p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> Zarodov, K. *Lenin and the Contemporary Problems of the Transition from Capitalism to Socialism*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1976, P.56.

These attributes are illustrated in two chief elements of socio-economic formation known as 'the basis' and 'the superstructure' of the society. 'The basis' according to Berbeshkina, Yakovleva and Zerkin, 'informs the system of production relations' (capitalism or socialism/communism) while 'the superstructure' has to do with 'social values' (political, legal, philosophical, ethical, aesthetical systems and religious ideas...) comprised in the state, political parties and the church, etc.'<sup>12</sup>. The authors of *What is Historical Materialism?* further aver that as pivots to direct the course of the society, 'the basis and the superstructure as the main elements influence one another. For instance, production relations would determine the kind of economic system and vice versa'<sup>13</sup>. However, the basis is primary in influencing the superstructure and this strengthens the resolve of the fundamental concern of philosophy concerning society posed by the materialist; that the means of production must be collectively or publicly owned. Additionally, Berbeshkina, Yakovleva and Zerkin state that "production relations demonstrate the interconnection between economic and other relations and their mode of production as a determinant of all aspects of social life."<sup>14</sup> Differently put, production relations (basis) are the fulcrums which revolve human social life. Thus, production relations are very critical to the socio-economic well-being of humanity.

Socio-economic formation moreover, is a deliberate integration of the mode of production of material benefits into a whole which are inherent in an organic system and could interact directly or indirectly. For example, the communal system of production was characterized by the nature of the society in which the tools for production were crude and the population thin. Berbeshkina, Yakovleva and Zerkin maintain that 'though, historical communities (clans, tribes, communities, societies, kingdoms and nations), classes and other social groups, (the family, everyday life, etc) constitute socio-economic formation, they, however, differ in quality in the different formations.'<sup>15</sup> It is generally held that the global birth of socio-economic system took place more or less simultaneously (all over the world man began gregarious existence at micro level of family, relations, clan, community and society, etc.) with a communal socio-economic system. However, the transition from one system to another was a long process as this was not accomplishable at the same time globally.

---

<sup>12</sup> Berbeshkina, Yakovleva & Zerkin, Op. Cit., P. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Berbeshkina, Yakovleva & Zerkin, Op. Cit., P. 62.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Berbeshkina, Yakovleva & Zerkin, Op. Cit., Pp. 62 - 63

## **Marxists' Stages of Socio-Economic Formation and The Nigerian Nation State**

To the Marxists, there are five successive socio-economic formation stages which the most of the contemporary world societies including Nigeria are on the fourth level, looking forward to the attainment of the ultimate stage which is communism. The levels are as follow:

(1) Primitive communal socio-economic formation: This was based on communal ownership of means of production and relations of cooperation as well as mutual assistance resulting from it. 'The primitive communal era was a period of economic equality and not exploitation because everything produced was shared equally.'<sup>16</sup> The development of productive forces (the means of production, the workers, their production experience, knowledge and labour skills) was low since the 'opposition to nature', that is, production activities were joint exercises. However, the evolution of the productive forces of the society eroded this system. Labour became accumulative as a result there emerged social divisions of labour. For example, land tilling became separated from cattle breeding or cattle rearing and blacksmithing, as well as fruit gatherers and hunters, etc. Division of labour, besides introducing the idea of exchange of products of labour, also created surplus products. Division of labour revolutionalized the social system and it became needless to have a joint economy since clans became broken down into families and each family became an independent economic unit. Surplus products created the need for exploitation and therefore, brought about the emergence of economic inequality. Economic inequality impoverished some people in the society who became dependent on their kinsmen or tribesmen for survival. However, it was not long before the impoverished people were turned into slaves or were compelled to carry out one task or another for the people who had what they wanted, to get what they want from them. War prisoners were also captured and this increased the number of slaves who became owned by the elders, priests and military leaders, etc. in the society. This stage provided ample ground for the second stage of socio-economic formation based on slave-owning system to emerge.

(2) Slave-owning socio-economic formation: Slave owners' means of production and labour (slaves) determined the production relations which produced surplus product leading to exploitation. This became possible due to the development of production forces, etc. The change in the production relations created antagonistic classes; slaves and the slave-owners. In order to suppress the exploited class, and to perpetuate the act of exploitation, "the state and the laws were established with various organs of coercion, the army, courts of law, the administrative apparatus, etc."<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the slave-owners due to the cheap labour they enjoyed from their slaves, never attempted to improve on the instruments of production. In spite of this, productive forces became gradually developed as this led to a new social formation. More so, revolts by slaves and the poor coupled with the attacks from neighbours were too much to be withstood by

---

<sup>16</sup> Berbeshkina, Yakovleva & Zerkin, Op. Cit., P. 64.

<sup>17</sup> Berbeshkina, Yakovleva & Zerkin, Op. Cit., P. 66.

the slave-owners and the slave-owning socio-economic system crumbled. The biggest slave revolt against the exploiters took place in ancient Rome in 73-71 BCE, under the leadership of Spartacus.

(3) Feudal formation: The feudal lords' means of production and the partial ownership of the serf (labourer) informed their production relations. The feudal system had feudal lords and the peasants/labourers/serfs as the two main classes. The relationship between the two was based on contractual understanding or agreement. The peasants would come to the feudal lords who usually owned vast lands and lease a piece of land based on some conditions. For instance, it may be to help the feudal lord cultivate his land or give him a particular quantity of produce after harvest. In the feudal system, the peasants owned personal property; farms and workshops. The peasants due to private ownership of farms and workshops became interested in the improvement of production forces just like the feudal lords. The protection of the interest of the feudal lords could not stand the test of time when the advanced production forces became conflictual with social values (superstructure). The devotion of too much time to work on the feudal lords' farms hampered the productive forces of the peasants to be developed especially in agriculture. Thus, the peasant became less interested in his labour results/outputs.

Meanwhile, in the feudal formation, industrial production in towns required the services of workers/peasants to be free of both feudal bondage and the means of production. That is, peasants migrating to cities to work for the bourgeoisie who owned industries must not be committed anywhere in terms being in a bond with any feudal lord or the individual possessing his personal farm or workshop. The bourgeoisie in the feudal era intensified their agitation and this informed the emergency of a new formation known as capitalism.

(4) Capitalist Socio-economic formation: The capitalist mode of production relations caused a rapid growth of the production forces. A capitalist is the private owner of the means of production. He hires and exploits the labour of workers who are denied of the means of production and are compelled to sell their ability (labour) in order to be productive. The hired labourer produces material wealth for his master e.g. machineries etc. The creation of various machineries produces wealth for the capitalist. The creation of various machineries requires that the laws of nature be conceived, studied and utilized. Thus, "man as a productive force developed along with the development of the means of production; his qualification and technical knowledge improved; higher demands were placed on the quality and organization of labour."<sup>18</sup> In other words, the advanced means of production produced by man equally changed man's outlook and output on the production of material goods such the quality and organization of labour began to attract higher demands and yields.

The hired labour creates surplus value in terms of the products produced which the capitalists or bourgeoisie appropriate. Besides, the worker becomes alienated from his work of labour since

---

<sup>18</sup> Chalyan, Gayne, *Fundamentals of Scientific Socialism*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1988, P.9.

the pay-package (wages) is just enough to keep him alive and cannot even buy the items he produces for his master. Work for him ceases to be a voluntary necessity but a forced or compelled necessity. This attitude gave rise to class consciousness which in turn, informed antagonism that created a sharp contrast between the workers and the employers (proletariat and bourgeoisie) i.e., the exploited and exploiters.

In the capitalist formation, the worker is compelled to sell not only his labour but his ability (the totality of his physical and mental capabilities required in the process of production). Human labour at this level becomes a commodity which is traded. The basic method of the capitalists' exploitation of the workers is better articulated in *Das Kapital (Capital)*, a famous work of Marx. He maintains that, 'the value of what the worker produces in the early part of the day is necessary labour because it is his labour power. Surplus arises when the worker is compelled to spend longer time at work to produce in excess for his master. In the main, every capitalist society has necessary labour which is of paramount importance to the capitalist because it produces surplus value which he appropriates without compensation to the worker.'<sup>19</sup>

The development of capitalism intensifies workers' exploitation. This is more so because the provisions in the superstructure give room for such exploitation. There are bourgeoisie's conceived or designed institutions that are put in place to subjugate the exploited perpetually. However, the antagonism which gives rise to class consciousness on the part of working class, propels workers to form Trade Unions to serve as an opposition to the bourgeoisie's ideas and policies that adversely affect their well-being.

This class consciousness differentiates between those involved in mental labour (office workers) and physical labour and also the bourgeoisie(employers). To expand their scope of opposition, the working classes(proletariat) under the direction of a Vanguard; a revolutionary strategist, are expected to carry out a socialist revolution in which the bourgeoisie's socio-economic formation is violently seized by the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the words of Marx and Engels "Socialism cannot be realised without a revolution."<sup>20</sup> This stage becomes possible because as production advanced under the capitalist system, it begins to look increasingly social in character. Nonetheless, the means of production remain in the custody of private hands who preserved the capitalist manner of exploitation. The perpetual and fierce class struggle between the working class and the bourgeoisie following the laws of dialectics, necessitate the replacement of capitalist production relations with socialist production relations. The overthrow of the capitalist system gives rise to a new socio-economic formation known as socialism/communism.

---

<sup>19</sup> Marx, Karl, *Das Kapital Vols. 1, 2, & 3 (Abridged)*, Angelo Segrillo & Peter Demant (Coordinators), Sao Paulo (Brazil): University of Sao Paulo Press, 2002, P. 40.

<sup>20</sup> Marx, K. & Frederick Engels, *Collected Works Vol. 3*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1975, P. 206.

(5) The communist socio-economic formation: The ultimate goal of the attainment of communism, apart from eradicating class struggle and exploitation of the mass of people by a few individuals, the communist's socio-economic formation creates condition for equal and general development of each individual and the society. Thus, the means of the production becomes publicly owned and this boosts material production and equally intellectual development. However, the society cannot advance straight to communism except via the medium known as socialism. This is imperative because "the transition from capitalism to socialism requires radical qualitative changes in all spheres of the life of the society."<sup>21</sup> The attainment of these has to go through a different epoch all together when the proletariat gain political power through a revolution and usher in socialism.

The emerging socialism has qualities of public ownership of the means of production, a planned economy which takes care of wastages and the eradication of exploitation of man by man. The goal of production at this stage is geared towards the general satisfaction of the entire society. As the inheritor of the capitalists' production, workers' skills and technology, the speedy advancement of socialism is guaranteed. Although, the present dispensation may not be able to produce enough consumables to meet the requirements of the general society, however, based on the moral principle of distribution under socialism which is; "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs,"<sup>22</sup> the transition to communism as the ideal society gains its footing. The recognition that there are individual differences would bring about the idea of equitable reward for all citizens.

There are obvious things at the earliest stage of communism; the residual element of capitalism like the distinction between the mental labour and the physical labour, cities (urban) and rural areas would still prevail. At this stage, a new reorientation is required to change people's view; mores and customs, and the adoption of new traits like the cultivation of new attitude towards work, etc. This may not change the conservatism immediately since it takes a considerable time to rebuild the people's consciousness and likewise, the evolution of a total communist society. The ultimate communist formation would embark on mass development of productive forces which culminate in abundant production of consumables. Consequently, it brings to the fore the actualization of the fundamental principle of communism; 'from each according to his capacity, to each according to his needs' as earlier mentioned.

The state and cooperative form of social ownership of means of production cease in a communist environment. Labour under this formation, becomes no longer a means of subsistence but a primary need. In the words of Marx in *Das Kapital* "By labour power or capacity of labour is to be understood as the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human

---

<sup>21</sup> Berbeshkina, Yakovleva & Zerkin, Op. Cit., P. 73.

<sup>22</sup> Berbeshkina, Yakovleva & Zerkin, Op. Cit., P. 74.

being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use value of any description.”<sup>23</sup> Communism eliminates classes, the difference between urban and rural areas, mental and physical labour and installs workers of the communist society who would not be inclined towards material wealth. Rather, man would develop in communism constructively, with his abilities and talents. He acquires intellectual wealth, moral integrity, physical fitness and mental alertness under the new dispensation(communism). Finally, the state becomes a communist self-government without social phenomena as politics, law and religion. And since nothing in the world is static, the communist society would continue to be refined to attain higher development, advancement and improvement for the general benefits of the citizenry.

### **An Overview of Marxists’ Laws of Societal Development and The Nigerian Nation State**

The Marxist theory of societal transfiguration better known as the theory of scientific socialism according to Chalyan, embraces “the most general laws governing the development of nature and society, the advancement of social production, emancipatory struggle of the working people, revolution, and creation of a just-socialist-society.”<sup>24</sup> The theory is comprised of three fundamental components. Chalyan annotates that:

The first component of Marxist theory is philosophy – the science of the laws governing the development of nature and human society. The second component - political economy - studies the relations shaping up among people in the process of labour....The third component is scientific socialism - the theory of the struggle waged by the working class together with all working people to eliminate exploitation and build a new - socialist – society.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, Marxism overtly approaches man as an ultimate goal of history. It systematically provides the way forward towards the understanding of issues confronting man and the society as it also supplies the impetus towards their dismantling. It is on this premise that we focus our discussion on the Nigerian situation.

From the foregoing, it is not opaque that, the contemporary world society is basically capitalist. However, there are pockets of socialist’s/communist’s countries like North Korea, Vietnam, China, Laos and Cuba. Meanwhile, the Federal Republic of Nepal and the Republic of Nicaragua are constitutionally referred to as socialists. In the main, the contemporary world society which includes Nigeria is complex with its attendant problems that require full knowledge of the socio-political, economic, spiritual and other processes that are characteristic of the epoch. Nigeria as a ‘creation of the British colonizers’ is by ‘birth’ a capitalist society. It is patterned after the socio-

---

<sup>23</sup> Marx, Karl, *Das Kapital*, *Op. Cit.*, P. 48.

<sup>24</sup> Chalyan, Gayne, *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

economic formation of Britain. For nearly a century (1884/5 – 1960) Nigeria was a colony of Britain and accordingly, soaked “all the three stages of British capitalism – primitive capital accumulation, industrial capitalism and finance capital.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, 'the basis' and 'the superstructure' in Nigeria are in tandem with the British system. Nigerian was made a state with all the attendant features. But a state to the Marxists is a creation by the bourgeoisie for the purposes of exploitation and coercion of the ordinary citizens. In his description of the state, Marx says:

The state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another; it is the creation of “order” which legalizes and perpetuates this suppression by moderating the conflict between the classes.<sup>27</sup>

This description cannot be more apt when the case of Nigerian state is reviewed right from the colonial era to the contemporary times. The Nigerian state has become non-repentant for the suppression and coercion of the masses rendering them hopeless more than 60 decades of independence from the colonizers. Apparently, the masses are now colonized by their own people. Engels explains that “the bourgeois state does not “wither away”, but it is “abolished” by the proletariat in the course of the revolution. What withers away after this revolution is the proletarian state or semi-state.”<sup>28</sup> The implication is that the Nigerian nation state will continue to manifest the characteristics of the bourgeois state until the masses revolution is carried out.

Thus far, it is not tasking to appreciate the Nigerian situation from the Marxian lenses. The definition of state is a pointed depiction of the Nigerian situation. Nigeria is plagued by so many ills which the Marxists never quite envisaged. Indeed, the Nigerian situation is very much a complex one. There is the problem of ethnicity/tribalism, religious bigotry/fundamentalism, corruption, nepotism, communal crises, religious crises, political crises, thuggery, corruption/moral sterility, high level of illiteracy/ignorance, poverty, suffering, hunger/hardship, rising cost of living and unemployment/joblessness and crop farmers/herders' clashes, etc. However, clearly, there is a class structure as opposing sides are openly given in Nigeria. There is exploitation, alienation and injustice meted to the workers and the unemployed in the country. For instance, there are employees of certain organizations or private institutions in Nigeria who cannot afford the school fees of those institutions to enroll their children or wards. This is due to alienation and exploitation. In the same vein, government employees cannot meet the basic needs of their families due to poor wages. Inflation is on a perpetual rise. There is the absence of social

---

<sup>26</sup> Ulyanovsky, Rostislav, *Present-Day Problems in Asia and Africa: Theory Politics Personalities*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1978, P. 124.

<sup>27</sup> Lenin, V. I. *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1984, P.11.

<sup>28</sup> Lenin, V. I. *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State ... Op. Cit.*, P.20.

security. This gave rise to a situation where some families cannot enroll their wards and children in school such that they dropped out of school only to embrace crime, prostitution and other anti-social vices. Outrightly, some children/youths cannot go to school because their parents are poor and jobless. Simply put the Nigerian situation is that of ‘some animals are more equal than others’.

Predicated on dialectics as the doctrine that is interested in the general laws which govern development in its entirety and scientific socialism, the Nigerian society, in view of the inherent contradictions, is ripe for a revolutionary change. Though the Nigerian society has formidable Trade Unions like ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities), TUC (Trade Union Congress), NLC (Nigerian Labour Congress), and NMA (Nigerian Medical Association), etc. to mention just these, it is not very likely that these Unions and others not mentioned here, based on their docility, can push for a revolution. ASUU even though a Union of intelligentsia appears to be in a state of slumber, may be comatose. For instance, the Union has been renegotiating 2009 Agreement with Federal Government for almost a decade and a half (2009 - 2023) without meaningful conclusion. The workers on their part even though undergoing exploitation and other forms of dehumanizations under the present bourgeoisie democracy, they have not understudied Marxism enough to adopted it as a philosophy and revolutionary theory. Generally, what these trade unions care for is improved working conditions and wages. In other words, the workers under their different Trade Unions lacked the capacity to execute a Marxian-kind of revolution. This situation is a depiction that the workers are satisfied with the capitalist system, however, they are not contented with its mode of operation and hence their demand for improved wages and not the total dismantling of the system.

On the other hand, the Nigerian youths, graduates and the ordinary citizens/peasants who are completely neglected and marginalized without hope of securing jobs as well as attaining meaningful lives, are the beacon of potential social change agents of Nigeria. From the inception of the last uninterrupted bourgeoisie democratic rule in Nigeria from 1999 – 2023, the Federal Government has never carried out any mass recruitment in the public service. This is ditto states and local governments levels in Nigeria. Clearly, the petty- bourgeoisie in Nigeria have no human face but have rather introduced insecurity by not meaningfully engaging the youths and other qualified persons in meaningful ventures. Thus, the youths, graduates and the peasants in the Nigerian context are the potential proletariat and revolutionary force that may tackle the exploiters headlong via a violent revolution. Their revolution may not take shape exactly like the Marxian type, but the youths as change agents in Nigeria are poised for action. One standing and shining example of this scenario is the End SARS Protest of Year 2020. (SARS is an acronym for Special Anti-Robbery Squad, a special arm of the Nigerian Police that was notorious for terrorizing and brutalizing innocent Nigerians on claims of criminal suspicion). The youths in that year, under the leadership and coordination of some civil societies groups, marched out all over the country with one agenda: SARS must be ‘ended’ (abolished) and this had come to pass. Thus, with a revolutionary vanguard likely to be an intelligentsia, the Nigerian revolutionary

pregnancy would be put to bed in no distant time. The population of the youths in Nigeria coupled with the intense desire to introduce change in the country is likely to do what the Trade Unions in country cannot do.

Nigeria as a society did not evolve following the Marxian stages of societal formation due the punctuation by the colonizers. However, having taken shape, it embraced the capitalists' mode of production. This accounts for the more reason why most government-owned businesses were either sold to the petty- bourgeoisie or commercialized. The quiddity of this policy is not farfetched; to reduce government spending and welfare for the ordinary Nigerians so that the petty-bourgeoisie would continue to plunder or loot the state resources. This agenda has remained very successful over the years leading to stiff class distinction in the Nigerian society.

The salient features of the Nigerian contemporary epoch cannot be consciously ignored in spite of one's biases. Some people have argued that Marxism is dead and one cannot return to an obsolete ideology. This is a misconception. Ideology as Lyman Tower Sargent plausibly notes is:

A system of values and beliefs regarding the various institutions and processes of society that is acceptable as fact or truth by a group of people. An ideology provides the believer of the picture of the world both as it is and as it should be, and in doing so, organizes the tremendous complexity of the world into something fairly simple and understandable.<sup>29</sup>

As Sargent succinctly informs, ideologies as constituting a system of values and beliefs shape institutions and societal processes. They provide a worldview which depicts things as they are and how it should be in the society. The Marxists theory of socio-economic formation of the state is predicated on this. But much more, it is able to break down the complexities of societies by equally advancing laws that could adequately surmount the identified issues. In this wise, Marxism is an evergreen ideology. Zarodov admits that 'as an ideology, Marxism does not and cannot grow old. It can be enriched, developed and augmented with new content.'<sup>30</sup> What Marx and Engels saw as exploitation, inequality and other forms of injustices in human society in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century have remained prevalent up to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and may go beyond if the exploited, alienated and dehumanized people are reluctant to take their destiny in their hands. However, the ideological legacy of the duo; the blueprint to the workers and peasants on how to overcome the exploitation of the bourgeoisie as well as the incorporation of the masses into revolution, etc have remained enduring legacies.

---

<sup>29</sup> Sargent, Lyman T. *Contemporary Political Ideologies: A Comparative Analysis*, (Belmont CA 94002 – 3098: Thomson Wadsworth), 2006, P. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Zarodov, Op. Cit., P. 20.

Nigerian revolution (whenever it takes place) may not immediately advance to socialism in view of the complexities and even peculiarities of the country. Nigeria is enveloped in ethnic, religious, cultural, political and economic differences which are more of inhibitions towards the liberation of citizens. These factors as they are, have stood firmly in the way of advancing the Nigerian society. However, they are surmountable as the injustice, pain and the poverty inflicted on the masses by the bourgeoisie and the petty- bourgeoisie know no religion, tribe, culture and political differences. The Nigerian youths due their liberal thinking and collective resolve to change the system that has remained tormenting, punitive, enslaving and insensitive to their well-being, are the people best equipped to do the job. They are equipped mentally and physically with the resolve to bring about a positive change in Nigeria. However, only time will tell regarding the revolution. This assertion finds favour with V. I. Lenin who notes that: “The objective prerequisite of the revolution matures according to laws beyond the control of man. In this sense revolution can never be forecast; it comes of itself.”<sup>31</sup> Be this as it may and considering the deep-seated class consciousness and animosity in Nigeria, revolution may not be forecasted but can be predicted. Zarodov agrees with this saying that “by analyzing the socio-economic aspects of social development scientifically it is possible, in many ways, to foresee the basic features and trends of the future revolution, its motive forces and the forms of the revolutionary struggle.”<sup>32</sup> The stark realities of the downturn of the socio-economic conditions in Nigeria as it consequentially affect and infect the masses leave no one in doubt of an imminent revolution. The youths and the masses without any formal meeting, have unanimously settled for a change in the status quo of Nigeria that would give their lives a meaning. So far, to exist in Nigeria is at best an embodiment of pessimism.

## **Conclusion**

The Marxists have advanced Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism as road maps for socio-economic transformation of societies which occur scientifically and historically. The Nigerian situation may not follow the laid down theory as a result of the country’s peculiarities, however, the inherent contradictions are some of the architectonics that would be the rallying point to usher in a revolutionary change in Nigeria. When this shall come to pass, may not easily be predicted. However, the intensified harsh economic situation/high cost of living, unemployment, corruption, class consciousness, insecurity, etc. constitute internal contradictions which are tearing down religious, ethnic sentiments and other barriers. It is not in doubt that good government promotes the common good of the society while a bad one erodes the common good of the entire society. The implication is that the bourgeoisie and the petty- bourgeoisie have clearly defined their class in which they sojourn comfortably and throw banter for their subduing of the masses in the reckless manner they inflict psychological and physical pains on

---

<sup>31</sup> Zarodov, Op. Cit., Pp. 115.

<sup>32</sup> Zarodov, Op. Cit., P. 115 - 6.

them. The petty- bourgeoisie have inundated the ordinary citizens with policies and actions that have absolutely eroded their thinking and rather increased their pains and frustration. The then Central Bank governor, Dr Godwin Emefule, for example, unilaterally, introduced Naira currency swap from December 2022 to February 2023. This policy, it is on record, brought about one of the most untold hardships in the country. There are many more of such policies being hatched to be inflicted on the masses. These truisms as they demonstrate the dehumanization, alienation, exploitation, suffering of the masses and the injustice inflicted on people, invoke the conviction that “Marxism lives in the heart and minds of millions of people, *Nigerians inclusive* (italics ours) and it is the most important social movement of our epoch.”<sup>33</sup> As an article in the *Time Magazine* once quipped “... the attraction of the Marxist vision may persist until the modern society finds a more effective way of explaining itself and its direction. And that could be a long, long time.”<sup>34</sup> Such is the conviction of Nigerians in the face of the undaunting pains and miseries inflicted on the people without any signs of abating.

## REFERENCES

- Berbeshkina, Zoya, Lyudmila Yakovleva & Dimitry Zerkin, *What is Historical Materialism?* (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1988.
- Chalyan, Gayne, *Fundamentals of Scientific Socialism*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1988.
- Lenin, V. I, *Karl Marx and His Teachings*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1977.
- Lenin, V. I. *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1984.
- Lenin, V. I, *Dialectics is the Soul of Marxism: A Short Philosophical Essay*, (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Press House), 1989.
- Marx, Karl, *Das Kapital Vols. 1, 2, & 3* (Abridged), Angelo Segrillo & Peter Demant (Coordinators), (Sao Paulo (Brazil): University of Sao Paulo Press), 2002.
- Marx, K. & Frederick Engels, *Collected Works Vol. 3*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1975.
- Nor, Zaato Matthew & Augustine Terhide Maashin, “Marxism: From Humanism to a Metaphysico-Epistemic Enlightenment of the Proletariat - II” in Zaato M. Nor (ed), *Or-Che-Uma: African Journal of Existential Philosophy (AJEP)*, Vol. 10 No. 2, a journal of the Department of philosophy, Benue State University, Makurdi, March/April, 2022.

---

<sup>33</sup> Zarodov, Op. Cit., P. 70.

<sup>34</sup> Zarodov, Op. Cit., P. 71.

Oizerman, T. I & A. S. Bogomolov, *Principles of the Theory of the Historical Process in Philosophy*, (trans.) by H. Campbell Creighton, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1983.

Sargent, Lyman T. *Contemporary Political Ideologies: A Comparative Analysis*, (Belmont CA 94002 – 3098: Thomson Wadsworth), 2006.

Ulyanovsky, Rostislav, *Present-Day Problems in Asia and Africa: Theory Politics Personalities*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1978.

Zarodov, K. *Lenin and the Contemporary Problems of the Transition from Capitalism to Socialism*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1976.