

WORKERS' ALTERNATIVE

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of the
Working Class
And Youth

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Not a Kobo increase in Fuel Price!

Nothing can testify to man's bestiality towards fellow man as the current attempt by the Goodluck Jonathan's regime attempt to further increase the price of petrol. Nothing is as wicked as this program and it has fully exposed the true face of the regime to the overwhelming majority.

Coming at a time when the overwhelming majority are living in abject poverty with no hope in sight, large numbers are living on less than \$2.00 a day. This will no doubt be a death blow to many in Nigeria.

Unemployment has reached record levels, factories are closing down by the day, mass migration is taking place from the rural areas that are now poverty centers to the cities, all infrastructures collapsing – road, schools, etc.

A regime of poverty wages and terrible working conditions now reign in the factories and work places round the country.

The gap between the rich and the poor is now so huge to the extent that it was recently confirmed that less than 6% of bank depositors own 88% of all bank deposits in Nigeria. The remaining 94% of depositors mainly the working people and

poor own about 12% of bank deposits in Nigeria.

Why would this not be when senators, governors, reps, etc, in Nigeria are earning much more than the president of the USA; when so-called elected men in Nigeria consume a large and growing part of

the overall income of the country.

Despite the poverty in the land, Nigeria is said to have recorded over \$247 billion GDP, with over \$36 billion in foreign reserves, and an estimated \$180 billion expected from total sale of oil this year.

In essence, there is poverty in the midst

of abundance. This reflects extreme cruelty.

We have witnessed over 18 fuel price increases in Nigeria and the arguments of the proponents remain the same since the 1970s. This confirms the extreme shallowness of the various regimes representing

the interests of the Nigerian elites and their imperialist masters.

No subsidy on fuel!

The claim of subsidy is topmost on the lips of the agents of government calling for increment in fuel prices. They claim that an unnamed cabal is milking the country via subsidy. They come up with all sorts of figures to justify their claims.

However, in their desperation, they put forward arguments that are totally illogical; they lie with ease and put forward figures that never add up whenever they are subjected to independent investigation.

They raise alarm that if 'subsidy' is not withdrawn the country will collapse. However, there are so many facts available to debunk all these shallow and illogical arguments.

In 1978, they claimed there was subsidy when petrol was sold at 15 kobo; today, 2011, they still claim there is subsidy after an over 4,300% increment; how come? When will there be no subsidy? By how many times have the wages of Nigerian workers been increased since then?

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Oppose The Privatization & Liquidation of PHCN!

◆PHCN top Management & Ministers not Workers Responsible for Darkness!

Currently, major attacks have been launched by the Goodluck regime against PHCN workers. Soldiers have taken over all the power stations, transmission stations and major PHCN offices nationwide and leaders of the power sector unions were arrested for some days and are all on the watch list. The plan is to 'wind down' PHCN by the first quarter of 2012.

PHCN workers had embarked on a 2-day strike to protest these assaults, it was this that forced the government to release the union officers but the armed take over and other atrocities are still continuing.

A major misinformation and propaganda

Gbemiga Alabi

war has also been declared on PHCN workers. Several paid adverts have been placed in major newspapers in Nigeria combined with several publications against PHCN workers.

All of a sudden the victims became the accused. PHCN workers have all of a sudden become responsible for the crisis of the power sector in Nigeria.

The truth about the real situation must be told to the Nigerian masses that are on the receiving end and who would inevitably suffer the consequences of these imposed draconian programmes.

Privatization, Deregulation & Anti Workers Programs

Currently, the sale of the power stations has commenced secretly. Several power stations, transmission stations and district offices in Nigeria have been 'willed' secretly to criminal gangs who have no technical capabilities and who are fronts for corrupt government officials and Nigerian ruling elites.

The government is consciously undervaluing various PHCN infrastructures nationally in order to dispose them cheaply to themselves.

Already tariffs have been increased and further increase would take place very soon. Private companies are being brought in to take over the revenue section of PHCN.

The government has not done anything to address the question of inhuman conditions of work in PHCN till date. Casualization of labour is still in place; there are thousands of casual workers in PHCN who are placed under inhuman conditions with very low wages and no job guarantees.

These workers are responsible for several important jobs from manning power stations to finding power faults to collect-



ing revenue. Of course, a worker placed under inhuman conditions can never be of good behaviour.

The 50 percent wage increase agreed to by government is yet to be implemented

in spite of promises.

All these and more were responsible for the PHCN workers concern and in order to implement the various anti-people programs, which the workers oppose, the

Goodluck Jonathan regime decided to bring in the soldiers in order to intimidate workers and repress them.

That they brought in the soldiers because of Boko Haram is a big lie. Here again, we can see that the regime is not truly interested in fighting individual terrorism. They are rather interested in exploiting it to repress the masses and cheat the people.

Soldiers were brought in to safeguard the ongoing privatization and deregulation process. They are handing over the power plants and other properties to their cronies and they intend to increase power tariffs soon.

These processes would lead to job losses and a more terrible power situation.

Who are responsible for darkness?

Over the years, the government has bombarded Nigerians with several reasons for the crisis in the power sector. Many

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Nigerian Economy: The Impending Catastrophe

Ola Balogun

Although the Nigerian economy has been officially growing at over 6% for the past 5 years, the poverty rate keeps increasing; youth unemployment has risen to an unprecedented 47% and over 80 per cent of Nigerian youth don't have more than a secondary school certificate.

Infrastructure is collapsing with power generation hovering between 1,000 to 3,500 mega-watts, when Nigeria actually needs over 75,000 mega-watts to power its size. Out of over 160,000 kilometres of secondary and tertiary roads in Nigeria, with an average registered network of 4,000 kilometres per state, only about 10–15 per cent is paved. While a large proportion of this network remains in poor or very poor condition with only 15 per cent of federal roads in good condition.

"It is sad to note that rural roads, which are statutorily referred to as local govern-

ment roads which constitutes about 132,000 kilometres (67.7 per cent) of the entire road networks in Nigeria is the worst hit by this state of disrepair." (Rural Access and Mobility Project, RAMP).

Per capita income today is less than per capita income in the 1960's, with the real wages of Nigerian workers now less than 35% of what it was in the 70's.

With a Gini-coefficient of 0.57, Nigeria has one of the most unequal distributions of income in the world. Nigeria has a 78% illiteracy level and despite having 70% of its 55 million workforce in the agricultural sector, Nigeria is a net importer of staple foods; domestic production of rice has never been able to meet the demand, leading to considerable imports which today stand at about 1,000,000 metric tonnes yearly. The imports are procured on the world market with Nigeria spending annu-

ally over US\$300 million on rice imports alone.

Nigeria is a maritime state with a coastline measuring approximately 853 kilometres; of the 36 states of the federation, nine are located on the coast where the waves of the Atlantic Ocean lap against the land and yet Nigeria imports between 700,000 and 900,000 metric tonnes of fish annually to partially meet a shortfall of 1,800,000 metric tonnes, thereby spending \$800million annually on fish imports.

Nigeria, which was once the second exporter of tin in the world has completely destroyed this industry. What is most unfortunate about this statistics is that all this is happening at a time when Nigeria is said to be growing at an impressive rate of over 6%. This growth is largely driven by oil exports and commerce. The big question

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Not a Kobo increase in Fuel Price!

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How can there be subsidy when the funds used to pay for the fuel is coming from the sale of fuel both locally and internationally?

One of the most guarded secrets in Nigeria today is the actual price of fuel from the foreign refineries it is acquired from and the internal working of the entire oil sector both upstream and downstream. The reasons for this are not far-fetched from the fact that if the truth is known there would be a revolt.

The government agents have been giving conflicting figures of the cost of subsidy, varying between N1 trillion to N3 trillion for last year. However, the national assembly declared that it was actually to the tune of N450 billion for last year. The question is what was the source of that fund? The N450 billion came from oil sales, so how can that be subsidy?

In spite of the conscious attempt to cover up the workings of the entire oil sector and confuse the public, we can still see the realities of the situation. These realities further confirm that the various regimes are out to milk the masses to their bones for profit. They continue to tax fuel in order to make money.

Nigeria produces oil via the oil multinationals for both internal and external consumption. 445,000 barrels per day are allocated to internal consumption and it is to be forwarded to the domestic refineries. This is not part of the country's OPEC oil quota of over 2.5 million barrels per day.

However, the national refineries have all been sabotaged. Since 2003, this quota is being sold on the international market with the initial understanding that its proceeds will be used to pay for the country's fuel importation.

Prior to 2003, the 445,000 barrels per day is sold to NNPC at near production price and if the Nigerian refineries were down it is exported to foreign refineries and the country just pays for the cost of refining. The refined products are brought back.

However, in order to make much more money this method was abandoned in the interests of the multinationals and the very rich in Nigeria. All the Nigerian refineries have since been grounded and the government is planning on selling them cheaply.

The total sale of the 445,000 barrels per day for this year alone amounts to about \$14 billions at \$90.00 per barrel. This is more than enough to pay for the importation of all the country's fuel.

Petrol is currently sold at N65.00 per liter and this price actually covers the cost of importation and still gives profit to both the government and the oil giants doing the importation.

The claims of the government agents, PPPRA, that the landing cost of petrol is N128.00 per liter is extremely fraudulent. As at October 2011, when the figures they put on their web site were added the result was less than N15.00 per liter. They

have recently edited the web site.

However, just recently, another government agency, the DPR, recently made a slip by revealing that landing cost of petrol is actually N48.00 per liter.

A lot of fraudulent figures and processes are added in order to inflate figures to give the impression that there is subsidy. For instance, fuel ship tankers are always to berth in Nigerian port for two weeks after arrival at the port in order to increase the demurrage charge. This is in spite of the fact that demurrage charges for tankers of fuel in Nigeria starts from the day the ship is loaded with fuel in the foreign refinery.

Fuel importers (fuel cabal) pay these dubious and inflated government charges per importation. These funds are then refunded back to them after the entire importation process, all these to give the impression that there is fuel subsidy.

A hell lot of corrupt practices go on within this highly fraudulent process. For instance, the fuel importers do a lot of over invoicing. They inflate the volume of fuel they plan to import; pay the charges for that volume of fuel but import less than what they declared. They paid back the funds for the government charges for the inflated volume. They make money from both ends, from the government and from selling the fuel to Nigerians.

This is an open secret which the PPPRA also acknowledges but refused to act on in spite of the fact that it is supposed to



have power to bring the crooks to book.

Anyhow we consider the issue, there are no subsidies on fuel in Nigeria; fuel is paid for from the sale of the 445,000 barrels per day domestic allocation to the international market and the direct sale of fuel to the public at a direct price currently higher than its actual cost.

Workers' Wages, Devaluation & Fuel prices

The whole essence of fuel price increment is to shift the burden of the crisis created by the elites on the heads of the working people. It is to suck more blood from the veins of the working masses and has nothing to do with subsidies.

The Nigerian government has been taxing fuel over the years as a means of making money. They do not call it tax in public that is why the preferred term is

subsidy in order to deceive the working people.

The government over the years has imposed series of IMF/World Bank economic policies part of which is fuel price increment.

They devalue the naira as a means of cutting the actual wages of workers. Devaluation is usually followed by increase in the prices of goods and services above their corresponding value.

This is why in spite of the higher quantity of naira notes that workers earn today, Nigerian workers in the 70s & 80s actually earned more than the workers of today.

The current attempt to increase fuel prices is coming some few months after the increase in the national minimum

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Nigerian Economy: The Impending Catastrophe

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therefore is "what will happen when the price of oil crashes and the income crumbles?"

The rising debt

The Obasanjo regime, in an extremely dubious deal of April 2006, celebrated the exit of Nigeria from debt entanglement, which was then estimated at 35 billion dollars. The celebration alone cost 2.4 billion Naira and he was beating his chest as a man who has done the impossible. Less than 5 years later, Nigerian debt has risen to 39 billion dollars, a figure that clearly surpasses the earlier figure.

The significant difference between the present debt and the earlier one is in its composition. While the previous debt was predominantly foreign, the current debt structure leans more towards the domestic creditors; only 5 billion dollars is foreign held, while the remaining 34 billion is domestic. Though this is still less than 25% of GDP, it gives a pointer to what awaits the Nigerian economy in the coming period and this explains why there is so much panic among the Nigeria ruling class.

Within this debt figure is 16 billion dollars allocated to power generation but pocketed by Obasanjo during his tenure; it includes almost 100 billion naira reportedly embezzled by Governor Daniel and Governor Akala, the 152 billion naira fraud involving Bankole. The EFCC investigations show that Bankole has spent some of these corruptly acquired funds to commence construction of high profile properties and to purchase the 32-storey NITEL building in Lagos. He is currently developing a N7 billion resort in the Akodo area of Lekki. Arisekola and other Nigeria billionaires had their names published in many public media in 2006 as debtors to most of the distressed Nigerian banks, and many of them still continue owing these banks and the response of the Government then was to provide public money to bail out these banks.

It is also of interest to remind ourselves that many bank CEOs like Akingbola of Intercontinental bank and Ibru of Oceanic bank were spending depositors' money on their various personal projects, which led to many of these banks col-

lapsing after the first 2007 shock that rocked the stock exchange. The government bailed out these banks with over 5.3 trillion naira of public money and consequently it formed part of this domestic debt that the Nigerian ruling class is asking Nigeria's masses to bear the burden of.

Another significant portion of this debt is owed to contractors who are constructing and repairing roads. This has raised a lot of questions from Nigerians, which roads are being constructed and which ones are being repaired?

Therefore, a booming Nigerian economy has only widened the gap between the extremely rich minority and overwhelming poor majority of Nigerian working masses. While this accelerates the accumulation of immense wealth in the hands of a handful, it pushes many more people into the abyss of poverty and want; it robs the poor to pay the rich. It calls on the already impoverished majority to tighten their belts and be prepared for hard times, while the ever diminishing fat cats continue to grow fat. It scares people with rising debt, while channeling the public wealth into private pockets. We are going through a boom, which deceptively presents billionaires Dangote, Akingbola and Ibru's private debt as public debt, so as to swindle the people of their public property.

Does this mean that the Nigerian ruling class is just playing games and its future is rosy? Obviously not! There is panic written all over their faces. They are everyday losing confidence in their capability to manage the incoming tsunami; they can see it coming but they unfortunately see themselves powerless to do anything to prevent it, because along the path of capitalism there is no solution to the catastrophe that is fast approaching. They can see Tunisia, Egypt and Greece showing them their future but what can they do to avoid this?

Although, the Nigerian ruling class is one of the most inept and most inefficient ruling classes in the world, it has a very close and cordial relationship with its western masters; and its master in the western countries definitely must have informed them that with recession in Eu-



rope and significant slowdown in America, which will inevitably negatively affect the Chinese economy, it is just a matter of time before the price of oil plummets. The crashing of oil prices internationally is currently on the agenda and this clearly explains why the Nigeria ruling class is seriously panicking. It understands quite correctly that unlike in the 80's and 90's, there is no easy cash to be doled out by the IMF and World Bank if Nigeria is financially stranded. Western banks are still battling with their losses in Greece and Italy and are not in a very nice position to carelessly hand-out money to an economy with a bleak future.

All this limits the available room for manoeuvring unlike in the past and this clearly explains why the economic policy of Goodluck, as dictated by the IMF through Okonjo Iweala, is taking on this aggressive form. The desperation to completely deregulate oil and gas, the aggressive sales of public property through privatization, cuts in education and public health, and the recent campaign for a Sovereign Wealth Fund, are policies aimed at saving the decaying capitalist system at the expense of the overwhelming majority of Nigerians.

Sovereign Wealth Fund and the IMF agenda

A sovereign wealth fund (SWF) is a state-owned investment fund composed of financial assets such as stocks, bonds, property, precious metals or other financial instruments. Sovereign wealth funds

invest globally. Some of them have grabbed attention making bad investments in several Wall Street financial firms including Citigroup, Morgan Stanley, and Merrill Lynch. These firms needed a cash infusion due to losses resulting from mismanagement and the subprime mortgage crisis. Most SWFs are funded by foreign exchange assets. How does this fit into the Nigerian ruling class's popular slogan of "Government has no business doing business"? If it is in the interest of the ordinary Nigerians, Government will have no business doing business; if it is in the interest of the rich and their Western backers, Government will have a very strong reason to do business.

The global economic crisis has dictated this dramatically laughable change of policy of the IMF/World bank towards the "third world" countries. The IMF is no longer satisfied with massive sales of public properties at take away prices in the name of privatizations; it is no longer satisfied with huge cuts in public spending that further impoverishes the majority of Nigerians; the IMF has conveniently added to these policies the Sovereign Wealth Fund; that is, it is asking Nigeria to ensure huge savings from the proceeds from oil and other social cuts, savings not for the purpose of investing in Nigeria because "Government has no business doing business", not for the purpose of improving the life of the overwhelming majority of Nigerians because "Capitalism is a system for the minority against the interest of the majority (1% against the 99%)", but savings for the purpose of

investing in the western market. How laughable does this sound? The poorer countries should not invest in their own countries where there is urgent and desperate need to do so, but should turn around and invest in the rich western countries because they are going through a financial crisis; that is, the rich will be fed from the belly of the poor!

Revolution is inevitable

Obviously, the Nigerian ruling class is one of the most subservient to the dictates of the western powers, in the world. The IMF has a direct representation within the government in the person of Okonjo Iweala who will go to any extent to get the imperialists' interests protected to the last. Along the path they have mapped out, the consequences are glaring! It will inevitably lead to an open clash between the overwhelming majority of Nigerians and the ever diminishing minority of exploiters. Egypt and Greece have provided an example of what is to come.

With their policies, revolution is on the agenda and there is no other possible alternative policy on the basis of capitalism. Only a social and economic system that focuses first on the interests of the majority and not on the profits of the few, can harness all the Nigerian resources, both human and material, and unleash the full capacity of Nigerians for the purpose of actualizing the full potential of the country. That system is Socialism and it is the only alternative to blood sucking capitalism. It is absolutely impossible to find a solution within a system that puts profit first before human needs, which judges the rationality of everything based on profitability, a greedy system that promotes greediness and turns man to beast.

Therefore the real enemy is neither corruption nor the mediocrity of the Nigerian ruling elites as such, but the dying system that breeds corruption in which the Nigerian ruling elite are mere appendages of the western powers. That is what the capitalist system is, especially in very backward countries like Nigeria. The alternative system is the only way out and this alternative is inconceivable without first booting out these degenerate servants of the imperialists.

REINSTATE ALL VICTIMIZED DANGOTE PASTA WORKERS!

Since August 30 2010, when over 200 Dangote Pasta workers were sacked for joining a trade union, life had been quite tough for the workers involved. However, they remain determined to resist this injustice.

Dangote Pasta is part of Dangote Group; a group of companies owned by the richest black man in the world, Alhaji Aliko Dangote. The Dangote group is quite notorious for attacking workers' unions. This accounts for why workers trade unions don't exist in most of Dangote's group world wide.

Denying workers the right to associate is a heinous crime; it is a gross violation of the fundamental human rights. But then, this is a norm in Dangote groups.

Workers join or set up trade unions to protect their lives and interests. Extremely exploitative managements are quite antagonistic to workers unionism as it prevents them from crudely exploiting the

workers.

The situation in Dangote Pasta is quite terrible. Workers work for long hour with quite low pay in spite of the huge profits declared. Work conditions are not safe as workers are exposed to all forms of hazards. There is no work guarantees. All these laid the basis for the workers agitation to set up a union, which would defend their interests.

The struggle for trade union rights in Dangote Pasta has been ongoing since 2004. From the first day workers started agitating for the set up of their union the management had been dagger-drawn to prevent it. The first round of victimization started in 2004.

Then, the first eight-man executive committee were sacked for no reason other than they joined and set up the National Union of Food Beverage and Tobacco Employees (NUFBTE). It took a long legal battle to get them reinstated

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back in 2010.

After the legal battle, the management of Dangote Pasta agreed that the workers would be allowed to freely join the workers' union with full rights. This led to the inauguration of the union in Dangote Pasta on August 11 2010.

However, about three weeks after the inauguration, August 30 2010, Dangote Pasta management hired armed thugs to take over the factory and locked out workers who refused to renounce their membership of the union. Elected union electives and workers were brutalized and many were forced to sign statements renouncing the member to the union.

Since then, over 200 workers have been sacked. This is quite tragic.

Unfortunately the response of the national leadership of National Union of

Food Beverage and Tobacco Employees (NUFBTE) has been quite slow in taking on the Dangote management to say the least. The worker had to stage several protests at the national secretariat of the union in order to force the national union leadership to act.

However, they have recently been forced due to pressure from workers to take on the management of Dangote Pasta in alliance with the NLC.

An ultimatum has been issued to the management by the NLC and NUFBTE.

However, the management has now declared that for it to reinstate the victimized workers it would have to sack more workers from the plant. This is in an attempt to try break workers solidarity of the victimized workers and the workers still working on the plant.

The fact that they are considering reinstatement is a confirmation of the fact that they know the consequences of a

workers' strike action led by the NLC and NUFBTE.

Management fears the bond between the victimized workers and the workers till on the plant. This is why they want to divide and conquer but this cheap ploy would fail in the face of a united workers action.

This is the time to rally round the victimized workers and to insist on the demand for their reinstatement and full reinstatement of trade rights and stand against any cheap attempt by management to sack workers.

A victory for Dangote Pasta workers is a victory for all workers and it is bound provoke workers agitation for trade union rights on other Dangote companies.

There is no way Dangote can defeat a united and determined workers' movement.

Oppose Privatization & Liquidation of PHCN!

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people have been made to believe that it is the PHCN workers who are responsible for this situation.

The degenerate situation led many to put the blame first on the workers, as they interact with the staff first and they don't normally see the top management persons responsible for the situation.

Many people have been duped by corrupt PHCN workers, many have outrageous bills, many don't have electricity and when they make compliant report they never get results. The list is endless.

Many so-called government experts, 'consultants', IMF-World Bank agents have done a lot towards confusing issues in order for people not to see the truth, which is quite glaring.

No matter how much they try to confuse the issues the buck always stop at the feet of Nigerian government and elites.

It is government that solely and undemocratically appoints PHCN's top management not workers. It is members of the Nigerian ruling class that get appointed into PHCN top management boards not workers.

PHCN Mismanagement

The Nigerian power crisis was created by corruption and mismanagement of PHCN. The various top management elements appointed by the government over the years are responsible.

These political appointees, on most occasions are completely bankrupt of all ideas and not qualified to be on any man-

agement. They are at times complete illiterates or have no knowledge of the situation in the power sector. They are mostly political cronies of the ruling regimes and they are members of the Nigerian ruling elites. Many have business interests that had compromised them in the first instance.

The current minister for power, Nnaji, is said to be on the board of two private power companies currently bidding for PHCN units and he is said to owe banks billions of Naira. What concerns them is never how to develop the power sector but how to loot it.

PHCN workers never have input to who the government nominates to head PHCN or to be part of its top management.

When the top is rotten the bottom can never do better. The corruption at the bottom is a reflection of the corruption above.

Extreme Corruption & Sabotage

Trillions of Naira equivalent of billions of dollars have gone into PHCN over the years. In fact, more billions of dollars have gone in within the past 12 years since the 'civilian' took over power. Yet there is almost nothing to show for it. Only darkness can be guaranteed.

The corruption at the top management of PHCN is quite intense and crude. This has grave consequences for the entire sector.

The senate panel on the so-called independent power projects was a major



eye-opener to the extreme level of corruption going on in the power sector.

We have cases of thermal power stations built without provisions for gas pipes to supply fuel. We have cases of power stations built and the operating manuals were in Chinese.

PHCN workers were never indicted. Those indicted remain top PHCN management, top government officials, top contractors, etc. The PHCN staff unions were even denied audience by the panel.

Today, the stolen public wealth still remains in the hands of the looters and PHCN workers get blamed for the consequences of the crimes of the elite.

It is the same looters who are working towards the privatization of PHCN today. They are in the forefront calling for the deregulation and sale of PHCN.

Deregulation bound to fail

A privatized PHCN and deregulated power sector would spell doom for the Nigerian working people. Already, tariff rates have gone up and are to further be increased by January 2012. All towards encouraging the private sector to come in and invest!

A privatized PHCN would definitely mean many villages and town would get cut off.

Worst still, deregulation would definitely not lead to paradise the way the proponent put it. It would rather throw the country backward.

Today, it is a known fact that of the over 400 government corporations sold over the years, less than 10 percent has survived. The current program of privatization and deregulation of power is also bound to fail.

PHCN is being broken to 18 companies and sold off. This is bound to create serious problems of coordination, as the dismembering a whole body into parts inevitably creates serious problems.

Just like in the oil sector where licenses for refineries had been issued for years, but not one had been built by the so-called private sector. The so-called investors are not ready to invest a single kobo from their ill-gotten wealth on building power

stations. Rather, they intend to cheaply take over the existing ones and milk it.

In the short and long run the policy is bound to fail.

Workers' Fight Back

Over the years, PHCN workers have embarked on several struggles against the terrible working conditions and wages in PHCN, even under military rule.

PHCN workers are considered to be essential services workers who do not normally embark on strike, however, due to the terrible conditions the workers had on several occasions been forced to strike.

The workers have remained opposed to the privatization program of the government has they have seen from experience that it is a step in the wrong direction. They know it would lead to job losses, high power tariffs, closing down of power plants and loss of pensions.

However, many people are not usually ready to solidarize with PHCN workers, thinking that they are the ones responsible for the poor power situation in the country. This is far from the truth.

PHCN is a very large corporation, with several power plants, transmission and distribution stations. The overwhelming majority of these workers don't even interact with the public. Their stations are usually out of town.

This kind of attitude only pays the criminals who have plundered the power sector; top government officials and government management appointees are the culprits.

Unfortunately, union leaders over the years have not been forthcoming in explaining the situation in the power sector to the public. They are usually seen defending the various policies of the management of PHCN.

These were the reasons why PHCN unions split under the Abacha military regime and the workers then had to set up an alternative union to champion their struggle then.

What is to be done?

A defeat for PHCN workers is a defeat for the Nigerian labour movement. The

consequences of such a defeat would be grave on the Nigerian masses.

It is therefore important that the Nigerian trade union movement, NLC and TUC, rally round PHCN workers in this struggle. Full working class solidarity is needed. The leadership of the NLC and TUC should mobilize the full might of Nigeria workers behind these workers and totally reject the obnoxious policies of government.

The consequences of these policies would be quite grave not only on PHCN workers but on Nigerian workers as a whole. As these policies are not in the interests of the working masses of Nigeria. These policies include further increment in PHCN tariffs, sacking of thousands of workers, and liquidating PHCN.

Currently, it is reported that the NLC intervened in the current faceoff and issued an ultimatum to government. This should be followed up with action and not abandoned. Committees of actions should be set up and workers should be mobilized nationally in support.

In the face of a national action the regime would back down.

Socialist Alternative

The current crisis in the power sector cannot be solved on the basis of the existing order; there has to be a system change. Those responsible for the crisis can never offer a way forward. The only policies they have remain the policies of the IMF-World Bank, which caused the crisis.

The PHCN like other government corporations have been plundered heavily over the years by the elites with no reinvestment in its infrastructure in spite of trillions of naira that was spent on it and the trillions the corporation has made. The corporation was allowed to sink, while they smile to be banks.

Workers take over and democratic control of the power sector remains the only way forward. That is the nationalization of the power sector under workers' democratic control and management. Only the workers have a genuine interest in saving PHCN and providing constant power that can power growth.

Workers must have a say in all levels of management and all appointed professional management personal must be approved by workers democratically. This is the only way forward.

However, this can never happen except the Nigerian workers take political power. Therefore, as workers fight for their jobs, against privatization and numerous draconian policies, they must also transform their organizations and build a strong workers' party that can contest for political power.

Sadhwanis Workers' Struggle Nine months after

Since February 2011, when the over 50 workers of Sadhwanis workers were sacked over their protest against the terrible working conditions and unilateral dismissal of workers, the workers still remain committed to the struggle for their reinstatement and for compensation.

A legal defense for the workers is been worked on by the workers. Unfortunately, the national leadership of their union National Union of Chemical, Footwear, Rubber, Leather and Non Metallic Products Employee, NUCFRLANMPE, has refused to take up the matter since then.

NUCFRLANMPE leadership has one of the worst records in defending the interests of its members. The fact that national officers of the union sided with the management of Sadhwanis testifies to this unfortunate reality.

The workers were abandoned and they had to put up a defense alone. The legal suit the workers want to initiate is sponsored directly by the workers themselves that the workers have refused to allow the injustice against them go unchallenged remains quite impressive.

The role of the national union leadership made things difficult for the workers. The union leadership began by supporting the Sadhwanis management during the workers' struggle in February 2011. This was reported in our March/April 2011 edition.

After the management dismissed the workers they did nothing to challenge the victimization.

One of the major tasks before Nigerian workers is to transform their unions. These included removing corrupt and treacherous union leaders and replacement them with sincere class fighters who would not sell workers for a fee.

Egypt: SCAF-organised elections will not satisfy aspirations of the masses

Hamid Alizadeh

On Friday, 25/11/11, more than a million Egyptian youth, workers and poor yet again assembled in Tahrir Square. The masses have once again risen in an attempt to remove the remnants of the Mubarak regime, which are still in power. Not far from Tahrir, in Abbassiya Square, not more than a couple of thousand people gathered in a pathetic demonstration in support of the SCAF. To the sceptics who did not believe in the revolution, this should be a clear demonstration of the real balance of forces. But at the same time the revolution clearly faces obstacles, not from external forces, but in its own internal contradictions.

Differentiation within the movement

The past ten days we have witnessed the most intense struggles between the masses and the remnants of the old ruling cliques – the SCAF and the Central Security Forces. Day after day hundreds of thousands have gathered in Tahrir Square and fought with the police and the army. More than 40 protesters have been killed and more than 4000 injured.

At the same time the Muslim Brotherhood has come out fully in opposition to the revolution. Not only did it come out against the demonstration on Friday, but in a move aimed at dividing the movement, it called for a separate demonstration against "Jerusalem's Judaisation".

All the forces that once appeared as a united bloc are increasingly separating out into two distinct camps, between the exploiters and the exploited. On the one side there are the men of business, i.e. the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist Salafists, the Liberals and the Army High command. On the other side you find the youth, the workers and the poor, i.e. the working masses who made the revolution, but who do not see any significant change.

Massive demonstration

Despite all attempts to undermine it, every hour tens of thousands of protesters streamed into Tahrir Square early Friday morning. The "Friday of Last Chance", as the organisers had dubbed the protest, far exceeded the size of the "million man march" held last Tuesday. Chants of "The people are a red line", "Down with military rule" and "Tantawi has gone crazy and now wants to be president" could be heard all over the square. Besides Cairo, tens of thousands gathered in other cities across Egypt.

"I came here on Saturday to join my brothers, protest and fight those brutal officers," said Gamal Ali, a 24-year-old university graduate who sold gas masks on the square, to The Guardian, "I don't have money; I decided to sell masks during the day and protest at night."

"The military is killing us because we are protesting that we don't have jobs. I studied business and now I am a street vendor barely making a living," he said summing up the essence of the situation.

All layers of the masses joined in. A number of high school students, organised a march from Giza towards the square to express their solidarity. Also students from the American University in Cairo, who were on strike and had occupied their campus, marched to the rally.

A strike was also called by several union bodies. But due to the fact that no national coordinating body or even significant regional bodies exist, such a call did not materialise. Despite this, several factories and workers' formations marched to the square. These are very important steps as the working class – as was shown in February – played the decisive role in bringing down the regime. In the end the future development of the movement is dependent on the involvement of the working class, but it is still early days for a class that has not had experience in



organising on a big scale for more than six decades. In spite of all this, working class organisation is crystallizing under the hammer blows of events.

What is clear is that workers, at least on an individual basis, had a big presence at the rally. Although all platforms had been removed and all political slogans banned, the spirit in the rally was one of optimism and confidence.

The militant protesters agreed on three basic demands: the immediate transfer of power to a civilian body; immediate trials for officers responsible for the killing of protesters since January 25; and the dismantling of the Central Security Forces.

The junta is shaking

About ten days into this second round of the Egyptian revolution, the SCAF now stands increasingly isolated and its rule is losing legitimacy. Only two weeks ago, a superficial look at the situation would have led many to believe that the generals faced opposition only from a tiny minority of "extremists". Aided by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafists and the liberal parties, the SCAF attempted to create the illusion that it was at the service of the revolutionary people. But below the surface the contradictions between the rule of the SCAF and the aims and aspirations of the masses were piling up. Then on Saturday, November 19, in the course of a few hours, everything changed.

The generals thought they could score an easy victory by clearing a few thousand demonstrators from Tahrir Square. But the attack had the opposite effect. Marx explained that sometimes a revolution needs the whip of the counter-revolution in order to drive it forward. The attack on Tahrir Square, instead of demoralizing the masses and strengthening the rule of the SCAF, had the effect of radicalising the revolution and bringing all the pent up contradictions to the surface.

All illusions were shattered and the vanguard of the movement, that a few weeks ago had seemed isolated when they protested against the rule of the SCAF, was now joined by broad sections of the masses that came out to defend the revolution.

On the following Sunday and Monday [November 21-21] hundreds of thousands came out onto the streets culminating in the million man march on Tuesday. Then again during the following days anything between 200,000 and 400,000 people came out on the streets, defying the thick fog of potentially lethal teargas that the armed forces were using to cover the whole area around Tahrir. The climax of the week was on Friday, when we saw demonstrations involving between 1.5 and 2 million people gathered in Tahrir and across the country.

None of the moves of the SCAF and the police had the desired effect. Their violent attacks only served to radicalise the movement further, while its concessions and steps back were seen as signs of weakness.

Thousands of people sustained injuries from tear gas, rubber bullets and live

ammunition. But this violence did not break the spirit of the protesters. If anything, it strengthened their resolve to take their battle against the ruling military council to a new level.

The reactions of the military rulers also reflected their sudden loss of legitimacy. To begin with, they denied that anything significant was happening in Tahrir Square, but as the movement developed the top brass of the army appeared more and more isolated.

On Monday night the government of Essam Sharaf resigned – for the second time since August – displaying the obvious weakness of the SCAF. But the split was not due to the sudden democratic sentiments of the Sharaf government. The pressure from below was causing cracks to appear in the regime. The revolution was eating its way into the fragile social base of the Junta.

Officers' revolt

A clear indication of this was seen on Tuesday when, along with millions of ordinary men and women, several army officers joined the crowds in Tahrir Square wearing their military uniforms. The officers, who were carried on the shoulders of a sea of people, publicly exposed the real situation within the army, where it is clear that the ordinary soldiers and lower ranking officers are not all with the SCAF. This open and public defiance of the officers was a warning to the generals that they could easily end up being a military high-command with no army.

Again, after Friday's massive mobilisation the layer of officers openly joining the anti-SCAF demonstrations rose. Captain Ahmed Shouman, who is acquiring vast popularity amongst the revolutionary youth, was quoted as saying that, "The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces does not reflect the whole Egyptian army. We must be in cohesion with the Egyptian people once again. This is the best way. We must resort to the essence of the revolution."

Another army officer, Major Tamer Samir Badr, told The Guardian: "I want the people to know there are army officers who are with them, my feelings came to a head last week when I saw people dying, and the army gave the orders for us to just stand and watch. I'm supposed to die for these people, not them die for me. Now I'm ready to die in the square, and I'm not afraid of anything."

Speaking next to an open window that looked out on to Tahrir Square, and which Badr insisted was left open so that he could hear the crowds, the 37-year-old claimed that many other officers had been attending the protests secretly in civilian clothes.

"Scaf is composed of 19 generals and they are the ones who have power in this country. But those 19 are nothing compared to the thousands of people in the forces. I demand that the field marshal hand over power to a civilian government immediately, and that he just leave," he said.

"Of course this puts me in danger, but I am on the right side. I'm with the people. If I die, I will die with a clean conscience. Either I will get killed in the square, or get

sent to a military court, then prison."

Major, Amr Metwaly added: "I have been a military man for a long time; it does not matter if we represent the Egyptian civilians or the armed personnel. But most important of all is that we are all from Egypt; we stand side by side with the revolutionaries and we stand in support of the revolution."

He condemned the killing of protesters as being part of a Western plot to derail the revolution in Egypt. He denounced the junta's stance against the revolutionaries and the use of excessive force against protesters.

These developments must be causing alarm amongst the ruling clique in Egypt (and its masters in the US). They know the Egyptian army is made up of different layers. These officers are very much under pressure from ordinary rank and file soldiers who belong to the people. Egypt has a tradition of nationalist, left leaning officers. We must not forget that the very popular Egyptian nationalist Gamal Abdel Nasser, who swung far to the left during his rule in the 1950's, originally came to power through an officer's coup. At some point in the future, the repetition of such developments, especially in the absence of any revolutionary party and leadership, cannot be entirely ruled out.

New government, old tricks

In any case the open opposition of a layer of officers to the SCAF exposes its weakness. In an attempt to win back some of the lost territory Tantawi appointed Kamal Ganzouri as new prime minister. Ganzouri served as prime minister from

slow down or reverse the gains of the Tahrir Square uprising. The poll was conducted before the events of last week.

Any regime needs a social base to consolidate its rule. The SCAF, however, has not even begun to consolidate its rule, and it is already losing the slim social base it had. It is clear that the fall of the SCAF is merely a question of when and how.

The Muslim Brotherhood

The most important ally of the SCAF in the last nine months has been the Muslim Brotherhood. The organisation, that was the loyal "opposition" during the Mubarak era, has remained loyal to its role of being the second line of defence for capitalism in Egypt.

In January and February, the party refused to publicly support the revolution which de facto meant support for Mubarak. A vast layer of the youth of the organisation, however, broke away and joined the revolution in Tahrir Square, openly defying the party leadership.

After the revolution this behaviour of the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood has continued. They have been firm defenders of the SCAF, constantly calling for "patience" and "restraint" on the part of the revolutionary masses who have protested against the rule of the Junta. In return the Junta has drawn up the electoral rules in such a way that the Muslim Brotherhood and the old remnants of Mubarak's NDP are assured a majority of the seats. As under Mubarak's regime, the Brotherhood's leadership will remain silent as long as the party is allowed access to the corrupt corridors of parliament and the state apparatus.



1996 to 1999 under Mubarak, but later on distanced himself from him. Clearly the military were trying to use him to dupe the masses once more, but this blatant manoeuvre did not work. As the news was reaching Tahrir's million man march on Tuesday, the crowds chanted, "Illegitimate, illegitimate!"

One protester Mohammed el-Fayoumi, 29, summed it up for The Guardian, "Not only was he prime minister under Mubarak, but also part of the old regime for a total of 18 years. Why did we have a revolution then?" Another protester in the square, 45 year old Fatma Ramadan, told Bloomberg: "He was the one who oversaw the privatization of companies and fired workers; he has many problems."

It is clear to all parties, that Ganzouri is nothing but the puppet of the SCAF. Appointing him resembles Mubarak's dismissal of the cabinet of Ahmed Nazif in the last days of January. Many of the actions of Tantawi in fact resemble the actions of Mubarak in his last days. He has appeared on TV on several occasions, making promises and concessions mixed with threats of chaos and terrible repercussions.

As for the concessions, they are seen to be too little, too late and as for the threats; they only serve to further radicalize the movement at the present. A recent poll shows that 43% of Egyptians believe their country's military rulers are working to

This has been clearly exposed in the last week. Whereas the Brotherhood, under immense pressure from below, had to call a demonstration on Friday, 18th November, it had no intention of following up on it. Over that weekend, where the army was violently attacking protesters, injuring thousands and killing tens, the Brotherhood publicly distanced itself from the revolutionary masses, going so far as to even discourage its members from participating.

Again on Tuesday of last week, as more than a million took to the streets, the Brotherhood discouraged its members from going to the rally. Instead it said that its members should focus on the parliamentary elections, which in the eyes of the revolutionary masses no longer had any legitimacy. And finally on Friday the party was exposed as a fully counter-revolutionary force, as it called for a separate demonstration in a deliberate attempt to divide the movement – an attempt that if it had been successful could have had fatal consequences for the masses in Tahrir Square.

The Brotherhood has now lost all authority with the revolutionaries. An indication of this was seen in the fact that Mohamed el Beltagi, secretary-general of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, was carried out of the square by his assistants on Monday last week after being attacked by protesters.

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LABOUR PARTY IN THE FUTURE OF NIGERIANS WORKERS' POLITICAL ALTERNATIVES

The April 2011 election has come and gone; and one thing it revealed as the major challenge before the Nigerian masses is the challenge of a credible political alternatives. The present state of things in Nigeria is really appalling where over 70% of the population live below poverty line, where over ten million Nigerians children are presently out of school and where over one million Nigerian children between the ages of 1 – 5 died annually, a situation where Nigeria ranked among the poorest countries in the world at number 158 out of 182 in the Human Development Index ranking of 2008. Nigeria has an overall GDP which is just barely the same as the State Domestic Product of Nevada, a state in the USA, which has just a tiny population of 2.4 million compared to the 150 million population of Nigeria. These explain why Nigerians are desperately looking for an alternative. But unfortunately all the present political parties and their aspirants do not represent that alternative. They all belong to the same Nigeria bourgeois political class who have plundered the country for the past 50 years and also defend the same interest.

With all this lamentable state of things in the country, a genuine working class based Labour Party had a great potential to be the biggest party not only in Nigeria but also in Africa considering the size of the Nigerian working class, which is 55.5 million strong with ten million organised in trade unions. But unfortunately the party has been abandoned by the people who formed it i.e NLC/TUC to the bourgeois politicians and thieves who now used the party for their selfish

means, making it difficult for the party to act as a genuine political alternative in the electioneering process.

The Present State of the Party

Nigerian Labour Party was formed in 2002 by the leadership of NLC. Since then, the trade union leadership has not done anything towards building the party, and making it a genuine workers party, to effectively challenge the other bourgeois party by mobilizing its members into it, but they choose instead to abandon the party. A striking confirmation of this was what happened in 2007 general election where Comrade Adams Oshiomole (former President of Nigerian Labour Congress), who was once respected by workers for leading some struggles in the past and who was also instrumental to the formation of the Labour Party, instead of contesting under the banner of the party for governor of Edo State abandoned the party for one of the bourgeois party (ACN). This obviously demobilized many workers who looked up to him as their leader from moving into the party, many of them defected to ACN especially in Edo State.

Expectedly, he won the ticket in Edo state not because he was in ACN but because of his record as a Labour man. Up till now, he is still being referred to as the comrade Governor, which shows that if Oshiomole had remained in the Labour Party and contested under the party banner not as Edo State Governor which he would have won but as Presidential aspirant in 2007; even if he did not win, he would have successfully popularized the party throughout the country, and the party

Rashy



would have become a force to reckon with in this present transition process.

But unfortunately, these did not happen and this situation now opened up the party to people who are completely anti-workers, people who have lost in their various bourgeois parties to come into the party. What happened in Ondo State is a striking example of these, Governor Mimiko of Ondo state who won the Governorship ticket under the Labour party defected from bourgeois PDP party, since then he has also become one of the national leaders of the party. These individuals instead of attracting the ordinary workers and genuine people to the party definitely repel them and this present state of the parties tends to attract failed politicians and careerists to the party.

The results of 2011 National Assembly elections are also another confirmation of these facts. All the three(3) senatorial seat and eight(8) house of representative seats won by Labour party came from Ondo State, with close margins with PDP contestants because ordi-

nary Ondo people does not see much difference between the policy of Labour Party as it is presently constituted and the PDP.

The declaration by the National leadership of Labour Party for PDP presidential aspirants, also means that the probability of the Labour party still retaining Ondo State in the coming election if the party continues like this is very slim. The situation is worse with the other elections, where in spite of high hopes of the leaders of the Labour Party, the party performed woefully outside Ondo State with nothing to show for its participation in all the elections contested.

Another event worthy of mentioning is the performance of Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) in the ongoing election. This party was formed less than a year ago and with no serious structures on ground but its performance well surpassed the Labour party which was formed nine years ago. It won six(6) senatorial seats in four states namely

Kaduna(1), Katsina(3), Nasarawa(1), Niger(1) and thirty – five (35) house of assembly seats in nine(9) states namely Adamawa(1), Bauchi(4), Gombe(1), Kaduna(7), Kano (2), Katsina(12), Nasarawa(3), Niger (4) and Taraba (1).

These confirmed the facts that Nigerians are tired of the present state of things in the country and desperately looking for alternatives, and in the absence of such tends to go for lesser evil, which is what they thought CPC presently represent. But unfortunately, CPC and all other parties including the Labour Party as it is presently constituted do not represent the genuine alternatives.

Way Forward

The present state of things in Nigeria is highly pathetic and extremely volatile; we are not too far away from Tunisia and Egypt episode. Nigerians are angry, tired and desperately looking for a way out. The solution to Nigerian problems lies not in lining behind one wing of Nigerian ruling elites or the other because in the last analysis they all represent and defend the same interest that is, defend the private ownership of the means of production, but in having our own political party. NLC/TUC have a big role to play because, only the working class can offer credible alternative.

They have formed a Party but instead of building the party to be able to provide that political alternative; these leaderships abandoned it for the thieves. They should as a matter of urgency build the Labour Party by mobilizing the workers rank and file into the party. That is the only credible and reliable way forward.

Free Healthcare Services – Nigeria vs Venezuelan Example

Oke Ogunde

The situation of the health sector is a particularly embarrassing one. On a continual basis, thousands of Nigerians continue to die due to conditions that are clearly preventable. For an example, more than five thousand individuals died in the later part of last year due to cholera infections, a disease condition that is highly preventable with provision of portable water; unfortunately in Nigeria this is a luxury to come by for more than 80% of the population. In the same vein, according to statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO), 800 out of 100,000 Nigerian women died yearly due to pregnancy related causes – this is more than twice the world average and 50 times more than the average for European countries.

Similarly, 1 out of 6 children born in Nigeria are likely to die before they reach the age of five due to poor healthcare. The causes of most of these deaths in the aforementioned women and children groups are largely preventable if the facilities and trained personnel are put in place.

More than anything we need to reflect on the Nigeria's poor health indices and unlike the likes of Dora Akunyili (former minister for information) who once denied the reality of these indices, one sticks on the side of making things better within the context of a philosophical stand-point that the health of the citizenry must be accorded the status of a fundamental human right. Everyone living in the country must enjoy a non-impeded access to universal free healthcare system.

In the private health institutions, for many of the patients, what they are confronted with is commercial medical practice: you get what you can afford and not necessarily what you need. The usual argument being that these private health facilities exist mainly as commercial profit making ventures.

The story is not much of a difference in the public health settings where there is a generalized infrastructure collapse



and unfortunately, revamping these is not a priority for those in governments. Rather than equip the hospitals with modern facilities that will be manned by well trained and well motivated personnel, it is always convenient for the powers-that-be to drum it out that these ventures are not within the financial capacity of the various governments at all levels for revamping. Meanwhile they continue to superintend over the stealing of our mutual wealth.

Presently, there no programme or projection that will cease to make many Nigerians to continue to be victims of cheap and elective deaths, basically because they cannot afford appropriate healthcare at the point of need. For an example, there is nothing close to the Venezuela's experience where, since the advent of President Hugo Chavez in the late 1990s, health has been accorded the status of fundamental human right, where all citizens and residents are accessing health at the point of needs at no cost. By the way, Venezuela is also an oil-producing country like Nigeria, deriving almost equal amount of revenue from oil. Venezuela provides an example of how to spend and spread the petrol-dollar income of Nigeria for the common good of the masses.

Talking about Venezuela and providing for citizens' health needs, the right to health care is guaranteed in the 1999 Venezuelan Constitution. Through imple-

menting a state-funded social program called Barrio Adentro, or inside the barrio, free comprehensive health care is available to all Venezuelans. Beginning in June 2003 through a trade pact with Cuba, Venezuela began to bring Cuban doctors, medical technology, and medications into rural and urban communities free of charge in exchange for low-cost oil. This programme expanded to provide a broad network of small neighborhood clinics, larger regional clinics, and hospitals which aim to serve the entire Venezuelan population. President Chavez appropriately referred to this new health care system as the "democratization of health care" stating that "health care has become a fundamental social right and the state will assume the principal role in the construction of a participatory system for national public health."

Implicitly, in Venezuela, not only is healthcare a right; it is recognized as essential for true participatory democracy.

Some of what characterizes this movement towards health care for all includes popular participation, preventative medicine, and evaluation of community health issues. Generally speaking, commercial medicine practice, as in a private for-profit system, has little incentive to prevent costly illnesses and typically operates in a top-down fashion. Doctors treat symptoms, and often fail to evaluate the larger picture of community health issues or teach prevention. After all, to prevent people coming down with illnesses implies less profit to be made from providing less treatment.

On the other hand, in Venezuela, the Barrio Adentro health system began by constructing clinics within neighborhoods where many had never been to a doctor before. Through this program, a community can organize to receive funding to build a clinic and bring in doctors. The community is responsible for creating health committees, the members of which go door to door to assess the specific health issues of their community. Doc-

tors who live in the communities also make house calls. People participate in the process of serving the health needs of the entire population.

According to reports, the extensive health program is also being used to train a new generation of Venezuelan doctors. The training program takes place within the clinic system itself and relies heavily on experiential learning. Using popular forums, medical professionals are able to respond to the needs of the community and offer education, treatment and consultation addressing unique public health issues.

Although the Venezuelan system began by focusing exclusively on preventative health, it has expanded to include emergency health services, mental health services, surgeries, cancer treatment, dental care, access to optometrists as well as free glasses and contact lenses, support systems for those with disabilities and their families, as well as access to a large variety of medical specialists. They have succeeded in taking an under-funded, corrupt public health care system and changing not only the quality and accessibility but also the mentality of those working there. Instead of a for-profit industry systematically denying access to large sectors of the population, health care in Venezuela is seen as a basic human right. No one is turned away, and no one is denied care; the system treat whole person, not simply their illness, and money stays where it belongs- outside of the health care system.

One US citizen who visited Venezuela a while ago had this to say of his experience with healthcare system in the country: "during my time in Venezuela, I developed a cough that went on for three weeks and progressively worsened. Finally, after I had become incredibly congested and developed a fever, I decided to attend a Barrio Adentro clinic. The closest one available was a Barrio Adentro II Centro de Diagnostico Integral (CDI) and I headed in without my medical



records or calling to make an appointment. Immediately, I was ushered into a small room where Carmen, a friendly Cuban doctor, began questioning me about my symptoms. She listened to my lungs and walked me over to another examination room where, again without waiting, I had x-rays taken."

He said further: "I walked out of the clinic with a diagnosis and treatment within twenty-five minutes of entering, without paying a dime. There was no wait, no paperwork, and no questions about my ability to pay, my nationality, or whether, as a foreigner, I was entitled to free comprehensive health care. There was no monetary value connected with my physical well-being; the care I received was not contingent upon my ability to pay. I was treated with dignity, respect, and compassion, my illness was cured and I was able to continue with my journey in Venezuela."

The example enunciated above about how citizens readily access basic health needs in Venezuela is a workable system that can be adapted to the Nigeria situation, where many still suffer on a daily basis from inability to access basic health needs mainly because they cannot afford the cost.

Not a Kobo increase in Fuel Price!

Continued from page 2

wage to N18,000.00 and 140% across the board. This is yet to be implemented nationally; many state governments, government corporations and private companies are still resisting its implementation. However, the naira has been devalued and they are already increasing the prices of various commodities and services. That is, giving with the right hand and taking it back with the left.

Devaluation of the Naira increases the rate of inflation and therefore increases the rate of exploitation because the actual wages of the workers have been cut due to devaluation.

What has been changing since the late 70s till date has been the value of the naira. The value of the naira has massively depreciated since the mid 80s till date. As at 2007, when the last increment in petrol price took place the value of the naira was about N118.00 to a dollar; it is now at about N160.00 at the official market and much more at the black market. It is said that it would go to as low as N200.00 to the dollar.

As at the time the minimum wage was approved the naira exchanged for about N150 to a dollar; N18,000.00 was equivalent to about \$120.00. At N200.00 to a dollar, the current minimum wage would be equivalent to \$90.00. In essence, wages of the Nigerian workers would have been reduced by 30%.

Workers' minimum wage in the early 80s was N125.00, which was equivalent to \$250.00 then, as the naira was exchanged at N.5 to a dollar then. This imply that the wages then is actually equivalent to more than N31,000.00 today. \$250.00 in the 80s is equivalent to more than \$560.00 today.

As at the time the minimum wage was N125.00 in the 80s, the price of a brand new Volkswagen car was about N5,000.00. All these changed in 1986 when the IBB started the implementation of structural adjustment policy, SAP.

The government devalues the naira and increase the prices of goods and services then hold down the wages of workers. The prices are actually increased to the level above the corresponding prices before the devaluation. The same applies to fuel prices.

The money they make from this crime is then used to pay fictitious local and foreign debts, and goes into private pockets of the elites.

If they are really concerned about subsidy why can't they increase the value of the naira to the level it was before devaluation? They would not because that would mean more money for the workers. They actually want to pay workers less in order to make more profit.

Today, over N3 trillion has been used to bail out Nigerian distressed private banks and more billions are still expected to go to the banks. These banks mismanaged trillions of naira but they were rescued with public funds. Of course, they don't call this subsidy they call it bail out.

Throughout the period of the global oil boom, the Nigerian masses did not see any improvement in their lives; they only saw pain and more poverty. The enormous wealth was shared by the Nigerian ruling elites and their imperialist masters who own the oil multinationals. As the global economy is now heating up, it will have a negative effect on countries like Nigeria as the price of oil is bound to fall.

In the face of any shortfall, the elites are bound to try shift the burden on to the heads of the masses. They are never ready to pay for the crisis they create they always push it on the heads of the masses.

Corruption & Failed Promises

To say the government and the Nigerian elites are corrupt is to say the most confirmed fact. The fact that the so-called cabal profiting from subsidy cannot be named today reflects this reality.

Since 1999, when the civilian regime started increasing fuel prices, an estimated over N30 trillion had been made and there is nothing to show for it. The roads are bad, no hospital, no power, etc, the country has been moving more backward.

The Nigerian masses have lived through years of failed promises. This is why the promises been made by Goodluck has no hearing what so ever among the masses.

In the past the NNPC was solely responsible for the importation of fuel. Today, it is big multinationals, associates of top government officials, etc. Billions of dollars are involved.

These are the reasons why the refineries are not working.

Deregulation a Failure!

The prices of kerosene and diesel have been deregulated since 2007 and today diesel in Nigeria ranks one of the most expensive in Africa. Same goes for kerosene which has currently disappeared from the pumps.

The real intention of government is to totally deregulate the price of petrol too. Therefore, its price can change without notice. This is the paradise land the exploiters are hoping for.

Only the multinationals and big time dealers benefit from this process. The masses are the big time losers.

Today, most of the fuel related infrastructures built in the past have collapsed – pipelines, storage depots, refineries, etc. The country is now totally dependent on fuel importation.

Since the deregulation of diesel no 'investor' has deemed it fit to build a refinery. It is on record that over 18 refinery licenses have been issued but none has been built since 1999. The contrary is the situation when compared with Venezuela. Further deregulation would spell more

disaster.

Fight Back!

No fuel price increase was implemented in the past without resistance from the working class, close to nine general strikes has been called on this issue since 1999.

It is unfortunate that the leadership of labour undermined this strikes. These strikes were results of pressure from the rank and file workers in Nigeria.

There had been several protest marches round the country against fuel price increases and currently it is clear that the mass majority are opposed to further implement. It may be the straw that broke the camels back.

The past strikes were usually called off by top labour leaders undemocratically without serious concessions granted by the regimes; however, the next fight backs may not be that easy to call off undemocratically by top union leaders. This is why many are quite critical of the leadership of the trade unions both NLC and TUC.

Independent protest groups are already being set up across the country. The global protest movements and revolutions would also have an influence in the impending movement in Nigeria. Top labour leaders will definitely be under much more pressure this time around. More unions are bound to experience internal conflicts as workers are bound to make attempts to remove corrupt and compromised union leaders.

The government and bosses have over the years invested heavily at corrupting labour leaders. However, in spite of this workers have embarked on struggles for better life and on many occasions they had forced the leaders to act.

Labour leaders have refused to involve the rank and file workers fully in decision making; they did not set up committees of actions round the country with powers to

coordinate the strikes. These are tasks that must be done in the coming movement.

Workers' Party and Socialism the way forward

The bulk of the problems facing Nigerian workers are political; unfortunately, Nigerian workers don't yet have their own serious political party that can take power and start addressing all these problems.

The lack of a political alternative will make the fight backs fruitless as those responsible for the crisis will remain in power and they will continue to impose their extremely exploitative policies on the masses. These are programs designed to make the poor pay for the crimes of the rich minority and multinationals.

Currently, the NLC set up a Labour Party that it abandoned in the hands of corrupt politicians who have converted the party to platform for all forms of opportunism. The party excludes workers and it is totally taken over by bourgeois politicians of various extractions.

The party declared support for Goodluck Jonathan at the last elections.

A workers' political party still needs to be built. Labour must reclaim its political platform from the hands of opportunists and open it to workers, youth and other poor strata of the society.

The crisis facing the society today can only be solved by the class responsible for the production of the wealth of the society, working class. Without the working people taking political power in Nigeria, the problems shall continue and get much worse.

The crisis in the oil sector can only be solved by the nationalization of the sector and putting it under the democratic management of the workers. This is opposite to deregulation.

In essence, socialism is the only way forward.

Egypt: SCAF-organised elections will not satisfy aspirations of the masses

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The Guardian correctly observed: "The leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood has declared against the protests. This has been a very bad move. They're perceived to have sided with SCAF against the people. They've caused a split within their own ranks: some members of the Brotherhood have disobeyed orders and obeyed their consciences and joined the protests. But the Brotherhood can no longer claim that the numbers in the streets are due to the Islamists – the numbers we've been seeing in the streets of Egypt since Saturday night [November 19] are mostly without the Brotherhood."

Unfortunately, some on the left who claim to be Marxists, instead of appealing to the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood on class lines, they collaborated with its capitalist leadership, thus giving them anti-imperialist and revolutionary credentials. In doing this they only helped to sow illusions in the Muslim Brotherhood and create confusion amongst a layer of youth. In doing so, they have also damaged their own reputation and also created confusion as to what the position of genuine Marxists on this question is. Genuine Marxists are opposed to Islamic fundamentalism and explain that it plays a reactionary role. It attempts to portray itself as "revolutionary" while in reality it defends the status quo, the privileged and the rich at the expense of the working mass. This is now becoming clear to the revolutionary wing of the mass movement in Egypt.

Need for a workers' alternative

If one thing has characterized the Egyptian revolution, in relation to other revolutions, it is the crisis of all established po-

litical currents and their lack of authority. The reason for this is clear. None of the big political forces today represent any real break with the past. They are all "liberals", i.e. bourgeois political forces, some of whom are trying to exploit their position of semi-opposition during the Mubarak era. The truth is that they were not genuinely against the Mubarak regime, but it was the regime that could not tolerate them, as it could not tolerate any form of opposition that might provide a channel to the growing anger of the masses. In fact many of them, just like the Muslim Brotherhood, made secret deals with the regime. They are essentially all bourgeois parties and are thus organically incapable of representing the revolution. That is why the masses correctly do not trust them.

"All they care about is elections and seats in parliament," said Mohamed Zinhom, a 28-year-old mechanic who was shot in the arm last Sunday [November 20] to Ahram Online. "They abandoned us and went to hold talks with our killers. How can I trust them?" Another activist said: "The political forces are the reason we're in this mess in the first place. They're all working for their own interests and don't care about the general welfare."

At the same time the left organisations, apart from those who were not already associated with the old regime, like the Tagammu party, have either isolated themselves through sectarian methods as mentioned above, or like the Communist Party of Egypt, focussed all their political campaigns against "islamism" and "islamisation". Instead of putting forward social demands and exposing the bourgeois nature of the Brotherhood and the other Islamic parties, they have decisively aligned themselves with the liberal "secu-

larists" and are seen by the masses more as "anti-Muslim" in general than anti-Muslim Brotherhood.

In fact, in one way or another, they all fall into the reformist camp, which means they try to address the problems of society from within the confines of the capitalist system. However, to think that any significant reforms are achievable under the present conditions of capitalist crisis is sheer utopia. The only real and sustainable alternative to the present society is socialism, where the economy and the state power are directly under the control of the masses.

Thus, not daring to say what is true, all the parties, in the final analysis, end up moving in the same direction, i.e. the defence of the status quo. Thus, the level of trust in the established political forces is so low that the activists at Tahrir Square have banned all party-political propaganda, leaflets, uniforms and speeches.

But this move will not solve anything. Standing in the way of the revolution are not political ideas in general, but the political ideas of the established parties. The main weakness of the revolution up until now has been precisely the lack of a genuinely revolutionary leadership.

Until now, on a national scale the movement has been under the influence of liberal leaders, one more cowardly than the other. What needs to be done is not for the revolution to oppose parties per se, but to build its own party, based on the revolutionary workers and youth. This must be the main task of all honest revolutionaries.

What lies ahead?

Nine months after the beginning of the Egyptian revolution it is clear for most Egyptians that the fundamental problems have not been solved. Unemployment and



poverty far from being solved are rising towards historical levels, at the same time it is clear that the state apparatus is still under the control of the counter-revolution that has no intention of granting the masses any significant democratic rights.

The SCAF, who has the backing of US imperialism and the old ruling clique, is manoeuvring to stay in power, but it has lost all legitimacy. The elections are taking place, but the parliament that will emerge from such elections will not have the authority the present regime would wish it to have. The problem is what is to take its place?

In a counter-move to the appointment of Ganzouri, the activists in Tahrir Square on Friday organised a sort of election with prominent politicians as candidates. On the basis of this they presented an alternative "Government of National Salvation". Heading this government was Mohamad El-Baradei. This would indicate that, among the activists "government" is

already seen as being far more legitimate than any official body.

The fact, however, is that El Baradei, rather than being the favourite of the revolutionaries was merely seen as the least useless among the politicians that people can vote for. In fact when El Baradei tried to enter Tahrir Square earlier on the same day he met such resistance that he had to be escorted out again. The situation amongst even his own supporters is not much better. A few weeks back his campaign faced collective resignations of campaign staff in ten of the provinces, and amongst these was Cairo itself. The staff was protesting against the bureaucratic manner in which the campaign was being conducted.

This does not come as a surprise. El Baradei was groomed in the corridors of the UN and the so-called "international community". Accustomed to reaching

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Support the ASUU Strike!

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This is one of the reasons why the workers are calling for increase in retirement age. In advance countries workers are calling for the lower of the retirement age but in Nigeria due to the economic crisis and uncertainties workers are calling for the extension of retirement age.

As the government continues to cut down funding for education, the children of the elites continue to travel abroad in thousands to study. Currently, billions of naira is spent on them by their rich parents.

According to the CBN Governor, Sanusi, over N155 billion is spent on the school fees of 71,000 Nigerian students in schools abroad. British schools are said to receive over N88 billion from Nigerian parents as school fees for their children studying in UK schools. Higher education is now an exclusive property of the rich in Nigeria.

Beyond the 'Agreement'

It will definitely take a lot more than the 2009 Agreement to address the crisis of education in Nigeria, as the reality is that there is a conscious sabotage by the Nigerian ruling class who are mere tools in the hands of their imperialist masters.

They no longer see the need to educate the people or produce more graduates. They are of the opinion that there are too many graduates already and they are not interested in creating jobs or developing the society. They are more interested in sucking blood from the people without giving anything for it. They no longer want funds devoted for social services like education, health care, etc; they want such funds made available to them to loot.

Therefore, a much more political programme and organization is necessary.

ASUU correctly identified the terrible realities facing education and Nigeria in their recent communiqué. This is one of

the best and clearest communiqué coming from a Nigerian trade union today.

ASUU correctly identified the class structure of Nigeria and identified the fact that the Nigerian ruling class and their imperialist masters are responsible for the crisis in education in Nigeria.

The struggle ASUU is waging is quite commendable and the entire Nigerian labour & youth movement have a lot to learn from them. Had the leadership of the trade unions been this principled and focused, the Nigerian workers would not be in the current situation.

However, what is at stake remains building a united front of Nigerian workers against the ongoing attacks on the working masses by the ruling class.

United Action Needed!

A joint action of Nigerian working masses and youth is needed to save education. ASUU, NASU, SSANU, and NAAT need to join hands in this struggle, as there is enormous strength in unity.

Currently, the Nigerian students' move-

ment lacks a national and credible organization. This is because of the hijack of power by rightwing corrupt elements that have nothing to offer. Today, most of the campuses lack independent students' unions in spite of the fact that students are on the receiving end of the attack on education.

Student activists must not only support the ASUU strike but must build up on the demands of the students and work towards the transformation of the NANS.

The NLC and TUC which are the umbrella bodies for the unions in the educational sector must break out from their shell and lead this struggle.

Start Building a Political Alternative Now!

The current economic crisis manifests itself in all sphere of life and there is no end in sight – both locally and globally. The only reality is that the ruling elites want the masses to continue to carry the burden of the crisis they created. They have no other alternative.

This is why the working masses must work towards taking political power that is the only way the problems facing the society can be genuinely addressed and solved. With the current arrangement, the elites will always come back to implement their draconian policies.

All the current political parties in Nigeria belong to the elite and are bound to continue with the policies of the IMF-World Bank. Even the current Nigerian Labour Party does not represent the interests of the Nigerian working masses.

Therefore, as the Nigerian working masses fight for their rights, they must also aim at building a genuine revolutionary political organization (political party) with a pro-masses program which is socialism.

It is either workers retake the NLP or they build a new party resting on the trade unions and the working masses with a socialist program.

Without taking political power, the crisis in education will never get solved but will get worsened by the day.

Egypt: SCAF-organised elections will not satisfy aspirations of the masses

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deals in the comfort of top class hotels and plush convention halls, he is by nature distrustful of the masses and clearly feels uncomfortable in their presence. His cowardice was shown in the run-up to last year's parliamentary campaign, in which he could have used the occasion to gather a layer of activists around him on at least a genuinely democratic programme. However, due to his distrustful and weak nature, and due to the fact that his aim was clearly to channel the growing mass opposition down the road of bourgeois compromise, he failed miserably and subsequently ended up disappearing from the scene for several months.

The fact is that this time – having clearly seen the revolutionary potential of the masses to overthrow the whole regime and the rich who back it – he will be

even more inclined to betray the masses than before. He will most likely attempt to portray himself as the "true" representative of the people for a short period before exposing himself as yet another lapdog of the rulers and call for "unity" behind some kind of "transitional" (read bourgeois) regime.

It is not possible to foresee in advance all the details of how the situation will unfold. A revolution is an infinitely complex process, with all kinds of possible temporary aberrations, figures who appear and disappear as each is put to the test. What we can conclude, however, is the following.

The balance of forces is overwhelmingly in favour of the masses that are confident and undefeated. At the same time the regime is weak, lacking legitimacy and in a deep crisis. However, in spite of

this it still controls the state and the commanding heights of the economy remain in the hands of the ruling bourgeois elite. The main obstacle facing the movement is to be found in the lack of a clear leadership of the revolution that is capable of leading it to take power and expropriate the old rulers. Due to this lack of revolutionary leadership, the movement will inevitably take a series of detours as it tries all the available options. In the process the movement will learn and move to a higher level.

The elections that were improvised on Friday's march can play the role of propaganda tool, but can in no way provide a way out of the situation. What is required are real elections of committees in the workplaces, in the neighbourhoods, with representatives being elected from the bottom up across the whole country, com-

ing together as a genuine representative body of the revolutionary people. To cleanse Egypt of all the muck from the old regime, to provide the masses with a genuine democratic expression what is required is a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly, and such a body can only be elected under the supervision of the above described committees.

The elections organised by the SCAF have already lost much of their legitimacy. The most advanced wing of the movement has correctly called for a boycott. But a boycott where people just stay home in and of itself is not enough. The question is: what is the alternative? Millions of people will vote in these elections as they see them as the only way of expressing their desire for change. The parties on offer, however, cannot provide that change. Furthermore, the SCAF and the

Muslim Brotherhood will use all the means at their disposal to make sure they get the result they want. There are already reports of vote-rigging and violation of the electoral rules.

The fact is that because there is no alternative, the elections will produce a parliament, albeit unrepresentative of the revolutionary aspirations of the masses, and from this a government will be formed. Sooner or later a new clash will take place between the masses and this government.

What is needed is a body the represents the masses – a parliament of the revolution. This should be based on revolutionary committees in every workplace, neighbourhood and barracks. Only such a parliament would enjoy a real revolutionary legitimacy and would have the right to lead revolutionary Egypt.

LASU Students Struggle against Fee Hikes!

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sale of land and land related charges. Land is precious in Lagos the way oil is precious in the Niger Delta. The list of funds coming to Lagos remains endless. However, in spite of the fact that civil service has agencies assigned to collecting government funds, the tasks had been contracted out to private interests in Lagos.

The amount required to provide free and qualitative education in Lagos is quite insignificant when compared to the huge income coming into the state and the huge waste pipes they go into. The state's overall income runs into several tens of billions of naira per month and hundreds of billions per year.

The impression always given is that there is no money; however, they never open the books to the masses. They maintain a high level of secrecy over the income and expenses.

In addition, Lagosians are the most taxed people in Nigeria; the state is plagued with multiple taxes that target the poor and less privileged. Most of these taxes are paid by the poor and low middle classes; to the extent that the slogan of the state's private tax collectors is, if you stay in Lagos you must pay taxes even if you don't have a job! The rich and top politicians and officials pay next to nothing if they pay at all.

In spite of these, there is practically nothing to show for the huge funds being extorted from the masses. Terrible roads plague most parts of Lagos with the exception of the areas where the rich live and do business. There is no water, no health care, no sanitation. Primary and secondary education have collapsed; most people have to send their wards to private schools, etc.

Hike unjustifiable in anyway

Currently, an average LASU students on the main campus pays at least N25,000.00 per session excluding money for imposed handouts, bribe, etc. Fee increment is quite regular in LASU and students have waged several battles against this assault. LASU also operates fleet of campuses, where students there pay through their noses for low quality education. LASU is currently said to be the university with the largest students' population, about 90,000 students in all.

LASU is said to currently generate billions from current student fees but with nothing to show for it as most of these funds go directly to private pockets. How can students now be forced to pay much more?

The funds available to the bourgeois populist regime of Jakande who set up the university in the early 1980s is chicken feed when compared with the funds available to the current Fasola ACN government which is actually in billions of dollars equivalent. Even under the military, when oil was being sold at less than \$19.00 per barrel, the regime could not even think of the current scale of fee increment.

Oil is currently going for over \$100.00 per barrel average. A major part of funds for Lagos State comes from oil proceeds.

Corruption, Mismanagement & Waste

As stated earlier, even in the midst of plenty, the government always says there is nothing. They are never ready to spend on anything that will be of benefit to the masses and move the society forward.

On wages, they say there is no money, on roads, health, education, social infra-



structure the answer is the same. On industry, they say government has no business doing business. What then does government want to spend money on?

There is money to pay top government officials and assembly men huge wages. The Lagos State top officials' wages are as huge as their federal counterparts. They too are earning more than the president of the United States!

Billions of state funds are going directly into private pockets.

A councillor of a ward in Lagos earns more than a professor in the federal university and much more than a professor in LASU.

Currently, hundreds of billions of Naira is being spent on areas where the high and mighty lives at the expense of the working class areas. It is on record that Lagos state is currently building an artificial city on the Atlantic Ocean called the Atlantic City. A loan of over N500 billion has been acquired by the state for this purpose.

Fee imposition will kill, not save!

The current attempt to impose these draconian fees would accelerate the death of education rather than save it contrary to what some of the proponents of fee imposition are saying.

For one, the overwhelming majority don't have the money and those with this kind of disposable funds would rather send their wards to luxury private universities or to institutions abroad. The Central Bank governor recently disclosed that over 71,000 Nigerian students are in Ghana and over N155 billion is being spent by their Nigerian parents or sponsors on them.

Currently, the total budget for Nigerian universities is put at N122 billion, according to the CBN governor.

The hike in fees is actually the first step towards killing off LASU as the agenda of the ACN government in Lagos is to totally hands off funding of the university. This would mean that the university would be funded by school fees com-

pletely. That wages and pensions would come from school fees. This would end up in a disaster.

National Students' Action Needed

Nationally, school fees are being hiked to unprecedented levels. The story is the same north, east, west or south; all tertiary institutions in Lagos have had their fees hiked. There have been several students' protests and some campuses have been closed as a result of students' agitation against school fees hike. Several students have been victimized as a result of these movement and several arrested.

What is needed is a series of coordinated national action against this major attack on education.

This is the time for students to rebuild their organizations from the local students' unions to the national students' union. This is the time to transform the National Association of Nigerian Students, NANS, to an organization relevant to the yearnings and aspirations of Nigerian students.

However, this anti-fee struggle will be strengthened with the direct support of the staff on campus. This is why all effort must be made to link up with the workers who also have a stake in this struggle.

Support the demands:

Oppose school fees hike.
For Free and Qualitative education at all levels.
For Independent Students' Unionism without any form of authority control and imposition.
Make Education a RIGHT not a Privilege!

SUPPORT THE ASUU STRIKE!

◆ Support the Struggle against Underfunding of Education

By the time the current strike of Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU, commenced on December 5 2011, it had been two long years after they had an agreement with the Federal Government. That was in 2009. The 2009 Agreement is actually a review of the 2001 Agreement.

Earlier in September, ASUU had embarked on a one-week warning strike and the union shifted lots of grounds by extending the period for dialogue with the hope that the federal government would be sincere.

Nigerian universities have been on the downward slide for years, same goes for education in general. Funding has continually been cut and the available funds are mismanaged and stolen by highly incompetent and corrupt managements appointed by the government.

Practically all infrastructures have collapsed in the universities, from the lecture theaters to laboratories to hostels to staff accommodation to morale. Thousands of able hands have left the system over the years. The conditions of service continue to collapse.



2009 Agreement (MoU)

In 2001, the government entered into an agreement with ASUU on various issues pertaining to the state of university education. This came into being because of the struggle of ASUU then. It was agreed that the Agreement shall be reviewed every three years.

The agreement was due for review in 2004 but that did not take place until 2007 and the final agreement came in 2009. This was due to insincerity of the govern-

ment.

In essence, it is still the 2001 Agreement that is still in place ten years after. Within the same period, we have seen a systematic collapse in education. Funding has continuously been cut, intellectually bankrupt management imposed on all institutions, fees introduced and increased arbitrarily, etc. Attacks on trade union rights continue, till date ASUU is still banned in University of Ilorin and the ASUU activists victimized there are yet

to be fully reinstated in spite of the judgment of the Supreme Court in their favor.

The major objectives of the 2009 Agreement according to ASUU's December 2 2011 communiqué are:

“to arrest the rot and reverse the decay in the university system in order to reposition it for greater responsibilities in national development;

“to reverse the brain-drain, not only by enhancing the remuneration of academic staff, but also by disengaging them from encumbrances of a unified civil service wage structure;

“to restore Nigerian universities through immediate, massive and sustained financial intervention; and

“to ensure genuine university autonomy and academic freedom.”

In the breakdown of the 2009 Agreement, ASUU did try to offer several detailed ways out of the crisis but the government have a totally different agenda.

The IMF-World Bank inspired agenda of the government is to destroy education in general. They are committed to cutting funding, commercializing and privatizing it, stifling thinking and creating an environment where mediocrity reigns.

Destroying Education

The realities of the day are collapsing education sector and a worrying increase in the numbers of uneducated in Nigeria. The number of Nigerians with a tertiary

level certificate is on the decline. This implies a growing reduction in the number of skilled workers.

The reason is not far from the cuts in funding for education and other draconian policies. Today, government allocation to education is as low as 8%. This is contrary to the UN recommended 26%. Even the 8% allocated is grossly mismanaged.

For the 2012 budget, education gets 8.23% about N400.15 billion; this is actually lesser than the amount allocated for education in 2008, as the naira has been devalued from N118.00 in 2008 to over N160.00 today.

Though there had been increases in wages due to the struggles of the ASUU and workers in the university over the years, the wages still remain one of the lowest in the world and is being cut via the devaluation of the naira and inflation.

Working conditions remain terrible and the tools to work are not available. This is why no Nigerian university is listed in the first 6,000 universities in the world. This is a big scandal when one considers the fact that Nigeria has made billions from oil over the years.

The pensions of workers are under attack; there are thousands of university workers, lecturers and non-academic staff, who have retired years ago and are yet to collect their gratuity and pensions.

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Support LASU Students' Struggle against Fee Hikes!

- ◆ Oppose fee increase in all Lagos State Schools
- ◆ Defend the Right to Education for All!

Ayo Ayodeji

Since the LASU authorities declared in October the draconian increment in school fees, LASU students have embarked on a heroic struggle against this grand assault on education. They have not only boycotted lectures they have embarked on exam boycott and mass protests.

The over 725% fee increment was authorized by the Fasola led ACN government in Lagos. The fees were quite outrageous to say the least and it exposed the true nature of the ACN for what it really is – an anti-people party making pretension to be ‘progressive’.

From the new fee table, the least paying student would pay N198,750.00 per session, while as much as N348,750.00 per session will be paid by medical students. Students are currently paying about N25,000.00. It wasn't long ago that school fees were hiked from N250.00 to the current N25,000.00 by the CAN regime of Tinubu.

No doubt this is another major step towards making education an exclusive reserve of the rich as there is no way the children of the working class can such huge sums of money.

Currently, the Lagos State government says it is paying N18,700.00 to the least paid worker in Lagos but has not implemented the 140% wage increase across the board in line with the new minimum wage. How can an average worker of the Lagos state government afford to send his kid to LASU?

How can the overwhelming majority of citizens of Lagos afford LASU, with factories closing down daily, businesses folding up, with the available jobs paying



peanuts as wages with terrible working conditions, etc. Unemployment and poverty is indeed widespread.

Education normally gives an edge to the individual no matter from which background. However, with these fees, the children of the working masses cannot have access to higher education; therefore they are sentenced to life of permanent poverty.

Is Hike in Fees Justifiable?

The irony of the situation is that those spearheading the imposition of these outrageous fees all paid next to nothing for their own higher education in the past, thanks to the struggles of the Nigerian students and masses that made tertiary level education almost free in the past.

For instance, the governor of Lagos state, Fasola also from a humble background paid no tuition fee in University of Benin in the 80s to study law. Had this not been the case, had tuitions been imposed in UNIBEN then he and millions of Nigerians would not have had access to edu-

cation.

The fees, said to be the recommendation of a university panel, is supposed to make the university financially independent from the state government. The question begging for an answer is why? Why should a government social agency set up with public funds, maintained with public funds all of a sudden now be made financially independent from government? Who owns the public fund? Whose responsibility is it to fund social services?

Education remains a top social service in human society that is why it is universally declared as a right not a privilege.

Social services are to be funded with public funds, which are the collective wealth of the society created by the working masses.

Lagos state claims to make more than N18 billion per month from internally generated revenue, IGR, and more billions per month come from the Federal Government from proceeds from oil, and from

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WHAT WE STAND FOR

- For an end to fuel price increases and against the deregulation of the oil sector, for the nationalization of the downstream oil sector.
- For a halt and reversal of all IMF/World Bank inspired ‘reform programmes’ such as privatization, deregulation, cut in public spending, etc.
- For the nationalization of the commanding heights of the economy and placing them under the democratic control and management of workers.
- Against the hypocritical and selective anticorruption crusade that has no real effect, we stand for the trial and confiscation of the properties of all those who have stolen and mismanaged public funds by panels made up of the working masses.
- For the payment of all outstanding arrears of pensions and gratuities to all workers nationwide and the abolition of all bureaucratic bottlenecks aimed at frustrating pensioners. And the abolition of the reformed pension scheme aimed at shortchanging workers.
- For Free and Qualitative education at all levels. For the cancellation of all outrageous fees imposed on Nigerian students.
- For Free and Qualitative health service for all. For National Health Service, free to all at the point of need.
- For a N52, 200.00 National Minimum Wage linked to the cost of living.
- For a Labour Party with a Socialist Programme.
- For Socialist policies in the interests of the working people. Labour must lead the struggle to save the society from the chaos the capitalist ruling class has created based on their economic and political policies.
- Forward to a Federated Socialist States of Nigeria as a basis for a Pan African.

9, Amore Street, Ikeja, Lagos
Tel: 08065438544
Web Site: workersalternative.com
E-mail: wa@marxist.com