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SOCIAL JUSTICE AND LABOUR ETHIC:

FOSSIL ANATOMY OF MARXISM WITHOUT DIALECTICS

BY

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ABSTRACT

Marxism is very much relevant to possible solutions to diverse global social and economic problems in contemporary political economies. With the dearth of actually Marxist existing societies in the world today, many policy makers have turned their back on the lesson of Marxism on political economy, labour ethic and social justice. The early Marxism is humanistic enough for human social, economic scientific progress as well as panacea for global economic and social problems. It is argued that Marxist historical materialism and its humanist principles without the dialectical materialist question is enough reason to continue to re-invent Marxism as a political and economic philosophy for policy makers. Marxism has taught and will continue to teach the world that a worker deserves a fair wage to satisfy his basic needs namely, housing, education, food, health – care and finally, the enjoyment of the fruit of his labour as well as happiness.

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INTRODUCTION

One basic assumption of this thesis is that Marxism is very much relevant to ethics, global challenges and corporate governance in both the international and local economics, despite the gradual disappearance of the actually existing Marxist states. Hence, the fossil anatomy of Marxism is the making into contemporary and global relevance some the basic theories, or what remains, if

Marxism in the face of the triumph of capitalism and liberal democracy. I shall first attempt to address the question of Marxism without 'dialectics and on the basis of historical materialism postulate the global importance of Marxist economics and labour ethic.

CAN THERE BE MARXISM WITHOUT DIALECTICS?

This thesis is like a walk on a very narrow and inconvenient bridge across a big river of about sixty kilometers from one end to the other. Trying to filter Marxism without dialectics from the totality of Marxist science and epistemology is just as difficult as walking across the river. Alternatively, we ask; can there be Marxism without dialectics? Professor Nkem Onyekpe first sensitized me to this question. He however denied that there can be Marxism without dialectics, but I affirm it for the sole purpose of excavating the ethical, social, economic and humanistic relevance of Marxism to contemporary world where dialectical materialism and necessity of history looks like an utopian fog. According to Marx, (1) dialectics is "the science of the general laws of motion, both of the external world and of human thought"[1] (2) "The philosophy of Marxism is dialectical materialism, in which materialism and dialectics are indissoluble interconnected"[2] (3) "Marxist dialectics examines the wold in constant movement, change and development"[3]. From these extracts from Marxist philosophy, it can easily be concluded that 'dialectical materialism is the necessary and sufficient law of Marxism. But much as this seem to be so, Marxism, I think, can be appropriately defined as the philosophy of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. As a science, metaphysics, and epistemology, Marxism is summed up in dialectical and historical materialism. On the other hand, historical materialism (1) is a Scientific, dialectical materialist interpretation of phenomena of social life"[4] (2) It elaborates the corresponding categories and concept which reflect the most general aspects of social development. These concepts include 'social being', 'social consciousness', 'mode of production', 'basis', 'superstructure', 'social progress' etc"[5]. (3) Historical materialism is the result of "the generalization of people's practical experience throughout history and the achievement of the social

sciences”[6]. It can equally be concluded also that historical materialism seem to be an inseparable aspect of Marxism. At same time it seems that history has witnessed either the separation of dialectics or materialism from Marxism. Dialego has argued: “Those who stress materialism at the expense of dialectics in their political practice will ignore the pressures for change steadily building up, while those how see only dialectics and neglect materialism inevitably overlook the concrete realities of the situation and the particular stage of the struggle”[7]. The problem of Marxism in political practice today is the tension that has always been between the concept of change and revolution (dialectics) and the humanistic and ethical goal of Marxism. Also, J. G. Nkem Onyekpe has argued a case against Marxism without dialectics with respect to Nigerian Marxists who allegedly failed to appreciate the dialectical content of Marxism in their nation state. According to him, “the concept of dialectics is simply about the struggle of tendencies that are fundamentally opposed to each other… the most critical problem of Marxism has been the failure by most scholars to accept the dialectical aspect of it. Yet the dialectics is the central kernel and essence of Marxism, and that is what qualifies Marxism as science….”[8] I agree with Onyekpe that dialectics is the Kernel of Marxism, but there is need to justify it only as an aspect of Marxism, that is, the driving force of history, but unfortunately the cause of inexorably ascendancy of human thought and development bordering on both futurism and utopianism. It needs also to be pointed that without dialectics and objectively non-warrantable future history, Marxism offers insight into our socio-economic problems of today. A dialectics of change, Marxism is a philosophy for revolution, a “natural and logical philosophy for all revolutionaries “.[9] Yet in the world without revolution, the world of global competition, Marxism as historical materialism, as philosophy of social being, social consciousness, mode of production and social progress and not as dialectical materialism offers insight into todays problems of economics and labour ethics. As a theory of social action, Marxism,

> *“as it relates to explanation of crisis, social upheavals wars, violence and so on, is highly relevant to Nigerian situation.*

> *…Although, a revolutionary situation has been in existence in Nigeria, its concomitant factor, the subjective condition, is problematic. A limitation of Marxism is that the doctrine of the proletariat, the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are highly problematic especially in the Nigerian situation"*[10]

The insight Marxism offers into the Nigeria situation as well as in similar socio-economic situations all over the world provides the labour ethics of Marxism without dialectics.

RESPONSE TO THE CRITIQUE OF MARXIST LABOUR ETHIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

If one reads the works of Marx one will not fail to observe that he uses the term 'exploitation' in so many places to pass moral judgement against capitalism. For socialists of Marxist leaning,

> *"Capitalism is a class antagonistic exploiting system as were the preceding, slave-owning and feudal ones. Consequently, it possesses the same basic features characteristic of any exploiter system. It follows, therefore, that capitalist society, similar to slave –owing and feudal ones, is based on the private ownership of the means of production and exploitation of man by man…*[11]

In contrast to the above alleged governing principle of capitalism, "the goal of socialist production is the fullest possible satisfaction of the growing needs of the people and ensuring the all-round development of all the members of society"[12]. Marx's use of the term exploitation against capitalism is suggestive of the idea that capitalist is unjust, so the controversy surrounding the term has been whether the workers are exploited, or whether exploitation means injustice.

Richard J. Arneson in his article "What is wrong with exploitation" brought out some genuine difficulties in Marx's treatment of the term. He identified a technical and ordinary sense of exploitation in Marx's work. By technical exploitation, he means the appropriation by a class of non-workers of the surplus

product of a class of workers and by ordinary sense of exploitation he means mistreatment. He cited as an example a feudal society in which the serfs are bound by custom to the lords estate and the lords bound also to supply military protection for the serfs. This protective services given to the serfs are paradigms of public good. “No doubts Lords often, perhaps always, mistreated or oppressed their serfs, but that they did so does not follow by definition from the relations that according to Marx, are constitutive to feudal society”[13]. Marx’s view of exploitation is a compound of ordinary and technical senses of it as shown above. It is a mixture of “historically contingent and analytically necessary features and so do not provide a near list of necessary sufficient conditions for the presence of wrongful exploitation”[14]. Two moral concerns are said to be used in Marx’s idea of wrongful exploitation. “One is the idea that people should get what they deserve, the other is that people should not force others to their bidding”[15]. But this deservedness thesis has difficulties, which Richard Arneson has tried to point out. He postulated hypothetical society of the disabled and the Robust after the incidence of Holocaust. The disabled have the tool and the Robust have not. The Robust make use of the tools and work above their subsistence for the disabled. The disabled are not capable of making use of the tool because of their disability. So the Robust have it as their duty to work with the tools of the disabled and compensate them in terms of “Comparative advantage”[16] The economic relation between them are therefore not marked by any overall inequalities in bargaining strength. Therefore the deservedness thesis of Marx fails to apply to this hypothetical society.

It is plain that the disabled can be fully as deserving of economic remuneration as the Robust who do contribute to the economy. In the society of the Robust and disabled, morally arbitrary factors should not bring about inequalities in the economic advantages. However, I believe, the challenges of today’s global political economy could sit back on Marxism without dialectics for a better understanding of the relationship between the labourer and his employer. Privatization and commercialization in Nigeria and Kenya, for instance, instead

of bringing about sanity and justice in the society, promoted corruption among the leaders and the owners or buyers of means of production who technically exploit their workers and mistreat them at the same time. The only analytically necessarily feature in the relationship of the worker to his employer is natural justice that will ensure right and fair wage for the worker. The historically contingent factor are born out by the opacity of ideology, the mindset of the capitalists and the owners of the means of production and distribution fully immuned and armed by governments policy of privatization and commercialization in a corrupt economy. The hypothetical society does not exist in contemporary African societies where exploitation is the motto of business enterprises.

Another critical issue in Marx is his use of the notion 'the products he creates' and the related notion of the 'surplus produced by the workers'. To the critics these seem to be unclear because the productivity of a worker depends on certain necessary and contingent6 conditions. The problem has to do with "The fact that what is produced by labour depends on the productivity of the tools and raw materials on which labour is operating as well as on the productivity of labour"[17]. Anersoin gives example two villages in a town. One is located on a fertile soil and the other on a rocky hill, quite unproductive. The people of the village with fertile soil cultivate the ground and give percentage of the yield to the second village which is incapacitated because of the rocky nature of their land. According to him, what can be said to be operating here is technical exploitation, and not wrongful exploitation. It is therefore argued that there is nothing unjust in the economic relationship between the two villages. Yet I think, the productivity of labour is relative to his skill and the sophistication of his tool. Again the surplus is also relative to the above factors, hence whatever surplus of any condition must be accounted for the employer and, a fair wage in view of this must be paid to the worker. There must be a fair wage for the worker corresponding to the necessary and contingent condition of labour and productive relations. Again the hypothetical two villages in question cannot be compared, for instance, with the

exploitation of the oil rich Delta region of Nigeria where oil is drilled without adequate compensation for the ravages of the environment to the notive people of the region.

In The critique of Gotha Program Marx contemplates two stages towards a socialist society: “To each according to his labour contribution”, and the second stage, ‘from each according to his ability’. But according to Anerson, a person’s economic ability at a given time depends upon what he has in the past to develop his economic talents. Persons may choose to develop in themselves needs that place greater or lesser strains in scarce resources and the nature of these choices may render them more or less economically deserving. Arneson gave an example of two persons with artistic need. One is cost minded and satisfies this need in cheap media while the other satisfies his need at extravagant cost. One cannot determine the monetary need of these two persons in the same way. Therefore, the ‘to each according to his need’ slogan is vague. ‘To each according to his labour’ admits of a paraphrase in terms of rights. Arneson says Marx’s suspicion of right constitute a verbal quibble. A Marx says that right can never be higher than economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby”.[18] what Karl Marx is advocating is not any general skepticism regarding right but an empirical claim about the prerequisites for securing them.

According to Richard Arneson Marx owes us an explanation of the role of coercion and forcing in his account of exploitation. The appropriation of an economic surplus by non-producers must be a forcible talking if it is to count as technical exploitation. The necessary condition for technical exploitation is that a product be produced whose deposition is not under the control of the producers. Suppose a number of producers democratically decided what to do with the products they make. We can have minority of voters who never are in the majority and who have the privilege of deciding what is to be done with the products they help to make. If it is true wherever there is democratic control of products it thereby follows that labour is exploited. Then this is a controversial

point. I think there is a technical difference between the producer and the labourer(s). The exploiter (producer) should not be in a position to decide for the labour. Where it so be, and the labourer earns unjust wage, then there is both a technical; and wrongful exploitation in the given society.

The power inequality thesis of Marx also raises a question. “Are lopsided inequalities intrinsically or instrumentally bad or both”[19]. If inequalities are deemed instrumentally bad, then why is it fair to forbid accumulations of wealth on the ground that these accumulations put persons in a position to take advantage of others if they so choose? According to Richard Arneson, “It is not in general morally permitted to forbid someone from doing something morally acceptable because doing it puts him in a position where he might do something morally unacceptable”[20]. If power inequalities are deemed intrinsically bad, this needs defence. But “if we think of an economic order as necessarily stamping a moral judgement on each person’s conduct in the form of the income and other benefits accruing to each person in virtue of his contribution, Marx deservingness claim looks plausible”[21]. There is an ethical belief that persons are not strictly deserving of praise or blame for anything except the quality of their intentions, which in favourable circumstances may seem to lie within everybody’s control. It needs to be clarified whether, “Marx’s doctrine of exploitation presupposes the moralistic picture of an economy sketched above, and if so whether this picture can be amplified and defended against other contenders, and if not, what picture doe s underlie Marx account and what features of it ought draw our assent”[22]. Power inequality. I think, is instrumentally bad especially in the context of economic realities of many countries, for instance Nigeria, today, the poor gets poorer and less powerful. Such an economic order prevalent in African continent necessarily stamps a moral judgement on each person’s conduct in the form of unequal income and other benefits accruing to some persons. Hence exploitation presupposes a negative moral evaluation of such an economy.

Marx and Engels condemned justice talk as mere ideology. They made a relativistic analysis of the concept. Justice to them never seems to mean anything more than justice within a particular socio- economic system. In *Capital Vol. 1,* Marx says:

> *"The circumstance that on the one hand the daily sustenance of labour power costs only half a day's labour, while on the other hand the very same labour power can work during a whole day, that consequently the value which its use during one day creates, is double what he pays for that use, this circumstance is, without doubt, a piece of good luck for the buyer, but by no means an injury to the sellers"*[23].

The word injury signifies an injustice in bourgeois economic system. Marx seems to be condemning capitalism as unjust, but in his relativistic analysis of the concept, he seems to be saying that capitalism is just to the practitioners of capitalism. William Leon McBride distinguished between justice within a given ethicolegal system and justice within the limits of a given system. It was for this very reason that they were so sceptical of talk about justice. So they could not talk about justice from external perspective. Yet, I think, the concept of injury' is the equivalent of unjust treatment in an economy characterized by inequality of income and power. This injury is present in the labour and power relations in many economies in the world today. The fact that Marxism points it out underlies an external perspective which explains the economic problems of most countries today. Beyond his treatment of justice and legality as ideological smokescreen, society presupposes unjust and unethical business management in most economies today. Marxism itself is a morality because it is a "doctrine about fundamental human good and how they can be realized"[24]. It has been questioned whether a Marxist can believe in human right when according to Marx and Engels upon the attainment of communism the concept of human right would be redundant because the condition of Socialism would have no need for it. Marx seems to me to have reservation only over the concept of right in

capitalist democracy. He has a concept of right which he thinks is genuine and realizable only under socialism. But which universalizable as labour's right.

According to Marx, the bourgeoisie produce ideas which dominate the system. It is believed that ideas are transmitted via cultural an educational institutions, public communication systems and so on, into the otherwise empty minds of the working class. John Mephan says that "the effective dissemination of ideas is possible because these ideas have a sufficient degree of effectiveness both in rendering social utility intelligible and in guiding practice within it for them to be acceptable"[25]. Yet I think that production of dominant ideas in the society by the bourgeois or bourgeois is meaningful without dialectics. It is not true in the light of contemporary socio-economic realities today like corruption, hunger, misery, unemployment that bourgeois ideas have sufficient degree of effectiveness in rendering social utility intelligible and guiding practice. Without dialectics, Marx would suggest that legal, ethical social economic and political ideas be produced by the masses, teachers and the workers.

Marxism without dialectics and socialist revolution stands for the empowerment of the people and the labour. The wage rises in many countries like Britain and in many branches of industries over the last fifty years is not contrary to Marxism. But according to a Marxist Scholar, G. Plekhanove, higher wages can go hand in hand with a lower price of labour power and consequently also with a greater degree of workers exploited. Plekhanove is trying to absolve Marxism of the criticism based on increasing interest of the government on the welfare of the people. It is also well known that some governments, like that of Britain, are practicing welfarism whereby the life of the ordinary man is catered for. It can be argued in the face of the economic realities of the globalized economy, that welfarism and reformist, policies on the global capitalist economics are a response to Marxist questions on production and labour relations in local and international corporations and industries. Clearly speaking, welfarism and all the chattered workers reforms in United States, Britain and especially n the Nigerian

portends' policy directions ostensibly to cushion the effect of privatization and commercialization and be speaks of Marxism without dialectics.

It seems to me, however that Marx's early writings which include among other things, the theories of alienation, surplus value, exploitation and so on, are in consonance with the natural law. Marx's attitude in writing here shows him to have the interest of the masses, the less privileged and the down trodden at heart. This is not to say that this theory of surplus value is without difficulty. According to schumpeter,

> *"The labour theory of value, even if we could grant it to be valid for any other commodity, can never be applied to the commodity labour, for this would imply that workmen, like machines, are being produced according to rational cost calculations. Since they are not, there is no warrant for assuming that the value of labour power will be proportional to the man-hours that enter into its production[26]".*

There are many theoretical and practical difficulties of this sort inherent in Marx's economics, but that is not enough to ignore the humanistic undertones of the early writings of Marx. In his later writings, Marx's theory of dialectical and historical materialism tends to construe his concept of justice and law as positivist i.e. the concepts of justice and law are class bound. "The state together with its law is the coercive machinery for the maintenance of exploitation of one class by the other, an instrument of the class of exploiters, which, through the state and its law, becomes the politically dominant class"[27]. As we pointed out earlier, if Marx meant to show that justice is relative to socio-economic conditions, then he is a positivist, but not in the Hobbesian sense Marx's type of positivism would therefore be that the concept of justice is neither trans-historical nor cross – cultural. But we observed earlier, that Marx may not have meant to say that capitalism is relatively just, but rather he intended to condemn it outright. If that is the case, then, there is no relativity and therefore no positivism in Marx.

CONCLUSION

Marxism without dialectics is very much relevant to global competition and political economics. It abhors the lopsided economic relations among nations, particularly in, the areas of exploitation of the worth, the resources and wealth of the developing nations by the developed nations through unfavorable economic policies from the center to the peripheries. It frowns at the international politics that aids and abates the yawning gap between the west and the third world. It deplores the international production relations which buffets the economies of the west to the detriment of the consumer economies of the third world. Above all Marxism is for equality of power among nations and against all forms of neocolonialism, imperialism, and cut throat competition.

Marxism without dialectics provides insight for the economic and social crises in the third world countries. It stands for social justice which prescribes that the Labour must earn his exact wage without ceding any part advertently or inadvertently to the employer. The labour ethics of Marxism without dialectics says that the labourer or worker must earn according to his basic needs it prescribes state control of public utilities like education housing, hospital, road network, petroleum, ports, and major industries and parastatals that cater for the immediate and necessary needs of the messes and the labourers. Hence it is against privatization and commercialization because it amounts to control of means of livelihood by select, privileged few and exploiters who buy over public oriented utilities and consequently pay poor and unjust wages to the labour. Nigeria is a classic case. Marxism without dialectics on the early Marxism is synonymous to humanism.

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