

ABSTRACT

Labour at the Crossroads of *Change* in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects for Rebirth

The paper aims at robust analyses of the current moment of (multi-faceted) change in the Nigerian economy and polity, as a context within which the problems and prospects of emancipatory politics for the labour movement, equally witnessing a revival, would be assessed and projections made. It is envisaged as well that the paper would thus feed into the ongoing debate revolving around organised labour's initiation of a rebirth of mass-based, long-lasting popular resistance.

The anti-fuel price hike general strike and mass protests in 2012 was the most sweeping popular resistance in the country's history. The immediate beneficiaries of this moment however, turned out to be the bosses' opposition parties that merged the following year, paving the way for the victory of an opposition party for the first time, in 2015.

The new "regime" which emerged on an electoral platform of change has substantive support, based on the promises of reforms it made and which are being expected. It has also endeared itself with its apparently fierce anti-corruption campaign. But, the collapse of global oil prices and the *de facto* devaluation of the naira has resulted in very dire economic straits which have resulted, amongst other things, in backlog of salaries being owed workers and the rampaging of diverse forms of privatisation.

In the trade unions a transition last year as well brought in radical leadership after a decade of relative docility. There is a palpable renewed commitment to "return the trade union movement to its founding principles". Life is being breathed into the Labour-Civil Society relations that had been merely on the drawing board for a decade. The first draft of a Climate Change Policy of the Nigeria Labour Congress was also drawn up within six months, underscoring the all-rounded quest of the new beginning now commencing.

On the central issue of political power and partisanship which could buoy or sink the current moment, there are sharp divisions. Should the Labour Party (created in 2002, but to a great extent since 2007, becoming little different from the bosses' parties) be "reclaimed"? Would it be more apt for the trade union movement as part of its re-radicalisation to birth a new party, drawing on the renewed vigour of labour-civil society relations, and lessons from the Labour Party experience? What possible strategy could be used to roll back the ruling "change" regime's austerity, and win real systemic change, through a combination of non-electoral and electoral means?

These are some of the key issues the paper would attempt to problematize. The ongoing rebirth of the labour movement cannot be wholly consummated without its challenging the hollowed change of the post-2015 regime, in Nigeria, with a view to system transcendence. Nigerian reality equally has to be situated within the global era of crisis and resistance. The paper applies Marxist theory to social movements. The largely qualitative research which will leverage on the author's singular privilege of playing key roles within the trade unions, the civil society movement & the party will utilise an advocacy/participatory methodological approach.

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Theme 5: *Political parties, alliances and trade union organisations, and political power*