

A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE TO THE WORKPLACE STRATIFICATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Inequality exists in various forms in different societies, ranging from unequal distribution allocation of goods and services to differentials in reward allocations and classification of people and groups into hierarchical layers based on prestige and wealth.

These classifications based on socio-economic standing are also present in the workplace like they are in the larger society, and have been explained from various schools of thought by various sociologists over the years. One of which is the Marxist idea which believes in a conflict theorem between the two distinct class strata leading to revolutionary pressures and an eventual change in the social order.

The paper examines the realities of the class relations in the Nigerian industrial relations system over the years in relation to the Marxist school of thought for areas of divergence and convergence and in order to draw up inferences of possibilities of the class relations in the future.

1.0 CONCEPT OF STRATIFICATION

Inequality exists in all complex societies in various forms. A good example is how prized goods are allocated unequally in the society, another is the classification of definite groups one above the other in terms of aspects such as prestige and wealth. Social stratification system bears on the social institutions that give rise to observed inequalities of this nature.

Social stratification is the term sociologists apply to the ranking or grading of individuals and groups into hierarchical layers, representing the structured inequality in allocation of rewards, privileges and resources. This infers that some individuals are more privileged than others just by virtue of their roles or group membership. The key components of stratification systems are:

- i) The processes defining what goods are desirable and valuable
- ii) The rules guiding the allocation and distribution of these goods across various positions of labour (e.g. farmer, housewife, nurse, doctor)
- iii) The mobility mechanisms that links individuals to positions thereby generating control over valued resources

Groups are therefore stratified on basis of in socio-economic standing, awareness of common interests and common identity. Members of a distinct class are graced with similar quota and types of resources.

1.2 Theoretical Perspectives

The common theoretical perspectives on social stratification are the Functionalist and Marxist perspectives.

The functionalist perspective: Functionalists believe that every society requires people who can be placed and motivated for certain tasks and that these tasks have social positions and duties attached to them. Functionalists believe individuals are assigned specific positions based on their eligibility and criteria and that positions not being the same means some require special training and are more functionally important than others. For example, a policeman's job being more important than that of a salesgirl at a supermarket will attract a better reward. The role of a supermarket salesgirl does not require the same skill and training level as that of a policeman and

without incentives such as higher pay and benefit why would a policeman take risks associated with policing while they could just work as a supermarket salesperson as well.

Based on functional logic, society has different rewards and these rewards are distributed based on one's social position. Therefore, social order is created which constitute of rewards and distribution pattern laying the foundation for the stratification system in the society.

Marxist perspective: Unlike functionalists, Marxists regard stratification as divisive rather than integrative. Marxists believe the existence of social strata with social interests promotes social inequality and exploitation in a system. Marxists are also known as critical sociologists.

The Marxist approach highlights conflict as a distinguishing feature of a stratified society. The conflict is between the two broad social classes with opposite status over the distribution of scarce resources and economic value. The two recognized classes are the Bourgeoisies or Capitalists or Owners of the means of production and the Proletariats or Working class. The scarcity aspect is important here because it yields power to the owners (capitalists or haves) while non-owners (working class or have nots) are deprived.

Marxists believe the great income inequality between the capitalists and the working-class is a result of the corporate elites' ability and capacity to accord hefty salaries and bonuses to themselves. According to Karl Marx, the feeling of deprivation in the non-owners will eventually lead to a class consciousness which will get accumulated and become instrumental in a fight for social change which could lead to common ownership/communism.

Marxists also believe the political and legal system of societies is designed to support the domination of the ruling class over the subject class. They believe the ruling class is controlled directly or indirectly by the capitalists.

2.0 MARXIST PERSPECTIVE TO THE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN NIGERIAN ORGANIZATIONS

2.1 Linkages between the Marxist Idea and Workplace Stratification in Nigerian Context

The Nigerian industrial relations space shares distinguishing features peculiar to the Marxist perspective of stratification. The presence of these key factors as highlighted below, which are in alignment with the key principles of Marxist idea to stratification makes an explanation of the social class and stratification system in Nigerian organizations from the Marxist perspective tenable. First is the existence of two distinct social classes (i.e. the capitalists and working class), then the class struggles and various revolutionary pressures between the two distinct classes, and finally Capitalists' use of the State's political and legal systems as an instrument of domination.

2.2 Workplace classism and inequality in Nigerian Organizations

One of the major implications of the modern organization is the gradual but steady polarization of society into two main classes, the poor and the massively rich. This is evident in the bourgeoisies' and proletariats' workplace classes.

The owners of the means of production and those in control of the system (business leaders and executives) belong to the bourgeoisie class, while the working class are member of the proletariat class. This scenario is not limited to Nigeria but the growing amount of resentment that the overwhelming majority poor (the proletariat class) feel towards the very few rich bourgeoisie makes her case particularly worse. Key features binding members of a class, in this case, are level of power and/or control over production and distribution of goods, consumption, ownership of material values, and income levels.

It is a common belief that this workplace stratification system is oppressive, with the modern labourer seen as sinking deeper and deeper below conditions of his own class, instead of rising with the industry. These beliefs have led to tensions and struggles arising from class inequalities and antagonisms between the bourgeoisie and the proletariats in the Nigerian context over the years. The struggles are centered on issues of how to remove the fear of perpetual

marginalization, domination, unfairness, and injustice in the working class and capitalist relations.

Other forms of observed employment associated inequalities worthy of mention are a) gender inequality in labour market in terms of wages and lagging representation of females in management positions, with very low level of female participation of females in corporate boards (21% in Nigeria) b) shifts in bonus practices which is now soaring among top earners and shrinking at the bottom, and c) educational attainment as evaluation of productivity, skill possession and grounds for higher earnings.

2.3 The Class Struggles

Class struggle applies to the contest or conflicts generated by the contradictory class relations of the bourgeoisie and proletariats. The struggle is not solely based on division by wealth, but also the process to equal collective ownership of society's productive resources. The struggle is part of the yearning of the dominated class for freedom, equality, and equitable distributions of proceeds of the effort they put into work in modern organizations.

Some of these struggles are revolutionary in the sense that they could act as social and economic catalysts with the potential to necessitate a sudden and fundamental change in the polity. These struggles may lead to the overthrow of the ruling class, compelling reforms concerning employment terms and conditions, democratic participation in industrial affairs, etc.

Class struggles have been inherent in Nigeria over the State's transformation from the pre-colonial to colonial, and then capitalist modes of production. The struggles culminated in demonstrations such as the struggles for Africanization of political posts, independence struggles, the Anti-Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) scuffles, and the struggle for the democratization of the Nigeria. In recent times there have been face-offs between the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) cum the people of Nigeria and the Nigeria ruling class over pump price of petrol and other aspects of bad governance.

The 2012 strike against the removal of the fuel subsidy by the government is arguably the biggest in the history of Nigerian strikes, it incapacitated the economy of the country for a week. The strike unified and invigorated the country such that despite the North East being the book

haram terror base, not a single terrorist attack was recorded the week of the strike. Also, some features of workers' power flourished, an example being the agreement that traders could open stalls at evening time to allow workers to buy basic necessities. The magnitude and potentiality of the movement terrified even the trade union leaders that originally initiated it. It posed the question of the working class in Nigeria taking power, even though it was not yet fully understood by the majority of participants in the strike.

These struggles are vigorous articulations of Marx's class conflicts when viewed from the socialist perspective.

2.4 The Ruling Class as the Capitalist's Instrument of Oppression

Marx argued the exploitation of one class by the other arises as a result of the emergence of the State. The State which is a powerful isolated apparatus existing above other parties (employers and workers/worker unions) in the industrial relations system is supposed to act as a regulator of these class relations through laws and policies that will represent the interests of all, but in Nigeria's the State has been more of a tool used by the dominant class to maintain dominance. This is evident in acts of the inconsistent policies of its executive instruments, such as the lack of political will of the government to review outdated and weak legal and regulatory frameworks (which are outdated and not in tune with socio-economic realities) guiding these relations, and the overburdening of the judiciary through inflated jurisdiction of some executive members, particularly the excessive powers placed in the hands of the Minister of Labour in the settlement of trade and industrial disputes as against the use of an independent judiciary, all in a bid to frustrate justice system in cases involving these two classes in favour of the dominant class.

Conclusion

The sequence and series of events of the class relations in the Nigerian industrial relations system make it very relatable to the Marxist school of thought's conception of social stratification. With the 'bourgeoisie/capitalists/haves' and the 'proletariats/working class/have nots' as the two distinct classes in existence, and the constant class struggles that present itself in the forms of demonstrations, protests, and revolutionary pressures of the worker/labour unions in recent years being typical of Marx's hypothesis of class struggles.

The indications of rising contempt for the ruling class amongst the vast populace of the proletariats and flashes of revolutionary pressures witnessed in recent years through labour movements, such as protests embarked on by the central workers' representatives (NLC) on national issues such as reduced subsidies and plans to deregulate the purchase, as well as other agitations that although was not initiated by labour unions, got their support. The "end sars" protests of recent for example which held the country by the jugular got the support of PENGASSAN and the TUC in the nationwide riot that looked nothing short of what could degenerate into a revolution. All these are indications of the awakening of working-class consciousness and make the possibility of a massive revolutionary movement in the future which could disrupt and/or re-organize the current social order if the deprivation of the working class continues to worsen in the hands of the capitalists and ruling class.

In essence, Marx's idea of an eventual social change and reconstruction of capitalist states as a result of the awakening of class consciousness may not be inconceivable regarding the Nigerian situation.

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