

WORKERS AND POPULAR MASSES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper will deal with the relationship between the organised labour movement, especially the trade-union movement in Nigeria, and the wider popular masses, through the example of the campaigns against fuel price increase. The campaigns, spearheaded by the trade-unions and which are regularly happening about every year or so in the country since the middle of the 1990's, and with more frequency since 1999, have always witnessed massive popular support. Key to the success of those events is the particular relationship that exists between the employed worker and the common people, mostly part of the informal sector, which constitutes the majority of the Nigerian population. The share of the informal economy in this country is one of the highest in Africa, and represented nearly 75% of non-oil GNP in 2003. This sector has undergone a real explosion in recent years, parallel to the development of the crisis and the implementation of structural adjustment policies which have led to massive lay-offs, notably in the public sector. Most of the dismissed workers, but also many salaried workers, have recourse to this economy of survival and "getting by". Whether through overlapping between formal and informal activities, or membership of community groups (religious, ethnic, regional or village networks), employed workers thus have contacts of solidarity, exchange, mutual aid or dependence with most of the popular layers. Their collective mobilisation concerns and affects, in one way or another, the whole of the population, which in its majority shares similar difficulties and is then rather inclined to give them their support. All the more when it comes to the highly sensitive issue of price of petroleum products, which directly affects everybody's daily life: higher fuel prices lead systematically to higher transport and production costs and then increases in the prices of basic products like services. So the mobilisation around that issue is a particularly interesting moment to look more closely to this specific class relationship. Our study will focus on the more recent campaigns, waged during 2004 and 2005. Who are the different groups composing that relation? How do they relate to each other? How is the alliance between them concretely forged and for how long? Those are some of the questions we would like to address.

Terms: Labour movement, Trade Union, Workers, Popular masses, Fuel price, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

“The construction of labour as an actor of political change is a process shaped by the relations between internal and international capital, union organization and workplace struggles, political mobilization and informal opposition. A multi-faceted analysis of labour, concerned with shifting boundaries between institutions and militancy, centralised bargaining and localized conflict, political and social alliances, commitments to democracy and defence of living standards seems then required in this regard. This analysis would expand the study of labour beyond its organized expression to encompass networks of resistant subjects produced in the articulation of forms of solidarity, social cooperation and knowledge across the factory-community borders.” (Barchiesi, 1997:211)

Nigeria has witnessed political instability ever since its independence in 1960; experiencing a bloody civil war (1967-1970) and a series of military coups which were only interrupted by brief periods of civilian rule (1979-83; 1993-94). The last democratic transition which happened in 1999 raised high hopes for a much smoother era of political and economic development. They were, however, soon to be quite dashed (Bach, 2006; Obi, 2004). At the same time as a return to some kind of institutional normalcy (with, for instance the holding of two series of national elections in 2003 and 2007), there has also been a renewal of multiple conflicts on every front. The best-known are certainly the ethno-religious ones, like the contentious implementation of Islamic law in some northern states, or the ethno-communal insurgencies in the troubled Niger delta region. But another of the major confrontations that has also rocked the country in recent years has to do with more precise socio-economic matters: the issue around fuel price increases. The conflicts that developed from it have highlighted the profound class division of a society where such cleavage tends usually to be overshadowed or underplayed by ethno-related or religion-related contentions. If the latter are indeed important features of the Nigerian societal fabric, the class divide has also its say in explaining the working of that entity. And this is precisely the question we are aimed to address.

CLASSES IN NIGERIA

A kaleidoscopic society

The Nigerian society is a very complex one. According to the most recent census held by the government in 2006, the country has a population of 140.003.542. When the last census was held in 1991, Nigeria's population was only 88.5 million. The United Nations report that Nigeria has been undergoing an explosive population growth; and has one of the highest growth and fertility rates in the world. By their projections, it will be one of the countries in the world that will account for most of the world's total population increase by 2050. Presently, it is the ninth most populous country in the world, and even conservative estimates conclude that more than 20% of the world's black population lives in Nigeria. And while Nigeria is slightly below average for the level of urbanization (around 48 %) it nevertheless has one of the world's highest urbanization rates (an estimated 5.3 % per year). 2006 estimates claim 42.3% of the population is between 0-14 years of age, while 54.6% is between 15-65.

The country has more than 250 ethnic groups, with varying languages and customs, creating rich ethnic diversity. The largest ethnic groups are the Yoruba, Fulani, Hausa, Igbo, accounting for around 68% of population, while the Edo, Ijaw (10%), Kanuri, Ibibio, Nupe

and Tiv comprise 27%; other minorities make up the remaining 5 %. The middle belt region is especially known for its diversity of ethnic groups, including the Pyem, Goemai, and Kofyar. There are small minorities of English, Americans, East Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Syrian, Lebanese and refugees and immigrants from other West African or East African nations. These minorities mostly reside in major cities such as Lagos and Abuja, or in the Niger Delta as employees for the major oil companies.

The number of languages currently estimated and catalogued in Nigeria is 521, including 510 living languages, two second languages without native speakers and 9 extinct languages. In some areas of Nigeria, ethnic groups speak more than one language. The official language is English, chosen to facilitate the unity of the country. The other major languages spoken in Nigeria represent three major families of African languages – the majority are Niger-Congo languages, such as Yoruba, Igbo; the Hausa language is Afro-Asiatic; and Kanuri, spoken in the northeast, primarily Borno State, is a member of the Nilo-Saharan family. English, being the official language, is widely used for education, business transactions and for official purposes. But, as a first language, it remains an exclusive preserve of a small minority, mostly of the country's urban elite, and is not spoken at all in some rural areas. With the majority of Nigeria's populace in the rural areas, the major languages of communication in the country remain tribal languages.

Finally, the population is split primarily between Islam (50 %) and Christianity (40 %). Muslims are the majority in the north and Christians the majority in the south. The remaining 10 % of the population adheres to indigenous beliefs such as animism.

For Nicolas (1990), those characteristics classify Nigeria as one nation in

“(…) the category of the great very populated nations, bubbling of life and contradictions (...). The most ordered institutions rub elbows with hearths of violence. The most various and most contradictory collective identities are hustled in a perpetual play of always provisional adjustments. One lives there as in these volcanic surfaces where a serious eruption is always likely to occur, but where one puts up with this threat. The Cassandre who periodically predict its explosion, while being based on the obviousness of explosive tensions, are constantly contradicted by “revivals” and other situations perpetuating a paradoxical consensus. This situation is related to a substrate of major crises.”

Each member of this society belongs at the same time, both simultaneously and alternatively, to a framework of several collective spaces, each one organized on the basis of a distinct polarization ordering from its dynamics. These various configurations of social relationships do not form a mosaic of juxtaposed blocks. They are ordered on a magmatic bottom according to a kaleidoscopic device, each subject being solicited by its various memberships or identities at the same time. Temporary economic situations can encourage one to temporarily privilege one or the other and to mobilize itself consequently. It must then choose between the different set of solidarities that request it. With each re-organization, it must obey the laws of the dominant configuration, at the expense of those of the other configurations.

Beside a set of four major configurations (the national, ethnic, regional and religious ones) Nicolas (1990) also points out as a first secondary polarisation the one linked to the socio-economic structure of the society.

“It opposes, on the one hand, the powerful minority, made up by the principal recipients of the system of redistribution of the oil revenue and the foreign investments, whose fortune are

considerable and lifestyle provocative (called millionaires, the 'haves', 'naira power', 'jet society'), on the other hand, the great mass of the citizens with low income, struck today by the economic crisis and measurements of rigour of the regime (the 'have nots', undertrodden or common men). This cleavage redoubles the older one opposing the powerful ones to humble (*talakawa, mekunnu*). (...) it nourishes a latent popular current hostile to the "plunderers of the national wealth", (...). It can also lead to peasant revolts (the Agbekoya movement in 1968-1970) or to "hunger riots", such as the anti-SAP demonstrations of June 1989 (...). The considered field is organized, in addition, on the basis of multiple socio-economic categories: regular employees, businessmen and contractors, market women, trade unions, peasants, etc, who constitute as many special interest groups exclusively attached to the defence or the promotion of their interests."

It is within this large and specific part of the population that can be found the motive force of the main socio-economic movements of the recent years.

The masses

According to the United Nations Development Programme, Nigeria is among the world's poorest nation, ranking 159th out of 177 countries in the 2006 Human Development Index. The Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics reported in 2004 an estimated 54.4% of poverty in the population, i.e. around 68.70 million people. The country had a GDP per head¹ of US\$1,051 in 2003, compared with an average for the least-developed countries of US\$1,328; and 70.2% of its population lived on less than US\$1 a day in 2003 (The Economist Intelligence Unit:2007, 16). The poor condition of health care is one of the factors responsible for an average life expectancy of only 47 years. Poor overall living conditions are another factor. In 2000 only 57 % of the population had access to safe drinking water, and a slightly lower percentage had access to adequate sanitation. Although improvements have been noted in infant mortality and immunization rates, the under-five mortality rate has risen from an average of 147 per 1,000 in 1990 to 200 per 1,000 males and 197 per 1,000 females in 2003. In addition, the incidence of HIV/AIDS has been rising. As of the end of 2003, about 3.6 million Nigerian adults were infected with HIV/AIDS, representing a prevalence rate of 5.4 %. Finally, the literacy rate is 68 % on average according to a 2003 estimate. In 2004 the Nigerian National Planning Commission described the country's education system as "dysfunctional." (Library of Congress, 2006:8-9).

Those appalling living conditions are shared by the vast majority of Nigerians. But this population is not homogenous. It is made of socially and economically diverse groups. The mass of the "common men" first comprises a large chunk of peasants: 70% of the 57.2 million-strong labour force is active in the agricultural sector², whereas 20% is in services³; and 10 % in industry⁴ (Library of Congress, 2006:13-14). They are the worst hit by poverty: two-third of the poor population is rural-based (Thomas & Canagarajah, 2001: 145). According to Nicolas (1990), apart from some rare peasant revolts, they mostly react by rural exodus to the cities. Then there are the workers in the "modern" sector, mostly civil servants and large companies' employees. A third sector is made of small traders, organized in local guilds. Finally, there is a more marginal group of "*Lumpenproletariat*" comprising former

¹ Figures calculated on a purchasing power parity basis.

² It contributes to 26.8% of the GDP in 2005.

³ 24.4 % of the GDP in 2005.

⁴ 48.8 % of the GDP in 2005.

peasants, unemployed⁵ and illegal immigrants eking out a living in the big metropolis. (Nicolas, 1987: 162-163)

“(…) in farming villages in 1990, (…) people lived in small, modest households whose members farmed, sold some cash crops, and performed various kinds of non-farm work for cash income. Still for most of the 70 to 80 percent of the people who remained involved in agriculture, life was hard, and income levels averaged among the lowest in the country. (…) In the cities, occupations were highly differentiated. Unskilled traditional work was more common in the northern cities but not yet extinct in southern areas. Such workers included water carriers, servants, women and young girls selling cooked foods on the streets, and hawkers of all kinds linked to patrons who supplied them and took part of the proceeds. The move to cities involved vast numbers of unemployed, who sought any type of work. In the modern sector, the unskilled were taken on by manufacturing plants, wholesale or retail establishments, hotels, and government departments. Such people lived in crowded rented rooms, often several families in a room with a curtain down the middle. They cooked in a common courtyard and used a latrine that might serve a number of families; the compound might or might not have a source of water. They barely managed even when their wives and children also sought work daily. Lower-level skilled workers in the traditional sector were employed in house building, and a variety of crafts from pottery to iron and brass smithing, leather work, tanning, and butchery. (…) Their counterparts in the modern sector were clerks, store attendants, mechanics, carpenters, and factory workers who had some schooling and had managed to get into the lower levels of the wage system. The two groups often lived in the same neighborhoods, although the education of those in the modern sector set them somewhat apart. Their incomes, however, provided them with similar amenities (...). The middle-level income groups in traditional jobs consisted of higher-level skilled workers and entrepreneurs (...). Modern-sector skilled jobs ranged from machine operators and skilled craftsmen to accountants; teachers; lower-level managers of service stations; small to medium-sized storekeepers, who owned or rented and operated a canteen; owners of a truck or two, or of a small minibus used as transport for people and goods; and the middle ranks of the vast public services that, until the shrinkage of the 1980s, made up more than half of the salaried jobs in Nigeria. This group lived in small to medium-sized houses with Western-style furniture, a refrigerator, and electronic receivers; the better-off had color television sets. Housing was sometimes owned by the worker but more often rented. (...)” (Chapin: 1991)

Whatever the differences between those groups may have been at some time in history, they were increasingly made bound together by very similar and difficult both living and working conditions.

“In the late 1980s, inflation and wage controls had drastically eroded the incomes of the salaried elites and, in most cases, they had to moonlight in the private sector through farming, trade, consultancy, or business. It was not unusual to find a professor's campus garage used as a warehouse for his trucks and the equipment in his construction business, and behind the house pens, where his wife conducted a poultry business. (...). The sudden decline in the income of the elites resulted from Nigeria's belt-tightening policies. (...) By the late 1980s, however, many of the elite and even the middle classes were being obliged to adjust to a lower standard of living.” (Chapin: 1991)

One of the places where this relationship is being tied, both at the economic and social level, is the ‘informal’ sector. The ‘informal’ activities are said to account for 57.9% of the Nigerian GDP for the years 1999/2000, which makes Nigeria amongst the three largest informal economy in Sub-Saharan Africa (behind Zimbabwe and Tanzania), and the 8th out of 105 countries in the world. (Schneider, 2002) The informal economy refers to economic activities in all sectors of the economy that are operated outside the purview of government

⁵ According to some estimates in 2003 the unemployment rate was 10.8 % overall; urban unemployment of 12.3 % exceeded rural unemployment of 7.4 %. See Library of congress (2006: 13).

regulation. This sector may be invisible, irregular, parallel, non-structured, backyard, under ground, subterranean, unobserved or residual. Informal economic activities in Nigeria encompass a wide range of small-scale, largely self-employment activities; and numerous areas of informality – environmental, spatial, economic, and social; covering business activities, employment, markets, settlements, and neighbourhoods. Most of them are traditional occupations and methods of production. Others include such financial and economic endeavours of subsistence nature as: retail trade, transport, restaurant, repair services, financial inter-mediation and household or other personal services. Activities in the informal sector in Nigeria are difficult to measure; they are highly dynamic and contribute substantially to the general growth of the economy and personal or household income. (Ekpo and Umoh, 2000; Kwaka, 2005) The development of the informal sector follows closely the general pattern of urban development in Nigeria and of economic crisis. Actually, “since the imposition of Nigeria’s Structural Adjustment Programme in 1986, informal activity has expanded from an estimated 50 % of the urban workforce in the late 1970s to 65 % by the late 1980s”. (Meagher and Yunusa, 1996:2)

Finally, adding to this pattern, there are also deep and ancient rural-urban linkages tying together those different sectors of the masses.

“Cities in Nigeria, as elsewhere, have historically exerted potent influences on the countryside. Among the most important interactions between rural and urban areas through the 1980s in Nigeria and most other parts of Africa were the demographic impacts of urban migration on rural areas. (...) Migration was strongly stimulated by the oil boom of the 1970s, (...). Since then, migration has waxed and waned with the state of the economy. (...) This process affected the rural economy in the areas of migration by creating marked changes in the gender division of labor. (...) The departure of men helped to generate a lively market for rural wage labor. In many areas in 1990, male and female laborers were commonly hired to perform agricultural tasks such as land preparation, weeding, and harvesting, which in the past were done either by household labor or traditional work parties. In turn, the growth in demand for hired labor fostered an increase of seasonal and longer term intra-rural migration. (...) Some of the most profound impacts of urban areas on the rural economy derived from the vast increase in food demand generated by the growth of cities. Both the amounts and types of foods consumed by urban populations helped to transform agricultural systems and practices. (...) The expansion and improvement of the transport network in the 1970s and 1980s played a key role in tying urban markets to rural producing regions. (...) The continued growth of urbanization and expansion of transport capacity were likely to be the major driving forces of agricultural production and modernization through the 1990s.” (Chapin, 1991)

So this is on one side of the class divide. What about the other side? What about the ruling classes?

The elites

The dominant classes in Nigeria are, just like the masses, neither homogenous nor united. They have three fundamental characteristics. They are highly dependent on the state apparatus; they lack any clear common vision or ideology for a broad social project; and, as a consequence, they have series of deep divisions according to personal, ethnic, religious and faction-like lines. (Ihonvbere, 1994; Obi, 2004) Economically they are also heavily dependent on the international market, especially when it comes to oil. They are rooted around “indigenized” foreign companies, a powerful state capitalist sector and a smaller private sector. The state has a monopoly on the oil rent and is the main employer in the country. It has been the main avenue for primitive accumulation of capital and control of resources. As for

the Nigerian private sector, it is made of a business bourgeoisie involved in import-export, trade, finance and gravitating around the state and the foreign companies; the top bureaucracy, its senior civil servants and permanent secretaries; and the highest levels of the military which periodically imposed its rule over the country and thereby got deeply involved in business. There has also been a phenomenon of integration of the leading military factions of the soldiers into the political elite via a starting process in retirement and civilianisation. This is a way to return to power by other means.

“This development has two sides. It is positive to the extent that it signals the acceptance of the military faction of the supremacy of civil and democratic authority, but it also raises the risk that the political process would be subject to the survival tactics of these (very wealthy) erstwhile practitioners of organised violence who may be dictatorial, impatient or dismissive of the complex and slow workings of the democratic process. Also relevant is the way in which they view any opposition, and the manner in which they contest for political positions.”(Obi, 2004:8)

The indigenous bourgeoisie has always depended on the state for its accumulation of capital. The colonial state had the monopoly on the purchase of raw materials and on the contracts; and it tightly controlled the development of the local investors. This dependence has remained during the postcolonial era: hence this class’ instability and its weak hegemony on society; and its dependence on the access to the political power rather than on production and investments. It has been “structurally divorced from production” and had no other option but to rely on “the manipulation of politics and the control of public power to facilitate a form of primitive accumulation. (...) competition for state power became a life and death battle. (...) *lacking a material base, the indigenous elites resorted to the manipulation of primordial loyalties – religion, ethnicity, and region.*”⁶ (Ihonvbere, 1994: 14)

According to Iyayi, to pass from the right to the capacity to control, i.e. from political independence to economic independence, the primitive accumulation of capital of the indigenous capitalist class was based on the government and the state, which became its core and its zone of reproduction. For instance it made legislative attempts through the strategy of indigenisation in 1972 to create an indigenous capitalist class by the forced transfer of the property of the means of production, distribution, and of exchange of the foreign capitalists to the indigenous or local capitalists. But to do that it required for the indigenous capitalist class to acquire monetary capital, which the Nigerian administrative and political class tried to solve through 1) the installation of institutions of financing by the government and 2) by using corruption, a method “much more important”, which “remained the major source of the monetary accumulation of capital for the indigenous capitalists”. Corruption is thus “the principal method by which the Nigerian indigenous capitalist class has attempted to accumulate the large sums of monetary capital needed to establish itself as both an economic and political class.” (Iyayi, 1986: 36)

This strategy of primitive accumulation resulted in the failure of the policy of indigenisation and “in the further consolidation of expatriate, international capital in Nigeria and in the further subordination of the indigenous capitalist class, and indeed of the entire domestic economy, to the interests of metropolitan capital.” (Iyayi, 1986:37) The use of corruption led to an enormous capital flight, which reinforced the dependent and neo-colonial nature of the economy through the loans to the international financial institutions. This process didn’t impede, nonetheless, the formation of an indigenous capitalist class. In addition to the small share of indigenous capital in the industrial companies, the process of

⁶ Emphasis mine.

privatization engaged by the state as from the 1980's profited mainly with the indigenous capitalists, who although in small number, started to form a powerful new class. But it remains "subject to the overall control, direction, and domination by international capital. A section of the new class of indigenous Nigerian capitalists is, however, sufficiently conscious and well located to want to compete with representatives of international capital for the control, direction and use of the political machinery of the Nigerian state to advance its specifically recognised economic interests. It is this competition for control, direction and use of the state machinery that largely accounts for recent instances of political instability of the Nigerian state". (Iyayi, 1986: 38)

THE CAMPAIGNS AGAINST FUEL PRICE INCREASES

From oil boom to neo-liberal gloom

Oil was first discovered in Nigeria in 1956 by Shell and British Petroleum, in the Niger Delta region. The Nigerian oil production started in 1958, at the rate of 6.000 barrels per day. The proven reserves went from 16.7 billion barrels in 1984, to 21 billion in 1994 and 35.3 billion at the end of 2004. Since a couple of years, Nigeria is the first crude oil producer of the African continent. The National Nigerian Petroleum Company (NNPC), the national oil company, reports that at the beginning of 2005 the country held 35.5 billion barrels of proven crude oil reserves, i.e. seventh proven world oil reserves. Oil has represented in the last years approximately 40% of the GDP (against 15% ten years earlier), 95% of the export earnings, 90% of the sources of currencies and 70% to 80% of the revenue budget of the country. With the restoring price level of the barrel since 2002 and the blaze which accompanies it since the second six-month period 2004, the GDP is but progressing, as well as the share of oil in the GDP. The World Bank reported that the Nigerian GDP reached in 2004 the record figure of 71 billion dollars, whereas it was yet only 58.4 billion in 2003 and 46.7 billion in 2002. At the beginning of 2005, the country held, according to the Central Bank of Nigeria, more than 16 billion dollars of foreign-exchange reserves, against 9 billion one year earlier, due to oil revenues. (Sebille-Lopez; 2005: 158-159)

Oil is thus the life blood of the Nigerian political economy. But while it has made the country extremely rich over the decades, it has yet to benefit to the majority of its people.⁷ This paradoxical situation which sees the coexistence of vast natural resources wealth and extreme personal poverty is usually referred by economists as the "curse of oil." In facts, there is nothing supernatural to what has been happening to the oil machinery.

"(...) the deepening crisis of growth and development since achieving political independence can be found in the constraints of the neo-colonial inheritance, in particular, the weakness of the local bourgeoisie and the instability and non-hegemony of the state. (...) oil wealth accentuated and consolidated the underdevelopment Nigeria. (...) the current problems of the country are in very many ways not unconnected with the massive inflow of oil rents, the low absorptive capacity of the economy, large-scale and unprecedented corruption and waste, as well as the enthronement of a mediocre and extravagant culture among the bourgeois class (...) The elites, in the traditional culture of decadence, resorted to

⁷ At the climax of the oil boom, i.e., during the civilian rule of S. Shagari (1979-1983), Nigeria boxed more foreign currencies thanks to oil exports (more than 43.6 billion will naira during these 4 years) than during the 21 preceding years of production (1958-1979) during which it gained a little more than 42 billion will naira (From F. R. A. Marinho, *Nigeria : A Regenerative Economy or Vegetative Existence ?*, Lagos, Nigeria : NNPC, n.d., 3. Quoted in Ihonvebere, 1994: 24.)

accumulation, not through production, but by constructing direct and indirect linkage to public treasury and looting it dry.” (Ihonvebere, 1994: 19-20)

A much better way to understand the process could be by using the analysis of the “Dutch disease” syndrome. Dutch disease is an economic concept that tries to explain the seeming relationship between the exploitation of natural resources and a decline in the manufacturing sector. The theory is that an increase in revenues from natural resources will de-industrialize a nation’s economy by raising the exchange rate, which makes the manufacturing sector less competitive. The term was coined in 1977 by *The Economist* to describe the decline of the manufacturing sector in the Netherlands after the discovery of natural gas in the 1960s. Traditionally this analytical pattern has been applied in such cases as Nigeria⁸. All the non-oil sectors have been neglected and remained under-developed, because of an overdependence on oil. Agriculture, for example, once the main sector of the economy, has suffered from years of mismanagement, bad government policies, and lack of basic infrastructure. It has not kept up with rapid population growth, and Nigeria, once a large net exporter of food, now must import food.

Oil dependency, and the allure it generated of great wealth through government contracts, spawned other economic distortions, as recorded by analysts. The country’s high propensity to import means roughly 80% of government expenditures is recycled into foreign exchange. Cheap consumer imports, resulting from a chronically overvalued currency, the Naira, coupled with excessively high domestic production costs due in part to erratic electricity and fuel supply, have pushed down industrial capacity utilization to less than 30%. Many more Nigerian factories would have closed except for relatively low labor costs (10%-15%). Domestic manufacturers, especially pharmaceuticals and textiles, have lost their ability to compete in traditional regional markets.

But it is for the common people that the fruits of the oil riches are the sourest. When the price per barrel of crude oil soars, the inhabitants of Nigeria, rather than rejoicing, grit their teeth and cry with rage. While government income rises, they have to put up once again with an erosion of their purchasing power. Nigeria, a big producing and exporting country, is obliged to import the biggest part of the fuel it consumes, largely because of bad management of local refineries. When it earns money thanks to the rise in the price of crude oil exports, it loses money in refined imported oil. And because of the inadequacies of basic infrastructures like electricity and water, and the lack of an adequate and functional rail network, the country depends enormously on oil products for production and distribution. Higher fuel prices thus lead systematically to higher transport and production costs and then increases in the prices of basic products like services.

To sweeten the pill the state used to concede relatively low fuel prices. But the international financial institutions considered this policy incompatible with the deregulation process, and have increasingly pressured for it to stop. So now the government justifies the increases by the need to put an end to the “subsidising” of prices at the pump in the framework of the new policy of deregulation of the oil sector.⁹

⁸ According to Mkandawire and Soludo, “in most recent attempts to explain Africa’s performance with growth and investment regressions, studies find that inaccessible location, poor port facilities, and the “Dutch Disease” syndrome, caused by large natural-resource endowments, constitute serious impediments to investment and growth” (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999: 3). But recently, some analysts have argued otherwise, in the case of Nigeria. See Budina et alii (2007).

⁹ G. Fawehinmi, relying on a comprehensive breakdown of the cost of producing one litre of petrol, argues that “there has never been an oil subsidy”, as this has always been “pleaded as a swarm-son refrain – one of their

The Nigerian state had long been engaged in IMF-inspired economic policies.¹⁰ In the mid-1980s, to face the deepening crisis of its distorted, oil-dependent economy (collapse of international oil prices, chronic over-indebtedness and financial mismanagement of the state), the Babangida military government adopted the first full-packaged structural adjustment program advocated by the IMF as a new development strategy. One of the main objectives of SAP was to pursue deregulation and privatization policies, leading to removal of subsidies, reduction in wage bills and the retrenchment of the public sector in order to trim the state down to size (Igbuzor, 2003: 4). Policies were implemented such as the abolition of price-fixing agricultural boards, banking deregulation, partial liberalisation of the exchange rate. With the return of a civilian regime in 1999, the drive to privatization, and therefore to reducing of the perceived subsidies and increase of the prices, has been even more intense.

During the last eight years of civilian power, there have been almost as many increases (or attempts of) of prices of petroleum products as during the twenty years period of time since the first hike in 1978 (which was operated, already at that time, by an Obasanjo-led military government)¹¹. But each time, it was met with a renewed resistance from civil society, particularly the labour unions, which vigorously opposed what they regarded as anti-people policies.

2004: fuel prices hikes and working class strikes

The year 2004 was particularly acute of such class confrontations, with the state and its ruling elite custodians supported by the “invisible hand” of the international market on the one hand, and the exploited and oppressed masses on the other.

“The subsequent face-off between labour and the state has led to disruptions in the economy following nation-wide strikes, prolonged tension between state and civil society, and a seeming disjuncture between “political opening” and “economic closure” in which most Nigerians are owning less, and fewer Nigerians and their foreign partners are buying over state assets. In the process, considerations of profit and efficiency appear to be overtaking those of social welfare and provisioning, equity and access, without any viable structures and processes for absorbing the resultant shocks and stresses in the system.” (Obi, 2004:1-2)

It had been preceded just the year before in June 2003 by one of the most violent of such confrontation when the government had announced around + 50% increase from 26 nairas (N) to N40 (*Marchés Tropicaux*, July 2003). The strike had begun on June 30 and lasted for eight days; with the police violently repressing the movement and 12 live lost (*BBC News online*, June 2004). It had a final cost of more than N100 billions (*Libération*, June 2004). The protests against fuel prices hikes, spearheaded by the Nigerian Labour Congress throughout 2004 also shed new light, based on class lined understanding, on the ethno-regional conflict in the country.

The year began with an “unfathomable New Year gift from the president”, when the government announced a new N1.50 fuel tax. After a 14-days ultimatum, the Nigerian Labour

concocted and illogical reasons for increasing the petrol price. (...) Rather each time the price of petrol is increased, the people are being made to subsidise general corruption in the economy and particularly in the mismanagement of the oil sector” (G. Fawehinmi, 2002:41,61)

¹⁰ See World Bank (2002); Igbuzor (2003).

¹¹ There were 8 such moves between 1998 and 2007, compared to 9 ones between 1978 and 1998. Figures taken from Fawehinmi (2002: 29-30) and from a personal review of local and international newspapers.

Congress (NLC), the largest confederation, embarked on a 1-day strike on January 21, until the Federal Appeal Court of Abuja ordered both the government to suspend the tax and the NLC its strike. It had consisted in a stay-at-home protest, by which the labour leaders had called the labouring population to stay out of work. The labour leaders had added to their demands, besides the removal of the tax, that the government begun to phase out importation of fuel products in favour of local refining; that it stopped arbitrary fees in all schools; and all moves to sack 40% of public service workers. They had planned to organise mass meetings and rallies to discuss “how to make the strike successful”. Newspapers reported stories of how a student would have found herself running out of money in the course of a daily taxi trip or how a clerical officer in manufacturing company would have resorted to trekking back home because of the sudden increases of fares to accommodate the new tax. The press was mostly sympathetic to the daily plight of the common people who blamed the president; highly critical towards the government accused of behaving in an autocratic manner with a “disdain for legislature”; and friendly urging the NLC to find other means than striking. The government tried to defend its measure by arguing that the tax was meant to fund road maintenance, but it was made to back-pedal in what was described as a “humiliation” in the face of general disapprobation. It was a “sweet” symbolic victory for the labour leaders. (*The Guardian*, January 21, 2004; *Newswatch*, January 26, 2004; *Newswatch*, February 2, 2004)

Then in late May, Nigerian people had another increase in prices of petroleum products which went from around N40 to N50. The NLC, joined by Trade Union Congress (TUC), and the Confederation of Free Trade Unions (CFTU) reacted swiftly by calling for a 21-day strike from early June. The call was also backed by pro-Niger Delta organisations who asked foreign oil workers to leave the region. The strike went ahead despite a court ruling ordering trade unions to stand down, and instructing the government to cut petrol prices to previous levels. The government had said it would comply, but this had not mollified the unions which had replied that the strike would continue until there was evidence that the cost of petrol was actually coming down. The two major oil unions, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN) and the blue-collar National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG), took part in the strike. They were threatening to shut down oil terminals and rigs, leading to concerns that the work stoppage could sharply curtail oil exports. Oil multinationals announced they had put in place contingency plans to ensure oil shipments would continue as normal. As the conflict finally settled down after three days of action, the British-Dutch oil giant, responding to an independent report, acknowledged that its business activities “inadvertently” fed the conflict in the Niger Delta. (*Nigerian Tribune*, June, 7 2004 ; *BBC News* online, June 8, 2004; *Jeune Afrique l’Intelligent* online, 8 juin et 11 juin 2004; *CNN* online, June 9 and 11, 2004 ; *Libération*, 11 juin 2004 ; *Le Monde*, 12 juin 2004 ; *Newswatch*, June 14 and 21, 2004)

Finally, in the autumn, a third set of working class based struggle developed around the issue of oil and fuel price, at a time when the global oil community was facing continuing problems in Iraq and contracted petrol supplies offered by Saudi Arabia and other OPEC countries, and in a situation rendered still more sensitive by the damage caused by Hurricane Ivan in the Gulf of Mexico. On October 7 oil workers across the nation initiated a two-day walkout to protest against rising fuel prices. They had been raised by +22% from N40 to between N52 and N60. The next day the walkout ended and world oil supplies were not noticeably disrupted and prices remained stable (at around USD\$52.97 a barrel). The leader of the NLC was reportedly arrested by the men of the State Security Service on October 9 and kept in custody the all day long. The NLC and its allies then threatened a general strike which could have had far worse effects than the previous walkout had done. On October 12, the

general strike was carried out. For the next four days, workers for the corporations refused to show up for work in a massive protest about skyrocketing fuel prices. The strike was suspended on October 15, but gave another two-week notice to the government. By the end of the day on Friday, oil prices had shot up to USD\$55. (*The Vanguard*, October 3 and 6, 2004; *The Guardian*, October 11 and 14, 2004)

So twelve days after the end of the strike, on October 27 the NLC threatened to hold another general strike as early as November 4 to protest against the massive poverty the nation was suffering despite huge revenues from the vast oil supply. It then pushed the strike to November 16, threatening that the new strike would be indefinite, unlike the four day walkout in October. On November 1 Shell failed to prevent its employees from beginning a strike of their own. The workers union was taken to court to prevent further action. On November 9 the Nigerian government issued a statement saying that workers who joined the strike might be fired, and unable to regain their old jobs. The NLC stated they would not give in to pressure. The next day Brown Ogbeifun, the president of the PENGASSAN, the largest white-collar union, said that his organization would join the blue-collar workers in their strike on the 16th, and threatened sanctions against any branch of the organization which did not go on strike. On November 15, the Nigerian government finally agreed to lower domestic oil prices in a major concession to the unions. The NLC suspended the strike set for the 16th, after the government backed down in ridicule again, with a NLC spokesperson saying the goal was “to give the government a chance”, (*The Associated Press*, November 1 and 15, 2004; *The Guardian*, November 17, 2004; *The Vanguard*, November 19)

This last sequence of events was even more problematic for the government because at the same period it was also facing renewed ethno-regional insurgencies in the Niger Delta (*Reuters*, October, November and December 2004). But what is the most is the number of similarities between the late 2004 conundrum of struggles and the 1994 wave of strikes and democratic struggles. In both cases there were massive popular movements spearheaded by the working class and putting in conjunction several economic, social and political dynamic at the regional, national and international level¹². Although the political periods (from a military junta to a civilian democratically elected rule) and the outcomes rather different in quality and degree¹³, in those two occurrences the organised working class movement has been leading the mass struggles of the people against the state, and managed to weaken it.

A WORKING CLASS LEADERSHIP

Strengths and impact

In putting their fingers on the highly sensitive question of the management of oil revenues, the trade unions have become over the last decade to be seen as the only real political opposition to the government (*IRIN*, 2004). If the unions are generally in a situation of having such an impact (and this has been the case one way or the other since 1999) it is less by their size than by their particularly strategic political, social and economic position in the

¹² For a detailed analysis of the 1994 oil worker strike – and corresponding argument about the connections between the working class struggle, the political instability and the ethno-regional conflict, see Aborisade and Onyeonuru (1998).

¹³ In 1994 the movement almost brought down the ferocious dictatorship of S. Abacha to its knee before being of savagely repressed; while in 2004 if Obasanjo was also able to strike back at the trade-unions, especially through the 2005 trade-union bill, he didn't succeed in taming them. See subsequent development.

Nigerian context. Certainly, with its three big confederations – the most significant, the NLC has, according to its own figures, 29 affiliated unions and 4 million members – the Nigerian union movement is far from being negligible. But what really gives it strength is both its central economic position and its implantation in diverse strata of society. On the one hand the workers in the oil sector, organised either in the NUPENG, or the PENGASSAN, have their hands on the main tap of the country's economy. They alone can unleash a general strike. On the other hand there are these multiple links (social, economic, familial, ethnic and so on) which unite wage earners with the rest of the population. As sketched in our first part analysing the class composition of the country, whether through overlapping between formal and informal activities, or membership of community groups (religious, ethnic, regional or village networks), workers thus have contacts of solidarity, exchange, mutual aid or dependence with most of the popular layers. Their collective mobilisation thus concerns and affects, in one way or another, the whole of the population, which in its majority shares similar difficulties and is, then rather inclined to give them their support (Barchiesi, 1997:187).

Trade union mobilisations take on a political character both objectively and subjectively. First, as the state is still the country's main employer, each mobilisation of public sector puts workers in direct confrontation with the government and each struggle thus has a strong political dimension. But the trade union movement has always made more or less explicit political demands. From the outset, the first Nigerian trade unions (which date from the 1910s and which developed first in the public sector) opposed the state politically under conditions of a colonial domination which institutionalised racial discrimination. The first wage demands targeted systematically the differences in treatment between white and black employees and were a first form of political resistance to the colonial order, even if they were mostly expressed in rather moderate and conciliatory terms. At the same time that economic concessions were made here and there the colonial authorities were often obliged to concede more political freedoms, under pain of seeing the strike movements take on too radical a turn. Thus the strike in 1920 of carpenters in the Nigerian Mechanics Union, which extended to the entire protectorate of Lagos, had as direct political consequence the formation of a new legislative council including this time the indigenous delegates. Three years later in 1923 the first Nigerian political party, the Nigerian Democratic Party, was founded.

From 1945, the trade union movement acquired a more distinctly political dimension with the emergence of the anti-colonialist nationalist movement. It was in that year that the first general strike in the country's history took place: for more than six weeks 43,000 workers in "essential" economic and administrative services went on strike for wage increases. Two years later, the first constitutional reform, establishing the bases of a tripartite regionalism which would fundamentally deform the political development of the country, was adopted. But it was some years later, in 1949, following the bloody repression of a miners' strike movement in the east of the country in Enugu, that trade union agitation and anti-colonial politics reached its apogee with the demand for an immediate autonomous government. After the independence, obtained in 1960, the trade unions would again play a prominent role in a certain number of significant political developments. In 1964 for example a new two week general strike won wage revisions and for a time a real inter-ethnic workers' solidarity existed, in a context of growing political and institutional crisis which would lead to civil war in 1967. But the trade union movement's relationship to politics and political power was also shaped by specific developments in the political history of the country – especially with regards to the history of its state – and which have strongly influenced it.

A troubled political history

The Nigerian elites had inherited a state built by the colonial power with the sole aim of exploiting the country and controlling its people, without challenging its bases. But the contradictions of a colonial state artificially built on the arbitrary unification of territories and peoples as diverse as varied complicated the nationalist project of the new Nigerian ruling class, as it was unable to maintain within itself the initial consensus. Its different sections tore each other apart in the struggle for control of the state apparatus, the main instrument of political and economic power, which determines the sharing out of the means of primitive accumulation. This intestine war would virtually lead to the collapse of the Nigerian entity, through the experience of a long and costly civil war. At this time a new ruling actor appeared: the army, and more specifically the top (initially middle) military hierarchy. In a process of a Bonaparte's type, this new actor "reconciliated" the ruling classes in conflict, and re-founded the nationalist project. Posing as an arbiter and rallying the support of a majority of the social, political and community groupings of the country (including the trade-unions), the army would lead and win the war against the Biafra secession and rebuild the state on the basis of a consensus which established the hegemony of the centre (the federal government and the centralised state apparatus) and its control over the oil resources which became the essential and indispensable fuel of state and national development.

But from the mid-1980s, the machine began to seize up. The world crisis struck the dependent countries of the South more harshly and sapped the economic bases of the nationalist project, already deeply damaged by the rapacity of the Nigerian ruling classes. The formidable level of corruption which infected the whole system was for a while contained by the arbitrage of the military, but they quickly got stuck into the process themselves. The nationalist model had failed.¹⁴ This period saw the beginning of the implementation of the first structural adjustment plans, local version, in 1986. The trade union movement was hard hit by this turn of events. If at the political level the alliance with the nationalist leaders quickly turned sour once independence had been obtained, the unions had nonetheless taken part in a certain fashion in the nationalist project by defending the underlying ideological perspectives of development and of the national "interest"¹⁵. Two main tendencies had traditionally disputed the leadership of this movement: a trade-unionism of collaboration affiliated to international bodies of the capitalist bloc, and a more radical and confrontational trade-unionism influenced by Stalinism¹⁶. None of these orientations actually questioned the fundamental nature of the nationalist project, being either content to quite simply accompany it, or only opposing it in relation to the effects and consequences of its malfunctioning on the living and working conditions of workers.

Facing the crisis in the 1980s, new contradictory dynamics emerged. On the one hand there was a tendency by the union leadership to collaboration or even cooptation toward the state. It was especially embodied in the person of Pascal Bafyau, who is considered by some as one of the worst presidents of the NLC. On the other hand, there also was in some sectors a

¹⁴ On the crisis of the Nigerian nationalist project see Cyril I. Obi, "No longer at ease: Intellectuals and the crisis of nation-statism in Nigeria in the 1990s", in *Revue africaine de sociologie*, 8, (2), 2004, pp.1-14.

¹⁵ "The developmentalist discourse propped up by both civilian and military regimes in the post-independence period found a constant motif in the appeal to the working classes for assuming their share of responsibilities and sacrifices. This was partly made possible by the incomplete nature of class formation in Nigeria, the relations between national elites and their local following mediated by the patrimonialisation of the state, and the absence of a productive dominant class capable of a comprehensive design based on political inclusion and social integration" (Barchiesi, 1996:364)

¹⁶ See Ananaba (1969); Otopo (1995).

persistent and strong radical trade-unionism which was very active at the rank and file level, following the example of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). This union of teaching personnel in the universities emerged from the mid-1980s as the spearhead of trade union radicalism, fiercely opposing budget reductions, attacks on the autonomy of the universities and more globally, the privatisation of higher teaching. (Adesina, 2003)

During that decade, the successive military regimes often responded with savage repression towards the unions, notably under S. Abacha. It led to the dissolution of the NLC, then the single official trade union federation, twice in 1988 and in 1994. Numerous union leaders were arrested and continually harassed; union meetings systematically attacked or banned. But the violent strategy of the state did not stop the trade union movement from playing a significant part in the democratic movements which emerged from the 1990s onwards. New alliances with other civil society organisations were forged. Inside broad democratic coalitions¹⁷ unions like the ASUU or the Nigerian Union of Journalists would mobilise for the drawing up and implementation of a genuine programme of democratic transition; then, after the cancellation of the electoral process in 1993, for the actualisation of the results and the end of the military regime. (Edozie, 2002)

In July 1994 the oil sector unions organised one of the most significant strikes of the period against the military regime. The regime would bring down all its strength against those unions. Their presidents were imprisoned and their organisations, like the entire NLC, put under the control of single administrators named by the government. A range of draconian measures was taken to totally destruct the apparatuses of the union leaderships and to prevent a coordination of rank and file action. Finally, the government defeated the movement, due notably to the ambiguities and weaknesses of the NLC leadership. Despite actions and movements here and there in the years which followed, it would be only from 1998, with the death of Sani Abacha and the establishment of the transition that the unions would really start again to play a significant political role.

Current constraints

The “democracy” completed from 1999 finally gave the unions freedom of action (at least formally), following the lifting of most of the anti-union military decrees and the liberation of the imprisoned leaders. In that year, as the new civilian regime came to power, the Nigerian unions welcomed a new leadership at the head of the NLC. The new union president, Adams Oshiomole, had campaigned on the theme “Renaissance 99” and the Nigerian workers, like their millions of compatriots, really hoped to see the opening of a new era where they would reap the dividends of democracy. And to some extent it the trade-union movement has more benefited than others (Aiyede, 2003). But the democratic transition has also allowed a continuation of the same neo-liberal and anti-social policies under a democratic cover¹⁸. And the workers very quickly returned to the road of mobilisation.

The movements which followed the transition fought on a broad spectrum of demands, from wage rises to struggles against dismissals. But the focal point of these movements was precisely the fight against oil price increases which began from 1999 onwards. It reconstituted the alliance of the unions with the other forces of the social movement and led to the emergence of NLC leader Adams Oshiomole on the public and national scene. Yet his personality and politics are not without ambiguities and contradictions. For, he is the very

¹⁷ Such as the Campaign for Democracy or later the National Democratic Coalition

¹⁸ See Humarau (1999): Amuwo (1999).

product of the conservative tendency in the contradictory dynamic that developed inside the labour movement in the late 1980's. (Adesina, 2003: 62-63)

Elected in 1999 and re-elected in 2002 at the head of the umbrella body, Adams Oshiomole is often presented as the unofficial leader of the opposition particularly since the campaigns against the oil price increases. A charismatic leader, Oshiomole climbed the ranks of the trade union hierarchy during the troubled years of the 1990s. His strength resides in the constant linking of a sometimes very radical rhetoric and an attitude which is in reality much more conciliatory. Thus he has ambiguous relations with the government and Obasanjo. In 1999 he tempered the ardour of the workers to "preserve" the transition and ended up negotiating a 25% increase in public sector workers' wages with Obasanjo. In 2003 he supported Obasanjo for re-election. But popular and trade union discontent in the face of government counter-reforms have also led him to confrontation with the regime, which is not without risk. And if he has positioned himself as leader of the campaign against the oil price increases, he also participates in the National Council For Privatisation, the body charged with supervising a number of economic measures of which the oil price increase the unions are fighting is one of the logical consequences (*BBC News*, July 7, 2003 and October 13, 2004; Adesina, 2003: 79-80).

All those ambiguities mean that when faced with a government totally dedicated to the advancement of its aggressive neo-liberal policy the movement has no real strategy. In recent years it has often confined itself to protest against price increases, deregulation and privatisation without challenging the global logic of this policy. The campaign of 2005 perhaps marked a turning point. Rather than call for yet another strike modelled stay-at-home protest (which may not have been able to maintain itself very long, in particular because of the difficulty faced by small and informal traders in surviving without liquidity), the unions and their allies inside the Labour and Civil Society Coalition (LASCO) developed a new approach. It involved calling for demonstrations and the holding of big public meetings on the theme of opposition to an increase in prices at the pump; but also against the general policy of the Obasanjo government as the main factor in the impoverishment of the population. These demonstrations, organised across the country, attracted thousands of workers every time, around forthright and political slogans. They have given expression and form to the politicisation of a broad layer of organised workers, and have radicalised opposition to the government. If the concrete results of the movement are yet to be seen, due to the apathy of the union leaderships which seem to be happy with this first phase, the process, patiently and politically built, could lead to real perspectives of alternatives (Barchiesi, 1997:192).

And this is urgent, because the structural crisis of the Nigerian state has not been resolved with the opening up of the institutions. It seems on the contrary to be continuing, nourished by the transformations wrought by neo-liberal policies¹⁹. The battles inside the ruling classes for control of what remains of the state apparatuses, like the attacks to extract still more profits from the rest of the population, could sharpen. In the absence of clear perspectives for the movement, these developments are already crystallising around other cleavages - regional, ethnic and/or religious - which are source of violence and division among workers and the other popular masses.

CONCLUSION

¹⁹ That is the dismantling of the state which had been the means and the site of primitive accumulation. See Adesina (2003: 82).

Recent political developments have come to confirm many of the above points. On April 21, 2007 Musa Umaru Yar'Adua, the PDP candidate, was declared victorious of the third presidential election in Nigeria since the 1999 transition. The official electoral commission, in tune president Obasanjo, conceded here and there some "failures", but camped on its positions by affirming that the elections had proceeded regularly and that the results were undeniable. All the other national and international groups of observers had however reported a procession of irregularities whose number called for the organization of a new poll, according to the Transition Monitoring Group, one of the principal coalitions of independent observers of the country.²⁰ Of the immense hope felt by the million Nigerians in 1999 transition, only a great bitterness seems to remain. A survey carried out by Afrobarometer reported that in 2000, one year after the transition, 84% of the Nigerians were satisfied of the democracy of Nigeria. In 2005 almost 70% had ceased believing that the elections would enable them to get rid of disputed leaders. (Afrobarometer, 2006a and 2006b)

But the story didn't just end there. At the beginning of June, the NLC send a 14-days ultimatum to the new power in place. It protested against a whole set of measures taken by the Obasanjo government in the very last day of its exercise, in particular another increase in prices of the petroleum products, a rise of 100% of the VAT and the sale of two public oil refineries to some close relatives of Obasanjo. The NLC, joined by the TUC and by its allies in the civil society within the LASCO, called for a general strike and mass demonstrations in all the countries from June 20. The said day, the whole of the country was almost completely paralysed. The government called upon its usual repressive panoply: anti-trade union propaganda, attacks of demonstrators by the police force, arrests of trade-union leaders, etc. But the threat to see the strike propagating into the oil sector finally forced it to move back and reopened the negotiations.

The trade unions obtained satisfaction for most of their grievances: cancellation of the doubling of the VAT and the increase envisaged in the oil paraffin and the diesel, increase of 15% of the wages of the civil servant with retroactive effect, creation of two committees of experts, integrating the trade-union organizations, one on the prices of the petroleum products and the other to reopen the file of the sale of the oil refineries. The government was committed for no more increases of fuel prices for one year, while maintaining half of the decided raising of prices. Nevertheless, the trade unions estimated to have gained an important political and symbolic victory vis-à-vis the new regime. (Aborisade, 2007a and 2007b; various newspapers and news agencies²¹)

²⁰ *AFP*, 24 April 2007, 25 April 2007; *AP*, 24 avril 2007; *Associated Press (International Herald Tribune)*, 29 March 2007; *Al Jazeera*, 29 May 2007, 23 April 2007, 22 April 2007, 21 April 2007, 19 April 2007, 18 April 2007; *BBC News*, 27 April 2007, 24 April 2007, 23 April 2007, 21 April 2007, 20 April 2007, 29 March 2007, 22 December 2006, 17 December 2006, 25 November 2006; *Daily Trust (Abuja)*, 24 April 2007; *Le Pays (Ouagadougou)*, 24 avril 2007; *Le Potentiel (Kinshasa)*, 24 avril 2007; *Panapress*, 23 avril 2007; *Mail & Guardian*, 29 August 2006; *Nigerian Tribune*, 25 April 2007; *Reuters*, 22 April 2007, 16 April 2007, 24 April 2007, 23 April 2007, 21 December 2006; *RFI*, 22 avril 2007 ; *SMH News*, 24 April 2007; *The Economist*, 21 October 2006, 19 April 2007; *This Day (Nigeria)*, 26 April 2007, 22 April 2007; *UN Integrated Regional Information Networks*, 23 April 2007; *Washington Post* 'Nigerian Senate Blocks Bid for 3rd Presidential Term', 16 May 2006.

²¹ *AP*, 24 juin 2007; *Business Day*, ; 21 June 2007 ; *Daily Champion (Lagos)*, 25 June 2007, 24 June 2007, 22 June 2007, 21 June 2007; *Daily Trust (Abuja)*, 21 June 2007, 21 June 2007; *Fraternité Matin (Abidjan)*, 20 Juin 2007; *L'Express (Port Louis)*, 21 juin 2007; *This Day (Lagos)*, 24 June 2007, 22 June 2007, 22 June 2007, 21 June 2007, 20 June 2007; *RFI*, 21 June 2007 ; *Vanguard (Lagos)*, 22 June 2007, 21 June 2007.

The success gained by the strike is a positive sign, testifying to the great vitality of the labour movement and its political power. In the light of the future attacks of the neo-liberal policies that are likely to continue, this kind of victory is not insignificant. As reported by the very official government-owned News Agency of Nigeria, this is just a “truce” between the two camps.

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