

## Nigeria: Labour to power 2011

Written by Workers' Alternative  
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Nigerian Marxists have always called for the setting up of a trade union based mass workers' party. The Nigerian trade unions have the authority, the power and the mass following to do this. A few years ago a half-hearted attempt was made to launch the Nigerian Labour Party without much success. The union leaders didn't give their full backing. Now, however, the party is becoming more attractive and in some states large numbers of workers are joining. Here we publish an editorial from the December 2009 edition of the Workers' Alternative on this question.

Undoubtedly the Nigerian working class is the largest and most powerful single force in the land. This indisputable fact is confirmed further by the fact that nothing can work without the workers; this reality does not just apply to Nigeria but it is also an international reality. Over 10 million workers are in organised labour in Nigeria, in the NLC and TUC. Millions of Nigerian workers who are yet to be unionised and millions of other poor strata of society are natural allies of the workers and look towards organised labour for support at most times. The massive support all the general strikes called by labour against fuel price increases and deregulation confirms this fact.

Unfortunately, a parasitic and unproductive class of the rich, bourgeois, who currently constitute the ruling class, holds society to ransom. They are the agents of the IMF, World Bank and various foreign imperialist interests in Nigeria.

For more than 49 years, the ruling elites have been in power and there is nothing to show for it. Rather the living conditions of the masses have worsened and society continues to decay, at a more accelerated rate now. Industries are collapsing by the day, the same for the roads, healthcare, education, security, etc; social services do not exist and the barbaric rule of the jungle operates everywhere.

All these are because of the draconian and ruinous policies of the Nigerian ruling class, who are the preservers of this brutal neo-colonial capitalist economy. Whereas the ruling class continues to smile at the banks, both local and foreign, the Nigerian working masses remain at the receiving end. They continue to carry the enormous burden created by this arrangement – low wages, high unemployment, terrible working conditions, cheap death, etc.

The tragedy of the situation is that the working class continues to produce the wealth of the country but they are made to suffer and carry huge burdens in order for the insignificant to continue to enjoy. This must stop and can be stopped.

### **No solution can come from the ruling elites**

On a daily basis, the reality that the Nigerian ruling elites cannot offer a way forward is continually drummed into our ears. They show clearly that they are only interested in furthering their own extremely selfish interests and the working masses can go to hell as far as they are concerned.

When their president falls sick, he travels out to receive healthcare in foreign countries at the expense of the masses. Patriotism, pride, and nationalism are no longer in their vocabulary. The past policies have ruined healthcare. We only hear of billions being allocated to healthcare but then get no healthcare. They can afford to leave the country or go to the highly expensive hospitals when they are sick. The masses can go to hell or church when they need healthcare.

Every day the noise of deregulation and fuel price increases continue to dominate, whereas these useless policies have paved the road to hell. It is because of their fear of the actions of the working masses that they are holding back for now, but they are still desperate to continue with them.

Corruption runs in their veins. Nigeria tops the list of the most corrupt in the world. All attempts to fight it have proven to be corrupt smokescreens aimed at fooling the masses but not at fighting corruption. Massive corruption remains the order of the day. The state treasuries are looted without mercy, officially and unofficially. Currently, wages and benefits of top government officials constitute the largest quota in government budgets. The presidency plans to spend N28 billion on maintaining the Aso Rock presidential villa next year.

On a daily basis, we see how the conditions in Nigeria continue to degenerate at a more accelerated rate. Billions of dollars came in because of the oil boom over the past years and there is clearly nothing to show for it. Society continues to slip towards anarchy on a daily basis. All kinds of problems continue to develop nationally. From the south to the north, the situation is generally the same.

### **How the weak currently dominate the strong**

In spite of their extremely small size and parasitic nature, the Nigerian ruling bourgeois elites continue to maintain their draconian rule over society. This is because the massive working class is yet to stand up and challenge them politically. The biggest fear of the ruling elites is the working class. The working class can do without them but they cannot do without the working masses. They know this fact very well. They have invested, over the years, a lot towards stopping the working masses from realising their enormous strength and potential. This is actually part of a global conspiracy against the working class by the imperialists and their local ruling elites worldwide.

Over the years, we have seen numerous anti-labour laws passed by both the military and civilian regimes. We see numerous laws passed in Nigeria aimed at stopping workers from participating in politics. Workers are only required to vote but cannot seek electoral offices due to these laws.

The ruling class had wanted a situation where the political options/parties open to the masses are strictly theirs, so either way the masses lose out. A situation where the masses are to choose between SDP or NRC, or now between PDP or ANPP or AC or AD or any of the parties of the rich. Meanwhile all these parties say the same thing in different ways and offer no way forward. They all concentrate on matters that have no relevance to the masses.

However, it is clear from past experience that once the working masses rise up the sky is the limit. All the very tools of deceit and terror are no match for the strength of the working class. The most important thing is for the working class to be organised and have a clear leadership armed with a socialist programme.

### **Political options only way out**

After numerous general strikes and a continuing decaying situation, it is clear that the only solution to the problems of the masses is a political one. To be concrete Labour must take power and only then can the problems facing the country be addressed and solved. All wings of the Nigerian ruling elites have consistently failed the masses over the years. It is time for the masses to go directly for power depending solely on their strength and organisation.

The most peaceful way now for Labour to take power is for the working class to utilise their overwhelming superiority in numbers to take power electorally via their current political party

the Nigerian Labour Party, NLP, come 2011.

All the current bourgeois parties combined are no match for the Nigerian working class and its allies in any way. Practically none of the current bourgeois parties in Nigeria have real members to match the figures of membership that they claim. The PDP for instance claims to be the largest party in Africa. This is open fraud. The real party membership is probably in some few thousands as the overwhelming majority of the members are rented. The same goes for the others.

### **Nigerian Labour Party?**

Of course, it is legitimate to question whether the Dan Anyanwu-led NLP can lead the masses to take power, taking note of the various limitations and past activities of that leadership, since the leadership emerged February 28, 2004, about six years ago; it is also legitimate to question the results.

For instance, the governor of Edo State, Adams Oshiomhole, former NLC president became governor on the platform of the AC not the NLP. In Lagos, the party ticket for the 2007 gubernatorial elections was sold for a fee to a failed bourgeois candidate, Gbenga Pedro. In Ondo state, it is an open secret that the NLP government that emerged is actually a PDP government with a Labour cover. Mimiko was the minister under Obasanjo's regime that ejected thousands of people from government official quarters that were privatised. From the rumour mills, we hear that another PDP chieftain, Andy Uba, is about to get the party's ticket to contest the gubernatorial elections in Anambra state Feb. 2010.

Also very important is the fact that the party has not grown in size. In Lagos, which is the industrial capital, the party's leadership was consciously shorting out everybody from the party until they came under pressure from the Campaign for a Mass Based Labour Party, CMB-LP. They now say that they would open the party in a very limited way to workers but this process is going at a snail's pace. The Lagos NLP leaders are more concerned about keeping people out of the party and fighting unseen enemies than building the party. There is also no democratic life within the party.

All this and much more is true. However, the Nigerian Labour Party, NLP, was created by the NLC and this was because of successful agitation for multiparty democratic rights; therefore, it remains the property of the Nigerian workers as a whole in spite of the unproductive actions of the leadership of the party.

The most important task is to transform the party and the workers can easily do this. The powers of the workers are enormous and the leadership of labour always responds to it. The ruling elites cannot confront the powers of the workers once workers are on the move. The leadership will definitely have to move along or be removed.

Currently, there is an ever growing political mood among Nigerian workers and the masses in general and this reflects the growing consciousness. They are realising that the various political parties represent the same interests and are looking for serious alternatives. This is why the NLP is becoming quite important now to the masses.

In spite of the various limitations of the methods used in the past by the leaders of the trade unions and the NLP, the masses can see some victories and they are further encouraged. In spite of everything, the NLP has become a household name. The ruling elites also realise the potential the party has and many bourgeois elements have tried to use the party to get to power several times.

The perspective for the coming period is clearly that the masses are bound to get more political and the probability that the NLP would grow quickly remains high. The massive support the anti-deregulation protest rallies received confirms these perspectives.

### **Build a Mass Based Labour Party with a working class base**

The NLP is probably the party that has the brightest future in Nigeria now. The party could have grown had it not been for the limitations of its leadership. The leadership of the NLC under Adams Oshiomhole set up the current leadership of the party and many of them were alien to the working class movement. Secondly, the various union centres did not mobilise for the party. Although the party is housed by the NLC, it has not done much to build it either.

The party was open to various elements that have nothing to do with the working masses. All these strange bedfellows currently constitute a threat to the interests of the masses, as they represent the interests of the ruling class. The current fractional conflicts within the party confirm this fact.

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Had Labour built the working class base of the party at the beginning, most of these conflicts would not have developed. It is therefore essential that there must be a massive effort nationally towards building the party but the workers base of the party must be built consciously. A national campaign towards building the party would definitely be well received by the Nigerian working masses.

Factory and work place units of the NLP can be built along with wards, and local government and state branches can also be built. The party must become relevant to the aspirations of the working masses by supporting actively the struggles of the working masses and not sell itself cheaply to the elites. The party must fight against all anti-labour laws that make politics an exclusive reserve of the rich.

### **Nothing could stop Labour from taking Power come 2011**

Nothing says that Nigerian workers cannot take power and use it to transform society. Only the agents of the ruling elites in the labour movement are against this in line with the interests of the ruling class. Labour has the power, numerical strength, organisation and the resources to take power and run society. This is actually the only solution to all the problems facing the society. The ruling bourgeois class, due to their greedy and selfish class interests, created the problems.

Nothing could stop Labour from setting up its party in the factories, workplaces, wards, local government areas, states and nationally. The masses are actually eager to join. The experiences of the protest rallies and strikes confirm this fact. Labour has the capacity to run for office effectively, from campaigning to monitoring the elections to running society. All it needs is sincerity on the part of the leadership. The mass of workers must put pressure in order for the leaders to act correctly. All the shortcoming of the past by the leadership of the Nigerian Labour Party can be corrected, based on a massive influx of the working people into the party.

### **Labour to Power with a Socialist Programme**

Clearly, the solutions to the crisis facing society lie in reversing the various IMF-World Bank inspired anti-people policies of the ruling elites. The only alternative to all these mispolicies is Socialism. The enemies of the working class and those that pretend to be friends of the working people do not want Socialism. This is why in alliance with the ruling elites and imperialism they continue to launch a series of illogical arguments against the ideas of Socialism.

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The ruling elites know that they may not be capable of holding power directly indefinitely and that one day a workers' government may emerge in Nigeria. This is the experience globally. This is why they invest a lot in corrupting the leadership of labour so that in case they should take political power, they would continue with the same programmes of the rich. The experience of Edo and Ondo States readily comes to mind.

They want an NLP that would be a tool in their hands. The current attempt to also co-opt the NLP into the mega-party is to be seen in the same light. This is why workers must insist that the Labour Party must be independent and with a clear-cut political alternative to the current rot facing the people.

The Socialist alternative remains the working masses' alternative in spite of what the ruling elites and their agents in labour say. Socialism remains the only alternative to privatisation, deregulation, commercialisation, fuel price increases, mass unemployment, poverty, etc. Only the workers taking over the commanding heights of the economy with central planning and workers' democratic control can put an end to the current day rot.

Support the:

- Demand for the opening up of the party for the masses to join.
- Demand the setting up of workplace and factory units of the party.
- Demand democratic control and management of the all affairs of the party. All party officials must be democratically elected.
- Demand for a break with all anti-people bourgeois elements and trends that want to corrupt the party.
- Demand an independent NLP with a socialist programme.

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