

Revolutionizing Political Economic Analysis in Nigeria

A Review of Kola Ibrahim's book: "Revolutionary Pen"

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Global Research, January 01, 2016

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Records of events are very important. They serve as not only historical documents but a guide for the future. The book, Revolutionary Pen has done it properly as it chronicles events of struggles of the working people, youth and the poor, that emanated in almost all facets of the encounters of the working masses and the society at large; at every serially and not seemingly ending periods of attacks by the state on them. It does not stop at reporting these events, but goes further to analyse the way forward the working masses and the society in general can take to end these state attacks and also to realise their own inherent political power, which can and only give them the panacea, to rebutting the system of oppression, and take charge of their patrimony.

It should be put rightly on record that events happen almost every second but many are missing in history. This is the main reason the book, *Revolutionary Pen*, which is a compilation of many articles on the field of struggle of the working people, epitomizes and accurately gives proper records of how these events happened, and also the way out of the problems associated, which makes it a resort for researchers and activists alike.

Far from a conventional write up, the book touches on the much awaited and "hoped for" 2015 Elections, which majority of the Nigerian masses reposed their belief for "Change" from the rotten and corrupt past Jonathan/PDP-led government in. It also x-rayed the similarities, nexus and the profit-oriented coloration of both Jonathan and nascent Buhari governments.

We are now in the aftermath of the elections, and the new 'Change' government and agenda are unfolding in the eyes of Nigerians. But before mentioning the tumultuous struggles of workers and pensioners for a living wage and pensions, it is necessary to say a few words on the current and unabated Boko Haram terror campaign in the north-eastern part of Nigeria. The book actually explains in clear terms, the roots of militancy and insurgency in the Nigerian society, the creators of this menace, the reasons behind their rise and how these terror groups and terrorism can be subdued, through the mass actions of working people, youth, labour movement and community movements. I believe that if the solutions proffered in this book can be put to practice by those affected and involved, our society, Nigeria in particular, would have less to bother about rightwing militancy and terrorism.

According to the book, the region where the menace of Boko Haram terrorism is rampant (the North East Nigeria) is the most underdeveloped part of the country where an average youth hardly knows the wonders or the efficacy of science and techniques. The book put forward that the reason is not far-fetched. It explains how these north-eastern youth could

not get access to quality education, while the bulk of their endowments and patrimonies are being shared as take-home by rich few in corridors of power. Furthermore, these rich few utilize divisive instrument of religion and ethnicity to subjugate the mass of people, as expressed in the use of Sharia by northern ruling elites when they lost control of political power. The monster of religious division and radicalization thrown to the society is now confronting the country through the Boko Haram terrorism.

Anyone could try to denounce the plight of workers and their senior brothers, the pensioners, especially when one enjoys a juicy contract sum from government or when one is not so 'lucky' to be in the employment of capitalist class – either in the state establishment or private sector. The reality of mass suffering of workers and pensioners was clearly expressed in the struggle for implementation of N18, 000 minimum wage and the continuous battle of pensioners for their pittance called pensions, after they have committed their adult lives to the public and private establishments.

The fact that the fate of the working class and those of other oppressed and exploited class is interwoven was recently expressed in Osun State where, as a result of the non-payment of salaries for several months, other oppressed strata, including market women and artisans, find it difficult to sustain a decent living and regular income. This underscores the essence of the book's serious and detailed analysis of the struggle of workers and pensions, and linking it with the general economic straitjacket the capitalist system, nay its neo-colonial type in Nigeria, has pushed the working and poor people into.

It also explores the role of labour leaders and labour movement in the struggle for living wage and pension payment; drawing out the lessons and errors of the leadership. The leadership of labour had earlier requested a N52, 200 minimum wage in 2010 only to settle for N18, 000 minimum wage in early 2011. Interestingly, when most of the state governments, federal government and private sector employers refused to implement or properly implement the meagre wage law, the labour movement could not defend the wage effectively.

The same story could be said of pension of retirees where the labour movement, instead of defending living pension based on cost of living and other economic and social indices, supported the fraudulent contributory pension scheme that deduct from workers' salary in order to pay them pension. The recent attack on pensioners by state-sponsored gangsters in June 2015 in Osogbo, Osun State, who protested non-payment of their pensions for up to a year, and stories retirees dying on the queues in the process to collect their meagre pensions, reflect serious suffering pensioners are undergoing. On the other hand, very few in control of retirees pensions are looting en mass billions from these funds.

Today, there is serious attack on N18, 000 minimum wage as many state governments are planning to cut the workers' salaries while some like the Osun State government have resorted to paying half salaries for workers. There are also plan to sack several thousands of workers by public and private sector. This section of *Revolutionary Pen*, under the title Workers' and Pensioners' Struggle, is a vital material for working people and activists searching for tactics and methods of defending a better living wage for workers and pensioners. More importantly, it underscores the need for labour movement to build a new mass party of working people, youths and the oppressed as a way of permanently ending the misery and sufferings of workers and pensioners. The writer, Kola Ibrahim, has since 2012 written a book on Minimum Wage struggle where all issues pertaining to minimum

wage were clearly explained.

The mass misery and squalor ravaging workers and the entire peasantry at large is not limited to Nigeria or Africa alone; it spreads across the entire globe. This itself the working masses must realize that it is a virile tool in the hands of the state. Examples are not far-fetched. We have cases in the northern part of Africa and Middle East where youths and working people, fed up with the failure of global capitalism and their sit tight rulers to improve their lots, took the road of mass revolts and revolutions against their ruling classes. This saw the defeat of decades-old regimes such as those of Hosni Mubarak and Ben Ali in Egypt and Tunisia respectively.

Aside spreading like wildfire, the revolts and revolutions also show the limit of terrorism as a tool of fighting the ruling class. Regimes that used terrorism as a tool to drive through anti-poor policies and sustain their rule were overthrown by mass revolts and revolutions. Of course, most of these revolutions have been derailed with counterrevolution taking deep root. This is a product of failure of these revolutions to end the rule of capital and establish a government of workers, youths and poor. This book underscores the fact that concessions are not won on a platter of gold, but fought for and won by mass of people organized in their common struggle to break the stranglehold of ruling class and improve their conditions.

This book under the section, International Issues, addresses the rise of revolutionary movements in Egypt, Senegal and Burkina Faso, and the continued Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It draws on various international issues and the struggles of the working people globally to underscore the uniformity of struggle of the working people and the need for international mass movement of working and oppressed people. It also exposes the hypocrisy and the failure of global capitalism and imperialism to solve political, social and economic crises facing humanity.

The book also put in proper perspective how the economy has been bastardized by selling off public properties to private individuals at a give-away prices all in the name of obnoxious privatization. Example is when Prof. Barth Nnaji who owns a private electricity firm was made a Minister of Power by the Goodluck Jonathan government. The resultant effect is that the public power sector was sold off to private firms close to corridor of power but with no serious plan to undertake massive long-term investments in the power sector. The same power sector today has not been performing better than before it was handed over to private shylocks. The case has been a sorry one with poor people paying the price with skyrocketing and estimated bill for unavailable electricity. The country after committing over \$20 billion to the sector since the civil rule began in 1999 can only boast of about 4,000 megawatts of electricity for a population of over 170 million. Meanwhile, South Africa with around a quarter of Nigeria's population generates more than 40, 000 megawatts. Even at that, millions of working class South Africans do not have access to electricity.

Revolutionary Pen submits that only when our economy is nationalized under democratic public control and management can we have serious plan of massive development of the power sector as part of the holistic plan to develop the economy and the society. The book explores various capitalist options propounded by bourgeois strategists and clearly shows how Nigeria cannot get out of its underdevelopment under this system.

Addressing the educational crisis in the country, the book provides analysis on how governments at various levels and at different times have neglected the education sector through under funding and capitalist policies of commercialization, rationalization and

privatization. The chapter on education titled Education Sector, addresses various issues ranging from analysis of the education sector especially in view of the 2013 six-month strike of the university lecturers' union, ASUU, to attempt of the Fashola government to totally price education out of the reach of the poor by hiking fees in Lagos State University (LASU), the only state owned university by over one thousand percent. It also addresses the issue of private university education that is becoming a significant feature of education system in Nigeria; while the book also addresses the problem of non-functioning library system in Nigeria, which as the author noted, mirrors the crisis in the education sector as a whole. The author was himself a proven student leader and activist during his days as a student; therefore, his proposals and analyses clearly expressed those of an insider, who has been part and parcel of the struggle and debate about proper funding and management of education sector.

The economic analysis ranging from the global economic meltdown that started in 2008 to the banking crisis in Nigeria in 2009 and the fraudulent bailout system under Jonathan administration, give vivid view of the future of Nigeria, nay the world under the current capitalist system. Not to be forgotten also is the analysis on the health sector vis-à-vis the Ebola virus disease and the attack on doctors in Lagos State by the Fashola government. The health sector analysis clearly delves into the root of the crisis facing the health sector such as inadequate funding and mismanagement of health institutions by government appointed managers. In the analysis on Ebola, the book also dwells on the role of global political economy and especially the pharmaceutical companies in the health crisis especially in Africa and third world countries. The author, just as he did in the education sector, challenged the in-house unions in the health sector to rise to the occasion by building a united platform of struggle to seek improvement in the health sector. The book conclusively links this with the ultimate political challenge before the working and poor people, by linking the health sector crisis with the political economy of Nigeria, nay Africa.

Finally, the book is a library material for students and academics seeking historical analyses and alternative narrative on the political, social and economic issues in Nigeria, Africa and the world. The ending chapter on politics, which includes an essay on the politics and personality of the late pro-democracy activist, Gani Fawehinmi, a discourse on the undemocratic nature of Nigeria's electoral system, and the debate on the political crisis generated by the health problem and eventual death of the late president Umar Yar'Adua, is also worth reading.

It is an honour to write a review of such an important historical book as *Revolutionary Pen*. The book is both revolutionary in its analyses and alternative approach to documenting political, social, economic and historical issues. Of course, I hope the publisher will improve on the quality of the book in terms of its production including its cover and graphics. However, the content and the historical value of the book far outweigh in manifolds, the shortcoming of the production. I therefore recommend the book to activists and civil society community; students of politics, history and economics; researchers and academics; labour leaders, journalists/media practitioners, and all those interested in alternative and leftwing understanding of Nigeria's and global political economic issues.

Revolutionary Pen: Collected Essays on Nigeria, and Global Political-Economic Issues, through the eye of a socialist, by Kola Ibrahim, 2015

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