

Marx's Labour Theory of Value and Trade Disputes in Nigeria

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Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ijdshmss.v12.i2.07

Abstract

Disputes between labour and capital or workers and their employers is endemic, a phenomenon attributable to their divergent interests in the labour process. This paper investigated the processes involved in the resolution of labour disputes and how labour has generally fared since the institutionalization of trade dispute resolution mechanisms. It was the general aim of this paper to explore the theoretical and historical roots of the incessant and perennial disputes between labour and capital or workers and employers, as well as the feasibility of the various mechanisms that have been put in place for the peaceful settlement of industrial disputes for the purpose of attainment of industrial peace and harmony and enhanced productivity. It found that, for the simple fact that trade interventionist institutions are the creation of the state, which is also a party and therefore implicated in the labour/capital contradiction, it is incapable of standing on a neutral ground to resolve such disputes and ensure lasting industrial peace, particularly in dependent capitalist societies. Marx's theory of the Fetishism of Commodities served as the theoretical framework for the paper. As a qualitative and historical study data were drawn from secondary sources such as newspapers, journal publications, books, reports and internet sources and subjected to logical content analysis. Conclusively, it drew attention to the fundamental irreconcilability of the parties and irresolubility of trade disputes within the context of a capitalist mode of production owing to the instinct for profit maximization of the capitalist enterprise which inevitably imposes a negative effect on workers' welfare and interests. Accordingly, the paper recommended a more socialized pattern of economic organization that would be more labour-friendly.

Keywords: *Labour, Value, Fetishism, Dispute, Class, Resolution, Capitalism*

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Background to the Study

This paper is about trade disputes which could simply be defined as disagreements between employers and employees, workers and management or labour and capital over several issues such as wages, allowances, training, discipline, working hours, overtime rates, bonuses, welfare packages, etc. Over the years the mechanisms for resolving trade disputes have become institutionalized. This institutionalization of labour disputes resolving methods and tactics serves as a control mechanism to discourage labour agitations against capital by the state in order to ensure a reasonable profit margin for employers of labour. Disagreements between labour and capital are the inevitable outcome of the dynamics of capitalism as a mode of production. They have become rather endemic and perpetual. Peacetimes between these two forces are only periods of re-strategizing in readiness for the next action or response to an action from the opponent. Industrial relations are more like a cat and mouse game, each constantly scheming to take advantage of the other. Neophytes often wonder why this is so. The simple reason is that one has to grow at the expense of the other. It is a zero-sum game. Whatever one loses becomes gain for the other. The ghost of industrial disputes has lived with capitalism right from inception and is difficult to exorcise and indeed must remain so. However, dispute resolution methods and institutions have been established in virtually all modern societies. Somehow they have succeeded in avoiding total industrial annihilation but labour unrests persist because they constitute an integral part of the development of capitalism.

Trade disputes have become endemic and even institutionalized mainly because of the divergent and diametrically opposed views and interests of the two parties. First, the capitalist or employer expects that labour will be available at a price that would ensure a reasonable profit margin for his investment while labour expects that wages would be reasonably high enough and continue to rise to enable them meet their needs as workers. Second, the employer is interested in engaging the most qualified or skilled worker for each job while labour is interested in how the unemployed would get jobs and those employed retain their jobs. Third, the employer expects labour mobility guided by law, i.e. his ability to hire and fire at will while labour expects job security to ensure that both workers and their family members do not suffer unnecessarily in the event of job loss. Fourth, the employer expects to be able to plan the production and distribution of his goods on the basis of calculated costs and risks and a guarantee against disruption of these processes while the worker expects to be able to stop the work process through collective effort because without being able to do so he would be left at the mercy of the employer. These are the main reasons for the incessant disputes in various industries and countries across the world.

The capitalist owns capital which he invests to make profit while the people must work to earn and ensure a comfortable living. Marxists define capitalism as a mode of production in which labour power becomes a commodity to be bought and sold in the labour market (Marx, 1951, 2015, 1975, 1981, Ake, 1981, Onimode, 1983, Ogali, 2021). Hence, the capitalist or investor hires the services of the labourer to mix his labour with the factory machines and produce goods or services. The primary purpose for this neat organization of the production process is to make profit. However, to make this profit the capitalist must pay the labourer a value of the

product of his labour that is less than the real value. This is called exploitation and Marx calculated it in terms of the number of hours worked daily by the worker and the value of his pay or wages (i.e. how many hours' work that is equivalent to his wages and how many hours are unpaid). There is a difference between the two that ensures profit for the employer. By exploiting several workers collectively the capitalist or investor or entrepreneur makes a huge profit while the workers get increasingly impoverished. It is this condition of economic misery resulting in an inability to provide for himself and family the necessities of life that forces the worker to confront his employer with series of demands. A viable and functional strategy of the worker to improve on his quality of life is to get organized with his co-workers and persuasively confront their employer in disputes. Government or the State also being an employer of labour consequentially makes efforts to curb industrial disputes. That is the dilemma of the worker in a capitalist society.

The Problem

The problem this paper is designed to address is the identification of the fundamental basis for the perennial disputes between labour and capital; i.e. why over several centuries these two categories of the modern economic organization of society cannot be reconciled and industrial harmony established for the benefit of all parties. It is a problem that could be located in what has been termed the value of a commodity. Precisely, the dispute is over who produces it and who controls or owns it between the owner of the labour power that produces it and the employer of the labourer or worker. In a primitive, classless society the labourer indisputably owns and disposes the product of his labour, but not in a class society where he is subjected, in various forms and in various relations of production - slave, feudal, or Asiatic, under the authority of another (Wittfogel, 1957; Engels, 1978; Melotti, 1981; Post, in Gutkind and Waterman, 1977; Vidrovitch, in Gutkind and Waterman, 1977; Anderson, 2006).

The specificity of the dynamics of the labour process under capitalism manifests in the uniqueness of the mechanisms by which surplus value is extracted from the labourer or worker by his employer – capitalist or the state. Before Marx several thinkers, such as the mercantilists, the physiocrats, the classical political economists and even the social contract theorists, had identified labour as the real source of value. Theoretical disagreements stemmed from the fact of production and distribution of surplus value within the society in form of interest, rent, capital and profit. Before Marx it was viewed as a fair distribution or “pure gift of nature” (the physiocrats) – wages to the worker, rent to land or landlord and profit to capital or entrepreneur. The unfair bargain, apparently entered into voluntarily by the labourer, but has actually been institutionalised by the State, through which the labourer has lost control over or is alienated from the product of his labour, its value and disposition, were ignored.

Marx's historical revisit to the various strands of classical political economy enabled him identify the surplus value produced by the labourer or worker, which has been alienated from him through a process by which he is paid wages equivalent to his use value or necessary labour and the surplus extracted from him to constitute the profit of his employer. By its very nature capitalism thrives not just on profit but profit maximization, a process that impoverishes the worker and against which he reacts in an intense class struggle. What

manifests contemporaneously as labour disputes is a measure of the intensity of exploitation and the class struggle over what proportion of the worker's surplus value that should either be appropriated by the employer as profit or returned to him as his wages and other emoluments or conditions of service.

Furthermore, if every state is a class state and functions in the general interest of the ruling class (Miliband, 1969; Engels, 1978; Ake, 1978; Poulantzas, 1978), and in contemporary society the capitalist class, then the institutionalization of the mechanisms for industrial dispute resolution would tend to favour the capitalist against the worker and to that extent incapable of resolving these disputes. In summary, this is Marx's unique contribution to the labour theory of value, identifying the real source of surplus value, adopted in this study to locate the source of industrial disputes and the problem this study is designed to address.

As a Third World country laws regulating labour disputes in Nigeria stem from two sources – Received English Law and Nigerian Statutes. As a former British colony all the laws relating to and regulating labour disputes have their origins in English Law and are known as “received laws”. The regulation of disputes between workers and employers has its origin in the Colonial Administration. The Trade Disputes (Arbitration and Inquiry) Ordinance of 1947, Lagos, was the first attempt by the Colonial Administration to regulate trade disputes. This was followed by the Trade Dispute (Arbitration and Inquiry) (Federal Application) Ordinance of 1957. Throughout most of the colonial period there were no permanent institutions apart from the Department of Labour to settle such disputes. Parties were at liberty to decide whether or not to go to court to settle trade disputes. Only ad hoc arrangements were commonly made for the settlement of trade disputes. The period therefore witnessed series of industrial actions, including the 1945 General Strike and the disturbances at the Enugu Collieries. Between 1940 and 1945 there were 45 industrial actions in Nigeria.

Under the military the Trade Disputes (Emergency Provisions) Decree of 1968 and the Trade Disputes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Decree No.2 of 1969 were promulgated. The Trade Dispute Act of 1976 is still valid and remains a critical machinery for resolving trade disputes in Nigeria. It provides for ways in which the parties to a dispute can resolve it themselves or ways to accept the intervention of a third party and also ways in which the matter may be taken to court for proper adjudication. It has however been complemented with the Trade Dispute (Amendment) Decree No. 47 of 1992.

All these mechanisms have however failed to resolve industrial disputes, which seem to intensify with the deteriorating economic conditions in dependent capitalist states. In the advanced capitalist states labour or industrial disputes appear to be less intense with the emergence of the “one-dimensional man” (Marcuse, 2007), produced by what Giddens describes as the institutional mediation of control which offers workers opportunities for share participation and therefore a sense of ownership and control, hence, making labour disputes less attractive. Such as situation has prompted scholars raise the question whether it is still capitalist society or transcendental-capitalism (Dahrendorf, 1972; Giddens, 1978; Marcuse, 2007), in form of late capitalism or industrial society (Adorno, 2001). However, labour disputes still subsist even in state socialist societies.

Aim and Objectives

It is the general aim of this paper to explore the theoretical and historical roots of the incessant and perennial disputes between labour and capital or workers and employers, as well as the feasibility of the various mechanisms that have been put in place for the peaceful settlement of industrial disputes for the purpose of attainment of industrial peace and harmony and enhanced productivity. The specific objectives are to:

1. Trace the historical and theoretical roots of labour disputes under capitalism as a mode of production.
2. Identify the reasons for the inevitability and irreconcilability of labour disputes under the capitalist mode of production.
3. Analyse the various industrial dispute resolution mechanisms that have been institutionalised in contemporary capitalist societies.
4. Examine the reasons why despite these mechanisms industrial disputes still persist, particularly in dependent capitalist countries like Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the historical and theoretical roots of labour disputes under capitalism as a mode of production?
2. What are the reasons for the inevitability and irreconcilability of labour disputes under the capitalist mode of production?
3. How have the mechanisms for industrial dispute resolution been institutionalised in contemporary capitalist societies?
4. Why is it that despite these mechanisms industrial disputes still persist, particularly in dependent capitalist countries like Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

The Marxist theory of fetishism of commodities has been chosen to provide the framework for this study. It is one of the most intricate properties of Marxist theory and has expectedly generated an epistemological debate among Marxist scholars, particularly in critical theory, but all aimed to provide the best explanation of the concept and its implications for the class struggle. In Marxist theory and particularly under capitalism, articles of utility become commodities only because they are products of the labour of private individuals or groups of individuals whose labour power has been sold in exchange for the product of labour (Ake, 1981; Onimode, 1983; Ekekwe, 2009). In any society the sum totality of the labour of all these private individuals forms the aggregate labour of that society.

As a general rule the producers come into social contact with each other only when their products are exchanged. Consequently, “the specific social character of each producer’s labour does not show itself except in the act of exchange of products with each other” (Marx, 2015, 48). This fetishism manifests itself in the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities and it therefore becomes inseparable from the production of commodities. “Yet, not the production of commodities per se but the peculiar social, abstract character of the labour which produces them gives rise to the fetishism of the world of commodities”. That is to say, labor as an abstract category comes to be completely separated from its “bearer,” human beings, and it becomes a “thing” (Marx 2015, 47-49).

Hence, fetishism of commodities is implied in Postone's reinterpretation of Marx's theory of value as a theory of social domination (O'Kane, 2013). Fetishism is conceived as a central aspect of Marx's thought and integral to his theory of social domination, manifesting in the various forms of labour disputes and the desperation to legally contain them through the institutionalization of the dispute resolution mechanisms. Fetishism of commodities has been viewed as a "theoretical illusion about the economy" that attributes to the exchange value that commodities possess as being intrinsic to those commodities, rather than the exploited human labour that produced them (Rosen, 1996, 294). It is apparently an illusion but in actual fact an aspect of bourgeois ideology or false consciousness designed to bemuse the worker.

Cohen (2000), characterizes fetishism as a form of false consciousness because of the illusory independence that is falsely attributed to fetishised commodities. Fetishism, reification and alienation are closely related Marxist concepts and tend to reinforce each other. Thus, it is specifically Lukac's (1972) theoretical contribution to deploy fetishism and reification interchangeably. In these conceptions fetishism and reification are treated synonymously to describe the transformation of social processes into material things which mentally dominate and deceive people as a form of mystification or false consciousness.

Following Marx's (2015) conceptualization of alienation as the process of the producer losing control of the product of his labour (Ogali, 2021), fetishism is conceived as being closely related to the concept of alienation, even as the economic dimension of alienation. Lefebvre (2008), argued that 'fetishism is the economic form of alienation. In this interpretation, alienation is both objective (product) and subjective (psychological effect), state generated by capitalist production in which humans are alienated from their products and cut off from their human essence (O'Kane, 2013).

It is apparent that both concepts of fetishism and alienation have been a perennial source of labour disputes, the employer or capitalist struggling to maintain ownership of the product of labour and compensate the labourer in form of wages, allowances and other emoluments in place of the product that is being fetishised by the employers, in both private and public sectors. The state as an employer has institutionalized the process of industrial dispute resolutions, some of the mechanisms of which are discussed below.

Methodology

As a theoretical paper the method of data collection is mainly from secondary sources, i.e. from existing literature such as published books, journal papers, newspapers, magazines, reports, internet sources, etc. and data analysis based essentially on logical reappraisal and analysis of historical and contemporary reports and records, as well as textual analyses of the qualitative data.

Liberal Theories of Value

Political economy, both as a movement, a particular mode of economic organization of society and as a field of study, evolved from diverse schools of thought, notably the mercantilists, the physiocrats, and succeeded by the classical political economists - Adam

Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, Alfred Marshall, etc. - and finally the vulgar political economists. It was the view of the Mercantilist theorists that the amount of wealth in the world was static. Consequently, each nation strove to ensure that it accumulated as much of this wealth as possible, thus requiring government intervention and regulation over each nation's commercial interests by limiting imports through tariffs and maximizing exports and collecting precious metals like gold and silver.

According to the mercantilist system, the sale of commodities above their value, and the profit resulting from that process, creates surplus value, and which was “a positive increase of wealth”. This profit was thought to arise not within a country but only in exchange with other countries, and that this value took the “form of money (gold and silver) and the surplus-value was therefore expressed in the balance of trade, which is settled with money” (Marx, 1959, 64). Each nation therefore strove for a favourable balance of trade competitively, including the colonization of foreign territories.

The economic health of a nation was thought to be determined by the amount of precious metals in gold or silver it possessed. Mercantilists also believed in promoting agriculture as a means of achieving self-sufficiency in food production and accordingly avoid food importation, which could create balance of trade difficulties. One of the major proponents of mercantilism was the French Secretary of State, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683).

It was the mercantilists' argument that value in the products of society was created at the point of sale by the seller exchanging his goods for more money. Mercantilism resulted in the introduction of free trade, based on the principles of specialization and comparative advantage. In the 18th century emerged a group of Enlightenment French economists, or *economistes*, called the Physiocrats with Francois Quesnay as the founding father. Marx conceded that the analysis of capital within the bourgeois tradition was essentially the work of the Physiocrats and for this service he credited them as the true fathers of modern political economy (Marx, 1959, 65). Quesnay studied the structure or pattern of commercial relations, or the physiology of economic society.

The Physiocrats assumed that the system of market exchange which it was their main purpose to analyze was subject to certain objective economic laws, which operated independently of the will of man and which were discoverable by the light of reason. These laws governed the shape and movement of the economic order, and therefore . . . the shape and movement of the social order as a whole (quoted in Dobb, 1979, 40).

They argued that the wealth of nations was derived from the value of land agriculture or land development and being the first to observe the crucial point of framing the question regarding the source and explanation of a *produit net* or surplus they held the view that “*production in agriculture alone was capable of yielding a produit net or surplus*” since the whole class of landowners lived on rent from land (Dobb, 1979, 40). Their greatest contribution to political economy was their emphasis on productive work or agricultural activity as the source of national wealth, and accordingly advocated the removal of everything restricting agricultural production such as restriction on trade and taxation, condemned as being socially harmful.

The Physiocrats were therefore the first to recognize labour as the only source of value, though they thought only agricultural labour created this value, since it was a period of general agrarian domination in Europe. They introduced the concept of an “economic order”, which gave full attention to the structure and pattern of commercial relations that formed the bedrock of the society, i.e. the physiology of the economic society. The Physiocrats also recognized “*the general interdependence of all sectors and all elements of the economic process in which . . . nothing stands alone and all things hang together*” (Dobb, 1979, 41).

This theory led the Physiocrats to the same conclusion with Adam Smith that when individual interests operate freely in a competitive environment and in a well ordered society they tend to generally and ultimately serve the public good. Each man, while believing that he works for himself or his self-interest ends up working for others or the entire society inadvertently, according to divinely ordered principles of economic or commercial harmony. A conception of natural laws guiding a self-regulating economic order or system was the primary concern of classical political economy. However, while the Physiocrats, led by Quesnay, located it in what Dobb called “*a circular flow of exchange*” or an “*exchange-circuit*”, to Smith it was the result of the operation of the competitive forces of demand and supply. The operation of the forces of demand and supply would in due course establish an equilibrium price toward which the prices of all commodities would gravitate (Ogali, 2021).

The Physiocrats immediately preceded the classical political economists whose emergence was influenced by the publication of Adam Smith's “*The Wealth of Nations*” in 1776, in which he argued that when businesses and even nations specialized in the manufacture or production of goods at which they were most efficient and which gave them comparative advantage they mutually benefitted from the process. He wrote at the transition between mercantilism and the Industrial Revolution and actually opposed the Mercantile School which identified wealth with money and the wealth of a nation with heaps of gold and silver.

Classical political economists, mainly Adam Smith and David Ricardo, strengthened the labour theory of value which recognized labour as the real source of all new value and profits that sustain the capitalist system, objecting that capital is not an original source of wealth but only a derivative source. Marx's disagreement with Adam Smith originated from the latter's reduction of the surplus value - the excess which the employer makes over and above the quantity of value necessary to replace his capital - to the portion of the labour which the workers add to the raw material in excess of the quantity that replaces their wages. He thus made surplus arise purely from that portion of the capital which is paid out in wages, and then immediately conceived this same surplus in the form of profit - that is to say, not in relation to that part of the capital from which it arises, but as a surplus over the total value of the capital advanced, “upon the whole stock of the materials and wages which he advanced”. He therefore conceptualized and identified surplus value directly in the form of profit (Marx, 1951, 131).

In their conceptualization of the labour process any value added to the original product of the peasant eventually separates into wages and profits. It is not the entire value that returns to labour, but is rather shared with his employer, i.e. the owner of the means of production. The

ratio of wages to profits differs from one industry to the other. It is a form of deduction theory which holds that both profit and rent are “deductions from what naturally belongs to labour” (Dobb, 1979, 45-46), though not viewed as exploitation or robbery.

Ricardo argued that as industrialization progressed it took less and less time to produce the goods workers needed and so the value of their wages continued to decline. Consequently, profits grew at the expense of wages. Early radicals like Thomas Hodgskin and William Thompson lashed on this view to suggest that workers were being robbed, and came up with slogans demanding the “full fruits of their labour” on the ground that labour is the sole creator of wealth. Hodgskin declared that:

I am certain . . . that till the triumph of labour be complete; till productive industry alone be opulent, and till idleness alone be poor, till the admirable maxim that 'he who sows shall reap' be solidly established; till the right of property be founded on principles of justice, and not on those of slavery . . . there cannot and there ought not to be either peace on earth or goodwill amongst men (in Dobb, 1979, 138).

Starting from the first industrial crisis between 1825 and the 1830s and spreading from the 1870s onwards, as the class struggle intensified in Europe during the epoch of imperialism with the growth of the workers' movements and the spread of scientific socialism, vulgar economists began to fashion new ways of defending capitalism that were derived from the erroneous conclusions of the classical political economists.

Elements of classical political economy include production, distribution and exchange; a market regulated economy; rule of the invisible forces of demand and supply fixing prices; simultaneous satisfaction of self-interest and the needs of the community; division of labour and specialization in the factory or industry; international free trade, global division of labour or the principle of comparative advantage; limited role of the state in the economy as well as the relationship between the factors of production – land, labour, capital and the entrepreneur. Smith (2012, 19) declared that: “*It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages*”.

Though Smith recognized labour as the source and measure of all value, he insisted, in the spirit of mercantilism, that consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production. Therefore, the interest of the consumer should be paramount, and the producer given attention only in so far as his interest promotes that of the consumer. Ricardo sought to discover the laws which regulated the distribution of rent, profit and wages – land (rent), labour (wages) and capital (profit). He was able to identify a conflict of interest between labour and capital. Marx then takes on John Locke in his original formulation of the theory of property in a natural, primitive communal economy where production is use value or for subsistence and exchange, where necessary, is by barter.

Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this nobody has any right to but himself. The labour of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he

removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property

The only limitation to property is therefore the energy of personal labour and that a man does not accumulate more things than he can use, referring to use value. Here, the product is sold for its value, not above its value. There is no excess of price over value. However, with the emergence and separation of the merchants or traders from the direct producers (Engels, 1978), the seller begins to sell the products he purchased from the peasant producers above the real value and thereby makes a profit (Ogali, 2021). Because it is sold at its exchange value, the seller realises a surplus value. This is only possible because he has not himself paid the full value for which he sells it, or because the product contains a portion of value which the seller has not paid for or replaced by an equivalent value. And this is the case with agricultural labour. The seller sells what he has not bought. This unbought element is traceable to the surplus labour of the agricultural labourer which has not been paid for by the landowner, and which the latter sells in the form of agricultural products. In pre-capitalist society and under agrarian capitalism because agricultural labour is the only productive labour, the only labour that creates surplus-value, the form of surplus-value which distinguishes agricultural labour from all other branches of labour, rent, is the general form of surplus-value. However, Marxism stepped in to build on the ideas of the classical political economists with the amplification of concepts like alienation, exploitation, surplus value, and exchange value, commodification of labour power, fetishism of commodities, class struggle, irreconcilable contradictions, and the inevitability of revolution.

Marx's Labour Theory of Value

Marxist labour theory of value is built on the premise that it is labour that produces wealth or value. Without labour land and capital or machinery would remain unproductive. To Marx and Engels it is labour power that produces wealth and it is this power that the capitalist purchases in exchange for wages the surplus-value of which constitutes his profit. While the worker is engaged to produce for the capitalist by expending his labour power he is paid less than the value of what he has produced and the surplus is retained by the employer as profit. In essence the capitalist only pays wages equal to the value of the goods and services the worker needs to survive and reproduce the next generation of workers.

In Marxist political economy the cost of labour power is socially determined. Normally, if a worker is employed to work for eight hours or more a day, this creates eight hours' worth of value, which is spread across the commodities the worker produces, i.e. it adds eight hour worth of value to the commodities. For example, if the worker produced one chair an hour then that chair would have one hour of value in it. If the worker produced a table every minute the table would contain one minute of value. During the eight hour day it may take only four hours to create the amount of value equivalent to the worker's wages. But the worker does not go home after four hours. To receive their wages equal to four hours' worth of labour they must stay at work for the duration of the eight hours or more per working day.

In addition to the four hours' worth of labour which pays their wages they create a new surplus value equal to four hours which belongs to the capitalist. This surplus value is the source of all profits in the capitalist system. This was Marx's solution to the problems identified by Ricardo's labour theory of value. It is the cornerstone of Marx's theory of political economy. It unlocks the mystery of capitalist production. Capitalist production is not an ethical construct, i.e. an unjust or unfair part of the capitalist system. It is how the system is structured to operate (Jalee, 1977). The capitalists do not “steal” or “force” their profits from the working class. Exploitation is an inherent and inextricable component of the capitalist economic system. It is the source of both the class struggle and economic crisis, “which are just as integral to the system” (Robbins, 1932, 16). The workers have no choice but to work, to be exploited, since they had earlier been alienated from ownership of the means of production. Capital is not just machines, factories, money, stocks and shares; it is a social relation between people. Capital, to the owners of the means of production, functions as a kind of self-inflatable money.

The value of a commodity is determined by the human labour embodied in it. However, to Smith it is the individual ownership and investment of capital, which engages labour to produce, that creates the wealth that sustains the entire society. “*The underlying preoccupation of the early economists of the age of Adam Smith was the notion of individual self-interest as the economic driving force. From this was fashioned the general conception of an economic system propelled by a momentum of its own*” (Dobb, 1979, 38).

However, for Marx the social form of labour is the crux of the matter since it is a social relation of production. Labour, to him, should be defined as a social relation of production. He argued that actors, musicians, dancing masters, cooks and prostitutes may all create a surplus or profit for an employer if they happen to be employed by an entrepreneur of theatres, concerts, brothels, etc. Even a writer is a productive labourer not in so far as he produces ideas, but in so far as he enriches a publisher (Dobb, 1979, 61). Thus, what matters is not the special type or category of labour but its social form or nature. Smith, like Weber encourages parsimony, thriftiness and saving as the critical constitutive factors in the spirit of capitalism or capital accumulation, arguing that “*parsimony, and not industry, is the immediate cause of the increase of capital*”.

Similarly it is one of the fundamental characteristics of an individualistic capitalist economy that it is rationalized on the basis of rigorous calculation, directed with foresight and caution toward the economic success which is sought in sharp contrast to the hand-to-mouth existence of the peasant, and to the privileged traditionalism of the guild craftsman and of the adventurer's capitalism, oriented to the exploitation of political opportunities and irrational speculation (Weber, 2005, 37).

Smith's parsimony is Weber's rationalism “*which avoids ostentation and unnecessary expenditure, as well as conscious enjoyment of his power, and is embarrassed by the outward signs of the social recognition which he receives*” (Weber, 2005, 33). However, the foundation of Marx's political economy is the treatment of this labour process as a “social relation of production” and also

the recognition of the exploitation of the labourer by the owner of capital. Identifying labour as the source of value or surplus is not enough. The crucial issue is what happens to this surplus, how is it distributed, who controls it and what proportion of it returns to the actual producer. Engels (1976, 248) summarizes it thus:

The whole development of human society beyond the stage of brute savagery begins from the day when the labour of the family created more products than were necessary for its subsistence, from the day when a portion of labour could be devoted to the production no longer of the entire means of subsistence, but of the means of production. A surplus of the product of labour over and above the costs of subsistence of the labour, and the formation and expansion of a social production and reserve fund out of this surplus, these were and these are the basis of all social, political, and intellectual progress. Historically up to now, this fund has been the possession of a privileged class.

Marx's most profound contribution to the theory of surplus value is to be located in the mechanism by which surplus labour is generated and extracted from the labourer. Labour *per se* has no value but not labour-power, which acquires value by being transformed into a commodity, to be bought and sold in the capitalist market like any other commodity. The value of labour-power as a commodity is determined by the labour-time necessary for its production and reproduction, i.e. by the labour time necessary for the production of the means of subsistence required by the labourer or worker to maintain himself (Engels, 1976, 261). Assuming this labour time is the equivalent of six hours of work but he actually puts in twelve hours, it would be impossible that his capitalist employer would give him wages equivalent to the labour-time of twelve hours. If that happened the business would simply fold up.

Marx viewed alienation from the relation of man to the product he produces, the relation of man to his own productive activity, the relation of a man to his own "species-being," and the relation of man to other men. The worker places his life in the object; but now it no longer belongs to him, but to the object. Therefore, "externalization of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien" (Marx 1975, 324).

It means the alienation of man from the very activity that characterizes productivity, for the product is simply the physical manifestation of the production activity. Thus, "if the product of labor is alienation, production must itself be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation" (Marx, 1975, 326). Alienation also refers to nature being estranged from man and equally man from himself. In summary, the function of alienation is a dehumanization process within which an individual loses all the qualities that make him a human being.

According to Marx, alienation is associated with private property, and accordingly, private property becomes the necessary outcome of alienated labour. He argued that “although private property appears as the basis and cause of alienated labour, it is in fact its consequence. Later, however, this relationship becomes reciprocal” (Marx 1975, 359). Then, the question of how man came to be alienated from his labour can only be answered by seeking to unravel the origin of private property. In this sense, private property represents the disintegration of the totality of human essence, i.e., instead of his total essence man is reduced to a one-sided essence by private property.

That is the extent of dehumanization of man by the accumulation of private property and its concentration in a few hands to the exclusion of the majority in need of it, as occurs under capitalism. Exploited and alienated man is no longer a complete human having lost part of his essence. Although private property is not synonymous with capitalism, as it existed in pre-capitalist modes of production, alienation as a process reaches its apogee under capitalism with the assumption of more subtle and pernicious forms. This is so because it is only under capitalism that not only the product of man but also his own labour power, i.e. the total mental and physical abilities that define his essence and as equipped by nature, becomes a commodity, independent and alien to him. In other words, it is under capitalism that the process of alienation coincides with the fetishism and reification of commodities.

For Marx, the distinctiveness of capitalism from all other modes of production is characterized and defined by labour-power becoming a commodity, to be bought and sold in the bourgeois market. Consequently, it is the commodification of labour power that is the essence or nitty-gritty of Marx's labour theory of value and his whole analysis, and this commodification process is characterized by commodity fetishism and alienation. Here, the commodity form and the value-relation of the products of labour, which is a social relation between producing men themselves is transformed into a relation between things and valued far above the recognition given to labour. Commodity fetishism attaches itself to the products of labour only when they are produced as commodities and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.

Labour as an abstract category is completely separated from its “bearer,” human beings, and becomes a “thing”. At this point, human relations appear as relations between things since both the products of labour and labour power itself have been alienated from each other. In other words, whereas the objects produced by man appear or are transformed into bearers of social relations, i.e., fetishism, the social relations between real people now appear as relations between things, i.e., reification. Reification has been defined as the act of transforming human properties, relations and actions into the properties, relations and actions of things that exist independently of human activity. Consequently, these facts govern the life of the human in accordance with the laws of a world dominated by the worship of material things and the loss of human dignity. Hence both fetishism and reification emanate from alienation (Schaff 1980, 80-82).

Defining Trade Disputes

Industrial harmony is the usual expectation in any work environment but it often turns out that such harmonious relationship between employers and employees is pathetically short-lived. Disruptions generated by disagreements occur very often. A trade dispute has been defined as any disagreement between employers and workers or workers and workers, which is connected to employment, non-employment or terms of employment or physical condition of work of any person (Trade Dispute Act, 1978). The concept of “trade dispute” contains a sense of disagreement between parties involved in a trade. A trade dispute is contemplated when it is impending and ready to occur. It exists when there is open disagreement between parties involved in a trade. A trade dispute must meet the following conditions:

1. There must be a dispute or disagreement.
2. The dispute must involve a trade and must be between employer and workers or workers and workers.
3. The dispute must involve employment or non-employment or terms of employment or physical condition of work of any person.

By implication therefore the elements of the dispute comprise the subject-matter, the parties and the purpose of a dispute. Employment as non-employment of a person includes initial employment, continued employment or re-instatement of a person in an employment. For instance, the non-payment of redundancy benefit to a worker that has already left the job constitutes a trade dispute. Terms of contract may be expressed or implicit and include wages, hours of work, holidays with pay, sickness benefits, grading, promotion and mode of dismissal. It is not limited to existing terms or rights but also revised or negotiated future rights. Condition of work has to do with safety and physical comfort at the workplace, including health facilities.

There is also the question of the parties in a dispute. For a dispute to be recognized as a trade dispute there must be the presence of proper parties, i.e. employer and workers or workers and workers. These are the defining characteristics of a trade dispute. There is however a distinction between an individual dispute (involving a worker and his employer or workers acting individually and their employer) and a collective dispute (involving workers acting collectively and their employer), though an individual dispute could be transformed into a collective dispute when trade unions get involved. There is also a distinction between a rights dispute and an interest's dispute. A *rights dispute* could be prompted by the violation of or interpretation of an existing right (or obligation) embodied in a law, an award, a collective agreement or an individual contract of employment. It is essentially an allegation that a worker, or a group of workers, has not been given his proper entitlement(s). An *interests dispute*, on the other hand, is one which arises from differences over the determination of future rights and obligations (e.g. what the next wage should be), and is usually the result of a failure of collective bargaining.

A worker has been defined as any member of the public service of the federation or a state or an individual (other than a public servant) who has entered into a contract with an employer for manual labour, clerical work or otherwise, expressed or implied, oral or written, whether to

execute a work or for apprenticeship. An employer has also been defined as “*any person who has entered into a contract of employment to employ any other person as a worker either for himself or for the service of any other person and includes the agent manager or factor of that first mentioned and the personal representatives of a deceased employer*” (Labour Act, 1990, Section 91, 1). It should be noted however that trade disputes usually involve employers and trade unions rather than individual workers. Trade unions usually act on behalf of individual workers and their right to do so is well established legally. The purpose of a trade dispute is to promote the legitimate or lawful interests of the workers concerned.

History of Trade Disputes in Nigeria

Laws regulating labour disputes in Nigeria stem from two sources – Received English Law and Nigerian Statutes. As a former British colony all the laws relating to and regulating labour disputes have their origins in English Law and are known as “received laws”. The regulation of disputes between workers and employers has its origin in the Colonial Administration. The Trade Disputes (Arbitration and Inquiry) Ordinance of 1947 Lagos was the first attempt by the Colonial Administration to regulate trade disputes. This was followed by the Trade Dispute (Arbitration and Inquiry) (Federal Application) Ordinance of 1957. Throughout most of the colonial period there were no permanent institutions apart from the Department of Labour to settle labour disputes. Parties were at liberty to decide whether or not to go to court to settle trade disputes. Only ad hoc arrangements were commonly made for the settlement of trade disputes. The period therefore witnessed series of industrial actions, including the 1945 General Strike and the disturbances at the Enugu Collieries. Between 1940 and 1945 there were 45 industrial actions in Nigeria.

Under the military the Trade Disputes (Emergency Provisions) Decree of 1968 and the Trade Disputes (Emergency Provisions) Amendment Decree No.2 of 1969. The Trade Dispute Act of 1976 is still valid and remains a critical machinery for resolving trade disputes in Nigeria. It provides for ways in which the parties to a dispute can resolve it themselves or ways to accept the intervention of a third party and also ways in which the matter may be taken to court for proper adjudication. It has however been complimented with the Trade Dispute (Amendment) Decree No. 47 of 1992. During the colonial period

Rights and Obligations of the Parties

In addition to the rights contained in the employment contract certain rights and obligation have been imposed on the parties in a trade dispute.

1. Employees, particularly those on essential services, cannot go on strike without giving a prior notification at least 15 days before commencement of the strike.
2. Employees are under obligation not to go on strike except as last resort and on reasonable legal ground.
3. Employees have the right to their wages and as and when due.
4. Employers have the right to withhold the salaries of striking workers for the period of the strike. This is the “no work, no pay” rule.
5. Employers cannot lockout workers during an industrial dispute. Doing so would make them liable to pay the workers since they are the ones preventing the workers from performing their legitimate duties.

The Industrial Arbitration Panel

An Industrial Arbitration Panel (IAP) was established under the Trade Disputes Act (TDA) Cap. 432 LFN 1990. Arbitration is essentially a mediation effort that requires the consent of the parties involved before utilizing it. It was set up essentially to restore industrial peace and harmony wherever industrial relations had broken down. However the parties to a trade dispute must mutually agree to go to the IAP to settle their differences. Where one of the parties is unwilling no force could be applied to enforce compliance. The outcome or award of its decisions depends on the acceptance of that award by the parties to the dispute. Section 12(2) (b), confers a right on the parties to “object” to an award before being granted. This right of objection appears to erode the enforceability of its decisions or awards. Consequently the awards of the IAP are not binding and therefore cannot be legally enforced. Its effectiveness for the resolution of trade disputes is therefore undermined as employers flagrantly disregard the awards of the panel.

Mechanisms for Dispute Resolution

Under the law there are mainly six (6) established mechanisms for the resolution of trade disputes. These include self-help, mediation, conciliation, the Industrial Arbitration Panel, the National Industrial Court, and the Board of Inquiry.

1. **Self-Help** – This is a very important mechanism for resolving industrial disputes. It states that where an agreement is in existence either, by virtue of the provisions of any agreement between organizations representing the employers and workers or any other agreement the parties shall first attempt to settle it by that means. This provision is quite laudable as it encourages the parties to settle dispute by means fashioned out by themselves and it is expected that the result of such a process would establish lasting industrial peace and harmony. Where industrial disputes are settled at this stage valuable time is saved and the work progresses without disruption. But resolution of dispute at this stage is only possible where there is cordiality between the parties involved.
2. **Mediation**
Where self-help fails or no previous agreement exists the parties would within seven days of the failure meet together with themselves or their representative under the auspices of a Mediator mutually agreed upon and appointed by or on behalf of the parties with a view to the amicable settlement of the disputes. The Mediator has seven days to assist the parties to reach a settlement. Where the Mediator is unable to settle the dispute within seven days of his appointment, a written report should be sent to the Minister within three days of the end of mediation either by the parties or by another person on their behalf report should be in writing and points of conflict and steps taken to resolve it must be stated. However, the choice of a mutually acceptable Mediator is usually difficult.
3. **Conciliation**
The Act empowered the Minister to appoint a fit person to act as conciliator for the purpose of effecting a settlement of trade disputes. Those appointed as conciliators are normally from the Ministry of Labour not below the rank of Senior Labour Officer. Conciliators are usually expected to always maintain a strictly impartial and

neutral attitude towards the parties. To maintain his acceptability a conciliator should not criticize parties at a joint meeting or in the presence of the other party because to do so will destroy the parties' belief in his impartiality.

Where the conciliator is able to settle the dispute within seven days of his appointment, he is expected to report this to the Minister with a memorandum of the terms of the settlement, signed by the representatives of the parties, which becomes binding on the parties. Any party that breaches the terms of the memorandum shall be guilty of an offence and punishable under the Act. If the conciliator is not able to reach a settlement within seven days of his appointment he is expected to report the failure to the Minister and the Minister shall refer the dispute to the industrial Arbitration panel. Conciliation is one of the most widely used forms of third party intervention in Nigeria.

4. The Industrial Arbitration Panel

Arbitration is a dispute resolution process, usually regulated by statute, whereby the parties to the arbitration agree to be bound by the decision, called an "award". The award is generally final and legally binding on the parties to the arbitration agreement. The arbitrator's award is registrable as a judgment upon application to a High Court. It is also enforceable as a Court judgment. The Industrial Arbitration Panel consists of a Chairman, the Vice Chairman and not less than 10 other members all of whom are appointed by the minister.

The Industrial Arbitration Panel is expected to make its award within 21 days or such longer period as the Minister may direct. A copy of the award is sent to the minister who shall send copies to the parties and publish same, setting out its award and specifying the time within which objections to the award should be made. If no objection is made within the time stipulated a notice confirming the award shall be published in the Federal Gazette and the award shall be binding on the parties and a breach of which will render the party guilty of an offence. If a notice of objection to the award is given to the minister within the stipulated time, the minister refers the dispute to the National Industrial Court.

5. National Industrial Court

The Act provides that there shall be a National Industrial Court for Nigeria which shall have jurisdiction and powers conferred on it by the Act with respect to the settlement of trade disputes, interpretation of collective Agreements and other matters connected to trade disputes. It provides that where the award of an Arbitration Tribunal is objected to and notice of this has been given to the Minister within the stipulated time the Minister is to refer the dispute to the NIC whose award will be final and binding on the parties from the date of the award.

The members of the Court consist of a president and 4 other members all of whom are persons of good standing to the knowledge of the Minister and well acquainted with employment matters in Nigeria. For the purpose of dealing with any matter which may be referred to it, the court shall, at the discretion of the President be constituted of either all 5 members or the President and 2 ordinary members. The National Industrial Court was established in 1976 under section 19(1) of the Trade Dispute Decree No. 7 of 1976.

The NIC has jurisdiction over matters on the environment and conditions of work, health, safety and welfare of workers, collective agreement, strike, lock out or industrial action or any conduct in contemplation or in furtherance of a strike, lock out or any industrial action, interpretation of collective agreements, any award made by arbitral tribunal in respect of a labour dispute; the terms of settlement of any labour dispute as may be recorded in any memorandum of settlement and any award, or judgment of the court. It also states that the court has jurisdiction and power to hear cases arising from labour, trade dispute, employment matters and all other matters relating to trade activities. It is also charged with the responsibility of interpreting trade union contributions.

6. Board of Inquiry

The Act provides that where any Trade dispute exists, the Minister may cause inquiry to be made into the cause and circumstances of the dispute and if he thinks fit, he may refer any matter appearing to be connected with or relevant to the dispute, to the Board of inquiry, appointed by the Minister for that purpose and the Board shall inquire into the matter referred to it and report to the Minister.

The Board shall consist of a Chairman and such other persons as the Minister thinks fit. It may consist of one person only. The Minister would cause the report of the Board to be published at such a time and in such manner as he thinks fit.

The main function of the Board is to make inquiry to determine the cause and circumstances of a particular dispute and proffer a solution to the dispute. An example of this can be seen in the celebrated trade dispute between the Lagos state doctors and the State government, over salaries and general conditions of employment in the state government's hospital service. The Board took evidence from 44 witnesses and examined documents and made recommendations which led to the establishment of the hospital management system in Lagos State. One problem is that since it does not serve as settlement institution, unions do not have much interest in it. It is rather regarded as a delay mechanism used to favour the employer who, for the most part is the government. In 1978, the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) declared a trade dispute over the proposed lay off of teachers in Lagos State. This dispute was referred to a Board of inquiry but the NUT rejected the idea for the reason that the Board would only investigate the cause of the dispute.

Further modifications or amendments have been introduced into Nigeria's labour laws after the Trade Disputes Act of 1990. Decree 47 of 1992 is an amendment to the Trade Dispute Act (TDA). The principal aim of the Decree is to remove the jurisdiction of the conventional courts from trade dispute matters and vest exclusive jurisdiction in such matters on the National Industrial Court (NIC). When the 1999 Constitution came into force, the Trade Disputes Act, as amended by Decree 47 of 1992, was deemed an Act of the National Assembly and an existing law, under section 315 of the Constitution.

It should also be noted that the coming into force of the National Industrial Court Act No. 1 of 2006 on 14th June 2006 has a profound effect on the application of the TDA of 1990 in the settlement of trade disputes in Nigeria. In the first place, by sections 53 and 54(4) of the NIC

Act, the whole of Part II of the TDA dealing with the NIC appears to have been repealed. Furthermore, the remaining provisions of the TDA are to be read with such modifications as to bring them into conformity with the NIC Act; and where the provisions of the TDA are in conflict with those of the NIC Act, the latter shall prevail. One of the profound effects of the NIC Act on the TDA is that the resolution of trade disputes in Nigeria can no longer be accomplished without recourse to the NIC Act. It has also been observed that concepts such as 'trade dispute', 'inter-union dispute', 'intra-union dispute' and 'collective agreement' have all been rephrased and given expanded meanings under section 54(1) of the NIC Act; and new terms/concepts have come on board such as 'labour dispute' (as an alternative concept to 'trade dispute'), 'organisational dispute' (as an alternative concept to both 'inter and intra-union dispute'), etc. The coming into force of the NIC Act on 14th June 2006 has actually upgraded the mechanisms for the resolution of trade disputes through the changes it has introduced into the labour laws in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper has endeavoured to discuss trade disputes and the mechanisms for their resolution, how trade disputes began, developed and became institutionalised, have also been traced, utilizing Karl Marx's labour theory of value. The paper has also sufficiently demonstrated that trade disputes are an integral part of or embedded or engrafted into the capitalist mode of production as such mechanisms would be inconceivable in pre-capitalist modes of production. The divergent interests of employers or capitalist investors or businessmen/women and their employees that are at the root of trade disputes as well as the institutionalized mechanisms for resolving them have also been discussed. What comes across is that trade or industrial disputes or disagreements between employers and employees have come to stay all over the world. Workers will continue to place their demands just as employers will resist these demands in order to maintain their profit margins Marx said “*the modern labourer . . . instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth*” (Marx, Communist Manifesto).

Each society has to evolve its own methods of settling industrial disputes, which have turned out to be a sham because no sooner has one labour dispute been resolved than another one is set in motion. In Nigeria labour disputes have intensified as corruption and many other methods are adopted to swindle the workers. Many companies, including the big oil companies, now engage majority of their workforce as “*casual workers*” as a means of avoiding certain industrial responsibilities. In some cases it is contractors that supply labour. These labour contractors manipulate the salaries of their workers after subjecting them to slavish working conditions. The level of corruption is so high that political leaders have enough money to embezzle but never have enough to settle workers' salaries.

On their part Nigerian workers have not shown enough zeal to fight corruption and other forms of economic mismanagement. What they fail to realize is that those evil forces they shy away from will eventually return and haunt them. Nigerian workers have the right to insist that corruption cases are not swept under the rug. If workers remain silent over the disappearance

of trillions of oil subsidy funds, the ownership of private jets, the huge allowances of political office holders, the privatization sleaze, the suppressed reports of various committees set up by both the executive and legislature, etc. their moral justification to make demands for better working conditions would be questionable.

It is also important to stress the point that the capitalist state functions in the overall interest of the capitalists or employers or businessmen/ women. Whatever gains that may appear to have been made by workers or employees only serve to reduce tension and allow employers to make profit. Furthermore, when workers begin to look inwards and concentrate on better working conditions from employers whose businesses are also struggling for survival in a badly managed economy they stand the risk of losing their society to politicians pillaging the economy. The battle for their liberty is not over labour or industrial disputes but rather over the mismanagement of the economy. Labour disputes are, at best, diversionary.

Recommendations

1. Labour leaders should be trained in the art of negotiations with other parties in course of the settlement of industrial disputes.
2. Workers or labourers should actively participate in the fight against corruption by providing information and exposing perpetrators since they're also victims of the corrupt activities of personnel in both the private and public sectors.
3. Labour leaders should resist the temptation of receiving bribes from the government to betray the workers they represent in labour disputes during industrial crises.
4. Labour leaders need to avoid economism and react to the mismanagement of the economy which affects them. Labour disputes could, sometimes, be diversionary from the real issues affecting the national economy.

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