

MANAGEMENT, LABOUR CONTROL, AND WORKERS PRODUCTIVITY: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF LABOUR CONDITIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the labour conditions in Nigeria by reviewing the conventional theories of labour productivity, like the scientific management of Frederick Taylor, the human relation approach and the various need and motivational theories. It also to observes the alienation of the Nigerian worker from his own product and his fellow worker. The study recommended among other things that production and distribution of goods and services should be controlled by labour. The government should steer clear of influencing labour union organization.

THE PROBLEM

Since independence the Nigeria labour has been so concerned, about its role of promoting rapid development of the nation, critist argued that Nigerian living standard would have risen if Nigerian labour has been up to its task. Nigerian labour has therefore been described as politically inherently lazy, arrogant and unproductive. See Dafe otobo (1981). Owogu Ananaba (1989) This paper is contesting those assertions which is referred to as an act of “blaming the victim” to exonerate the culprit. The paper argues that such comments are the products of the conventional theories of management, labour control and work design, such theories are heavily biased towards the management. The aim of the adherents of that theory is to make labour continue to increase its productivity ad infinitum. Labour is considered as an instrument for achieving profits which is the desired end of its owner’s. whatever might be the magnitude of what labour might have produced, the owners, hiding behind conventional theories of productivity are never satisfied. This led to the usual accusation of low productivity.

The paper therefore submits that (1) if productivity is defined as an act of creating a “useful value” when man exerts his energy on nature, then the Nigeria labour is productive

Because at least Nigerians depend on the products of labour . The shortages of most essential commodities is said to be caused by unproductivity of Nigeria labor (Ogunnika 2004).

In cases where optimum productivity is not achieved the blame should not be passed to labour but to the system itself. A labourer whose products is not equitably distributed can not be said to be productive. We argue that in the process of distributing this product, the Nigerian labour plays no part in deciding what to do or how to do it. All these resulted into the alienation of Nigerian worker from his own product (Material world) and his life activity (work). This eventually affects his attitude to work. We shall briefly review the conventional theories of labour productivity which forms the bedrock of the policy of the Nigerian government and other employers of labour which eventually led to labor alienation and a negative attitude to work.

THE CONVENTIONAL THEORIES

The conventional theories as conceived in this paper refer to the positivistic social scientists who regard their theories as a remedy for the cure of low productivity of labour. Such theories take workers as "things" which can be manipulated like mere machines. Labour as a factor of production is always emphasized while the human aspect of labour is down played. Prominent amongst such theories are - the scientific management of Frederick Taylor, the human relation approach, and the various need and motivation theories.

As originally conceived work is said to be social and necessary for human existence. Labour productivity should therefore be a normal thing as man is naturally inclined to work because he find the opportunity for self actualization in work. Braverman(1974) declare. But man is different from animal because his work "is conscious and purposive while the work of other animals is instinctive” (Braveman1974) Karl Marx also declares that human work does not consist of only effecting" a change of form in the material on which he works but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi (Karl

Marx1966). If things were normal and the worker is able to control both the process and the products of work, the motivational theories and method will be unnecessary.

This paper therefore regards the conventional theory in all its ramification as a device by a class, which by its behaviour (monopolizing the means of production and the product of work) has alienated the worker, to rehabilitate the and make them work against their wills. Work therefore is regarded by an alienated worker as exploitation since he has no control over its process and the product (Bertell Ollman, 1978 ;31).

The dismemberment of the worker and the revocation of his control of work process is discovered earlier as in Adam smith's theory of Division of labour. Before smith, division of labour was a process in which an individual worker divides his own work into various process and assign time to perform each of the processes. But in smiths conception, which aimed at increasing wealth which he called "nation", " not only are the operations separated from each other but they are assigned to different workers". The main aim of smith is to provide a method of work design and workers control which will increase productivity and consequently the owner's profit. The worker however become robot who is remotely controlled and who specializes in a fraction of a job.

The theory whose effect is greatest on modern organization is the scientific management theory of Frederick. W. Taylor. The universal acceptability of Taylor's work, especially in the capitalist world, shows how well it was intended to serve the will of the masters (Braverman,Ibid,P 87). Taylorism increases the workers alienation because it is intended not as a science of work generally but a science of the management of "others works". creates an operator called the 'management' which controls and design the work of labour (regarded as a thing) from a remote position. The theory is biased from the beginning since its specific problem is how to control and pacify alienated labour, does nothing to control the action of management against labour.

Scientific management viewed the workers as lazy, stupid and wasteful (Taylor, 1947; 79). Whose wasteful impulse must be controlled if the management is to realize any profit. This conception of nature led Taylor to profound theory of work design which changed the control of labour from previous position in which

tasks were generally set with little or no interference in the workers mode of performing them. Taylor affirmed that management must control every labour action from the simplest to the most complex. Even the social relationship of the workers is to be controlled. Though Taylorism is not existing as a separate school today because of the bad odour in the name, its fundamental teaching has become the bedrock of all work designs. Peter F. Drucker said that it is misleading to believe that personnel administration and the human relations are the concepts that underlie the actual management of the worker as the actual concept is scientific management. It then follows that most of the schools training our managers today equip them with the tools they acquired from Taylor which makes the managers become suitable instruments for the exploitation of the workers.

This is very evident in the case of Nigeria where most of the managers of labour are trained in the abroad. Moreover most of the organizational designs and company procedures *were* planned for Nigeria by foreign "experts" . The result of this is that work design and workers control in Nigeria are oriented toward the dictates of scientific management. This can be seen in the method of the control of labor movement throughout the history of Nigeria labour. The consumption style of government agents, ministers and company directors also show that these corrupt individuals believe that it is the duty of the worker to produce for them (the management, government and private companies) to consume.

But none of these managers or government officials will accept that they are using Taylorism in their organizations today. Instead they affirm their support for the newer psycho sociological theories of motivation. The most prominent of these is the human relations of Elton Mayo and the various need theories. Organizations feel confident to affirm human Relations because the name seems suitable. The need theory is also affirmed in order that the management can be praised for catering for the need of the workers. This paper however submit that these theories and the earlier one (scientific management) are children of the same ideological parent. Human relations has been described as an approach whose significance is "not that it provides the right answers but that it (only) asked the right questions. (Drucker (1954:280). Answers to the Questions it posed are only tentative and not more than hints and possibilities .The only difference between Taylor, Mayo, Maslow and

other psycho-sociological theories is not on whether it is right to exploit the worker but on how it can be done to kill the awareness of the worker. Human Relations and the need theories believe that Taylorism is too straight forward in its exploitation strategy. They believe if rigidly followed, Taylorism might make the worker become conscious of the exploitation and might lead to a reaction causing the loss of profit to the owners.

Mayo therefore designed a theory which will insure a willing co-operation of the worker in the production process. Maslow on the other hand viewed the worker as a needy animal full of instincts and drives. He believes that if his needs are fulfilled the worker will produce for its owners¹². This can also be detected in Alderfers ERG theory (see C P. Aderfer, 1972).

In sum all these theories arose in order to force the worker who is already alienated to work for the master.

THE NIGERIAN SITUATION

In this section we shall attempt an analysis of the effect of our discussion so far on Nigerian labour and work organizations.

Work design and labour control follow the principles of conventional theories in Nigeria. The Nigerian politicians, the ministers and government functionaries regard themselves as directors of a large company which they believe Nigeria is. The Nigerian workers are regarded as instruments to provide these directors with surplus. This almost explain (why these government functionaries are not feeling any sense of guilt and shame when plundering the Nigerian treasury).

On the control of labour, the Nigerian's so called directors seems to believe in the Taylorism method of control of labour. The Nigerian administrators right from the colonial, through independence including the various military governments have been trying to control the Nigerian labour movement through Union breaking to arresting and punishing union leaders. Even the last military government outright named some individuals as personal non grata in trade unionism in Nigeria. A profile of trade unionism history in Nigeria attested to this fact. Evidence today is pointing up to the fact that the arrest and detention of M.A.O. Imoudu in

1943 was due to his leading a successful agitation against the Taylorian work design in Nigerian railways in 1941 leading to the great and a one day strikek (See A.G. Hopkins 1889, U. P. Diejomoh 1966).

The Enugu bloodbath of 1949 was also an attempt by the Nigerian colonial government to silence the poor workers protesting against bad work design and labour control. The incident claimed the lives of at least 21 miners. Even the colonial government went as far as buying off corrupt labour union leaders in order to control the union as noted in the Y, struggle in the colliery union after the 1949 blood bath. (Wogu Ananaba Op. cited)

This systematic breaking up of labour unions was carried on to post independence Nigeria. It is even more deploring today as the present trade union was itself a child of the government decrees this became evident since 1975 when the military cancelled the existing trade unions in favour of one central labour union (The Nigerian labour Congress N.L.C.). However the struggle between David Ojoli and Hassan Sumonu for the leadership of the NLC shows that the government was not prepared to be neutral. The amount of support the Federal government gave to David Oj'oh shows that the government wants a stooge through whom it can control and teleguide the Nigerian workers. Otobo affirmed that the federal military government not only influenced the election of the central labor union but also the election of the various branch unions. David Ojoli was not punished for Pinning the committee for Democratic Trade unionism which was a defacto rival of the legal NLC. (Dafe Otobo, cited Op).

In sum this practice can also be traced to the big private companies. This action on the part of the employer of labor is a derivation of the conventional capitalist theory of work design which believe that once labour is effectively controlled it would be easy to introduce the work design and work condition that will bring the desired profit for exploitation.

ALLIENATION OF THE NIGERIAN LABOUR

The Nigerian labour is not free. What the labour produce and the design of its work organization are done by bodies which does not include the worker or his representative. This resulted into alienation and cause a negative attitude to work by the Nigerian labour. The Nigerian workers became disillusioned when it became

apparent that they are rendered . powerless and separated from what they believe they ought to control. The Nigerian workers situation fits into the Marxian notion of alienation which Bertel oilman, in interpreting Marx, describes as a state in which

Man is:... being separated from his work (He plays no part in) deciding what to do or how to do it) - a break between individual and his life activity. Man is said to be separated from his own products (he has no control over what he makes or what becomes of it afterwards) a break between the individual and the material world. He is also said to be separated from his fellow men (competition and class hostility has rendered most forms of cooperation impossible)a break between man and man. (Bertel Oilman, 1978 P. 1330

Karl Marx asserts that these "breaks" between man and his various desired ends left man (the worker) with nothing. It kills his aspiration and turned him to what Marx calls an "abstraction" which is termed as the "purity achieved in emntmese" (Karl Marx, 1963). An alienated worker like the Nigerian worker) is seen as an "abstraction" because he has lost touch with all human specificity. Nothing remains in his relations to his activity, his product and his fellow men, which can make him display his potential characteristics.

The Nigerian worker is separated from his work and he plays no part in deciding what to do or how to do it. He must always be an "obedient servant" to "the owners" of the job (government functionaries). The worker needs to be doing exactly what the master wants in order to retain his job. The worker must throw away the ethic of his profession and dance to the tune of the owners of the job. Theoretically permanent secretaries are said to be "permanent" but today they are political appointees. Woe betides a permanent secretary who tries to do his job as it should be done for he might be removed the next *day*.

Journalists must always report what the sponsors of their company want. Some must even submit their scripts to the masters for securitization before the news is printed or broadcast. It is not that we do not have a reliable, responsible and competent press in Nigeria but their poor performance is a result of alienation. Simply they are separated from their work. University teachers are gagged. A lecturer must be conscious of what he says in the classroom for there might be "spies" who might report him to the "powers that be" The result is that we turn out half' baked students. University teacher must teach particular courses as it has been pre-designed.

Innovations is not allowed in most universities. In our industries and private sector, one must be the “good boy” of the manager in order to go on. The Nigerian workers are nothing more than robots. They are in the work but not allowed to do the work. Free-will denied the Nigerian worker whatever might be his category. There is always a master to serve.

Secondly the Nigerian worker is separated from his own products. He has no control over what he makes or how the product is put into use. The runaway or the galloping inflation in Nigeria today confirms this. Essential commodities are no more available in Nigeria. The workers increase production daily while an unproductive selfish group engage in senseless consumption.

Dafe Otobo observed that the Nigerian legislators value their selection victories and the consequences of the spoils of offices more than tidy economic and industrial policies? This highly placed individuals and their few urban based agents could obtain essential commodities and even luxurious items with ease.

The poor workers who receive only N15,000 monthly have to buy a bag of rice for N10,000. The wife’s, and girl friends of highly placed individuals become the middlemen for “presidential rice” which has produced some millionaires in Nigeria.

This situation is coupled with the perceived conspicuous consumption of the Nigeria authority. It its common knowledge to see the Nigerian “heavy weights” offering gifts of Mercedes Benz cars and the like on occasions of girls friend’s birthday, daughter’s wedding and election victories. In a country in which 90 percent of its population earn less than \$1 dollar a day, It is ill gotten wealth’s are conspicuously displayed with impunity. Criminals become heroes. No attempt is made to bring most corrupt individuals to face the judgment for their offences. The worker become disillusioned after perceiving how his product is being wasted by the few privileged Nigerians.

The lots of the independent farmers are not even better. Otobe recorded that the attempts to get loans and agricultural extension services to peasant farmers “failed largely because of the activities of the corrupt bank officials” only the new crop of “influence farmers” who are mostly retired ministers, government officials

and high men got loans meant for the poor farmers. The poor Nigerian workers (in private or public) are therefore helpless. He is certainly separated from the material world. He is sentenced to die in poverty. Fake contracts are only awarded to loyal partyman who mostly got paid for what they have not done. The bulk of the Nigerian workers find it difficult to receive their monthly salaries. University lecturers and medical Doctors went on strike for months before they were able to negotiate the increase in their salaries.

Lastly the alienation of the Nigeria worker is completed when the worker is separated from his fellow worker. This is what Marx calls “a brake between man and man”. This is achieved through the interference of the management, government in the affairs of the Nigerian labour movement. The sole aim of the interference is to create disunity amongst the workers. The government/management believes that worker disunity will make it impossible for them (workers) to collectively rise against the authority.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE

Our analysis so far shows that the Nigerian labour is alienated because the labour has no control over his own products which other unproductive elements in the Nigerian society enjoy. The question is how this situation can be changed.

This paper disassociated itself from the various suggestion advanced by the conventional theorists who believe that the whole world is undergoing a great economic and social transformation .The consequence of which is making men everywhere to be transferring themselves fully and finally into the industrial way of life. In that case, they believe, labour will of necessity raise its productivity in order to survive in the new scheme. According to such view, nothing should be done to solve the alienation problem of the Nigerian worker, as he, of necessity produce, whether he is alienated or not.

Cark keer was an apostle of such view in his theory of commitment, he says that a committed worker necessarily produce more than an uncommitted worker.

This condition will then result in a wage differential favour of the committed. A realization of this situation will eventually force the alienated uncommitted worker to increase his production. If Keer's theory is followed, Nigeria should continue with the present situation which will eventually correct itself.

These authors believe that the above solution can not help the situation. To make the Nigerian workers increase production, we submit that the production and distribution of goods and services must be controlled by labour. We agree that this suggestion means a total change or revolution of the society which might take some time to achieve. The paper is however committed to supporting that goal no matter how long it takes. We however submit the following additional recommendations as a preparatory program leading to the achievement of the above suggestion.

- (1) The Nigerian Authority and employers of labour should steer clear of influencing labour union organization. Attitude like breaking the union and harsh punishment meted to known trade unions leaders must stop.
- (2) Conspicuous consumption should stop and effort should be geared towards utilizing the surplus produced by the workers to more meaningful ends. There should be a worker/management council resembling that of the Nigerian council of state which should have a great influence on the yearly budget and the Nigerian National plans. Members should comprise of the veteran trade unionists and active union leaders chosen by the worker themselves. Efforts should be made to see that unnecessary clear distinction is not practiced in Nigeria. Every Nigerian citizen should enjoy the fruit of Nigerian labour. A situation in which retired soldiers and government ministers turned farmers got access to things meant for the "real farmers" is not encouraging. . The practice must stop if Nigeria wants to survive.
- (3) Nigerians employers of labour should make more use of Nigerian intellectuals/consultants. Imitations should be discouraged. It is common knowledge that most of our wage/salary commission travel out to the so called developed "nations" in order to recommend wage and condition of service for the Nigerian workers. All they succeed in doing is the dumping on this nation of a system which is foreign and alien. This mostly increases the suffering of the workers and produce more alienation resulting into lower productivity.

Lastly, the whole social system should be overhauled. There is need to transform the workers residence from what Marx called "a cava" '3^ as it exists in Nigeria today to a "real home" Marx refers to the workers home as a cava because the worker only occupies it precariously. It is an alien habitation which can be withdrawn from him any day. It is a place from which he can be thrown out if he does not pay the rent.

Efforts should be made to assist workers to own life essential like his own home, transport and means of leisure.

(4) Middlemen should be discouraged. They (middlemen) caused the present inflation because their only aim is to suck the poor workers to the bone. What is stopping a government company like the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) from supplying petroleum products to individuals directly, instead the company (NNPC) prepared a list of registered dealers who buy its products in "controlled prices" to sell same to the unfortunate Nigeria at five times the normal price! The NNPC as its name implies is a middleman company. It does not refine petroleum. The products are bought with the surplus generated from the Nigerian labour. The NNPC's middleman are mostly favorites of the "powers that be". It therefore follows that the Nigeria labour whose sweat is used to buy the products should be allowed to sell the product

This practices of middlemen should also stop in the government offices and ministries. A contractor is necessary before a government office could purchase a loaf of bread. A contractor is necessary even if the number of the item required is only one. What is wrong in sending a messenger to buy toilet rolls for office to use?

This recommendations we believe can improve labour conditions labour productivity, and the standard of life of the average Nigerian.

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