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## Victims as Sacrificial Lambs: A Critique of Public Service Reforms in Nigeria

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### **Introduction**

The Nigerian public service, made up of government ministries, extra-ministerial departments and statutory agencies and corporations, is the locale for the management of what can be called the development process. It is through the public service that the framework of government policies and programmes are determined while, in the process, the tone of national development and the roles/responsibilities of the different stakeholders are set. The Nigerian public/civil service was the creation of British colonial rule to assist the colonial administration in its exploitation of the resources of the country. Although formal colonial rule began in what is now Nigeria around 1861, it was not until the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates that a unified governmental structure was established for the country while a unified civil service did not come into place until the 1920s (see Olowu, Otopo and Okotoni 1997). Nigeria became a federation through the instrumentality of the 1954 Constitution, made up a Federal Government at the centre and three regional governments. Correspondingly, this led to the emergence of the federal civil service at the centre and the regional civil services for each of the regions. Not unexpectedly, the Public Service Commission was set up to coordinate each of the services.

It is important to note that, just like it obtains elsewhere, the Nigerian public/civil service was created by the political authority for its own administrative convenience; and as such, it is inconceivable that any political authority or government in power would not seek to manipulate the service to suit its own temperament. This partly explains the endless

quest for the so-called reforms the Nigerian public service has been contending with since its inception. Over the years, the Nigerian public service has gone through a lot of phases, all in a bid to make the service result-oriented. Along this line, attempts have been initiated over the years to make government structures and operations more effective. The public service reforms which constitute a major plank of the global reform agenda of the Obasanjo administration is arguably the most frontal and far-reaching in terms of its consequences, not only for the country, but particularly for public sector employees. It is important to note that what has been unfolding in Nigeria is not an isolated one, as similar efforts at re-orientating the public service were made in other English speaking African countries.

Since the inception of the Nigerian public/civil service and before the efforts of the Obasanjo administration, there have been 14 previous major attempts through commissions, committees and teams, (see Table 1) beginning with Hunt's Commission of 1934, at addressing the state of the service, incorporating both conditions of service, staff performance and service delivery (see Adegoye 2006 and Salisu 2001). Underlying the various efforts is the need to create a holistic perspective in government management, one that would match the comprehensive outlook applied in economic planning, while at same time ensuring that the service is staffed with the right calibre of personnel.

**Table 1:** Civil Service Reforms in Nigeria 1934-1994

S/No	Name of Commission/ Committee	Year
1	Hunts Commission	1934
2	Harragin Commission	1945
3	Foot Commission	1948
4	Gorsuch Commission	1951
5	Phillipson-Adebo Commission	954
6	Mbanefo Commission	1959
7	Hewn Committee	1959
8	Morgan Commission	1963
9	Eldwood Commission	1966
10	Adebo Commission	1971
11	Udoji Commission	1972
12	Dotun Phillips Reforms	1985
13	Decree No. 43	1988
14	Ayida Review Panel	1994

**Source:** Salisu 2001 and Adegoye 2006

Beginning with the Adebo Salaries and Wages Commission of 1971, it appears successive governments have paid particular attention to both the structure and the role of the public service as well as the issue of efficiency. In fact, a major focus of the Adebo Commission was the 'establishment of a Public Service Review Commission to examine the role of the public service commission, structure of the civil service, conditions of service and training arrangement'. In 1972, the Udoji Commission, among others, had as its major focus 'increasing efficiency and effectiveness within the context of meeting the challenges of a development-oriented society'. The twin of efficiency and effectiveness of the public service were frontal in the attempts at reforming the civil service under the Babangida military junta in 1988 and the public service reforms initiated by the Obasanjo administration. In all these, the service has been vilified as corrupt, inefficient, peopled with deadwoods, etc., by political leaders, who may turn out to be the real problems of the Nigerian public service.

In spite of all the efforts at reforms, the problems or accusations remain. In the words of Salisu (2001), 'in spite of efforts at reforms, the service remains inefficient and incapable of reforming itself, let alone the rest of the economy. Corruption has become an endemic feature of public sector activities, with the oil booms and busts distorting the incentive structures of civil servants and other agents in the economy'. In a similar vein and in justifying the reform measures of the Obasanjo administration, Adegroye (the Director-General of the government agency in charge of the reforms, Bureau for Public Service Reforms (BPSR)(2006) posits that 'by the mid 1980s, the Nigerian civil service was far from being ideal. It was tradition-bound, somewhat ponderous and showing signs of deterioration and several undesirable characteristics of which the following were the most prominent: over-centralisation, incessant conflicts between cadres, little emphasis on results and concrete performance, counter-productive separation of authority from responsibility at the topmost hierarchy, dangerously low staff morale and productivity, inappropriate staff development practices' (p.7).

If the above is true, it either means that the real problems of the public service have not been identified or that the wrong solutions have been applied. The contention here is that it is a combination of both. As is becoming customary of managers of the Nigerian state, the real issues are neglected while precious and allegedly scarce resources are wasted in chasing shadows. Those who are bearing the brunt of the present reforms are already victims of a political economy that primarily serves the interests of international finance capital and its local comprador class. Rather than accepting the fundamental flaws inherent in the system, the present reforms

have ended up making sacrificial lambs out of the more vulnerable categories of public servants whose views do not really matter in the scheme of things and who, in clear conscience, cannot be accused of being the source of the problem.

This chapter takes a look at the major components of the reform package, particularly at the federal level, and how these have affected the bulk of the public servants. Part of the arguments is that the so-called reforms constitute part of the neo-liberal agenda imposed on the Nigerian state by its foreign mentors and are essentially meant to serve the interests of international finance capital. In this context, it is necessary to find scapegoats to justify the reforms and create avenues for the use of consultants, mostly foreigners and agents of the Bretton Wood institutions, driving the reforms. The inescapable conclusion is that the present reforms would likely end up the way of previous ones, that is, failing to achieve advertised objectives. Ultimately the Nigerian people would need to contest the content and direction of development policy in order to ensure that their interests are accommodated and protected.

### **Scapegoatism and Public Service Reforms in Nigeria**

Each attempt at 'reforming the Nigerian public service has usually been premised on some justifications to portray government's moves as altruistic. But unfortunately, at the end of each exercise, they are no more than mere justifications. The Obasanjo administration almost immediately at inception initiated the reform process. The first step in this direction was the organisation of a 10-day seminar for Permanent Secretaries in the employment of the Federal Government. This was followed by a series of similar seminars organised for officers at the Directorate level. The communiqué issued at the end of the seminar raised issues that are being addressed by the reform measures. Some of them, highlighted by Adegroye (2006), are:

- (i) The need to address the massive expansion in the size of the Service which had risen to 350 per cent between 1960 and 1999, compared with a national population increase of 160 per cent over the same period;
- (ii) Dealing with the decline in the institutional capacity, efficiency, effectiveness and commitment of the Service;
- (iii) Focusing more on ethical and moral issues, and in particular, addressing the popular perception that the Civil Service was corrupt;
- (iv) Restructuring and streamlining the Service (see Adegroye 2006:13-14)

The report of a study commissioned by the Federal Government in 2001 would appear to have given further impetus to the reform drive. Among other things, the report highlighted the following:

- (i) Dominance of an aging population – 60 per cent of the workforce is constituted by officers who are 40 years old and above;
- (ii) Preponderance of unskilled staff in the service –70 per cent of the entire workforce is constituted by officers on Grade Levels 01-06 while only 1.7 per cent of the workforce is made up of officers in the strategic thinking Directorate Cadre (GLs 15-17);
- (iii) Prevalence of ‘ghost’ workers symptomatic of poor personnel records and payroll control systems;
- (iv) Deployment of about 60 per cent of Federal Government spending to servicing the federal bureaucracy (including the National Assembly);
- (v) Onset of pervading low morale, especially at the higher levels of service, resulting from non-professional Human Resource Management Practice;
- (vi) Imposition of a highly centralised, hierarchical and rule-driven system which stifles individual initiative and muffles corporate accountability;
- (vii) Existence of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) with no Mission and Vision Statements or clear corporate and individual schedules of duties;
- (viii) Creation of under-resourced public institutions lacking the capacity to make optional use of technological changes to modernise;
- (ix) Gross inadequacy of working tools required to operate a modern management system;
- (x) Erosion of professionalism and esprit de corps;
- (xi) Degeneracy of policy making to a routine response to addressing urgent problems rather than being a structured initiative involving painstaking analysis, consultation and monitored control;
- (xii) Existence of serious capacity gaps at all levels due to prolonged absence of systematic training, needs identification and serious commitment towards updating skills;

The issues listed above create the impression that the reform process was driven from within and not imposed by foreign interests bent on ensuring

the subservience of the Nigerian public service. This explains why these issues are credited to participants at a seminar and findings from a commissioned study, both of which cannot really be said to be free from the manipulation of a political authority with some pre-conceived agenda. The government's own admission that its National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) is the overall framework for all the sectoral reforms in the country is a confirmation of the fact that the public service reform is a major component of the neo-liberal package for Nigeria. While we shall come back to the link between the neo-liberal economic package and the public service reforms, an attempt would be made, in the next paragraph, to examine some of the reasons given for the reform, to show that they are mere excuses to justify the punishment of largely innocent workers.

Most of the arguments are at best self-serving while others cannot be blamed on the workers that are made to pay for other people's sins. For anyone to talk of an over-bloated civil service, there is the need to establish what constitutes the ideal number of people to be employed. This is always difficult to determine, even in the private sector, and this explains why the issue of right-sizing or down-sizing never ends. What is clear is that when there is need to cut costs, especially in an unfavourable economic climate, jobs are usually the first casualty. Since government is interested in cutting its expenditure, it must find an alibi or a scapegoat to justify its move. The reference to the quantum leap of the size of the service by 360 per cent between 1960 and 1999 is at best a crude manipulation of data. Those who use this figure fail to reckon with the starting point and the fact that a few months before independence, there were only 2,308 Nigerians in the public service out of a total of 4,057. This is apart from the fact the scope of government activities and business was very limited. Equally important is the demand on government in a developing country, with a very small private sector to create and provide avenues for employment for the citizens.

As at 2001, there were about 240,000 persons employed by the Federal Civil Service (comprising all the ministries and extra-ministerial departments but excluding the armed forces, commercial and sub-vented parastatals). This figure represents 45 per cent of all Federal Government public employees (McCallum and Tyler 2001). This figure had gone down to 180,492 by 2005 and 161,000 in early 2006 (Adegoroye 2006). Adegoroye further provides additional statistics of the total employment profile in the entire public service of Nigeria from the federal to local government levels. In all, there are 2,267,492 persons employed at all the three tiers of government in Nigeria. With a population of about

140 million, the total number of persons employed in the entire public service in Nigeria (federal, state and local governments) represents only 1.61 per cent of the populace!!! It is amazing that anybody would argue that it is too much for a government to employ directly less than 2 per cent of its total population. The table below contains the breakdown of public sector employment profile in Nigeria.

**Table 2:** Public Sector Employment Profile in Nigeria

S/No	Location of Employment	Number Employed
1	Federal Core Civil Servants (including 47 Permanent Secretaries & 2000 officers at the Directorate Cadre)	180,492
2	Public Officers in the Military, Police and Para-Military Services	457,000
3	Public Officers in Agencies and Educational Institutions	470,000
4	Public Officers at the State Level	540,000
5	Public Officers at the Local Government Level	620,000
	Total	2,267,492

**Source:** Adegoroye 2006:4-5

In dismissing government's claim of excessive wage bill, a look at the breakdown of the payroll at the federal level is helpful. Available statistics show that the core civil service, which is worst hit by the present down-sizing, accounts for only 18 per cent of the total public service emoluments in Nigeria as at 2005. The complete distribution is presented below.

**Table 3:** Payroll Breakdown at the Federal Level as Percentage of Total Public Service Emoluments

S/No	Location	% of Total Emoluments
1	Core Civil Service	18
2	Military, Police & Para-Military	35
3	Agencies & Educational Institutions	31
4	Others, including Hospitals	16

**Source:** Adegoroye 2006:5

Closely related to the above is what the average public servant earns. By government's own account, those in the cadres of permanent secretary and the directorate each earn, on the average, US\$1,000 and US\$ 700 per

month respectively and constitute less than 2 per cent of all employees. The bulk of the employees outside the directorate cadre as at 2005 numbered 178,445 (if we take out the 47 permanent secretaries and the 2000 at the directorate level). Those at the level of confidential secretary are credited with a pay packet of US\$400 per month (Adegroye 2006) while those at the lowest level earn less than US\$100 each per month. We can then put the average earning of the civil servant at about US\$250 translating into a monthly wage bill of US\$44,611,250 and at an exchange rate of N130 to US\$1, this amounts to N5,799,462,500bn per month or N69,593,550,000 per annum. This wage bill contrasts sharply with a figure of N65.5 billion spent annually on the salaries and allowances of 472 political office holders who constitute the Federal Executive arm of government in Nigeria (see *The Guardian*, Sunday 1 July 2007). Again, this gives the lie to government's position as to what constitutes the drain on the common purse.

A second look at the issues listed by the study commissioned by the Federal Government will show that hapless public servants do not create the problems. Items iii, v, vi, viii, ix, xi and xii on the list are systemic problems that can only be addressed by the political authorities once the will is there. For example, government, through appropriate training and manpower development package, can address the issue of capacity. Again, 'ghost' workers are the creation of fraudulent state officials and bureaucrats and in any case, 'ghost workers' are ghost workers, they do not exist in reality. Equally, the issue of low morale cannot but be, given the starvation wages workers earn in the public service, particularly in the core civil service and the totality of the working environment.

The reforms have also affected the parastatals and other public enterprises that operate in the private sector environment. The major case against these enterprises by the apostles of privatisation is that they constitute a drain on public funds and, thus by privatising them, money would be released to provide social services and infrastructures. The position of the Nigerian government on the need for privatisation of public enterprises is summed up in the following words:

The privatisation policy became imperative following the failure of public enterprises to deliver on their mandates in spite of consuming a large chunk of the resources of the nation. Their other disabilities include failure to allocate resources efficiently; failure to engender entrepreneurial development; platforms for political patronage, which often times have jeopardised national interest (Adegroye 2006:27).

In reality, there is more to privatisation than the economic and financial reasons usually declared by governments to justify it. According to

Chottenpanda (2000:229), the USAID Labor Advisor to the Bureau of Public Enterprises, 'privatization programs are usually based as much on political factors as on financial and economic reasons'. In the same vein, The National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE) (2001:iii) argues:

... the point, to be blunt, is that Nigeria is trying to embark on privatization of NEPA and other public enterprises at all cost and in spite of overwhelming opposition, because it is a borrower, a debtor, who has been compelled by its external creditors or lenders to act in a particular way like a zombie. Any other argument to the contrary, of corruption, inefficiency, bad management and so on, are just academic sophistry meant to rationalize an objective or goal that has been preconceived in spite of the true situation on ground..

Privatisation would appear more political than economic. Otherwise, there are other options for addressing the so-called short-comings of these enterprises. If privatisation were just an economic policy, then there is no justification for selling companies that are self financing to generate additional funds for government. These include organisations such as, the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Nigerian Telecommunications (NITEL) and some of the government-owned financial institutions. The fall-out of privatisation is that many workers have lost their jobs. Figures available indicate that 8,000 workers lost their jobs in NITEL, 8,991 from the NPA, 4,800 from the Nigerian Postal Service (NIPOST), and 1,800 from the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN). From the core civil service, a total of 45,000 senior civil servants have been laid off due to the reforms.

Despite forcing these employees into premature retirement, accessing their benefits has been very difficult. As if to aggravate an already bad situation, government has tied the payment of their terminal benefits to their undergoing 'pre-severance training' in order (in the words of government) 'to prepare them for the transition to the private sector, and to enable (sic) put their terminal benefits to better use in retirement'. As at July 2007, these training programmes had not been fully implemented. The pre-retirement training programmes are at best opportunities to service the consultants who were given the assignments. In the same vein, the much advertised monetisation scheme has not been fully implemented. While political appointees swiftly collected their entitlements, many public servants are still owed, months in arrears, their own entitlements. Public sector unions regularly issue strike threats to ensure that they are not short-changed. Indeed, the manner in which the monetisation scheme has been implemented is an indication that government was only interested in saving money for members of the political class to squander.

Lastly, a word or two would not be out of place here in respect of the new pension scheme (which has been addressed comprehensively by Aborisade in the preceding chapter) that came as part of the reform package. The old pension scheme in the public sector was non-contributory. By this arrangement, the pension scheme was fully funded by government. Given the very low wages/salaries of public sector employees, the non-contributory scheme was considered a good deal which amounted to keeping, at best, what was withheld until retirement. Unilaterally changing to a contributory scheme, without a substantial increase in the earnings of the affected workers by way of salaries or wages, amount to denying Peter his due now in order to pay him later! There was nothing wrong with the old scheme other than corruption on the part of those managing it. Many instances have been uncovered of state officials diverting pension funds, without appropriate punishment being meted out to the culprits. Rather, victims of criminality are being made to pay for the crimes perpetuated by known offenders.

The bottom line in all of this is that the reform measures have ended up transferring the burden of reforms on the most vulnerable group of public servants. The swansong for justifying successive civil service reforms have remained the same; over-bloated personnel and large wage bill. If decades of reforms have not changed these, then we should look elsewhere for solutions. From all indications, the measures taken so far amount to class action by the ruling class against the weaker classes in society. This brings us to what can be considered as the real problem of the Nigerian public service.

The twin issues of profligacy and corruption encouraged by the political class and not the public servants constitute the bane of the service. The Obasanjo administration, just like its predecessors, was guilty of these. A few examples would suffice here. According to reports, the government spent a total of US\$1.1bn on the Port Harcourt and Kaduna Refinery and Petro-Chemical Companies between 2003 and May 2007 only to sell them for US\$721 million (see *The Guardian*, Sunday, 1 July 2007) on the eve of its departure to organisations that are suspected of fronting for top officials of the administration. This is both wasteful and corrupt. The power sector is no less offending. Between 1999 and 2005 about N1 trillion (US\$9bn) was invested by government while a sum of N7.46bn was committed into the Egbin Thermal Power Station which was again sold on the eve of the exit of the administration of Obasanjo. Apart from the fact that power generation keeps plummeting – it was down to 2,715MW, – a far cry from the target of 10,000MW by December 2007 (see *The Punch*, Tuesday 3 July 2007:7) – and the inability of those refineries to operate at

full capacity, it still needs to be explained why government should invest such sums in enterprises that were slated for privatisation. If such amount of money were sunk into these agencies, without anything to show for it, shouldn't government prosecute those responsible, except government itself just used the award of such contracts to siphon public money?

Lastly, the amount of money pumped into road construction and maintenance speaks volume of what really constitutes the drain on public resources. The Obasanjo government spent ₦1tn on road projects, yet what we have on ground is a near-collapse of the road infrastructure. The major federal highways are more or less death traps. This situation has led the Senate arm of the National Assembly to resolve, 'to investigate why we have spent so much money with little or nothing to show for it' (Senator Victor Ndoma-Egba, Deputy Senate Leader, quoted in *The Punch*, Friday, 6 July 2007). These are just a few of the many scandalous contract rip-offs witnessed under the 'reforming regime' of Obasanjo. The question that arises here again is whether it is public servants that awarded such inflated contracts or whether they are responsible for their non-execution.

Of course, the profligacy and corruption witnessed in the Obasanjo years is just a continuation of an established trend in Nigeria. The gross mismanagement of the economy by successive administrations contributed in worsening the economic crisis, which the country has been contending with since the early 1980s. This is manifested in massive stealing of public funds, excessive contract inflation, corrupt kick-backs and excessive borrowing at home and abroad (Onimode 1987) as well as lack of budgetary discipline and financial accountability (Osoba 1992). If the situation was bad under the Shagari administration, the dimension of the problem under the Babangida administration was simply frightening while the Abacha junta built on that legacy. Osoba (1992:4) puts the situation thus:

There has been a deliberate and cavalier squandering of allegedly scarce financial resources on inane exhibitionist projects, donations of vast sums of money to questionable, even damnable causes at home and abroad, proliferation of money guzzling bureaucracies (like DFRRRI, MAMSER, CDS) and a multitude of directorates, centres, programmes, authorities, agencies, etc. with no clearly perceivable or worthy function, but gargantuan, almost limitless financial allocations.

These duplications were equally witnessed under the Obasanjo administration. Emerging facts are already pointing in the direction of large-scale corruption at all levels of governments in Nigeria. We have gone this far in order to demonstrate that the problem of the public service in Nigeria is not that of too many hands or the ineptitude of the personnel. The problem is rather posed by parasitic elite with a huge appetite for

corruption and who regards public office as the shortest avenue to primitive accumulation. Already, the extent to which some of the former political office holders stole public funds is emerging. For instance, the sum of £2,961.560 was seized from a former governor of Plateau State in north-central Nigeria by British authorities (see *The Punch* of Wednesday, 3 October 2007) while property worth \$100 million belonging to the immediate past governor of Enugu State in south-east Nigeria have been seized in Morocco (see *The Nation*, Saturday, 29 September 2007). Having said this much, an attempt would now be made to locate the public service reforms within its proper context; the IMF/World Bank imposed neo-liberal economic reform package.

### **The Macroeconomic Framework of Public Service Reforms: Understanding the IMF/World Bank Inspired Economic Reform Packages**

The response of the Nigerian government, since the return to civilian rule, to the problem of underdevelopment and the recurring economic problems, which have refused to abate since the early 1980s, is encapsulated in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). The Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP), prompted by the World Bank as a condition for granting concessions to indebted countries such as Nigeria was the re-entry point and this ultimately provided the framework for NEEDS and similar packages in other countries.

The fundamental cause of our present economic predicament lies in the neo-colonial character of the economy characterised by the dependency syndrome. By this arrangement, dependent countries like Nigeria are tied to the apron strings of the advanced capitalist countries and consequently rely excessively on them. Since world capitalism itself is crisis-ridden, when the metropolitan economies run into crises, dependent countries such as Nigeria suffer the same fate. It was along this line that Mandel (1970), using Britain as an example, insists 'the ups and downs of the (British) economic situation cause corresponding fluctuations in the economic situation of the (continental) countries' (p.73).

There is also the lopsided nature of the Nigerian economy, which is both a reflection of the short-sightedness of the indigenous ruling class as well as the distortion engendered by the neo-colonial economic structure. The result is that certain sectors of the economy, such as oil, banking and distributive trade have been booming to the disadvantage of the agricultural and rural sectors. This explains, in part, the imbalance in the growth of the Nigerian economy.

The debt problem, which reached a crisis proportion around 1982 has equally succeeded in aggravating the economic crisis. The debt crisis arose principally out of the inability of debtor nations to pay back what they owe. The debt crisis itself was the direct result of the debt-trap set for oil producing countries by the G.7 group of most industrialised countries as a means of recycling all the petro-dollars back to their multinational banks (Osoba 1992).

The indebtedness, coupled with the need to re-schedule payment, has put the Nigerian economy almost absolutely at the mercy of international finance capital operating through such agencies as the IMF and the World Bank. The conditions imposed for debt re-scheduling have not only compounded the problems but have equally worsened the living standard of the masses of the Nigerian people.

Taking advantage of Nigeria's indebtedness and the Nigerian government's quest for debt re-scheduling/forgiveness, the creditor nations (acting through the IMF and World Bank) have imposed various conditionalities which are packaged as economic reforms such as SAP and, presently, NEEDS. The failure of the reform packages to redress the distortions in the economy is indicative of the fact that they are not the panacea to the problems. The reform packages are based on a number of assumptions and objectives, which appear rather simplistic and inflexible. The relevant ones to our presentation are:

- a. That these problems are traceable to the structure of prices (commodity prices, wages, exchange and interest rates), unbalanced budgets, trade restrictions and government intervention(e.g. parastatals);
- b. That only the capitalist model of development can resolve these problems, modernise these countries and eliminate their pervasive poverty.

A look at the major components of these policies and their outcomes would put things in their proper perspective. From about 1982 till date, the essential elements of the various economic restructuring programmes, by whatever name, (austerity measures, belt-tightening, structural adjustment or economic empowerment) remain the same; trade liberalisation, finding appropriate value of the national currency (devaluation), reduction in public expenditure, especially in respect of social services and privatisation and commercialisation of public enterprises. Irrespective of official posturing to the contrary, the thrusts of macroeconomic framework remain essentially the same.

There is also the political component of economic reforms with its insistence on 'reduced state participation in the economy with the private sector being the driving force with market forces determining prices' (Mwanza 1992:3). What is called private-sector driven development is one of the underlying philosophies of neo-liberal economic policies. In this context, firms are more interested in discovering, around the world, 'cheap but efficient production locations that offer them the largest and most secure and profitable return on competitive success' (Hirst and Thompson 1999:67). This is largely a response to the crises of capitalist development, which unfold periodically; the consequences of which are visited on developing countries. Haggard (1995:15) puts it thus:

Sluggish and erratic growth in the advanced industrial states matched by sharp fluctuations in import demand contributed to the economic difficulties of the Less Developed Countries (LDCs), especially in the early 1980s and again in the early 1990s.

This is similar to the position of Ernest Mandel referred to earlier. What this means is that those who created the problems facing the Nigerian economy and polity cannot be genuinely interested in solving them.

Of particular interest to the present discussion is the continuous cut in government expenditure and privatisation of many public enterprises, which have led to the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. Given the fact that government constitutes the largest employer of labour, the effect can only be devastating. Also, because of the viability of the sectors in which government is involved as an investor, the owners of private capital, especially foreign, would appear interested in taking over such lucrative sectors, not by way of fresh investments but by outright purchase of public enterprises at grossly undervalued prices. The international finance institutions controlled by the advanced capitalist countries readily come to their aid by pressuring governments of developing countries to hands-off such ventures.

In actual fact, there has always been a public service/administrative component of successive economic reform packages. It was not by accident that the 1988 civil service reforms came on the heels of the imposition of the Structural Adjustment Programme in 1986. In the words of Amuwo (1991), 'the reforms are the administrative counterpart of the economic reforms (structural adjustment programme, SAP and the political "reforms" (the transition package)'. It is in the same vein that the public service reforms constitute the administrative component of the economic reforms of the Obasanjo government. In relating privatisation, a component of the overall economic reform package, to globalisation, Went

(2000) lists the characteristics of the process of globalisation to include liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation, flexibility and internationalisation (Went 2000:2-3).

In fact, to think that imperialist-inspired economic policies, under whatever name or appellation, would assist implementing countries seem unrealistic. This is because:

Some of the policies carried out under the banner of structural adjustment (and presently globalization) tend to contribute to growing economic instability. For example, devaluation often leads to rising inflation and to declining real wages or salaries and other fixed incomes. When accompanied by government expenditure reduction, devaluation may lead to more income inequality in favour of the entrepreneurial class, including the merchants, the exporters and the foreign investors.... in heavily indebted countries, the main priorities of IMF programmes are the clearing of payment arrears, enhancement of debt servicing and replenishment of foreign exchange reserves (Mwanza 1992:6).

It amounts to a contradiction in terms to talk of economic empowerment in the face of the policy measures being pursued by government in Nigeria. People are being forced into premature retirement, their terminal benefits are not paid as and when due, pensioners are owed months, if not years, in arrears while at the same time opportunities for self-employment are restricted. This is why it is not out of place to sum up the effects of the various neo-liberal economic policies, including its local variant in Nigeria, as having succeeded in ensuring, in the words of Chossudovsky, 'the globalization of poverty' (see Chossudovsky 1997) while putting the burden of economic reforms on the disadvantaged groups in society. The point is that contrary to the arguments of its proponents, globalisation has worsened the inequalities among nations of the world and by necessary implication, the inequalities within nations. Even by the admission of their proponents, (including the IMF and the World Bank) these policy measures have failed to achieve results that would have impacted positively on the generality of the people (remember the admission that SAP needed a human face). That was after its authors, including the errand boys in Nigeria, had insisted that SAP had no alternative. We have said this much because of the wider ramification of the economic situation as well as the context in which public service reforms are unfolding. What is clear here, again, is that official justifications for the economic reforms are not valid, which explains why the state of the Nigerian economy remains parlous, in spite of over two decades of economic reforms.

## Conclusion

The implementation and outcomes of the public service reforms initiated by the Obasanjo government do not suggest that the advertised results would be achieved. It appears that what is touted as the panacea to the problems of the service is not capable of turning round its fortunes. Given the fundamental problems of the Nigerian economy and society, located within the context of neo-colonial economic relations, even if the entire public servants are sacked, nothing would change. The truth is that the public service cannot rise above the level of the political class that controls it. Put differently, the quality of political leaders/office holders determine the quality and output of the public service, particularly in a situation in which career civil servants are subordinated to the political elites. It does not really matter what the civil servants advise, ultimately it is what the politicians consider expedient that matter. For instance, in 2003 while swearing in his Special Advisers, President Obasanjo gleefully told the whole world that he was not bound to take their advice!

In this era of reforms, with all sorts of international consultants working for the World Bank and the IMF and some of the multi-lateral and bi-lateral agencies in virtually all sectors of the economy and society, public servants have been virtually rendered redundant. It does not really matter their placing within the hierarchy and level of educational attainment. This is part of the ideological warfare being unleashed on developing countries by the imperial powers. In order to justify their intervention in the developing economies, they must run down indigenous personnel. Unfortunately, our leaders have sold themselves cheaply to their foreign masters, thus parroting what is handed down to them as the gospel truth. Within the context of the neo-liberal economic reform agenda, the public service reforms are nothing short of punitive measures targeted at the lower echelons of the service. At the end of the exercise, we shall be taken back to the same starting point with the old swansong of 'an inefficient and unproductive public service'.

Without being theatrical, all the issues raised as being problem areas can be routinely addressed internally and most probably achieve better results. Of course, there is a need to attract the right calibre of personnel, who would be able to cope with managing the public service for results, into the service. This goes with putting in place a competitive remuneration package to attract such high flyers. In respect of the issue of capacity building for civil servants, an appropriate manpower development policy should be put in place. This policy should address things like the qualification framework for those to be employed, additional training they

should be exposed to and at what intervals, and what should be the mix between in-house training and those provided by external consultants?

Lastly, if we want the best out of people in term of performance and commitment to organisational goals, it is important to motivate them. Hence, how to motivate staff should be seen as a major policy issue. With respect to privatisation, the present option adopted by government is wrong. If performance and profitability are the problems, privatisation is not the best option. Performance setting is a viable option and by this arrangement the management of such enterprises should agree with the government on what is considered realistic targets, which would ultimately determine the tenure of the management team. Even in the core civil service, the criteria for assessing the performance of top management should be clearly set out while, as from certain level, appointment and re-appointment of top level officials should be done on the basis of meeting pre-determined goals (performance based contract).

In making these suggestions, we are not oblivious of the political undercurrent which is driving the reform agenda in Nigeria. The ultimate is for the Nigerian people, working through their own organisations and genuine allies, to contest the development agenda with those who are profiting from the present arrangement. Examples of other countries in the developing world where popular forces have made agents of international finance capital to beat a retreat, is enough to propel the Nigerian people to secure their own today and tomorrow. A few individuals are profiting from the present arrangement in which many Nigerians are worse off than they were at the beginning of the reforms. To do otherwise is to unwittingly encourage a situation in which victims would continue to be made sacrificial lambs. This is the basis for a determined struggle to enthrone a people-centred development agenda.

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