

Pétrocapitalisme, néolibéralisme, main d'œuvre et mobilisation communautaire au Nigéria

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Résumé

Au Nigéria, pays producteur, le liquide politique nommé pétrole sert de révélateur fondamental de la lutte des classes. La plupart des écrits sur les crises causées par l'industrie du pétrole reflètent pourtant fort mal le rôle crucial joué par la classe ouvrière dans sa production et sa distribution. Pour bien saisir les perspectives de changement social et les défis qu'il pose dans une économie capitaliste basée sur le pétrole, il faut comprendre le rôle de la main d'œuvre, particulièrement celui du mouvement syndical. Cet article cerne et analyse la forme, les tendances et les limitations des actions entreprises par la communauté pétrolière et par les travailleurs du pétrole au Nigéria, durant la phase néolibérale du pétrocapitalisme. En particulier, l'auteur note l'absence d'alliances organisées entre ces deux groupes et la nécessité d'efforts conscients pour bâtir l'unité entre les branches salariées et non-salariées de la classe ouvrière. Selon l'argument central, une forme de gestion socialisée de l'économie et de la société, basée sur la forme sociale de l'organisation de la production, mis en place par les forces productives, est nécessaire pour résoudre les contradictions fondamentales du capitalisme pétrolier. Pour ce faire, il faut éventuellement que les travailleurs de l'industrie pétrolière et la collectivité locale exercent un contrôle conjoint sur cette industrie.

Petro-capitalism, Neoliberalism, Labour and Community Mobilization in Nigeria

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Abstract

A fundamental measure of the class struggle in Nigeria, as an oil producing country, is the political liquid called oil. Yet, most writings on the oil industry-induced crises hardly reflect the crucial role of the working class, which is at the point of production and distribution. An adequate understanding of the prospects and challenges for social change in a capitalist oil-based economy lies in appreciating the role of labour, particularly organized labour. This article identifies and analyses the form, trends and limitations of actions undertaken by the oil community and oil workers in Nigeria within the context of the neoliberal phase of petro-capitalism. In particular, it notes a lack of organized alliances between these groups and calls for conscious efforts aimed at building unity between the waged and unwaged wings of the working class. This is based on the central argument that the resolution of the fundamental contradictions in oil capitalism requires a socialized form of management of society and the economy by the productive forces. This requires, ultimately, joint control of the oil industry by its workers and the local community.

Introduction

A fundamental measure of the class struggle in Nigeria, as an oil producing country, is the political liquid called oil. Yet, most analysis on the oil industry-induced crises hardly reflects the role of the social force at the point of production and distribution, the working class. But an adequate understanding of the prospects and challenges for social change in a capitalist oil-based economy lies in appreciating the role of labour, particularly organized labour. This article reflects on oil community and oil workers actions, in terms of the forms, trends and limitations, in the context of the neoliberal phase of petro-capitalism. While capitalism is by its nature a violent system prone to crises, based on exploitative and conflictual class relationships, petro-capitalism gives rise to even more acute contradictions, conflicts and violence. Indeed, a peculiar feature of oil capitalism is that it continuously fuels con-

traditions and conflicts. The oil-related conflicts tend to become more pronounced in an age in which world imperialism, led by U.S. imperialism, pushes for greater neoliberalization of the oil industry. The effect is that tension, rather than cooperation, tends to characterise the relationship between labour and community.

This article argues that the resolution of the fundamental contradictions inherent in oil capitalism requires a socialized form of management of the economy and society by the productive forces identical to social forms present in the production process. This will require joint control of the oil industry by its workers and the local community. Indeed, the effectiveness of resistance by the dominated classes, aimed at pushing the state to use oil wealth for social needs as opposed to being used to build the arsenal of terror and a militarized state, is dependent on the extent to which it can channel the energies of workers and communities and develop alliances between them.

The article intends therefore to identify the absence of these alliances and calls for the conscious building of unity between the waged and unwaged wings of the working class. It situates the study within a Marxian theoretical framework in order to clarify the link between the capitalist structure of work relations and petro-capitalism. This is followed by an analysis of neoliberalism in the Nigerian oil industry, and an assessment of both community and labour struggles under petro-capitalism. By way of conclusion, a case is made for a re-composition of anti-capitalist struggles in oil capitalism.

Capitalist Structure of Work Relations

Hyman (1975: 96-97) explains that capitalism constitutes a complex of work and social relations of production. The main features of the capitalist structure of work relations consist of the following: private ownership of productive forces; concentration of ownership in the hands of a small minority; the obligation of the majority of society to sell their labour power as a commodity; the domination of profit as the fundamental motive of economic activity; and top-down hierarchical control over production processes by owners and their managerial representatives. The structure of capitalist work relations thus presents an exploitative relationship – the wages and salaries paid to the employees represent only a portion of the value they collectively produce. The remainder is appropriated by the employer as profit. The capitalist

context of production is based therefore on an inherently conflictual class relation. Given the employee status (as opposed to a producer status) of the worker in the capitalist context of production, the workers, individually and collectively, are alienated from having a say in what is produced (product or service), how products are produced (that is, the process) and the allocation of resources or profit (the surplus value).

Marxists consider that capitalist societies are increasingly characterized by two major antagonistic classes, defined by their economic status: the ruling class (capitalists) and the subject class (workers). Capitalists own and/or control the means of production, distribution, consumption and exchange, as well as the means of political domination. The workers, on the other hand, are the subordinate class who neither own nor control significant property, but are subjected to the servitude of the interests of the ruling class, and are thereby politically, economically, and socially exploited and dominated.

Bukharin (2003) explains that based on the exploitative and conflictual class relationship, the capitalist system is by nature a violent system. Any system based on the exploitation of the overwhelming majority by a tiny minority can only survive by repressing the other class violently. A system that thrives on the imposition of the interests of the minority in the society can only engender social chaos, turbulence and war. To Bukharin, a capitalist society is inconceivable without armaments, as it is unthinkable without wars. He posits that war is nothing but another method of competition at a specific level of development and conflictual economic interests give rise to the inevitability of the existence of arms and wars (IST in Africa: 22). Caffentzis (2005: 121) explains further that capitalism is essentially war-like, both between and within classes, such that wars can be identified as profit, wage, interest or rent wars. Hence, the Marxist contention that war is the continuation of economics by other means.

Oil and gas operations appear to be organized in a war-like scenario as oil facilities are defended and secured by a combination of foreign, state and private security outfits. Staff housing estates of foreign oil companies as well as oil facilities tend to be located within paramilitary estates, with police and military posts providing security (International Crisis Group, 2000, 2002). Indeed, by the late 1990s, an estimated 20 per cent of Shell's workforce in Nigeria was categorized as 'security' (Watts, 2004:

15). The Nigerian state has unleashed terror on the people of the Niger Delta through the operations such as Operation Salvage, Operation Flush of various military task forces including the Rivers State Task Force and the Joint Task Force. These operations have included use of the mobile police called 'kill and go', the regular police, the notorious secret State Security Service (SSS), and the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI). Communal conflicts are often engineered in order to provide justification for increased military presence in the Niger Delta. In all these operations, the oil multinationals bankroll the procurement of weapons of terror by the Nigerian state.

Petro-capitalism

Petro-capitalism is a concept which implies an oil-based economy that includes the basic capitalist features described above. To properly analyse such an economy requires an adequate appreciation of the key elements identified by Caffentzis (2005: 101-103). First, oil is a commodity, and as a commodity, it is produced to make profit and not simply to guarantee human needs. The corollary is that if profit cannot be realized from oil, it would not be produced. Second, oil is a basic commodity because oil and gas is involved directly or indirectly in the production cycle of almost all other commodities. Consequently, changes in the price of oil cause changes in the prices of almost all other commodities, as well as wages and profits throughout the world. Thus, the price of oil is critical, not just because of the importance of oil for production and transportation, but because of the economic consequences on an international scale. Third, the production process involves a high organic composition of capital, meaning that it embraces large amounts of machines and equipment and relatively little direct labour, with all the consequent implications and contradictions. One of the basic implications of the high organic composition character is that although the oil industry generates the bulk of the wealth of oil producing nations like Nigeria, it provides limited employment. Fajana (2010) indicates that the Nigerian oil industry provides approximately 70,000 jobs, including expatriate, regular, contract and subcontract categories of employment. This raises a critical question: if surplus value is generated from the unpaid labour of the working class, where does the value derived from the oil industry (which employs limited labour) come from? It comes from the other sec-

tors of the economy with lower organic compositions of capital.

As Caffentzis (2005: 123) puts it, the bulk of the surplus is generated by the industries with the most labour, while the bulk of the surplus is appropriated by the industries with the most capital. Similarly, the Report of the African Peer Review Mechanism asserts that resources are continually channelled to the relatively more capital-intensive oil and gas sector that has limited direct linkages with the rest of the economy (African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), 2008: 143). This explains why the oil industry is considered a matter of concern for 'collective capital'. The capitalists are, therefore, concerned with controlling where the surplus that is shifted to the oil industry is going. Is it being used for the welfare of the working class or the benefit of the capitalists? Further, rent is paid to the owners of the oil fields – a kind of tribute to the owners of the land where oil is found. Caffentzis explains that war tends to accompany all rental claims (2005: 102). This occurs because rent is considered to be the epitome of unproductive income. It is, therefore, argued that if the owner of the oil field disrupts the productive activity of a profitable industry, the latter could lay claim to the right of exclusion and resist being disturbed.

Given the key features of an oil economy, elucidated above, it is clear why oil is a commodity that is the object of the collective interest of not only capitalists around the world, but also of nation states, transnational corporations and classes. It is within this context that the insight, offered by Bond, as far as oil-related conflicts are concerned, can be understood. Scholars, including Bond (2006), have argued that oil alone does not cause conflicts. Instead, it is the process of oil transformation and mediation through market, social and power relations in various forms as energy, profit and power that causes conflicts.

Oil production gives rise to acute contradictions, which are manifested in five types of class struggles (Nore and Turner, 1980). The first and main source of contradiction is that oil is a commodity, which is produced and marketed within capitalist relations. The second and most direct form of class struggle around oil is the confrontation between capital and oil workers within the industry. The third form of class struggle takes place among factions and classes for control of state power within oil-producing countries. The fourth, and most fundamental, is the class struggle between the exploited and the ruling classes in oil

producing countries. This includes conflicts between workers and the oil companies and workers and the state. The fifth is the conflict among different elements of the international bourgeoisie each based in a major industrial power.

Caffentzis (2005: 3-4) also identifies the following additional forms of oil production-related conflicts: between the resource owners (for example, oil producing communities, who lay claim to ownership and the right to control) and the tenants (for example private or state-owned oil companies); the struggle between non-state land owners and the state over the level of taxation that is to be levied on the rental income; and the struggle between central state-land owners and different class elements over the level of rents received and their social distribution in terms of wage levels and sharing formula to other lower levels of government.

Implicit in the above categorization of forms of class struggles is the conflict over ownership, between the oil producing communities and the state. Ownership tends to determine who has the right to control. Thus, in the Nigerian situation, the Ijaw ethnic group, in the Kiama Declaration, claimed the petroleum within Ijaw territory as common property of the Ijaw community:

1. All land and natural resources (including mineral resources) within the Ijaw territory belong to Ijaw communities and are the basis of our survival.
2. We cease to recognize all undemocratic decrees that rob our people's communities of the right to ownership and control of our lives and resources, which were enacted without our participation and consent. These include the Land Use Decree and the Petroleum Decree (The Kiama Declaration, December 1998).

The Kaima Declaration represents the communiqué of the conference held by the youths of the Ijaw ethnic group on December 11, 1998. Based on the perspective of community ownership of oil, militant groups argue that it is legitimate for them to take oil from the pipelines erected by the oil companies, because it is theirs. Further, there exists unregistered private oil refineries suspected to have been constructed by militant armed groups. On the other hand, by virtue of the legislation enacted by the state, the act of taking oil from the pipelines and constructing unlicensed refineries is considered illegitimate and criminal, as far as

the state is concerned. After the Odi genocide², the invading soldiers left scornful graffiti: 'na you get oil? Foolish people'. This means 'Does the oil belong to you? Foolish people' (Caffentzis, 2005: 181).

Rutledge identifies two pertinent and peculiar characteristics of oil capitalism which distinguishes it from manufacturing capitalism (2005: 3-4). These are the need to have access to landed property and the 'territorial imperative'. Oil capitalism necessarily requires having access to landed property in order to drill for oil. This means the oil company has to accommodate itself to customary rules and arrangements governing access to land and mineral rights, which includes oil. The state has historically retained the right to land, including mineral rights. Under the current Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), the government owns the land, including the minerals embedded in it. The State could only lease land to individuals or corporate bodies for various uses within the specified duration. According to the Nigerian Constitution, the State owns land in trust for the people of Nigeria. The State is thus constitutionally empowered to grant licenses for the use of the land, revoke the licenses granted, tax or demand some contribution in kind, and generally exercise the power to regulate the industry. Oil capitalism is distinct from capitalism based on agriculture or manufacturing because of its 'territorial imperative'. The oil company must continuously shift its operations from region to region, country to country, constantly seeking new reserves of oil to replace the ones already depleted. If it fails to replace the depleted reserves, its share price will decline and its directors and shareholders will suffer.

A major implication of these characteristics is that oil capitalism intrinsically and continuously fuels contradictions and conflict. It puts the oil company in conflict with oil producing communities (in the process of seeking access to land and searching for additional reserves) and potentially with the state, whenever the latter feels its sovereignty is seriously challenged. These conflicts are in addition to the inherent conflict between the oil companies and their workforce which is a reality for capitalist companies.

Neoliberalism in the Nigerian Oil Industry

The basic idea of neoliberalism is that free market economies will operate smoothly and steadily produce more wealth. Any problems that may arise are attributed to 'unnatural monopolies'. According to the neoliberal position, state economic intervention is an aberration, as it leads to economic distortions. The role of the state, therefore, should be restricted to defending private property, upholding contracts, national defence and overseeing the money supply. In essence, therefore, neoliberals see the existence of public enterprises (PEs) and/or government involvement in the economy as *the* obstacle to economic development. They, therefore, advocate commercialization and privatization of existing PEs and the promotion of the private sector as the engine of economic growth. They also oppose other state intervention in the market, for example, subsidies for basic commodities such as petrol (Harvey, 2005).

By contrast, the 1970s was a period of nationalization. In 1971, the government acquired 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ per cent equity interest in Nigerian Agip Oil Company. To retaliate against the support which France gave to Biafra during the civil war (1967 to 1970), the government acquired 35 per cent equity interest in ELF, as well as in Shell-BP, Gulf, Mobil and Ashland. In 1979, the government acquired 60 per cent equity interest in Gulf, Mobil, Agip, ELF, Texaco and Pan Ocean. In the same year, BP was nationalized as it was accused of shipping Nigeria's oil to apartheid South Africa. The radical measures thus resulted in raising state participation in most oil companies from 35 per cent in 1971, to 55 per cent in 1974, and 60 per cent in 1979 (Omeri and Nchi, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2005:2; Omorogbe, 2001). Even though Nigeria became the eleventh member of Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1971, the government took measures to enforce the declaratory statement by OPEC at its inception in 1968 that oil producing countries should undertake direct oil exploitation or where not possible, enter into various contracts, which involved holding equity interest in foreign oil companies, exercising greater control and ensuring payment of greater royalties. In line with OPEC's declaration, the 1968 Companies Decree forced all companies operating in Nigeria to become Nigerian corporations by being registered in Nigeria. In 1970, the 1969 Petroleum Decree was enforced. It required that Oil Mining Leases (OMLs) must not exceed 20 years and that

after 10 years, half the acreage of the OML must be transferred to government. Before the Decree, OMLs were valid 30 years on-shore and 40 years offshore, with no transfer requirement. The granting of an OML may also be on the basis of a specified level of state participation. OML holders were expected to guarantee that within 10 years of operation, 75 per cent of total management, professional and supervisory positions would be held by Nigerians and at least, 60 per cent of positions in each grade were to be occupied by indigenes. The 1968 Companies Decree also required all semi-skilled and unskilled workers to be Nigerians, within 10 years of an oil company starting operations (Omeri and Nchi, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2005: 2; Omorogbe, 2001).

The interventionist and developmentalist state approach, based on partial nationalization, increased state participation, higher equity interest and control of the oil companies characterized the 1970s. This contrasts with the neoliberalism of recent decades, involving a program of sale of state-owned refineries and equity interests in oil companies. This neoliberal paradigm shift tends to heighten conflicts between the major social forces, particularly in the oil-producing Niger Delta area.

Community Struggles in Oil Capitalism

Oil producing communities clamour for resource control, environmental protection, provision of infrastructure, access to jobs for youth, among other demands. Since the 1950s, minority ethnic groups in the Niger Delta have been agitating against marginalization, neglect and politics of exclusion by the three main majority ethnic-based ruling political parties and governments in Nigeria: the Hausa/Fulani in the Northern Region; the Yoruba in the Western Region; and the Igbo in the Eastern Region. The minority ethnic groups then agitated for the creation of separate regions. Based on these agitations, the Federal Government set up the Willincks Commission. The Commission rejected the demand for separate regions, preferring provision of constitutional guarantees against neglect, in the form of fundamental rights. The Commission also recommended the establishment of a Niger Delta Development Board to address developmental concerns in the area which began operations in 1959. The discovery of oil in commercial quantities in the area has, however, fuelled the agitation over resource control and restructuring of Nigeria. The minorities argue that each ethnic nationality, no matter how small,

should be allowed to form a state (a federating unit) which shall have the right to control its natural resources one hundred per cent while making contributions to jointly fund the central government: each ethnic nationality, no matter how big or small, should participate as equals with other nationalities in running the Nigerian Federation. The Nigerian Federation currently consists of 36 states, 774 local governments and one Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

The justification for resource control and restructuring of Nigeria, as explained above, can be appreciated when it is realized that although the Niger Delta produces the bulk of Nigeria's oil wealth, it is the least developed. Oil exploration processes create the worst forms of environmental degradation and abuse. The main occupations of the ordinary people are destroyed through the destruction of forests and farmlands, the pollution of creeks and fishponds by oil spills and the contamination of the air by gas flaring causing acidic rain water. Yet, basic amenities such as health care, pipe borne water, electricity are lacking. In an analysis of the kinds of demands made during community and youth mass actions, between 2000 and 2003, Ikelegbe (2005: 218) established the following categories: electricity, jobs, employment or empowerment, registration of indigenous contractors, scholarships, and compensation for environmental pollution and the land occupied.

Agitation for resource control and restructuring of the Nigerian Federation has also been spurred on by the steady obliteration of the principle of 'derivation' in revenue allocation as far as revenue derivable from natural resources is concerned. The distribution of revenue based on the source of such revenue is termed the 'derivation' principle in Nigeria. The historical development relating to the practice of distribution of revenue based on the derivation principle is explained below. In 1953, the regional government of the area where natural resources were found had 100 per cent control and merely had to contribute to fund the central government. The percentage of the revenue from natural resources which the regional governments (and later state governments) could retain was reduced to 50% by 1960; 45% in 1970; 20% in 1975; 2% in 1982; 1.5% in 1984; 3% in 1992 and rose to 13% by 1995 – the rate that is still retained in Section 162(2) of the operating Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999). The ethnic minorities in the oil-rich Niger Delta now ar-

gue that their struggle is for self-determination and political autonomy within Nigeria. They reason that, whereas the majority ethnic nationalities of Nigeria sought to exercise the right to self-determination during anti-colonial struggles for independence, successive governments, backed by the majority ethnic nationalities, have denied ethnic minorities the same right.

Community agitation by youths and women in the Niger Delta are directed against the multinational oil companies, on the one hand, and against the Nigerian state, on the other. Attacks against the oil MNCs are perceived as a means of retaliating with the Federal Government for putting them in a disadvantaged position. The ordinary people of the Niger Delta have adopted different methodologies of struggle. Watts (2004: 24) identifies the following forms of resistance by the oil producing communities against oil companies: demonstrations and blockades against oil facilities, occupations of flow stations, sabotage of pipelines, oil bunkering, legal actions, hostages and strikes. He points out that the patterns and rhythms of the different forms of resistance were affected by local and national elections, the deepening militarization of the oil fields and oil installations, as well as the emergence of ethnic militias and armed groups. However, it must be acknowledged that these forms of resistance developed in different phases, over time.

Until 1995, when Ogoni environmentalists, including Ken Saro-Wiwa, were hanged, resistance activities were characterized by peaceful modes of protests. In the early 1980s, women and youth disrupted oil production through peaceful mass actions. When the oil MNCs failed to respond quickly enough or at all to community demands, youths, acting on their own or on behalf of communities, would resort to shutting down oil facilities. There were several of such activities in Ogoniland and other areas in the Niger Delta in the early 1990s. The reasoning is, as Arnold (2000: 224) puts it, "if they do not benefit from the oil output, then, they will stop the oil from being produced" (Cited in Ikelegbe, 2005: 215). However, qualitative changes have occurred since the late 1990s. Communal agitation once took the form of peaceful mass protests with protesters carrying placards and tree leaves, as represented by the activities of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni people (MOSOP). Today, the struggle has acquired violent dimensions, involving the arming of militant community activists. The emergence of the phenomenon of armed struggle, as repre-

sented by groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), should be seen as a product of decades of criminal neglect as well as corporate and state repression. Ken Saro Wiwa had predicted this shift in methodology of resistance, from peaceful to violent, in his 1995 pre-conviction statement to the Ogoni Civil Disturbances Tribunal. The shift from non-violent to violent forms of resistance is, however, not entirely new. On February 23, 1966, Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, an Ijaw nationalist, along with a few other youths organized an armed struggle and declared the Niger Delta Republic an autonomous region, which lasted for only 12 days.

The violence of the armed groups is, however, not directed against the oil MNCs alone. Communal or ethnic conflicts have occurred between and within groups over access to and control of oil. Such conflicts have occurred between ethnic nationalities such as the Ijaw and Itsekiri; Ijaw and Ilaje; Urhobo and Itsekiri; and Basambri-Nembe and Ogbologbomabri-Nembe; and within communities such as Ozoro (Ikelegbe, 2005: 220). While in Warri, Delta State, communal violence manifests as the conflict between the Ijaw and Itsekiri ethnic militias, in Rivers State, it is manifested as a conflict between Ijaw groups. Oil theft, including oil bunkering, which occurred on a relatively small scale in the 1980s, has expanded to a very large scale since 1997.

The militant armed groups have also inflicted violence on both local and expatriate oil workers. Ikelegbe (2005: 219), citing Williams (2000) and Agence France-Presse (2003), found that over 66 oil workers were abducted or kidnapped for ransom, between April 2002 and April 2003, in seven incidences.

A downside of the pervasive armed resistance is that it provides to both local and international capitalists ammunition to justify their call for a military solution to the resistance (Fleshman, 2001: 3-11). Some segments of the international solidarity movement also express their misgivings, both philosophical and ideological, over the complex situation as it includes both public-spirited self determination groups as well as groups that engage in violent activities for ransom. The complexity of the state of violence has been captured by a study conducted by Human Rights Watch (2005: 1-8). The human rights organization establishes that violence in the Niger Delta is traceable to rivalries among militant groups, politicians who use frustrated unemployed youths and some of the armed groups as pawns, traditional

chiefs, and the oil conglomerates. Human Rights Watch established that rivalry between the Alhaji Dokubo Asari-led Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the Ateke Tom-led Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) led to intense fighting in the riverine villages in the southeast and southwest of Port Harcourt and within Port Harcourt itself around 2004 over the control of oil wealth (Human Rights Watch, 2005: 1-8).

Politicians tend to rely on armed groups to inflict violence on political opponents in order to secure victory during local and national elections. In exchange, such armed groups are given official support to tap directly into oil pipelines and extract crude oil. The oil is emptied into river barges that are hidden in small tributaries, and later transported to ships offshore for sale in neighbouring countries, a practice referred to as oil bunkering. According to the Managing Director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the sum of N 53.8 billion³ was lost between 2006 and 2007 due to illegal bunkering (APRM, 2008: 318).

The conflicts were compounded by manipulation of youths (many of them university graduates, who had been frustrated as a result of being unemployed for decades) by top government officials, politicians, traditional leaders, and organized syndicates involved in oil theft, which included the oil companies. The rival armed groups battle to control territory and lucrative oil bunkering routes. Currently, there are reported incidences of *unregistered* refineries being manned by some of the armed groups. Apart from the prominent armed groups, there are numerous other smaller groups.

Traditional leaders and chiefs also play a role in escalating conflicts. Apart from money paid to the government for exploration and production licences, oil companies also make payments to host communities through traditional leaders for compensation and contribute to community development funds. Oil companies tend to give security and labour contracts to traditional leaders or chiefs. Payments made through the traditional chiefs fuel conflicts and violence as they intensify competition over access to these positions. Similarly, youths who do not benefit from resources controlled by traditional leaders often constitute themselves into strong forces, blocking access to facilities, thus compelling oil companies to distribute some resources to them in order to ensure the security of their business operations (Human

Rights Watch, 2005).

Human Rights Watch (2005) also found that expatriate and local businessmen, politicians, military personnel and employees of oil companies have formed highly organized conglomerates engaged in oil theft. They recruit and sponsor armed youths to provide security for oil bunkering. It is possible that national revenue losses from oil bunkering involving the oil companies may be more than their declared revenue. It has been estimated that within a period of 40 years, beginning from the first export of oil, between US\$300 and \$380 billion was realized. By comparison, between 2000 and 2003, the average annual oil income for the Federal Government was N1,500 billion or about US\$15 billion in the period under consideration (Onyeukwu, 2007: 7, 11, 4). This translates to around US\$70 a year per person, over the 40 years of oil exports, and to around N10,000 (\$100 US) a year from 2000-2003, based on population estimates. In reality, more wealth may have been lost to oil bunkering than is officially declared.

Palliatives and acts of charity, such as the establishment of commissions, and violence have been the government's consistent response to community agitation in the Niger Delta. The Commissions that have been established are termed palliatives because the benefits arising from them are considered inadequate to satisfy the yearnings of the communities. The limited gains from the commissions and development agencies are perceived as acts of charity, doled out, out of pity for the plight of the communities. The recipients contend that they are actually the true owners of the resources and they ought to control the processes of sharing oil wealth with the majority ethnic nationalities.

The Commissions that have been established to provide palliatives for the Niger Delta include the following: the Willinks Commission (1958); the Niger Delta Development Board (1959); the Niger Delta Development Board (1961); the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (1976); the Presidential Task Force for Development of Oil Producing Areas (1989); the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (1992); the Niger Delta Development Commission (2000); the 50-member Consolidated Council on Social and Economic Development of Coastal States of the Niger Delta comprising the President as Chairman and Governors of all the oil producing states as members (2006); and the Ministry of Niger Delta (2008). Another palliative is the

granting of amnesty and unconditional pardons to all militants on the condition that they surrender and hand over all equipment, weapons, arms and ammunition and sign the Renunciation of Militancy forms for a period of 60 days, effective from 25 June 2009 (*The Guardian*, 26 June 2009: 1). Odukoya (2006: 256) explains that the commissions are actually anti-development in that they were set up with the goal of disempowering the revolutionary consciousness of the people of the Niger Delta. In addition, they also serve as another avenue for primitive accumulation by members of the ruling class from the Niger Delta region who are appointed to such commissions. The Commissions and development agencies listed above are viewed as avenues for primitive accumulation in that they are often mired in corruption.

Another form of governmental response to community agitation in the Niger Delta has been violent repression. The Niger Delta, rich in natural resources, has long been soaked in blood, a product of institutionalized violence and political control. It has been a strategic location for international capital, first for the shipment of African slaves to the plantations of the Caribbean and the Americas three centuries ago (Caffentzis, 2005: 133), then for palm oil and now for petroleum oil. On February 22, 1895, over 2,000 people were killed in Brass and Fishtown for daring to oppose the unfair trading terms of the British colonialists. Violence escalated with the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State in 1956. Ever since, the higher the level of oil production, the more vicious the repression. In 1995, Ken Saro Wiwa and 18 other environmentalists were hanged. In 1999, widespread reports confirm that Odi community was invaded, all buildings, with the exception of a church, a building belonging to a bank, and a health centre were burnt down and approximately 3000 persons were killed.

A new phase in the violence against the resistance movement in the Niger Delta was the case of the secret trial of Henry Okah, a leader of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Okah was arrested on September 3, 2007 at Luanda Airport, Angola and detained for five months in Angola before he was repatriated to Nigeria where he continued his detention. He was secretly charged and tried for treason. He was tried secretly with the justification that his trial would also involve the trial of serving military personnel who were accused of supplying arms to him. However, his counsel, Femi Falana,

argued that Section 36(4) of Nigeria's Constitution does not allow for the secret trial of anyone accused of a criminal offence. The Constitution, in section 36 subsection (4), prescribes a fair hearing in public and within a reasonable time (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). He was released in June 2009 when the Federal Government granted "amnesty and unconditional pardon to all persons who have directly or indirectly participated in the commission of offences associated with militant activities in the Niger delta" as reported by *The Guardian* (26 June 2009: 1).

Labour Struggles in Oil Capitalism

Labour struggles in an oil-based capitalist economy stem from the conflict between workers and oil companies generated by the contradictions inherent in that relationship. Workers are primarily concerned with job security and improvements in the terms and conditions of work while state and the oil companies are interested in maximizing rent and profits.

In the case of the oil industry in Nigeria, Ihonvbere (1984: 195) identifies overt and covert forms of worker resistance. While overt actions refer to normal trade union disputes, covert forms of resistance are actions employed by workers, typically at an individual level and in small groups, to resist exploitation and 'get even' with the employer. They include theft, absenteeism, acts of sabotage, 'accidents' and 'sickness' and involve direct and indirect efforts to withhold labour power while collecting benefits and salaries. Given the vicious nature of state labour policies and the power of corporations, the tendency is for workers to rely more on covert than overt forms of protest. Ihonvbere (1984) asserts that covert, hidden and individualistic forms of action are significant among the Nigerian oil workers and they form the bedrock of the open or overt forms of protest.

Apart from participation in general strikes in which all unions are involved, there is also a pattern of mobilization in which the national or zonal branches of the oil workers unions mobilize on the basis of particular neoliberal attacks on the rights of individual sectional units such as tanker drivers, or on the basis of addressing specific labour issues. The case of labour struggles in Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) provides an example. A meeting of all CNL contract workers with the Warri Zonal Council of NUPENG resulted in the issuance of a 14-day ultimatum, in ef-

fect September 21, 2008. It required CNL to address issues of unfair labour practices or face a strike action. The unfair labour practices in CNL included subjecting the majority of workers to the status of contract labour which meant they now lacked the right to negotiate and had to agree to conditions of service and could be subjected to arbitrary dismissal. The union argued in favour of unity among workers, declaring it wanted harmonized conditions of service that would further empower the youths of the Niger Delta and other Nigerians working in oil and gas (*The Punch*, 23 September 2008: 10).

Direct picketing of oil companies' operational offices and facilities is another mode of struggle that has been effectively adopted by Nigerian oil workers. In the first week of February 2010, members of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) picketed Mobil offices in Lagos, Eket and Onne for two days, chanting solidarity songs. At Onne, the workers effectively prevented the barges and ships from loading crude oil as well as refined products. At Eket, the workers were physically attacked by members of the communities. But when workers convinced the host community that the struggle was to save the jobs of the indigenes as well as other Nigerians, the leaders and youths in the community showed solidarity (*The Nation*, February 8, 2010)

Petition writing, press statements and press advertisements also constitute forms of protest by oil workers, particularly when they are caught in the crossfire between armed groups and the military Joint Task Forces of the State in the Niger Delta. For example, in a press statement, the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) confirmed that two of its members, an operator and a security guard, were killed and others sustained various degrees of injuries, during the guerrilla attacks on five oil facilities, including that of Shell's Alakiri flow station, Rivers State on September 15, 2008. NUPENG President Peter Akpatason blamed Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), the employers of the two dead workers, for not evacuating workers from the scene of the confrontations between the military Joint Task Force and the militants of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), one of the self-determination organisations in the Niger Delta that engage in armed struggle. In its statement, NUPENG declared that "we have been the hardest hit during the confrontation because our

members were at the receiving end ... It is sad that defenceless workers had to pay the supreme price..." (*Vanguard*, 23 September 2008: 5). Demonstrating an understanding of the militants' approach, but not promoting the use of guerrilla methods, the union reiterated that "we have continued to maintain that military option cannot and will not solve the problem. It is only constructive and meaningful dialogue that can" (*Vanguard*, 23 September 2008: 5). The Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) in another statement entitled "Attacks on Oil Workers and Oil Installations", lamented the killings, stating "the unsuspecting oil workers can no longer be the victims of the conflictual work environment" (*Vanguard*, 23 September 2008: 5).

Further, the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG), in a newspaper advertisement, warned that the Federal Government's 'amnesty' for militants will guarantee stability only if it is combined with the creation of 100,000 jobs; development of infrastructural facilities such as roads, housing, schools, hospitals, potable water; provision of loans to petty traders, farmers and artisans; and increases in revenue allocation to oil producing states, from 13 per cent to 25 per cent. The advert concluded with an appeal to the militants as follows: "The disarming militants (those members of MEND and other armed groups who were accepting government amnesty) and their cohorts should realize that 90% of oil and gas workers in the Niger delta are their friends, brothers and fellow citizens ..." (*Vanguard*, 3 September 2009: 44). It should be noted, however, that some of the armed groups are reconsidering resuming armed struggle. On January 30, 2010, MEND explained the reason thus: "...the government of Nigeria has no intentions of considering the demands made by this group for the control of the resources and land of the Niger Delta to be reverted to the rightful owners, the people of the Niger Delta" (cited in *Socialist Bulletin*, February 2010: 4).

In addition to petitions to government and employers, another emerging pattern of workers' resistance is petition to God at mass prayer sessions. For example, on October 15, 2008, NNPC workers in Abuja appeared in red dresses and gathered en masse, thus barricading all the gates to the NNPC premises for a two-hour prayer session. Work was paralyzed for the period of the mass prayer session. The workers asked their creator to

change the heart of government on the proposed sale of Eleme Petrochemical Company Limited, Port Harcourt; the Pipeline and Products Marketing Company (PPMC); and the Nigerian Gas Company (NGC). They also prayed that the N .5 billion (about \$US2.9m) realized from the unauthorized sale of the NNPC Pension Fund Limited by the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) in 2006 be paid back to the coffers of the Fund. The atmosphere was carnival-like, as the angry workers in red dresses sang and danced (*Vanguard*, 16 October 2008: 6). Prayer sessions as a methodology of struggle reflect two things – the conviction that fighting is a just cause and an element of hopelessness and powerlessness in the face of government determination to advance the neoliberal agenda at all costs.

The oil workers unions had used industrial muscle and mass prayer sessions which paralyse the work process to influence the political direction of the country and improve the lot of oil workers and the general welfare of the poor in society despite a formal declaration in the NUPENG *Charter of Hope* (1980):

We are advocates of the theory of peaceful co-existence. We detest confrontation...(we believe) that both employers and workers in the hydrocarbon industry will gladly come together in a bond of cooperation to fulfil this goal (of meaningful collective bargaining) for the progress and industrial stability of their industry...(NUPENG, in its Charter of Hope,1980, cited in Ihonvbere, 1984:145).

What is important about the unions' official declarations and what they actually do is often a reflection of the balance of forces and the momentum of struggle, particularly the pressure from rank and file members. Hyman (1975: 200) explains that the structure of power relations within capitalism constrains the goals and strategies which unions can adopt without provoking a challenge to their very existence. Workers are not only terrorized by the military power of the state which backs capital, depending on the balance of forces at a given time, they are equally terrified of losing their jobs and homes, particularly with the possibility of importing foreign workers, particularly in a 'globalized' world. The state seeks to contain labour activities, thereby influencing the balance of forces in the country through legislation, which could be both general and industry specific.

One of the industry specific laws inherited from military dictatorship, which is still in force today, is the Petroleum Production and Distribution (Anti-Sabotage) Decree No 35 of 1975, now codified as CAP P.12, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN), 2004. The Decree (now Act) criminalizes 'sabotage' in the process of production or distribution of petroleum products, which is punishable, on conviction, by death or imprisonment for up to 21 years. Although the legislation has not been fully applied, the state is not constrained from fully applying it against striking workers, if and when it feels strong enough to do so, for as long it remains in the statute books. The mere existence of the Act has the capacity to condition the behaviour of certain segments of the working class to levels tolerable by the state and capital.

In assessing labour resistance, the literature tends to describe oil workers as a labour aristocracy, based on their better conditions of work when compared to other Nigerian workers, and their union's tendency to be more conservative and corporatist in their relations with management. The contention of the theory of labour aristocracy is that the development of conservative consciousness results from better material rewards. Ihonvbere (1984: 153-160) has attempted to assess the application of labour aristocracy theory over time. Arrighi and Saul (1968) use the term with reference to skilled and semi-skilled workers in international corporations. Moorhouse (1978) explains that a labour aristocracy often leads to the incorporation of the working class which shapes the nature of class formation, class consciousness and class conflict into a form unlike that predicted by Marx. Incorporation could take the form of high salaries to 'buy-off' workers. Lenin (1977) used the term with reference to top union leadership in comparison to rank and file unionists but recognized that the corrupted sector of the working class can only be a minority of union members. Frantz Fanon (2001) uses the term to describe urbanized workers in Africa, as the most favoured and comfortable section of the population. Hence, urban organized workers in Africa are perceived as privileged segments of the working class who identify upwards and tend to be somewhat more conservative. Other scholars such as Peace (1975) use 'privileged' and 'conservative' concepts for some categories of the organized working class in Africa. But like Lenin, they maintain that the working class is not homogenous.

In his empirical study, Ihonvbere (1984: 164) also found that while at a general level, the oil workers do not see themselves as having interests opposed to those of other non-bourgeois classes, the better paid segments are relatively more conservative and do aspire to 'climb the ladder' of power in the industry. Thus, he asserts that differences in status, authority, income and access to company-provided benefits affect perception and consciousness among different categories of oil workers.

Ihonvbere (1984: 160-163) provides details of how the average oil worker in Nigeria enjoys relatively better wages and working conditions compared to other workers in the Nigerian economy. He points out that not all categories of Nigerian oil workers enjoy relatively better salaries and conditions such as temporary workers and workers on probation. In addition, oil companies often terminate positions before they become permanent, only to re-hire the same workers on a casual basis. In addition, the relatively higher salaries in the oil industry are not sufficient to compensate for the risks faced by workers, particularly on the rigs. Further, it could be argued that the benefits gained by oil workers have been the result of their militancy, coupled with the strategic importance of the industry rather than a result of company attempts to buy them off. The relatively higher salaries and better conditions of service obtained by workers in the industry, however, are an indication of their class consciousness rather than an affinity with their bosses.

Regardless of the differences in consciousness that may exist within and between each of the two oil workers unions in Nigeria, collective overt and individualistic covert forms of action have been occurring, particularly in the age of the intensified neo-liberal project. The fact that the Federal Government has not totally divested its equity interests in the joint venture agreements with the oil companies is primarily due to the active involvement of oil workers in a series of threats of action and actual strike actions. In the twilight of the regime of former President Obasanjo (1999-2007), two out of the four state-owned refineries, the Port Harcourt and Kaduna refineries, as well as some other national assets, were sold quickly and at a low price. The nationwide strike of June 2007, involving the two oil workers unions, the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), compelled the newly elected

regime of President Yar' Adua to reverse the sale. Labour argued that beyond the questionable process and the lack of probity in the sale, "our contention is that the nation should own and manage these national monuments, as well as the refineries" (Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), 2007: 9).

The perennial increases in the prices of petroleum products in the domestic economy have only been limited only by nationwide strike actions by organized labour, consisting of junior and senior staff unions affiliated to the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) respectively, under the platform of Labour and Civil Society Coalition (LASCO). Between 1999 and 2008, there were at least five general strikes, accompanied occasionally by street protests, as follows: June 2000, January 2002, July 2003, June 2004 and June 2007. Part of the resolutions of the 2007 strike was that there would be no increases in the prices of petroleum products in 2008. The lack of increases in the prices of petroleum products in 2008 was the only reason strikes and protests did not take place that year. The successes of those strikes were due mainly to the active involvement of the two oil workers' unions. In the first eight months of 2009, LASCO again embarked on a programme of regional rallies to protest the planned deregulation of oil prices in the domestic market, the sale of refineries, and push for implementation of electoral reforms and an increase of the national minimum wage from N 7500 at the Federal level and N 5,500 at state and local government levels, to N 52,200 (Labour Factsheet, 2009: 6).

Assessing the role of labour after the 2004 nationwide strike, a journalist with one of the prominent Nigerian newspapers, *Sunday Vanguard*, wrote,

In the past five years of the Obasanjo administration, petroleum product prices have been increased five times, from N 22.00 in 1999 to N 54.50k in 2004. And consistently, it is only Labour that has stood up to fight for the people against the harsh policies of the government; not the PDP, which has been taken over by Obasanjo, not the National Assembly, which has been emasculated, not the opposition parties (ANPP and AD), which have been compromised and disorganized by sponsored crises.From what happened with the four-day warning strike that had the support of the civil society groups, it was apparent thatthe political future of Nigeria lies in the

hands of this coalition and not the political class...
(Nwokocha, 2004: 16).

To the ruling class and its concerns to maintain the status quo, the anti-oil price hike strikes had implications for political stability, in spite of the “consistent denial by labour that it is in opposition to the Federal Government since the objective of labour is not to take over power” (Ojeifo, and Biniyat 2004:14-16).

However, it is not certain how long the oil workers unions may sustain opposition to the neoliberalization of the oil industry. At a joint emergency National Executive Council of both the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), the unions resolved to embrace deregulation with the perception that “lack of competition in the downstream sector has stalled growth and jeopardized job opportunities... [Hence] any policy that guarantees competition and deliveries of petroleum products to consumers will be encouraged...” (*The Punch*, 6 July 2009: 1-2). In spite of the above resolution, the unions have continued to participate in anti-deregulation street protests, reflecting the pressure of the rank and file on the leadership.

In assessing the labour strikes, Teresa Turner (1997) considers the 1994 oil workers strike to be the longest, most significant instance of militancy in the world’s oil industry since the 1978/79 Iranian oil workers strike, which expelled the Shah and drove oil prices up to \$40 US per barrel. Onyeonoru and Aborisdade (1998) describe the same strike as one of the most coordinated efforts by any segment of the civil society towards ensuring the exit of the military and the return to civil rule in Nigeria.

Turner’s (1997) analysis of the demands of the 1994 oil workers strike shows that the strike was, in significant ways, not only in support of the oil communities’ demands but also in support of the democratization process. The demands included:

- Resolution of oil communities’ grievances through ‘meaningful dialogue’
- The release of all political and labour detainees who had been resisting structural adjustment policies, including Ken Saro-Wiwa and many other environmental activists
- Restoration of all dismantled democratic structures and the

installation of the winner of the June 12, 1993 election, Chief MKO Abiola as Nigeria's elected President.

The strike thus showed the beginnings of the forging of an alliance between workers and communities, even though informal.

This section has shown contradictory tendencies, convergence and divergence, unity and division, between the struggles of the oil workers and community. As the study by Turner (1997) reveals, the oil workers strike (1994) made demands supportive of the oil communities. Also, upstream oil workers, under the umbrella of the Producers' Forum (2009), a member of PEN-GASSAN, in a petition to the Nigerian National Assembly, advocated that the proposed Integrated Joint Venture Companies (IJVs) contained in the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) before the National Assembly should include host communities in the owner structures. In press statements by oil workers unions, oil workers tend to identify with the interests of oil communities while at the same time denouncing attacks on the workers by community youths. During the 2007 national strike by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC), the Warri National Congress (WNC), in the Niger Delta, denounced the strike on the grounds that it was of no benefit to the people of the Niger Delta. In press statements, the WNC said it was not going to support organized labour. In fact, it stated it was going to lead a protest against the strike. It is remarkable though that no general strike in Nigeria has ever made the plight of oil producing communities a prominent issue in the charter of demands. Communities are, however, quick to support workers' actions, once they are convinced that they stand to benefit from the workers' struggle. The press statements and adverts by oil workers unions referred to above reflect the tensions in relationships between the two non-state actors (workers and armed militants), rather than their cooperation. This reflects capitalism's contradictory nature – the tendency to unite the working class and its allies (through common or shared experiences of deprivation and exclusion) and, at the same time, the tendency to divide the class without property (through competition for jobs and material survival).

But it is in the mutual interest of both labour and communities to consciously build an alliance. For example, it has been suggested that a reduction in working hours per day, without a wage cut, could provide job opportunities for the communities. Both labour and community therefore stand to benefit from united

actions. The 1994 oil workers strike combined with the campaigns of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), and other organizations in the Niger Delta seriously limited oil company operations, not only in Ogoniland but throughout Nigeria. This is the tradition to consciously and formally build on.

Conclusion: Need for a Recomposition of the Anti-Capitalist Struggle in Oil Capitalism

In principle, both the waged and the unwaged belong to the class of the exploited. The two categories of the exploited have a common interest which could form the basis of their collective resistance to the current economic order. Resistance by those who are adversely affected by capitalist neoliberal policies could therefore become a social movement, which reflects class struggle against capital (Turner, 1997). The most powerful weapon the government and oil companies exploit is division among the different categories of the dispossessed. For a meaningful resolution of the contradictions within oil capitalism in the interests of the poor and dispossessed, there is a need for what Caffentzis calls a recomposition of the anti-capitalist struggle in oil capitalism (2005: 133).

Ken Saro Wiwa's leadership of MOSOP made a connection between the struggles of (the ethnically-based and agriculturally-rooted) local communities with the Western environmental and human rights organizations. This was a form of unity between struggles at the production level and at the profit level for the common goal to force the oil companies to pay for the total costs of oil production, including any environmental damage they caused.

Building alliances between labour and oil producing communities requires the joint coordination of struggles, and ultimately joint control of oil production, between the working class (the waged) and the local communities (the unwaged) so that the priorities of economic life can be jointly determined for the satisfaction of social needs, rather than being subordinated to the profit interests of a few. The demand for resource control by the communities, in the context of the existing capitalist social structure, is clearly incompatible with the dictates of the system. To attain resource control in an enduring manner that would impact on the total quality of life, there is a need for collaboration be-

tween the fighting communities and those who are at the point of production, the working class. The capitalist political economy engendered by oil puts the rural communities in a secondary position to effectively challenge capitalist-induced misery, in spite of the oil wealth. Even if the demand of communities and militant groups for 'resource control' is successful within the capitalist social order, it could only result in the division of oil producing land among multiple family units, ethnic and armed groups. This would lead to the subsequent multiple reproduction of exploitative and conflictual relationships among competitive local communities and within groups in individual communities fighting amongst themselves over the benefits from the oil companies, local or international. There is, therefore, a need for a conscious and formal alliance between the local communities and the oil workers on the kind of changes that are required to bring about their collective control of the oil industry.

Ake (1989: 43) argues that "somebody has to determine that development is desirable, that a particular kind of development should be pursued and in a particular kind of manner". This demonstrates that desirability of development, the kind of development and the manner of attainment are neither accidental nor objectively determined. Ake argues that the state is a specific mode of capitalist domination and represents contradictory interests and forces. It is impacted by the nature and effectiveness of capitalist hegemony and by the capacity of the dominated and oppressed classes to deploy effective counter-forces in reaction to their domination. These go a long way towards influencing the possibility of development. The degree of effectiveness of resistance by the dominated tends to determine the extent to which the state uses scarce resources for developmental programs or for building the arsenal of terror required by a militarized state.

A major shortcoming of the struggles of both organized labour and community-based organisations, including the armed groups, such as MEND, regardless of whether or not they are moderate or militant, is that there is an apparent lack of a clear cut political goal that would eliminate economic and political exclusion. The goals of the most militant armed groups in the Niger Delta do not qualify them as rebel groups because they do not aim to capture power. They only declare their goals to halt oil production and export in order to increase their access to oil

wealth within the existing capitalist social structure. For example, MEND, in its *Draft Manifesto of the Niger Delta: Justice or Charity* (2006), declares that its program objective is to make it difficult or impossible for the Nigerian government to export oil.

Development economists have expressed concern over a situation in which a country is rich but its people are poor. There is concern that the petro-states are paradoxes of plenty (Sachs and Warner, 1995). However, the problems of poverty, economic collapse, inequitable distribution of resources, and conflicts are not simply products of dependence on natural resource abundance. Rather, they are the inevitable consequences of the capitalist system of commodity production. These problems are deepened within the current phase of capitalism – a neoliberal globalized era. The resolution of the current fundamental contradictions calls for a socialized form of management of the economy and society by the productive forces, in conformity with the social form of production process. This will require joint control of the oil industry by its workers and the local communities. Their joint interests in achieving this goal should help them form a meaningful coalition to fight their common class enemies, the oil companies and the Nigerian state.

Endnotes

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2. Odi is a community in Bayelsa State. Within the context of conflicts over community rights to oil resources and the right to a safe environment, the military invaded the community on November 20, 1999 and razed it. Though accounts of the massacre vary, unofficial reports by pro-democracy groups and opposition political parties had it that about 3,000 persons were killed while all buildings, except a bank, an Anglican Church and a health centre were burnt.
3. The Nigerian currency is called the Naira. The exchange rate in 2003 was \$US1: N 100 while in 2006 it was about \$US1: N 120. The current exchange rate to the \$US dollar, as of June 2010, was approximately \$US1: N150.

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