THE RESURGING INDIA

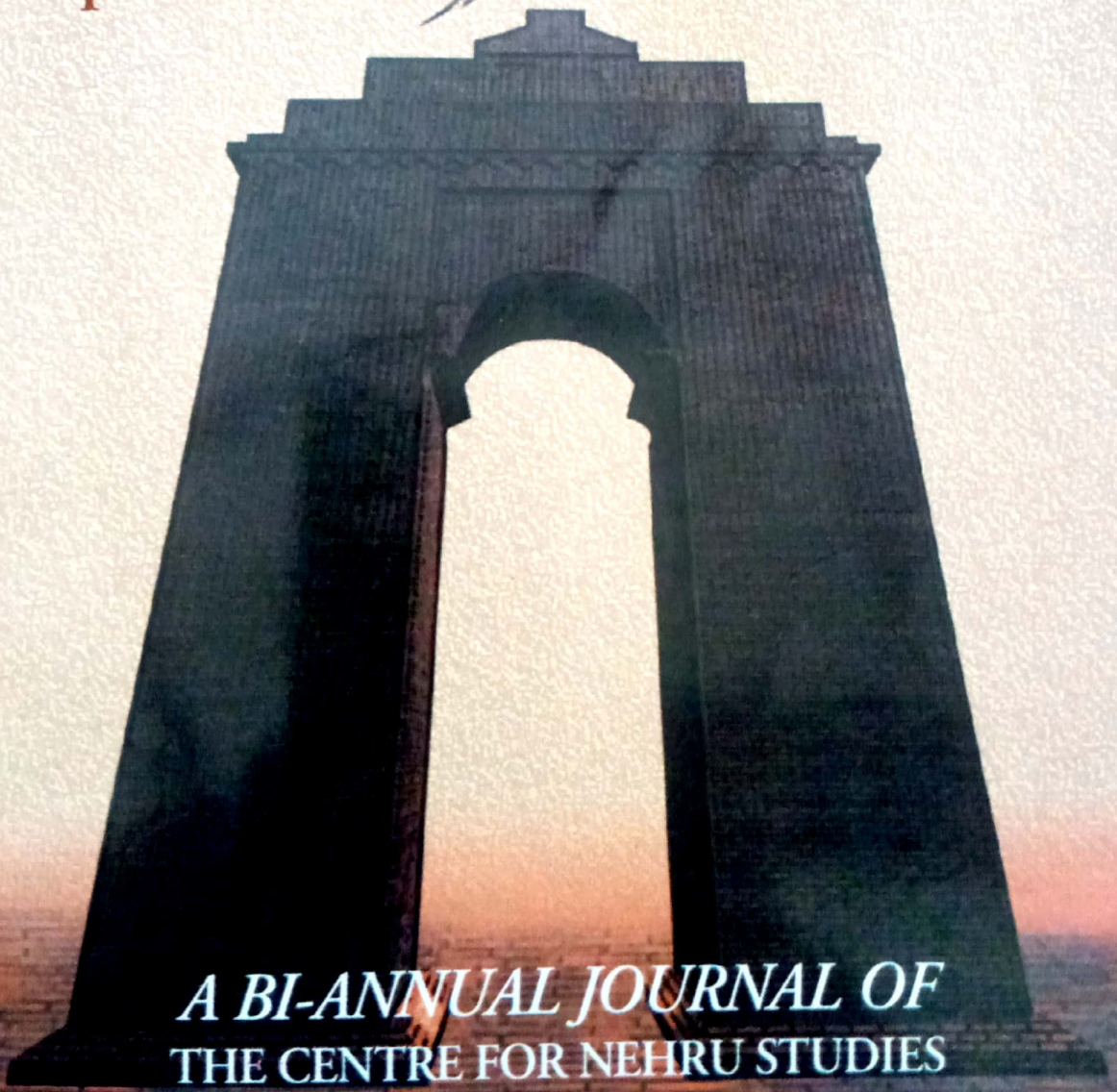
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Taufiq A. Nizami



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THE RESURGING INDIA

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CONTENTS

S.No.	Articles	Page No.
1.	**Attracting FDI: Impact of Government Policy and Location on Foreign Direct Investment Flows into Developing Countries** *Shah M. Tarzi*	1–22
2.	**The Failure of Democracy in Pakistan: The Pakistani Military Intervention in Politics as the Cause, 1958-Present** *Rathnam Indurthy*	23–66
3.	**Nehruvian Vision on Minorities and its Relevance in Modern India** *Badruddin*	67–76
4.	**Analyzing Democracy in Nigeria: An Overivew of Public Responses to Selected Government Policies (1999-2004)** *A. J. Omede*	77–106
5.	**India's Look-East Policy, A Shattered dream of an emerging power: A Study of Nehru Era** *Md. Mahtab A. Rizvi*	107–132
6.	**Social, Political and Economic Conditions of Women in India** *Indu Sharma & Triveni Dutt*	133–140
7.	**The Message of Bhagavat Gita** *Zulfiqar Ahmad*	141–152

BOOK REVIEWS

1.	Taufiq Ahmad Nizami: Edited Jawaharlal Nehru And Nationalism. Three Way Printers & Publishers, Aligarh 2004, pp. 266 Rs. 375/-	153–155
2.	Lawrence Saez: Federalism Without a Centre - The Impact of Political and Economic Reform on India's Federal System, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 252 Rs. 440/-	156–158
3.	Moazziz Ali Beg: The Ideological Integration of East and West: An Enquiry Concerning World Peace, Global Vision Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 244, Rs. 599/-	159–163

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ANALYZING DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA : AN OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC RESPONSES TO SELECTED GOVERRNMENT POLICIES (1999-2004)

A. J. Omede

Abstract

In Nigeria, between 1999 and 2004, the concept of democracy as a form of government in which the people elect leaders and representatives who are responsible for the welfare and improved standard of living of the masses has been put to test. Various policies initiated and implemented by democratically elected government of the Obasanjo adminstration have shown that the mass of the people has little or no input in vital policies that affect their continued existence as human beings. Policies such as the liberalization of the downstream petroleum sector, housing and educational policies as well as the Pension and the Labour reform policies has generated heated controversies because of their negative impact on the people their role in undermining the democratic process and contribution towards unrealistic sustainable development in Nigeria.

In 1999, the global wind of democratization brought into the Nigerian polity the recruitment of public officials through elections. In the system, people exercised the right to vote officials who will represent their interests in the running of state affairs. This is no small accomplishment for a country, which in all the years following the attainment of political independence from Britain in 1960 had been administered variously under military autocractic regimes.

Between the period 1999 and 2003 however, events that happened within the system indicated that sustaining democracy is an arduous task, which is often as difficult as estabishing it. The period witnessed tackling a lot of issues and activities that threatened to erode democratic values

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in Nigeria. A major issue of contention in sustaining democracy is the theoretical and empirical role of the people in choosing and legitimizing the government, as well as, involving the people on issues that affect their everyday life by elected public officials.

The period preceding the 2003 general elections (that is, between 1999 and 2002), witnessed the neglect and erosion of public values and interests by elected officials. There was a high prevalence of political violence, insecurity, mutual distrust and suspicion between the ruler and the ruled, intense rivalry, unnecessary jealousy and hatred among the rulers themselves. The entire civil society almost dwindled to a vanishing point with consequent degeneration into the "Hobbessian state of nature" in which life was nasty, brutish, and short. In fact, it was not until the middle of 2002 that elected official again became aware of the significance of the peoples' role in democratic system.

At the height of the 2003 elections, the race for public offices became deepened and was elevated to the level of a contest between life and death. Consequently, political aspirants - incumbent and potential alike, reawakened to the realization that the ambition to gain access to, and control political power, influence and authority, could best be achieved through the peoples' mandate which will confer on them, the legitimacy to represent the people in government for the next four years. Then came the 2003 April general elections. The people came out to exercise their right to vote and eventually, the Obasanjo administration was elected to continue in office until 2007. But then, there existed some fundamental questions and issues that needed clarification.

This article through content analysis of government policy statements, official documents, and the analysis of newspaper dailies as well as scholarly works on democratic governance and its impact on the people, seeks to establish the fact that governance in Nigeria since 1999 has largely been anti-people. We illustrate our position using some selected government policies between 1999 and 2004.

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Conceptualizing Democracy

Democracy is a concept that has gained universal acceptance as a form of governance in which the people participate by choosing those who will represent them in government. The Jeffersonian tradition of defining democracy as "the government of the people for the people and by the people" has gained more currency than any other since the term was enshrined in the American constitution. A more popular definition albeit a widely used one, and which is also in line with the focus of this study, is that which sees democracy as an institutional arrangement in which individuals acquire power by means of competitive struggle for peoples vote **(Birch; 1993-48)**

Democracy enables the people to have a genuine opportunity to choose among alternative representatives, policies, and in the long run, be able to pass judgments on state officials on the basis of their current and past performances. From this perspective, democracy also implies that the people have the opportunity individually or as organized groups to participate in the political process **(The Encyclopedia of Democracy, 1995: 913),** to make their views known and to exert pressure on government when specific decision about their welfare are to be made **(Kousoulas, 1982: 150)**. According to Saward **(1998:15),** Greenberg and Benjamin **(1993:23),** Nzongola-Ntalaja, **(2001:200)** what is crucial to the concept of democracy is the idea that the purpose of government is to serve all people and the people will ultimately have to rely on themselves to act in accord with their own values and interest.

All the definitions share one fundamental objective that is, democracy is a comprehensive system of government that ensures participation, accountability, leadership renewal or change, and above all, how to govern society in such a way that power actually belong to the people. The paraphrase used in describing democracy as "the government of the people for the people and by the people" is particularly more relevant and important in Nigeria, a country whose people had only experienced true democracy in just eleven out of thirty-nine years since attaining independence in 1960.

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Since 1960, Nigerians have been subjected to a prolonged period of military dictatorial rule between 1966-1979 and 1983-1999.

In spite of the varying ideological conceptualization and the degree of the practice of democracy around the globe, a common denominator that can be found in most of the definitions is that democracy is an embodiment of a complex body of enforceable rights and opportunities which according to Dahl **(2000: 38)** involves the freedom to:

> Participate in electing representative, the freedom of expression, inquiry, discussion and deliberatin in the widest sense, to form associations with others for inquiry and political action; rights and opportunities to citizenship and more.

In a typical democracy, it is assumed that the government will act on behalf of the people and above all, propose and implement policies that will shape the lives of its citizenry in positive and progressive manner. This is the essence of a lawful political government. Goverments that ignore the human component in their activities face the challenge and imperatives of political change and discontinuity that is so often expressed by the people through periodic elections. The conclusion one can draw here is that, a government must be organized in such a way that its leadership must be able to mobilize the public toward the common good. This requirement dictates that the government posses certain characteristics summed up in Appadoria's **(1975:140)** words as:

> A will directed to a high purpose, clearly visualized and courageously pursued; the instinct of gauging clearly the needs of the people and the initiative to formulate means of realizing them; the ability to present issues clearly to the people and to arrive at a fair judgment of the content of public opinion at a given time; self reliance, honesty and a sense of responsibility.

Obviously the most important desire of people around the world is to have a form of government that is liberal enough to, allow the expression of opinion as well as the sustained participation of its citizens

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in the formulation and implementation of policies. These aspirations which one can refer to as participatory democracy has imposed on leaders the moral obligatin to enforce not only on paper but also in practice, the effective rights and opportunities embodies in the characteristics of democracy, as well as the establishment of certain political structures and institutions required to govern the people in an atmosphere of peace and harmony.

Selected Government Policies in Nigeria (1999-2004)

In several democracies, even though the mass of the people are involved in choosing the representatives (small minorities) who make decisions on their behalf. Yet, these decision are in most cases reflective of the interests of the ruling oligarchy. Still, one cannot but contend that it is essential to a democracy that governmental decisions should nevertheless reflect or embody the popular will **(Birch, 1993: 48).**

Reflecting the popular will in decision making after electing representatives has often in most countries become a difficult task to accomplish. Hówever, in order to cope with the challenges of representative government, scholars are emphasizing that particular attention be paid to the principle of responsiveness which is one of the major features of democracy.

The principle of responsiveness according to Janda et al **(1992: 40)** implies that government should do what the majority wants, regardless of what it is Consequently, government must have a means for determining what the people want, and to a larger extent, put in place certain mechanisms for translating those wants into decisions. In other words, to run a responsive system, a democratic government requires institutional mechanisms, established procedures and organization to translate public opinion into government policy.

It is pertinent to mention here, that the practice of democracy in Nigeria does not reflect the popular will. Between 1999 and 2003 when a democratically elected government came to power amid pomp and pageantry, the country had withnessed a spate of governmental decisions which are not only anti-people, but which are generally regarded as a

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means of excluding and alienating the mass of the people from the very government they had entrusted their votes and morally supported to provide enabling environment in which their yearnings, demands and aspirations for a better standard of living will be realized within the first four years in government.

The unresponsive attitude of government towards the people has led majority of the people to show in various ways (through participating in demonstrations, strikes, armed robbery, corruption, wanton destruction of public infrastructure, vandalism, showing apathy to policies, etc.), their dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in Nigeria. The general feeling among the masses of the people is that the Obasanjo government since coming to power in 1999, has embarked on a deliberate policy of excluding the people from "sharing in the economic dividends of democracy" in the country.

The crisis confidence so generated by the contradiction between the theory and practice of democracy has cast a shadow of doubt over the pursuit of the public interest by a democratic government particularly in an emerging democracy such as Nigeria. In reality, the pursuit of the public interest has continued to be a myth rather than reality. Several factors account for these inadequacies. Most governments do not necessarily involve the people nor take their feelings into consideration. In other words, more than ninety (90) percent of the ordinary citizens have little to say on major policy decisions.

For instance, through political representation and citizen participation in the political process, the diverse views of the people are assumed to become inputs into the decision-making machinery. Ironically, members of the government whom the people have chosen to be their leaders have in fact come to form part of the ruling oligarchy **(Michels, 1962: 17).** Political leaders, bureaucrats and other members of government become the power elite. Over a short period, the elected leaders develop perspectives and interests different from the electorates. By and large. many of the policies of govenment reflect not the will or interests of the masses, but the will and interests of the leaders.

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The point can also be made that government becomes accustomed to dispatching important business on its own responsibility. Officials are also used to deciding various issues relating to the lives of the people without any attempt to consult them. Obviously, democratic control thus undergoes a progressive diminution and is ultimately reduced to an infinitesimal minimum **(Michels, 1962: 72)**.

In the life of modern democracies (Nigeria inclusive) the number of citizens who have a lively interest in public affairs is insignificant. Majority of the masses are contented with the pursuit of the individual self-realization. This is why a handful of public officials avail itself of the right, which the majority voluntarity renounces. This creates a situation, whereby the minorities promulgate laws for the indifferent and apathetic masses.

Highly-developed democracies like the United States, Britain, France, and several others, have institutionalized structures, processes and procedures such as the courts, the mass media, public opinion, opposition, effective parliament or congress etc., which ensures that government in many instances act in the common interest. In Nigeria just at it obtains in other sister African countries, the story is somewhat different.

Most developing nations are still in the process of adapting to democratic values and ethics of civil society. Members of the national assembly and of course, the state houses of Assembly are often embroiled in personality clashes and the egoistic display of their individual interests. The history of the Nigerian polity between 1999 and2003 is an attestation to this fact. Another observable trend in Nigeria's governance between 1999 and 2003 revealed that majority of elected public officials became apathetic to the feelings and yearnings of ordinary Nigerians who contributed to their election.

The focus of the study as the foregoing analyses shows, is the critical examination of the public responses toward certain governmental policies between 1999 and 2004 in Nigeria. Policies such as the incessant increases in the price of petroleum products, in-effective housing and educational policies, pension reform and the labour reform bill, as well as other selected

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policies considered by majority of the masses as anti-people, are hereunder examined.

Policy On The Increase In Pump Price Of Petroleum Products

In Nigeria, the issue of a unilateral increase, in the pump price of petrol and its allied products, by a democratically elected government without recourse to due process and other constitutional procedures, has been a recurring decima since the inception of President Obasanjo's administration on May 29, 1999. Barely one year in office that is, in the first week of June 2000, the government increased the pump price of petroleum products from the old price of =N=20.00 to =N=30.00 rate per litre. This action lacking constitutional and democratic procedures generated lots of controversies in the polity. The labour unions exemplified by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), its sister affiliate unions and other civil society organizations, took the government up on the associated negative impact of such an increase on both the Nigerian people, its economy, the organized private sector, and the entire polity in general.

The crisis so generated by the price increase forced the government to reduce the price from N30.00 to N25.00 per litre. Since then, the situation has been an up and down (yo-yo like) situation in prices of petroleum products in Nigeria (see Table 1 for details).

Reactions by the mass of Nigerians to the incessant increases in the prices of oil and its allied products since 1999, has been highly vociferous and mostly anti-government. There has been series of labour organized demonstrations and strike actions, some which had culminated in the loss of lives of innocent citizens. Human rights advocates and civil society organizations were also involved in organizing protests, workshops and other sensitization campaigns against such government actions. Most imprtant, majority of the Nigerian people are of the view that such actions are way adopted by the government to excluded the people from the economic dividends of democracy exemplified by high profits made from the sale of crude oil at the world market.

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A landmark dissent voice against the government was exemplified by a court suit filed against the Federal Government of Nigeria by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), an umbrella association of all labour unions in the country. In the law court action, the NLC argued that the government increases in the price of petroleum products between the year 2000 and 2004, were implemented without prior consultations with the people.

Table 1 : Petrol Price Increase In Nigeria 1966-2004

Date	Price per liter	Regime	Percentage increase
Jan. 1966-Sept 1978	84/5 kobo	General Aguiyi Ironsi General Yakubu Gowon General Muritala Mohammed	
October 1, 1978	151/3 kobo	Gereral Olusegun Obasanjo	73.9%
April 20, 1982	20 kobo9	Alhaji Shehu Shagari	31.0%
March 31, 1986	39 ½ kobo	Genernal Ibrahim Babangida	97.5%
April 10, 1988	42 kobo	General Ibrahim Babangida	
January 1, 1989	42 kobo for commerical while and 60 kobo private relucles	General Ibrahim Babangida	43.0%
December 1989	60 kobo for all	Gen Ibrahim Babangida	43.0%
March 6, 1991	70 kobo	General Ibrahim Babangida	16.6%
November 8 1993	N5.00	Chief Ernest Shonekan	614.0%
November 22 1993	N3.25k	General Sanni Abacha	-
October 2, 1994	N15.00	General Sanni Abacha	361.5%
October 4, 1994	N11.00	General Sanni Abacha	-
December 20, 1998	N25.00	General Abdulsalami Abubakar	127.0%
January 6, 1999	N20.00	General Abdulsalami Abubakar	-
June 1, 2000	N30.00	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	50%
June 8, 2000	N25.00	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	
June 13, 2000	N22.00	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	
January 1 2002	N26.00	Chief Olusegun Obasnajo	18.2%
June 20, 2003	N40.00	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	53.0%
June 9, 2003	N34.00	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	
October 1, 2003	N38.50&N42.00	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	
May 29, 2004	N49.90	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	
July 2004	N43 and 45 or	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	
November, 2004	N53 to N55	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	
November, 2004			

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Note: Reductions were achieved by strikes of threats of strikes. Note also that 100k is equivalent to= N= 1 and =N= 138 to $ 1. while the minimum wage in Nigeria is = N=7,500.00 a month The average salary of a University Graduate is=N=25.000. Exchange rate of the Naira (Nigerian Currency) is = N=138 to a dollar. **Source: Petrol Price Increase in Nigeria: A Truth You Must Know, in, The Tell (A Nigerian Weekly Magazine) No. 25 June 21, 2004.**

Consequently, the people have been subjected to series of untold hardships and sufferings. The following are highlights of the NLC suit regarded as politics of exclusion of the people from the dividends of democracy in Nigeria **(The Punch, Feb. 11, 2004:4):**

- The suit prayed the Federal High Court to declare illegal the decision to fix the prices of kerosene and diesel without establishing firm linkages with key segments of the society, including the NLC, pursuant to section 7 (i) of the Petroleum Products Pricing Regulatory Agency Act 2003 and Section 59 of the 1999 Constitution.
- NLC also asked the court to declare that the Federal Government is not competent to increase the prices of petroleum products without legal backing and without prior consultation with Nigerians.
- A declaration was also sought by NLC that the government is not competent to introduce or impose a road tax or any tax whatsoever. on the people without an enabling law validly passed by the National Assembly.

In a response to the NLC suit, a Federal High Court in the Nigerian federal territory Abuja ruled in January 2004 that both parties, that is, the labour union and the federal government should maintain the status quo. The court further directed that government should suspend the controversial N1.50 per litre fuel tax it imposed earlier in the year. Based on this ruling, labour suspended a proposed general strike slated for January 21, 2004.

It is important to state that when government again increased the

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pump price of fuel in June, 2004, the same Abuja Federal High Court ruled that the government and marketers should revert to the old rate of N38 per litre of petrol from the N50 sudden hike of 150 percent increase **(Tell - A Nigerian weekly magazine, June 21, 2004: 19-23)**. The court directive was ignored by petroleum marketers who in July 2004 increased the pump prices of petrol by a margin of N2.50 per litre.

In justifying the increase, the Petroleum Products Pricing and Regulatory Agency (PPPRA) argued that the marketers' action was in line with the deregulation policy in the downstream sector of oil and gas by the federal government. Consequently, gas stations adjusted their meters and started selling to the public at prices ranging between N43.70k per litre to N45.80k **(The Punch, July 6, 2004: 2)**

In less than two months after July 2004, prices of petroleum products climbed by an average of 20 percent on September 23, 2004. The new prices of between N 52 and N 55 litre came barely after a Federal High Court, Abuja (Federal Capital of Nigeria) barred the NLC from embarking on strike over the controversial N 1.50 fuel tax. The new price increase was justified by government officials on the need to "recover costs based on a new price band of between N 53.09 and N 55.07 per litre of imported petrol" **(The Punch September 24, 2004:1).** In celebrating the victory of government over the price increase, the Chairman of the Petroleum Products Pricing Regulatory Agency (PPPRA) Rasheed Gbadmosi, enthusiastically declared that **(The Punch September 24, 2004:1).**

> **Marketers are now free to procure products and release them to the public... The PPPRA shall continue to monitor and enforce price that justify decent returns on their (private importers) investment... All impediments placed on cost recovery of petroleum products have now been vacated. Therefore, the full effect of the September 29, 2003 instruction to marketers on full deregulation can now be realized.**

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Obviously, the PPPRA's Chairman speech can be regarded as nothing short of government insensitivity to the peoples plight. Since the Federal Government deregulated her downstream petroleum sector in 2003 petroleum prices have, therefore, become dependent on the market forces of demand and supply. Nigerians are now required to pay international prices at dollar rate for fuel. In fact, official record **(Federal Office of Statistics, 2004)** showed that inflation rate has increased in Nigeria from 11 per cent in 2003, to over 18 per cent by April 2004 and then, to 21 per cent by June 2004.

Part of the reason for the inflation has been attributed to the hike in petroleum products and its backlash on the increase in production and transportation costs. According to the Nigerian Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) **(Tell, July 12, 2004: 42),** "the all-item composite consumer price Index (CPI) in April 2004 was estimated at 117.0 representing increases of 0.8 and 18.1 per-cent over the levels in the preceding month and the corresponding period of 2003 respectively. Again, there is abundante evidence to show that increase in oil prices has adversely affected all other sectors of the economy and other competing needs of the populace.

The associated high prices of goods and services such as school fees, house rents, transportation is taking its toll on the citizenry. This situation has resulted in the draining of workers salary as well as a subsequent reduction in the people's purchasing power and declining standard of living. There is no alternative and cheaper transport system such as rail and metro-line to cushion the negative effects of petrol price increases. In particular, manufacturers are forced to close down most of the nation's viable industries. This is because they purchase diesel (AGO) to run their generating sets as an alternative sources of power. The services provided by the only source of energy supply in Nigeria, the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) is inconsistent and highly epileptic. In spite of its poor services, NEPA charges both the people and manufacturers high monthly electricity rates not commensurate with services rendered.

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The beneficiaries of the government incessant oil price increases are the oil haulage stakeholders and other political affiliates of government officials. The elite (the business and political class), enjoys the petroleum equalization fund (bridging cost) that accrues on every litre (=N=1.00) of fuel for the transportation of oil from the depots in the South to the Northern parts of the country. The ordinary people on the their part are forced to pay higher prices for petroleum products while they receive nothing in return from the government.

More pathetic is the situatioin of the people in the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria. Most of the companies operating in the oil producing Niger-Delta area have not done much to uplift the standard of living of the people in the area. For instance George Frynas in his analysis of the performance of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SDPC) in the last five years argued that SPDPS's projects have largely been a failure. Frynas **(The Punch July 6, 2004:11)** attributed the failure among other things to "absence of genuine engagement with stakeholders and differences in changing operational practices as well as SDPC's investments in corporate image at the expense of meaningful development programmes.

In a related development, Senator James Manager (representing Delta-South at the National Assembly) has challenged the management of the oil companies operating in Niger-Delta to be conscious of the well-being of the inhabitants of their host communities in their daily operations. Manager urged the companies to initiate not only policies and programmes aimed at uplifting the standard of living of the people and their immediate environment, but also, to do those things that will promote the people with sincerity of purpose that will eventually bring the desired developmental stride in the oil -producing communities **(The Punch July 6, 2004:11).**

What the foregoing analysis indicates is that a democratic government, currently in charge of state affairs in Nigeria, does not deem it necessary to adopt constructive dialogue with stakeholders (particularly the labour unions) whenever attempts are made to increase prices of petroleum products. The point has been restated that government is in the habit of flouting court rulings on the fuel price issue. This action greatly

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undermines the effectiveness of the judiciary and the respect for the rule of law by the Obasanjo administration. Finally, the whole scenario of the impact of the incessant increases in prices of petroleum products by government could be summed up according to Gani Fawehinmi, (a Presidential candidate of the National Conscience Party (NCP) and human rights lawyer in Nigeria as "socially, criminally, economically inexplicable and politically wicked and anti people" **(The Punch, September 24, 2004:7).**

Housing Policy

Between 1999 and 2004 that the Obasanjo administration has been in government, and no significant stride has been achieved in the provision of housing for the average Nigerians during this period. In most of the big cities like Lagos and Abuja (the Federal Capital of Nigeria) workers are forced to live in slums and city outskirts because of the exhorbitant nature of house rents. The difference between the elites that is, the politicians, top government officials, business executives, military oligarchy and government contractors; senior military officers and the ordinary civil servants are quite visible.

While the elites live in modern, beautiful houses at the city centres and central districts, the workers live in satellite towns and other isolated areas characterized by stricken poverty, lack of decent accommodation and portable water, incessant power outages, dirty environment occasioned by government neglect and apathy. It is this grim picture that made the Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo to comment that "the prevailing cost of office and living accommodation, especially in the nation's urban areas is annoyingly prohibitive" **(The Punch, March 4, 2003: 8).**

The acute disparity in the provision of housing between the low and high income, earners is somehow embarrassing. This contradiction accounts largely for the government effort to revive the National Housing Fund (NHF). The NHF was created as the main financial component of the strategic initiatives adopted by a former military government in 1991 as part of the National Housing policy to address the severe shortages

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and high cost of housing in the country. The Federal Government has given out billions of money contributed by workers to the National Housing Fund (NHF) as seed money to private estate developers under the "private sector Driven Housing Delivery Scheme". In addition to this, the government, through National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF) has at the end of March 2004 approved through the Federal Mortgage Bank (FMB) N8.08 billion as mortgage loans to twenty-one (21) developers with a repayment period of twenty-four (24) months **(The Punch, May 3, 2004: 1&7).**

Although the beneficiary developers were mandated to allocate all housing units produced with the money to NHTF contributors at affordable prices, still, it is a common knowledge that the average worker cannot have access to funds for purchase of houses. What is more important, under the terms of the financial arrangement between the NHF and the private developers, there is no concrete provision for a follow-up procedure or due process where houses are actually allocated to contributors at stipulated prices. One has also observed that most of the prices attached to the housing units are often exhorbitant and only within the reach of the rich who in most cases have resorted to the strategy of buying and reselling the houses for profit motives.

The pauperization of the people and the exposure of the masses to indecent living conditions, insecurity and the high incidence vices such as prostitution and armed robbery, are heaped on government officials who collude with the private developers to short changed the average worker. Ownership of housing development companies by top government officials, acceptance of kickbacks and payment of up-fronts as gratification coupled with allocation of housing units to relatives and friends of disbursing government officials are factors negating the provision of a decent and affordable housing that is essential to the well-being of individual workers in Nigeria.

Pension Policy

Another government action, which has also been a focus of public

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debate, is the introduction by the federal government, of a policy of "Compulsory Pension Contributory Scheme". With the passage of the Pensions Act on June 25, 2004 by the National Assembly, the federal government directed all its ministries, agencies and other establishments to commence the compulsory deduction of 5% of workers salaries and wages as pension contribution with effect from July 2004.

The actual implementation of the compulsory pension scheme has been criticized on various fronts. For instance, what makes the Pension Act 2004 a controversial and anti-people policy, was not the idea behind the formulation of the policy but the ambiguities inherent in the policy, as well as the hastiness by which the government has embarked on ensuring public compliance with the policy. Other criticisms borders on the deductions from workers' salaries that should have commenced in July 2004, but was backdated to January 2004 without a corresponding increase in worker' salaries and allowances. Furthermore, the structures, institutions and other regulatory bodies especially the National Pension Commission (NPC) that could have made the pension scheme more effective have not been put in place. In addition, proposed institutions such as the Pension Fund Administrator (PFA) and the Pension Fund Custodian (PFC) have not been licensed.

Public sector employees reacting under the auspices of Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), has decried the pension act as unconstitutional. Questions relating to the retrospective application of the act and the hasty deduction from workers salaries are considered by majority of Nigerians as anti democracy. Although the pension, no doubt has its merit, the point could, however, be made that the procedure for adoption and the implementation of the pension act amounts to a deliberate act of excluding the masses from issues affecting their welfare.

Labour Policy (The Labour Reform Bill)

The recently introduced Labour Reform Bill (LRB), which is aimed at amending the already existing Trade Union Act, was introduced by President Olusegun Obasanjo to; and passed into law; by the National

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Assembly in June 2004. The Labour Reform Bill seeks, among other things to decentralize the Nigerian Labour. Congress (NLC) - the umbrella trade union organization in the country. The bill also seeks to propose amendments such as **(The Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004):**

> The introduction of voluntary membership of the union, de-emphasize the compulsory payment of affiliation / check off dues, and above all, outlaw strike as instrument of bargaining, and most important, empower the labour minister to approve the establishment and, oversee the responsibilities of labour centers upon the de-registration of the NLC and a provision seeking to give discretionary powers an incumbent labour minister to allow or reject the fusion of trade unions (under a central body).

The labour reform has generated a lot of controversies among the citizenry since it was first introduced in the National Assembly. Foremost in reacting to the bill was the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), whose President, Adams Oshionmole emphasized that the new bill did not enjoy the support of the majority of the Nigerian people. A similar opinion was raised on the floor of the National Assembly by a Senator (Olurunibe Mamora), who was immediately rebuked by the then Senate President, Adolphus Wabara and his deputy, Ibrahim Mantu, apparently for daring to expose the insensitivity of the upper legislative body to the yearnings of the people **(The Punch, August 25, 2004: 2).**

On the other side of the divide are few individuals who hold the view that the amendments to the Trade Union Act was long overdue. Still, there exists a consensus among labour leaders that the amendments ought to have emanated from within the trade unions themselves, and not from the government. To further butterss labour's argument about the "vindictiveness" of government, several observable flaws emanating from the labour reform bill are highlighted follows:

- The contravention by the government of the International Labour Organization (ILO), convention which, place

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emphasis on effective tripartite consultation between government, employers and labour **(The Daily Sun, Thursday, August 26, 2004: 10).**

- Lack of stakeholders input into the bill and the wrong timing of the re-introduction of the bill to the legislature. People and labour leaders perceived that the trade union amendment bill was targeted at the NLC for its role in mobilizing and sensitizing the masses against the incessant increases in the price of petroleum products **(The Punch, September 1, 2004: 47).**

- The infusion of the no strike clause in the bill is a violation of the workers right to agitate against unfavourable working conditions in Nigeria. According to the NLC, the labour bill was a mechanism adopted by government to deregister the unions; destroy existing labour centers and other trade union structures in the country; and above all, have a leeway to implement anti people policy without opposition from the masses **(Oshionmole, 2004).**

The introduction by government of the Labour Reform Bill vindicated the NLC President assertion that the bill is "vindictive, punitive and calculated to destroy the labour movement" **(Oshionmole, 2004)**

Policy on Education

There is a continuous crisis in most of Nigeria's tertiary institutions. Most of the universities and polytechnics are in a sorry states of decadency. The funds available to government universities are dwindling and, most of government finances cannot maintain the institutions infrastructures because of overpopulation. The high rate of students' admission is also much more than what the infrastructures of the institutions could cope with. Moreover, there are serious flaws associated with the admission processes conducted, in the entire country solely by a body known as the Joint Admission and **Matriculation Board (JAMB).**

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Government neglect of public universities and the lack of government resolve to provide students' accommodation and feeding, well-stocked libraries and extra curricular activities have resulted in a serious problem of cultism and membership of secret societies among students. The general societal syndrome of the urge to get rich quick, the resort to violence to suppress opposition, lack of infrastructure and basic facilities, the proliferation of small arms and the general state of insecuity among others, are also attributed to these growing trends.

In its attempt to resolve the educational crisis in Nigeria, the Federal Government has come up with a plan, which it argued would solve the educational crisis in the country. The new plan tagged "The Liberalization of Federal Universities" (known locally as commerialization and privatization), contained policy statements widely regarded by the public and majority of the academic community in Nigeria as anti-people, The policy **(The Federal Government of Nigeria, New Policy on Education 2003)** emphasized that:

- The standard of university education in Nigeria is not falling.
- The Federal Government will not under any condition give financial assistance to universities owned by the various states in Nigeria.
- Government is ready to fund the movement of universities to their various permanent sites and complete abandoned projects after which the universities will be left to their own devices to survive or perish if it cannot raise funds to survive.

In its reaction to the new education policy, the apex body of univeristy lecturers in Nigeria, the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian University (ASUU) derided the proposals as a form of democratic dictatorship through which the federal Government has embarked on a disguised, re-colonization project which if unchecked, might plunge the nation's educational sector into total darkens **(The Guardian, Dec 25 2003: 72)**. ASUU further argued that the commercialization and privatization of universities as a major plank of funding would ultimately lead to the

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scrapping of public institutions. In addition, lack of government funding and the resultant internal revenue generation drive by public universities would "not only impose additional burden on students, but would deny many (the poor masses) access to university educatioin **(The Guardian, Dec 25 2003: 72)**.

One cannot but agree with the ASUU that the eventual privatization of public university runs contrary to the principle that education is a social good for which government should bear the major responsibility. While government might be justified to direct universities to generate revenue internally, the fact remains that the government has not put in place basic facilities and structures that will cushion some of the backlash of such actions. The provision of student scholarships, grants and loans are non-existent. Bursaries and fellowships are scantily provided and the meager amount given to students' as bursaries are not commensurate with the economic realities of our time.

Most of the libraries of universities are replete with outdated books. In fact, some wealthy individual's libraries are well stocked and more modern than those of most public universities in Nigeria **(Danjuma, T. 2004)**. Accommodation provided by the government is also not encouraging. Students are forced to live in abject squalor even when exorbitant fees are changed per bed space. There is virtually no government assistance to students feeding and subsistence. Only two or three federal universities have embarked on the policy of "work and school". Students are forced to find their ways to and from home or halls of residences to lecture rooms.

The state of insecurity of most campuses is quite alarming. Memberships of secret cult societies are on the increase. The rate at which female undergraduates prostitute themselves is unfathomable. Also outrageous are the rates by which students have resorted to stealing and harassing fellow students for money, cell phones, and other prized possessions so as to supplement their living expenses.

With these occurrences, public universities are gradually decaying,

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while private universities on the other hand, are springing up by the day. Private univesities charged exobitant fees and are mostly funded by foreign religious missions, as well as the rich, who have suddenly discovered newer avenues of legitimizing their illgotten wealth. One can, therefore, understand ASUU's warning that the government's new policies are directed in the long-run at the eventual scrapping of public universities and create in its stead, a situation where the mass of the people, that is the average Nigerian will lack access to qualitative education and thus, create a condition that will further widen the gap between the rich (few privileged class) and the poor (mass of the people).

Government Positive Efforts And Its Aftermath

The various criticisms against the government had in turn reawaken the government to some extent if not all of its responsibilities to the people. Foremost among the line of action taken by the government is the policy of tackling corruption in the country. Some of the steps taken in this area include:

- The publication by the Federal Ministry of Finance in major newspaper dailies and magazines around the country, of the monthly distribution of revenue allocation to state and local governments by Federation Account Allocation Committee.
- The indictment of, certain State Governors by the Minister of State for Finanace, Mrs Nenandi Usman, for looting their states' treasuries. According to the Minister, "there is need for greater scrutiny of the activities of Governors, particularly those who receive huge allocations from oil derivation every month" **(The Punch, May 21 2004: 15).**
- The creation of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) in 2000, which is vested among others, with the responsibility for the investigation and prosecution of offenders under the anti-corruption law **(Federal Government of Nigeria, ICPC: 2000).** In carrying out its functions, the ICPC is currently

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investigating six serving State Governors over alleged illegal transfer of a large amount of public monies abroad. In the same vein, the federal government (ICPC and the EFCC) has also started investigation into the activities of two former Ministers over the National identity card scheme. Some top government officials in collusion with the ministers were said to have taken bribes amounting to about $214 million through one French official and an agent of SAGEM S.A., the French company handling the I.D. card project **(The Punch May 21, 2004:15).**

- The creation of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and its subsequent carving of a positive image of Nigeria as a counry where the government upholds law and order and safety of lives and properties of both its citizens and foreigners alike. The EFCC through its numerous activities had been able to recover billions of money from fraudsters and also deny them the use of proceeds for further criminal activities. Other activities of the EFCC include **(EFCC News Bulletin, 2003),** instituting legal regulations on banks and other financial institutions from continuing to perpetuate financial crimes against the state; seeking amendment to the advanced fee fraud law and; investigating and stemming the tide of crude oil theft.

In spite of the attempts by government to inspire confidence and trust in the citizens, we made bold to say that subsequent government economic policies have not sufficiently addressed poverty, under-development and unemployment, which are breeding ground for grievances. Majority of government institutions are lacking in accountability, closed to the views of the public and unresponsive to their needs and grievances **(Federal Government of Nigeria, IPCR, 2003: 151).** There is also evidence that in the absence of a properly functioning regulatory and institutional framework, certain economic policies - including trade reforms generate unemployment and labour unrest in the short term **(IPCR,**

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2003:26 & 47).

In an in-depth study conducted for instance by the Government established Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) **(2003:312)** respondents cited corruption, self-centered leadership, poor implementation of government policies, the glaring gap between the rich and the poor and the arrogant display of stolen public fund by government official etc as the underlying causes of public anger and frustration that often erupt into violent conflict in Nigeria. In another study entitled the Enterprise Survey Summary Report **(Institute for Development Research, 2003: 12&15)** findings revealed that services rendered by public agencies are of low quality and the inability of government to do anything about the appalling level of service delivery has encouraged corruption within them. The findings also showed unequivocally that citizens do not have much faith in the judicial process. The after-effect of government's anti-people's policies one may argue is the distrust of elected officials by the majority of the people. This has become so because of their belief that political leaders are dishonest, wield too much power, are overly susceptible to influence and behave unethically **(Awake, August 22, 2005: 29)**. One may also posit that the distrust of politicians analyzed in the foregoing is in line with Dahl **(2000:36)** analysis which states that in most developing countries (and of course in a disturbing number of advanced countries), that citizens have significantly less confidence, for example, the extent to which politicians and parliaments, care about their opinions.

It is also pertinent to mention that government has not done much in terms of damage control and confidence building measures to safeguard against the apathy created in the minds of the public by its various popularly perceived anti-people policies. There is nothing like price control mechanism, salaries and wages of workers remain the same while the prices of goods and services keep escalating. The problems associated with such policies and its impact on the people can thus be summarized in Olashore's words **(The Nigerian Tribune, April 10, 2001: 1) as:**

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> Unchecked fiscal regime and lack of price control mechanism, resulting in low consumer purchasing power, high inventory of imported goods and resultant decline in industrial capacity utilization aggravated largely in part, by inadequate shelter for the most of the populace, lack of gainful unemployment, low wages and inadequate income for subsistence, and self sustenance. Above all, there is also the problem of poverty, a very profound problem associated with and threatening the development aspirations of the country.

In sensitizing the people to the government's anti-people policies, several rallies were organized by conglomerate of civil society organizations around the country. Prominent among the rallies, was the one that was held by the Civil Liberties Organisation in Lagos in May 2004, as part of the steps to dispel the cloud of gloom and despondency of the Nigerian people. The purpose of the rally according to its organizers can be found in the argument by Ayo-Obe, the President of Civil Liberties Organization -CLO **(The Punch, May 21, 2004: 36)** that :

> A lot of people have become disengaged from the political process. People are feeling more demoralized and depressed about the political and economic future of Nigeria. We have a civilian rule that is sliding fast into a civilian dictatorship. When people are not allowed to express their views, that is the beginning of a police state and dictatorship. When people who are standing right in front of the President (of Nigeria) can barely get three words out before the President descend on them, with above, we are sliding into a dictatorship.

Policy Options For People-Oriented Reforms In Nigeria

In order for government to ensure the implementation of people oriented policies and thereby ensure the consolidation of democracy in the country, the following are hereby recommended:

There is the need for government to improve the state of security,

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social infrastructure and other facilities that will make life more meaningful for the people. Government should also put in place the right policy and legal frameworks that will impact positively on the lives of the mass of the people. It is also important that government intensify efforts to promote accountability and transparency among public office holders. Government should promote public ethics such as sincerity, goodwill, and political commitment among the leadership and the public in general.

People oriented policies like the monetization of workers allowances should be implemented without delay. The contradiction inherent in the non-implementation of the monetization policy and the simultaneous deductions of pension contributory fund compulsorily, from workers salaries, without a corresponding upward review in salaries and allowances should be immediately discarded so as to create a conducive atmosphere of public trust and loyalty to the fatherland.

There is the need to set up an autonomous price monitoring intelligence committee to be composed of representatives from labour, the organized private sector, student bodies, farmers, and other relevant classes within the country. This unit will observe the trend in the prices of goods and services, report their observations to the supervisory ministry or the President of the Federation, who should without delay, take appropriate steps to improve the living conditions of the citizenry.

With regard to the compulsory pension contributory scheme, the federal government should take immediate steps to redress the contradictions inherent in the implementation of the scheme. For example issues such as the retroactive application of the act; the hasty deduction of the fund from workers' salaries, and establishing appropriate institutions to manage the fund should be addressed with a high sense of commitment to the greater good.

More importantly, the government should refund all the monies already deducted from workers to the pension fund pending when relevant institutional structures are firmly established. These actions, if speedily undertaken, would inspire worker's confidence in government policies

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and also assist in reducing the high level of fraudulent practices and mismanagement characteristic of government officials in Nigeria.

There is also the need for the government to re-orientate its public workers. A newer perspective couched in the form of civil service reforms should be introduced. Poor skills and work method, coupled with the corrupt attitude by bureaucrats should be discouraged. The federal civil service should be restructured along the line of training workers towards improving the quality of advice given to government in the implementation of public policies.

The government need to adopt a culture of incorporting scientific advice into its policy making and implementation. Care should however be taken so that senior public and party officials do not manipulate scientific information to suit their individual and selfish political interest. Research institutions such as the Policy Impact Assessment Agency (PIAA) or a Presidential Task Force (PTF) on public policy should be established. These institutes could in future conduct opinion and Gallup, polls, public hearings and referenda, to assist the government in gauging the reaction of the people to proposed policies.

It is also important that government should introduce appropriate macro-economic framework to make the policy of deregulation (particularly in the downstream petroleum sector) more meaningful. Beneficial and palliative measures aimed at absorbing the negative effects of incessant prices increase is necessary in order to reduce people's apathy towards government programmes. The federal, state and local governments should spend public money judiciously. Positive spend and beneficial public policies would have a multiplier effect by creating more jobs and wealth for the people.

People should be more actively involved in the informal sector instead of struggling endlessly to participate or secure government (white collar) jobs. Reducing unemployment in Nigeria will depend on huge investment and participation of the masses in micro and medium industrial concerns. Basically, people need to explore the informal sector more, in order to

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complement government efforts at reducing the rate of unemployment and its associated vices of insecurity, cult membership and other unproductive but destructive activities among the youths in Nigeria.

Lastly, there is the need for a reorientation by all Nigerians of the nation's value system. There is a need to reappraise such fundamental collective issue like the consciousness of who, the Nigerian people are; their vision for the future and the contributions to be made by each individual in order to consolidate democracy, ensure transparency and good governance and achieve sustainable development.

Concluding Remarks

One may conclude this study by contending, that the Nigerian people in an era of democratic dispensation under review (1999-2003), have been subjected to a series of controversial anti - people legislations and the dislocation of labour unions, as well as excruciating mass poverty amidst wasteful financial resources expended on poverty reduction programmes. The anti-people policies of the government, is a pointer to the fact that even, elected representatives in both the federal and state legislature have not exhibited so far, any moral obligation nor sympathy for the people who elected them in the first instance. Politicians and public officials are therefore, even when kept under the direct eyes of their constituents, filled with apathy for the public and are for most part oblivious to the peoples suffering and unfulfilled expectations.

The various government policies such as increases in the pump price of petroleum products, the Pension Reform Bill, the Labour Bill as well as housing and educational policies of the Obasanjo administration under review, has generated a crisis of confidence, and lots of ill-feeling among the mass of the people. Hence, in order to carry the people along, in addition to justifying its existence as a democratically elected government of the people, for the people and by the people, the recommended measures should be implemented without delay.

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