

Opinion

Endless debate over 'changing the world'

By Edwin Madunagu

SHORTLY before my last piece, *Perspectives on political economy* (August 16), appeared, I received a book, an examination of which immediately suggested that this highly condensed essay had to be expanded and extended after my break. The book, *How to change the world: Tales of Marx and Marxism, 1840 - 2011*, by Eric Hobsbawm, the 95-year-old world-renowned Marxist historian and historiographer, was sent to me by a comrade and compatriot who has taken it upon himself to ensure that I am as current as possible in this my chosen "line of business". Hobsbawm's book - which a reviewer has hoped and prayed should not be his last - was published in 2011. It is 470 pages long, divided into two parts - *Marx and Engels*, and *Marxism* - which together cover 16 chapters.

The book is enriched with copious notes, dates and sources - an attribute that students, academics and researchers would particularly welcome. Hobsbawm has remained a Marxist and was a member of the British Communist Party until its self-dissolution about two decades ago, I think. In spite of this, as the same reviewer has noted - and as I myself had found out long ago - someone could read some of Hobsbawm's books and essays - and he has written so many - without knowing that the author is so committed ideologically and politically. *The Guardian of London*, in its review of Hobsbawm's latest book said that the author is "one of the leading authors of the concept and language in which all of us now discuss our situation." I shall return to this point: it was one of the reasons I grabbed the book with two hands.

Incidentally, I received Hobsbawm's *How to change the world not too long* after I received, from the same source, a book, *Africa must be modern: The modern imperative in contemporary Africa*, written by Olufemi Taiwo and published in 2011. Taiwo, who, I reckon, is in his mid-fifties, is a Nigerian, educated in Nigeria and North America. I also reckon that he is still an academic in North America. Taiwo's 225-page book, which he called a *Manifesto*, suggests either that he is no longer a Marxist, which he was as a young university student in Nigeria in the late 1970s and early 1980's, or that he has

simply abandoned the *type of Marxism* propagated in theory and practice, by his former Marxist teachers back home and which had influenced him theoretically and politically. Either way, he made a major epistemological break in North America in mid-1980s.

A few years ago, I obtained a copy of the book, *The world we wish to see: Revolutionary objectives in the 21st century*, written by Samir Amin and published by Monthly Review Press, New York, in 2008. I make frequent references to Amin and his writings in this column and not too long ago - on his 80th birthday anniversary - I wrote a combined appreciation of the debt I owe him, Biodun Jeyifo and Leon Trotsky (*Time to recall, and honour*, December 1, 2011). Amin's 144-page, three-chapter book to which I refer simply as *Revolutionary Objectives*, carries two important appendixes including *The Bamako Appeal* (2006). *The Appeal* was issued in Bamako, capital of Mali, on January 19, 2006, on the eve of the World Social Forum, which took place in that city.

Signed by several activists and intellectuals across all the continents of the world, *the Bamako Appeal* "seeks to advance the principle of the right to an equitable existence for everyone; to affirm a collective life of peace, justice and diversity; and to promote the means to reach these goals at the local level and for all humanity".

The concerns of the three books - *How to change the world, Africa must be modern*, and *the world we wish to see* - are embedded in their titles and subtitles, and they are the same: the need to *change the world*, and how to accomplish this. There is a lot to learn and commend in each of them, but what I intend to do here is to appreciate Hobsbawm's book, shifting the appreciation of the other two to the future. Even then, there are a number of comments on Taiwo's book that I wish to insert here.

Olufemi Taiwo's *Africa must be modern* is a research-based argument for *modernity* where modernity can be taken in its literal meaning and then understood historically as referring to "a post-traditional, post-medieval historical period." The author's research as he claimed, led him, on page 6, to the following conclusion: "...a singular failing of African radicals, especially us Marx-

ists, was that we had misconstrued the import of Karl Marx's Thesis XI on Feuerbach, which stated: *Philosophers have merely interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.* From the dearth of fundamental literature on diverse aspects of African life to a near total absence of Marxist and other radical texts on the African world, it had by then become clear to me that African leftists had been so consumed by their eagerness to change the world that they had forgotten to preparatory first step of interpreting it."

For the avoidance of doubt, as they say, the author re-stated this conclusion: "In other words, leftist African intellectuals and those of us who were their students and were set to take our place as teachers and guides of the future brigades of world changers were engaged in an impossible task: we were trying to change a world that we barely understood". He there and then committed himself to interpreting the world, particularly its African segment.

My first comment on the author's "discovery" and "commitment" is to point attention to the phrase "in various ways" in his quotation from Karl Marx's 1845 notes on Ludwig Feuerbach's *materialism*. I would like to simply suggest here that what Femi Taiwo has done in his book, or rather, what he announced in the passage cited above that he would do, was simply to produce a different interpretation of the world - different, that is, from the earlier interpretation which he, his compatriots and his teachers had made. He had renounced his earlier interpretation and produced a different one, thereby adding one more to the "various" interpretations noted by Marx. His new interpretation does not replace the former one in the list of interpretations, nor does it make his former teachers "non-interpretors." Every interpretation remains valid until it has lost all adherents and has ceased to mobilise social forces. And since we are yet to *change the world*, Marx's thesis, to the extent that it was valid in 1845, is still valid.

The entire intellectual and ideological attitude of Marx who made the observation in the 1845 notes strongly suggests that he would agree that his own interpretation was simply one of the interpretations to

which he referred. All that I am insisting on here is the need for the "liberal spirit" and "scientific attitude" in this type of discussion. My call does not preclude *strong views* or strong formulations of convictions; it only asks that we appreciate the existence of rival interpretations of the world. It is, above all, a call for the adoption of a long view of history that reconciles itself to the suggestion that if humanity does not end up in "common ruin", a possibility Marx himself saw, only the change which we are talking about will conclusively resolve the argument as to which interpretation corresponds, or corresponds more, with reality.

My second comment on Taiwo's "conclusion" is a defence of myself and the author's (Marxist) teachers whom I knew and closely worked with - first from my location in a community not too far from the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and later from Calabar. The period in question embraces the shorter period (1976 - 1981), which I think coincides with the author's undergraduate years at Ife. At the time in question, some of these Marxist university teachers and I were embedded in the peasantry. From there we engaged in intensive process of *conscientization* and *praxis* with peasants, workers, students and middleclass strata throughout the country, but, in particular, in areas covering large segments of the present Osun, Oyo and Ondo states; and later, in areas corresponding to the present Southern Senatorial District of the present Cross River State. Those teachers that were not "embedded" were in active collaboration with those who were "embedded".

Most of the Marxist teachers had their formal academic training at home and abroad and engaged in radical and, at times, revolutionary, activities abroad - mainly Europe and North America - before returning home. They possessed big libraries with extensive collections including *Marxist books on Africa*. These collections were continually enlarged and enriched. Our project was not simply to change, but simultaneously to learn, to study, to teach, and to interpret. The experiences - as well as achievements, failures and lessons - were recorded for posterity.

• To be continued next Thursday.

Opinion

Endless debate over 'changing the world' (2)

By Edwin Madunagu

LAST week, in the first part of this series, I introduced three books on "changing the world": *How to change the world: Tales of Marx and Marxism*, by Eric Hobsbawm, *Africa must be modern: The modern imperative in contemporary Africa (A manifesto)*, by Olufemi Taiwo, and *The world we wish to see: Revolutionary objectives in the 21st century*, by Samir Amin. I also made some preliminary comments on the second book. What I intend to do in the remaining parts of this essay is to appreciate the three books, beginning with Eric Hobsbawm's, in the context of the current situation: local, national and global.

Nearly every critic of the human condition in Nigeria today, from functionaries of the Nigerian state and its various governments to the ruling classes and elites, down to the ordinary citizens ("critizens without labels,") would subscribe to the use of these condemnatory terms to describe our current national existence: mass poverty and unemployment; armed robbery, kidnapping and terrorism; corruption and ethnicity exploration and oppression; social inequality, marginalisation and alienation; cultural backwardness and socio-economic underdevelopment; ignorance and superstition; state bankruptcy and delinquency; patriarchy and sexism; inhumanity and immorality; etc, etc.

When "I say every critic" I mean literally, the powerful and the wealthy as well as their victims; the government and the people; the oppressed and the exploited, as well as the oppressor and the exploiter. Please, check it out: the phenomenon is uniquely Nigerian. There is therefore no problem in identifying our calamities. The real problem divides into two: the type of society we would like see and live in; and the transition to it. The first problem will, again, produce near-unanimity if the question is properly posed. We are, however, bound to disagree on the second: transition to the "new society". We have always disagreed, and will continue to disagree...until the change.

A couple of weeks ago, I undertook brief visits to the sites in southern Cross River State hosting a

for all types of construction - are excavated and crushed. Some of the products from both activities are used in Calabar and other parts of the state, but a greater fraction is transported in large trucks out of the state. That visit was a practical study not only in heartless exploitation, but also in the co-existence of modernity and pre-modernity; wealth and poverty; power and dis-empowerment. The terrible state of the Calabar - Itu highway, which is one of the two major roads that currently link Calabar with other parts of the country tells part of the story.

From Cross River State, I travelled to parts of Akwa Ibom and Rivers states - including Eket, Ibeno, Ikot Abasi and Ogoniland. There, I came face to face, once again, with the terrible human disaster that has been the fate of the peoples of the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta for decades through oil exploration and production: pollution of air and water and destruction of vegetation and farmlands. The effects of oil spillage go beyond water and farmlands, to roads, residential areas, markets and public buildings. Fishing, farming and hunting have been destroyed as occupations. At a point on our journey I dozed off. I woke up to notice that we were on a bridge over "blackwater". That was somewhere between Eket and Ibeno. I shouted and asked the driver where we were. He laughed, but before he could answer I realised that we were crossing a heavily polluted stream.

On my return to Calabar, I decide to visit parts of the Akpabuyo local Government Area that have been allocated to refugees and returnees from the ceded Bakassi Peninsula. The story is familiar and, in any case, very current. I did not find most of the young men and women they had gone out to fight for bare survival or to confront the Cameroonian gendarmes - a confrontation they believe is a means to regain their honour and humanity. What I have described are mere "specimens" of the conditions under which the overwhelming fraction of Nigerians live, reproduce their lives, pay multiple taxes and levies (including the illegal ones collected both by robbers and by law enforcement agents), and vote at elec-

this corner of the world, at the society whose change Hobsbawm and others are discussing.

An anthology has a particular attraction for me - whatever form it takes: a collection of essays by different authors on the same or related subjects or a collection of essays by the same author on the same or related subjects, or a collection of essays by the same author on different aspects of the same subject over a fairly long period of time. Eric Hobsbawm's book, *How to change the world*, is of the third type. Anthologies of this type show you the development of thought and phenomena over time.

The main body of the book under appreciation is divided into two parts: Part I: *Marx and Engels* (8 chapters) and Part II: *Marxism* (8 chapters). These are enriched and strengthened by copious Notes, "Dates and Sources of Original Publication" and Index, at the end of the 470-page book. The author's two-page introduction describes the content and range of the book, as well as those that might benefit from it. It is an important guide, especially, as the author says, for readers "with a more specific interest in Marx, Marxism, and the interaction between the historical context and the development and influence of ideas". The 16 essays were written between 1956 and 2009, that is, a period of 53 years. About two-thirds of them had either not been published at all or had not been published in English.

A breakdown of the contents may be useful. Part I is made up of *Marx today*; *Marx and Engels and pre-Marxian Socialism*; *Marx, Engels and Politics*; *On Engels' "The Conditions of the Working Class in England"*; *On the "Communist Manifesto"*; *Discovering the "Grundrisse"*; *Marx on pre-Capitalist Formations*; and *The Fortunes of Marx' and Engels' Writings*. Part II consists of *Dr. Marx and the Victorian Crisis*; *The Influence of Marxism 1880-1914*; *In the Era of Anti-fascism, 1929-1945*; *Gramsci*; *The Reception of Gramsci, 1945-1983*; *Marxism in Recession, 1983 - 2000*; and *Marx and Labour: the Long Century*.

Of the 16 essays, those most relevant to our present discussion are: *Marx and Engels and pre-Marxian Socialism* (Chapter 2); *Marx, Engels and Politics* (Chapter 3); *On the "Communist Mani-*

festo" (Chapter 5); *Marxism in Recession, 1983-2000* (Chapter 15); and *Marx today* (Chapter 1).

Eric Hobsbawm was born in Egypt in 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution. His father was a Jew. His family moved to Austria soon after the First World War and then moved to London when Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933. Hobsbawm served in the British Army during the Second World War, obtained a doctorate degree on Fabian Society from Cambridge University after the war, and became a lecturer at Birkbeck College in 1947. He rose to become an Emeritus Professor of History in 1982.

Hobsbawm has been very prolific. Between his first book, *Primitive Rebels*, which was published in 1959, and the one under appreciation, *How to change the world*, which came out last year, he must have published about 20 major works. Hobsbawm says that *How to change the world* is not a history of Marxism "in the traditional sense". Of course, it is not - at least it does not possess the structure of a history book like his own *History of Marxism*. I would call the book "Essays in the history of Marxism" or "Aspects of history of Marxism". One reason some reviewers, including myself, would describe the book as "aspects" is the insufficient attention paid to Marxist figures like Leon Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg and near-neglect of the question of women. On these two counts, I would have, two decades ago, considered this otherwise excellent book as irredeemably flawed. I still consider the omissions grave. But I am more tolerant.

There was something that particularly struck me when I was reading Hobsbawm's *The Age of Extremes: the short twentieth century, 1914-1991*. This was how the author reeled out dates and details of events big and small even while making what I may call "historical sweeps". A reviewer of the current book, and a biographer, have, in describing this attribute, equated Hobsbawm's brain to a modern research library, not simply on account of the amount of materials it holds, but also because of the ease with which any of these materials can be retrieved. Reading *How to change the world* will convince you that this is not an exaggeration.

• To be continued next Thursday.

Opinion

Endless debate over 'changing the world' (3)

By Edwin Madunagu

FOR the purpose of this discussion, we may restructure Eric Hobsbawm's *How to change the world: Tales of Marx and Marxism (1840-2011)* into three overlapping parts: *History, Defence, and Critique*. When we do this we shall see that although all the parts are important, what is most relevant to our present discussion is the Critique. Readers will acknowledge that this is not the time for militant self-defence, but of principled and courageous re-evaluation. The method of Marx provides the mechanism for self-criticism. Hobsbawm's critique is a critique of Marx and Marxism not by an anti-Marx, not by a renegade or a revisionist, but by a committed 95 year-old Marxist historian who has been a world-renowned activist academic for about seven decades. We shall continue this appreciation by examining Hobsbawm's criticism of what he calls "Official Marxism".

On Saturday, October 2, 1999, the day's edition of *The Guardian* newspaper carried the report that Karl Marx had been voted the greatest thinker of the millennium by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) radio listeners. I was, naturally, delighted by the news. It was with this feeling that I responded to the paper's invitation to write an appreciation of that report. My piece titled *Marx as thinker of the millennium* appeared in *The Guardian's* issue of Sunday, October 10, 1999. However, Hobsbawm, in his *How to change the world*, does not think that "too much should be made" of the report. Perhaps he believes that radio listeners do not constitute a critical "electoral college" to decide the "thinker of the millennium". I agree.

However, Hobsbawm says that if, today, you type Marx's name into Google "he remains the largest of the great intellectual presences, exceeded only by Darwin and Einstein, but well ahead of Adam Smith and Freud". This, for him, is a stronger reason to celebrate. Again, I agree. But why this "turnaround" for the fortunes of Marx within a decade? Hobsbawm gives two reasons. The first, he says, "is that the end of the official Marxism of the Soviet Union liberated Marx from public identification with Leninism in theory and the Leninist regimes in practice".

that "the globalised capitalist world that emerged in the 1990s was in crucial ways uncannily like the world anticipated by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*." To examine these reasons, some background is necessary.

Although the words "socialist" and "communist" were often used interchangeably in the days of Marx, even up to the time of Lenin, fine distinctions in the ways they were used can be articulated. Hobsbawm says that whereas the word "communist" always signified a programme, the word "socialist" was "primarily analytical and critical". Later, editors and publishers of Marx's works and "codifiers" of Marxism interpreted socialism to mean "lower stage of communism" and perhaps, communism (proper) to be the "higher phase of communism". For me, this distinction – or rather, this distinction, as we received it from "Official Marxism" – needs critical re-examination.

The point for me here is not whether Marx used these phrases or not (he used them), but that this theoretical structure became one of the more embarrassing and damaging dogmas of "Official Marxism" especially under Joseph Stalin, who was able to use this dogma to declare, in the 1930s, that the lower phase of communism, that is, socialism, had been attained in the Soviet Union! Even if Marx made such distinction, it would have been, as he did in his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha programme*, to emphasize that the transition to socialism/communism, as he envisaged it, must be a very long process.

I shall continue to use the terms "socialist" and "communist" interchangeably and simply define a socialist or a communist as a person who believes in the desirability and possibility of a classless society. Anyone can therefore be a socialist or a communist. But for advocacy, I prefer the term socialist. A Marxist is a person who subscribes to, and applies the scientific "doctrine" founded by Marx. Such a person, by necessity, will be educated. And one of the most precise statements of this "doctrine", in Marx's own words, can be found in his 1859 *Preface to Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

Karl Marx did not coin the word socialism; nor did he invent the word communism. He was

neither was he the first communist or communist ideologue. Marx's socialism and communism – and eventually the doctrine that became Marxism – emerged from his encounter with earlier socialisms and communisms and, before then, his encounter with Left Hegelians, Feuerbachians and classical political economists. Marx and Engels and their followers called the earlier socialists *utopians* not because the society they advocated was not desirable, or was unrealisable, but because it could not be created by the means described by their promoters (through anarchism or mere education). Marx and Engels and their followers called their socialism *scientific* because it was based on the analysis of the logic and actual development of the capitalist political economy and the emergence of the working class (proletariat).

Vladimir Illych Lenin (1870 – 1924) was the leader of Russia's Socialist Revolution of 1917. He was a socialist and a Marxist, and the Russian Revolution was the first revolution made "in Marx's name". As the Russian revolutionaries had no actually existing or past model to follow, they had to create the model and in so doing, create Marxism – Leninism, which was a particular interpretation and application of Marxism. There were of course rival interpretations – at home and abroad. But Marxism – Leninism won the fight both in the Soviet Union and in the Communist International, the federation of Communist Parties founded under Lenin. Most of these rival interpretations were literally liquidated.

Now, a caveat. I am a Marxist. I am also a Leninist, but to the extent first that I subscribe to the Leninist theory of revolutionary organisation (not organisation in general) and, then, to the extent that I believe that the Russian Revolution could not have taken place in 1917 or soon after, let alone consolidated, without what became known as Leninism. I have been debating this with myself for a long time: to what extent did Stalinist deformations of both Marxism and Leninism organically and logically grow out of certain elements of Leninism and to what extent they were alien? All I confirm, for now, is

developed into Stalinism before he died.

History itself has freed Marxism not only from Leninism but also from the official ideology of the defunct Soviet Union. Marxists should welcome this. The link has been, for many of them, including me, a theoretical, ideological and political burden. With this separation, Marxists may now, without feeling they are betraying anybody or anything, begin to *re-evaluate* those revolutionary Marxists who were not Leninists either for all time or for some time: Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Mao Zedong etc. At this critical moment, let Leninism, Stalinism, Trotskism, Maoism, Luxembourism and other "isms" of the Marxist movement and history stand each on its own, and be re-evaluated according to their respective contributions to the development – or deformation – of Marxism. I had come to this conclusion long ago, but I am pleased that Hobsbawm has come out strongly on it.

Some years ago, a Nigerian comrade told me, in a one-on-one discussion that he had been opposed to me in our movement because he thought I was not a Leninist. But recently, according to him, he discovered two articles I wrote long ago – one of them on Cuba, which showed that he was wrong. I kept quiet, for the circumstance of the discussion did not permit me to tell him that history itself has intervened in that controversy.

The year 1998 was the 150th anniversary of Marx's and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*. It was a year of "dramatic upheaval in the global economy", reports Hobsbawm. But, "paradoxically", he says, "this time it was the capitalists and not socialists who rediscovered him (Marx): the socialists were too discouraged to make much of this anniversary". This "rediscovering" is continuing. I still have the *TIME* magazine issue of February 2, 2009 with the Special Report: *The World Economy: What would Marx think?* However, if Marxists do not rise from their paralysis – understandable as it has been – the captains of neoliberal, globalised, capitalist economy will reconstruct the "rediscovered" Marx to their needs. Marx will then become "our Marx"! That would be a second tragedy.

To be continued next Thursday.

Opinion

Endless debate over 'changing the world' (4)

By Edwin Madunagu

LAST Thursday, in the third segment of this series, I implicitly introduced what Eric Hobsbawm, in his book *How to change the world: Tales of Marx and Marxism*, calls "Official Marxism". We may now be more explicit: Official Marxism was the state ideology of the defunct Soviet Union and countries of the "Soviet Bloc". The ideology was constructed first, by distorting (and wrongly interpreting) what Karl Marx (and Friedrich Engels, his inseparable friend and collaborator), said, and then turning this distortion (and interpretation) into a dogma by which every person, every institution and every state under Soviet control or Soviet sphere of influence was judged. The list of distortions (followed by dogmatization) is almost endless because in each distortion are several sub-distortions and reversals of positions and policies and interpretation, without apologies or explanations. This last phenomenon (sudden, unexplained policy reversals) was called "ideological somersault" by some critics.

We may partially get around this problem of endlessness by listing areas of distortion, rather than individual distortions. Some of these areas of distortion (and distortions) are only of historical and academic interest. But the more relevant areas in this historical period would include: the content and form of the revolutionary state (Marx's *dictatorship of the proletariat*); general conception of the state ("coercive" instrument of the ruling classes); the destiny of the state ("withering away of the state"); the deterministic doctrine of "inevitability"; "socialism in one country"; "revolution in permanence" or permanent revolution; "competition" between capitalism and socialism; Marxism and politics (The Communist Manifesto), "lower" and "upper" phases of socialism; imperialism and the national question; reform and revolution; class and political alliances; character of the state and class struggle in the period of transition, "lower" and "upper" phases of socialism; democracy and dictatorship; and the party system (uniparty or multiparty).

Hobsbawm warns that the setting up of "Correct Marxism" against "Incorrect Marxism" would be against the very method of social enquiry that Marx developed and used. These are

wise words. But for me, there is no question of "worshipping" Marx here. Marx was thoroughly mortal in every sense of the word. He was fallible. So was his friend and collaborator, Friedrich Engels. In fact, from time to time, Marx criticised and tried to correct some of his own mistakes. Engels also entered some self-criticisms and corrections both for himself and posthumously on behalf of Marx after the latter's death (1883). We are concerned here only with the refutation of distortions of what Marx actually said and did and the setting up of these distortions as dogmas. This is a defence of Karl Marx and what he left behind, not against correction but against distortion - from the Left as well as from the Right. Prove him wrong - if you can - but do not distort him.

Hobsbawm did not deal with all the issues earlier listed - or rather, he did not deal with all the issues as formulated and presented here. But we are appreciating Hobsbawm, and have to remain close to him.

I came to Marxist and socialist consciousness to meet the Cold War (1946 - 1991), the global struggle between the United States of America (U.S.) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), or the Soviet Union. Each of them was supported by its allies, satellites and clients. The struggle started as soon as the two countries moved to actualise the "control" of territories (spheres of influence) they allocated to themselves around the globe in a series of war-time agreements. They had done this as leaders of Allied Powers when it became clear that Nazi Germany's defeat in the Second World War (1939 - 1945) was both certain and imminent. Flashpoints of conflict initially included the Middle East, defeated Germany, Korean Peninsula, but soon spread to Southeast Asia (the so-called Indochina), the Caribbean, etc. The "allocation" of Western Europe to America and Central and Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union were settled questions between the two emergent "super" powers.

The Cold War was fought on the ideological, political, diplomatic, economic and, at times, military planes. It was fought mainly through proxies, but at times, it became or threatened to become direct (between the two supers) - as in Germany, Korea, Cuba and Iran. No region and no country of the world was immune from it.

The picture we were presented when we were growing up was that this Cold War was a global struggle or "competition" between (forces of) Capitalism and (forces of) Socialism. As we continued to learn, to read, to listen, and to observe, we began to see a different picture. Not that there was no "struggle" - it was going on before our very eyes - but that it was not exactly or entirely between (the forces of) global Capitalism and (the forces of) global Socialism, or between the two "social systems". It was largely - to put it mildly - a struggle for global hegemony between the two "super powers": America and the Soviet Union.

This struggle for global hegemony or a more favourable balance of power between the two super powers emerged from Second World War, a war in which allies, satellites, proxies and clients were involved at various levels, a war which witnessed so many contradictions, betrayals, abandonment of proclaimed principles and untold atrocities even against friends and "comrades". I had, also, in those days, believed that there were two rival world markets - one capitalist, the other socialist - and that they were in "competition". I later realised that there was indeed only one world market, that this singular world market was, (and still, is) a capitalist market, and that the "socialist bloc" was participating in it. Countries of the "socialist bloc" were, of course, not happy participants; but they were in it. We now know, of course, that with the current level of global integration, no rival market can be created. This one market must be transformed.

There was a particular philosophical question I continued to ask myself: What type of "competition" can exist between an old and strong entity (capitalism) and a young and fragile, though rising, entity (socialism)? Struggle, yes; but not competition. If I, as an underdog, initiate a *just* struggle against an old and powerful, but evil adversary, I will neither be ashamed nor dispirited if I am defeated once, twice or even countless number of times - as long as I consider my cause just and my ultimate victory inevitable, if the struggle does not consume both of us. On the contrary, I will be ashamed if I had conceived the encounter as a *competition*, a concept that suggests a struggle between equals or between adversaries that have equal chances of victory.

Marxism and Marxian socialism were not, and are not, in any sort of competition with capitalism. That would be unhistorical and undialectical. Competition for what, really? To show that socialism offers greater freedom and human dignity than capitalism? That will be evident in the character of the struggle itself if indeed, it is a struggle for socialism, a mass self-liberation struggle. Is it "Competition" to show which of the two systems - capitalism or socialism - develops the economy faster, as "Official Marxism" and other "competition propagandists" framed the question? That is nonsense. Capitalism and socialism are aiming at two qualitatively different worlds and different sets of social relations. Instruments of production may be the same or similar - but not their ownership, their control and their deployment.

The question of "competing" does not therefore arise unless, of course, you are lying. But an Urhobo friend of mine says that, "the man who is boiling stone and says that he is boiling yam is only deceiving himself and no one else". This is how Eric Hobsbawm responds to this question of "competition" in *How to change the world*: "The claim that socialism was superior to capitalism as a way to ensure the most rapid development of the forces of production could hardly have been made by Marx... What Karl Marx claimed was not that capitalism had reached the limits of its capacity to boost the forces of production, but that the jagged rhythm of capitalist growth produced periodic crisis of overproduction, which would, sooner or later, prove incompatible with a capitalist way of running the economy and generate social conflicts, which it would not survive."

And so? Eric Hobsbawm, interpreting Marx, thinks that if capitalism collapses, it would, "by its nature, be incapable of framing the subsequent economy of social production". The succeeding mode of social production "would necessarily be socialist". Or rather, either socialism or "common ruin", as Marx himself said in the *Communist Manifesto*. Running through this analysis is an assumption - sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit. And that assumption is *Class struggle*. You may refute the analysis or the conclusion or both. But do not ascribe to Marx what he did not say.

• To be continued next Thursday.

Opinion

Endless debate over 'changing the world' (5)

By Edwin Madunagu

IN the preceding segment of this appreciation of Eric Hobsbawm's *How to change the world: Tales of Marx and Marxism*, I listed 15 areas (among others) where, in my opinion, and largely in Hobsbawm's opinion, Marx's actual pronouncements have suffered distortion and dogmatization in the hands of his "followers". I have already touched on some of these in the last four segments. What I intend to do in this segment, and in the concluding one that follows, is to exhaust the list and then pull all my key propositions together.

But before I embark on this exercise, I would like to stress that I am not here engaged in pure academic exercise; and that all the distortions that I allege here (and others not listed) have been encountered in the Nigerian Left to which I belong and have belonged since mid-1970s. To be more specific, I have been involved in internal disputations – sometimes very turbulent – arising from all of them. This exercise, for which Hobsbawm's book has provided an opportunity, is therefore not simply a general review of our politics and our principles, but in a sense, an exercise in "self-criticism" and "re-affirmation of faith". I would like to provide just two illustrations of the relevance of this discussion as well as my personal involvement in what I have called "internal disputations".

Not too long ago, in a one-on-one discussion, a comrade told me that he had been opposed to me in our movement because he had believed that I was not a Leninist (an adherent of Leninist principles, Vladimir Lenin being the leader of the Russia's 1917 Socialist Revolution). But now, according to the comrade, he had begun to reconsider his position after discovering two articles I wrote long ago, one on them on Fidel Castro. I smiled and tactfully steered the discussion back to what brought me to him. I may only remark that his opposition to me – and the way we fought it out – had tragic and lasting consequences for our organisation and politics.

Another illustration: Long ago, when I was less than half my present age, I had a confrontation with a comrade I was meeting for the first time. It was at a conference of our movement in Zaria. As

we were registering our arrival, I was introduced to the young man. The first thing he said as he heard my name was: "I learnt you are a Trotskyite" – meaning an adherent of Leon Trotsky's tendency in the international movement. I replied in kind: "I know you are a Stalinist" (Joseph Stalin was Lenin's successor and Trotsky's enemy – "even unto death", to use a religious language). We later became close comrades and even closer personal friends, but he never forgot my "Trotskyism". I may remark here that our mutual "doubts" and "suspicions" split our organisation down the middle at a critical moment in our battle against General Obasanjo's military dictatorship (1976-1979). The comrade is now dead.

Back to the main discussion. Marx did not produce any political treatise and no "political blueprint". He, of course wrote a lot on what we may now call politics, but he did not produce anything that can be remotely compared to his major work on economics, or political economy: *Capital*, which runs into four huge volumes and several drafts each of which qualifies as a separable book. Whereas Marx's serious study of Economics did not start until about 1850, he started writing serious politics, history and political philosophy as early as 1843. In spite of this early start, all he left behind in the sphere of politics were scattered pieces in form of polemical book reviews, letters, study notes, critiques of group and party programmes, lectures, conference addresses and lecture notes and pamphlets.

Some of Marx's writings, such as *Eleven theses on Feuerbach*, were not even intended, by Marx, for publication: they were just study notes scribbled while reading. His posthumous editors "cleaned" them up, gave them titles and published them. We also know that several manuscripts – in various stages of completion – were discovered, long after his death. These were also edited, restructured, titled and published. And, of course, as with all thinkers, Marx's brain ran faster than his pen, and since he did not know when he would die, many research and journalistic projects, previously announced by him, were either not completed or were even untouched – as far as his literary agents, editors and publishers knew.

Although Marx (and don't forget Engels) left suf-

ficient materials to form the foundation of what developed into *Marxism* and, in particular, *Marxist politics*, a lot of "piecing together" and reconstruction had to be done by his successors and followers as well as by professional researchers and academics. In fact there is no subject under the sun on which a Marxist position and theory cannot be developed – or indeed, has not been developed. I have, in my own library, many fat and not-so-fat publications on such subjects as Marxist sociology, Marxist psychology, Marx on environment, Marx on colonialism, Marx on pre-capitalist economic formations, Marx on women, Marxist literary criticism, Marx on science etc. Each of these publications, as expected, is heavily annotated with references from Marx's (and Engels') works, and always with direct quotes.

The result of all these is what we have today: countless number of interpretations of what Marx actually said on every given subject. Many of these interpretations claim to be authoritative either because they were produced by "experts" or were approved by strong personalities in the movement or were endorsed by "Official Marxism". One subject on which there had been rival interpretations and bitter debates among Marxists as well as between Marxists and non-Marxists (who include anti-Marxists) is the state. Essentially, whereas some Marxists insist that the state is nothing other than the "executive committee of the ruling class", or the "instrument of the ruling class", others argue that the state is not simply these, that the state is more than these. Non-Marxists and anti-Marxists completely distance themselves from these descriptions. They see the state as a neutral body representing everybody and the nation.

Arising from each of the Marxist conceptions and variants of conceptions is the question of what a socialist revolutionary agency should do with the old state after victory: *Dismantle it? Smash it? Restructure it?* For me, it all depends on the form of that state, for we know what the content will be. Karl Marx actually used several descriptions and metaphors to describe the state. One of his hardest and most uncompromising descriptions of the state is to be found in 1848

Communist Manifesto, which Marx authored with Engels. The manifesto was commissioned by the Communist League of which both authors were members. The revolutions, which swept Europe in 1848 erupted barely two weeks after the publication of this slim, but passionate, and "electrifying" book. Later, Marx had to battle against the distortion, dogmatization and absolutisation of his incipient theory of the state.

The defeat of the 1848 revolutions, the coup d'état of Louis Bonaparte in France, and the seizure of power by Paris workers in 1871 led Marx to make several elaborations of his theory of the state and point out exceptional cases. The texts in which he made these elaborations included *Class struggle in France (1848-1850)*; *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852)*; *Letter to his friend Joseph Weydemeyer (1852)*; and *The Civil War in France (1871)*.

This is Eric Hobsbawm's opinion on the question: "The early communist form of Marx's theory of the state sketched out four main points: the essence of the state was political power, which was the official expression of the opposition of classes within bourgeois society; it would consequently cease to exist in communist society; in the present system it represented not a general interest of society, but the interest of the ruling class(es); but with the revolutionary victory of the proletariat it would, during the expected transition period, not disappear immediately but take a temporary form of 'the proletariat organised as a ruling class' or 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'" (*How to change the world*, page 52).

This is a greatly simplified understanding of Marx's theory of the state. I would subscribe to it, but would take care to add or underscore four points: first, that the revolutionary agency cannot just simply seize the state and use it as it is found; a new state has to be created; secondly that the state can be conceived as a double – organisation: an organisation of the ruling class, and an organisation of the nation as a whole; thirdly, that the state can sometimes represent a fraction of the ruling class and not the ruling class as a whole; and finally, that there is no "neutral" or "supra-class" state, the pretensions of Bonapartism and populism notwithstanding.

• To be concluded next Thursday.

Opinion

Endless debate over 'changing the world' (6)

By Edwin Madunagu

THIS is the sixth and final segment of this series. This does not, however, mean that I am about to conclude my appreciation of Eric Hobsbawm's *How to change the world: Tales of Marx and Marxism*, or end my review of this "endless debate". I shall return to both of them.

Somewhere earlier in this series, I said that one of the clearest statements of Marx's theory of history can be found in his *Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859). The passage in question is a short one, about 500 words long. I must have read this passage as many times as I have read the *Communist Manifesto*. The language is the same: authoritative, passionate and "electrifying"; but the *Preface* is "maturer", more intellectual and more robust. Marx himself announced that the 500-word passage in the *Preface*, starting with the phrase "in the social production of their life..." and ending with "prehistory of human society" was a major discovery, which, "thereafter, served as a guiding thread for my studies". These studies included, in particular, political economy.

Incidentally, this famous and highly laudatory statement happened to be one of the most politically and theoretically controversial (in interpretation and "application") among Marxists and social-democrats as well as students and scholars of various tendencies and interests. Partly for this reason, I shall, in presenting this statement, split it up into six or seven segments. *One*: "In the social production of their life, men (human beings) enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production, which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis, on which rises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness".

These opening sentences are clear enough. The tone of the statement then rises: *Two*: "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, it is their social being that determines their consciousness". You may notice that this

second segment is merely re-stating the first, and then advancing it a bit. Well, anyone who disagrees with this statement - even in its "dryness" - disagrees, not only with the "guiding thread" of Marx's thoughts, but with an entire school of philosophy (*Materialism* as opposed to *Idealism*). This is however, neither the place, nor the occasion, to argue with such objectors.

Three: "At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with existing relations of production, or - what is but a legal expression for the same thing - with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution". Now, this "social revolution" does not happen by itself. It is human beings that make "social revolution" - with materials accumulated in, and "transmitted" from, the past.

Four: "With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations, a distinction should always be made between the transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic - in short, ideological forms in which men (human beings) become conscious of this conflict and fight it out".

Five: "Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production".

Six: "No social formation ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore, mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least

in the process of formation".

This particular section of Marx's *Preface* has been a subject of emence controversy within the family of Marxists and between Marxists, on the one hand, and social democrats and revisionists who also claim to be inspired by Marx, on the other. I shall provide two interventions: one from Hobsbawm - whose book, *How to change the world: Tales of Marx and Marxism*, we are appreciating - and the other from me. Hobsbawm: "Actually, what Karl Marx claimed was not that capitalism had reached the limits of its capacity to boost the forces of production, but that the jagged rhythm of capitalist growth produced periodic crises of overproduction, which would, sooner or later, prove incompatible with a capitalist way of running the economy and generate social conflicts, which it (capitalism) would not survive".

To Hobsbawm's intervention, I add: I think some Marxist tendencies have read, into what Marx actually said, a mechanical - almost metaphysical - correlation between *social tasks* and *historical agencies* to carry them out. Those who study concrete history know that certain national tasks did were performed by the bourgeoisie in, say Europe, (e.g. resolution of the "national question") can now only be performed by revolutionary popular democratic forces in Nigeria. Marx did not say, and I think, could not have thought, that, depending on the historical context, a revolutionary socialist agency could not take power from a bankrupt bourgeoisie and then start with those tasks which the bourgeoisie *ought* to have performed, but did not perform or could not perform.

Seven: "In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production - antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of one arising from the social conditions of life of the individuals; at the same time the productive forces developing in the wombs of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism. This social formation brings, therefore, the prehistory of human society to a close".

This proposition has also been a subject of controversy. I believe much of this controversy would evaporate if it is appreciated that Marx is here taking a *long* and *total* - and not a "segmented" - view of human history. Marx, for instance, is not saying that every society has to pass through "Asiatic", feudal, bourgeois (capitalist)... and in that order. He only says that, taking the world as a whole, that sequence is what he has seen and that his analysis leads him to believe that the bourgeois society is neither the end of history nor can it be succeeded by any other exploitative system.

I would like to conclude this series with two passages from Hobsbawm's book: On page 61 he says: "All Marx's political controversies in his later years were in defence of the triple concept of (a) a political class movement of the proletariat; (b) a revolution seen not simply as a once-for-all transfer of power to be followed by some sectarian utopia, but as a crucial movement initiating a complex and not readily predictable period of transition; and (c) the consequently necessary maintenance of a system of political agencies that can be seen as the guiding form of the State".

On page 14 Hobsbawm underlines three "central features" "And yet a number of central features of Marx's analysis that, in his view, 'remain valid and relevant'. The *first*, 'is the analysis of the irresistible global dynamic of capitalist economic development and its capacity to destroy all that came before it, including ever those parts of the heritage of the human past from which capitalism had itself benefited, such as family structures'. The second "central feature" is the analysis of "the mechanism of capitalist growth by generating internal 'Contradictions' - endless bouts of tensions and temporary resolutions, growth leading to crisis and change, all producing economic concentration in an increasingly globalised economy."

The *third* "central feature of Marx's analysis" that remain valid and relevant, according to Hobsbawm, "is best put in the words of the late Sir John Hicks, as economics Nobel laureate. 'Most of those who wish to fit into place a general course of history, he wrote, 'would use the Marxist Categories or some modified version of them since there is little in the way of alternative versions that is available'".

• *Concluded.*