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**A TURNING POINT WHERE AND
WHEN HISTORY ITSELF TURNS**

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This publication is humbly dedicated to all lovers of Nigeria who are genuinely convinced that our country and continent should be bailed out of the economic mess of our day and age so that this generation and much beyond would henceforth experience golden and glorious liberation.

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A TURNING POINT WHERE AND WHEN HISTORY ITSELF TURNS

Professor Wale Oyemakinde

There is a turning point where and when history itself turns¹. This is the point at which things are not the same again². It is the point of no return, the point of complete change or about-turn. It would happen that total change would come about in a particular direction in which a new era would be ushered in that would be completely different from the old dispensation. It would be perceptible and somewhat remarkable. It would touch lives, many lives. The number of people involved would be so large that its impact would not be lost on the society in its entirety. The old order would depart and remain a point of reference which would usher in the novelty that would henceforth feature and indeed dominate³

Take, for example, the GSM factor in telecommunication. The Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL) operated for so long in this country and linked us with the world in its own way. Only a super privileged few smelt its services. Even then, it was confusion in complexity.

Services broke down before they could stand erect. Subscribers had to abandon their own jobs to carry ladders and lines about the whole place as they grabbed and bribed technicians who must disappoint one to answer another customer in frustration. At the end of the day, agony echoed and endured in multiples.

Needless journeys were embarked upon because people could not talk and be heard. Sometimes long distances were involved. Yet two commuters in opposite direction might cross each other and move further apart without meeting to discuss what would have been settled with a call. That was the situation for a very long time, indeed, from time immemorial. When it was opined that the leadership of the country where people lacked telephone facility were guilty of human rights abuse, many people indulged in contemptuous laughter.

Then came the GSM. While facilitating talking, it solved problems and established relationships. Applicants and employers contacted and contracted. Family members, friends, business associates, vocational, professional and political colleagues talked it out. It became a new world. Things were not the same again. It has been the era of the GSM revolution.

Could it now be imagined that something or somebody would cancel the GSM? Would the old order return and stand? Or put differently, how did the world survive for so long without the GSM? Has it, therefore, not been that our world has experienced a turning point where and when history itself turned?

Or take the example of the industrial revolution in Britain ⁴. Time was when the countries of the world were all at about the same level in organizing bread winning without which human survival would have been impossible. Agriculture fed all. The enclosure movement in England built on the manorial system to produce goods and services that satisfied the consumption needs of the citizenry. Then came the pulling out of the yeomen from agricultural pursuits to be relaunched into cottage industrialization

which multiplied the production of goods and services as the august consequence of the revolution that was happening in wealth generation.

England thus led the world and moved away from the common level it had been with the other countries to become the workshop for all of them. It was left for the other countries of the world, one after the other, beginning from Continental Europe to the Americas and beyond, to take industrialization seriously and accord it state sponsorship to make it a phenomenon. The transformation brought about by the industrial revolution was such that the world has not been the same again. The industrial world and the non-industrial world have since remained distinct entities. Whereas prosperity has generally characterized the former, poverty has sadly isolated the latter ⁵.

The essence of the industrial revolution has been the widening of gainful employment down the population such that the gap between Potential Gross Domestic Product (PGDP) and Actual Gross Domestic Product (AGDP) became considerably reduced. By far more people got engaged in the production of goods and services such that abundant wealth got created and the national cake came to be as large as possible⁶. Consequently, people were generally able to secure what they needed to consume and welfare arrangements were expected to flow accordingly. Poverty gave way to prosperity and the major concern shifted from wealth creation to the issue of equity in its distribution.

That turning point when and where history turned for Britain and subsequently for the rest of the industrialized world is what Nigeria should strive to achieve and show the way for other African countries to follow, if hunger and

abject poverty would not condemn one African State after another, to the club of failed states ready for recolonization, even at the time most of them are celebrating the golden jubilee anniversary of their independence from political imperialism. African economic planners and policy makers should endeavour to insist on zero tolerance for unemployment while the generality of the people should co-operate to make this noble goal an urgent reality. It is enough for one or two or more states to seize the bull by the horn and before long the country and the continent would catch the signal and be counted with the beneficiaries.

But this is far from advocating the creation of white collar jobs. Rather, we are talking of wealth creation in the context of employment generation for tangible production that would lead to multiplication of utilities. The emphasis must be on agricultural industry involving farming in all its ramifications and agro-allied industrialization that would transform the participants and the totality of the environment of their operation⁷.

Goods and services would consequently be produced in super abundance and the wealth of the nation would multiply sumptuously, such that poverty and penury would give way to prosperity and opulence. The hands that would produce the goods and services would also be those of the mouths that would be involved in their consumption. A situation in which everybody who is willing and able to work is accordingly engaged would not only provide vocational rehabilitation for the citizenry, it would also cut the ground under the feet of crime and criminal tendencies. For much of the motivation for criminal thinking and practice comes from idleness which is appropriately known to be the devil's workshop.

In this advocated regime of zero tolerance for unemployment, the economy is poised to operate at the level of full employment. This is statistically conceived as a situation in which not more than 4% of the population is unemployed. Such ones who are deemed to suffer unemployment at a point in time are routinely allowed to accommodate nursing mothers, recuperating invalids or just those who are temporarily out of job in readiness for being relaunched into gainful employment with the coming of a better dispensation. It is when the unemployment rate is above this level that crisis point is said to be approaching.

If we succeed in purposeful nation building to the extent that no one is unemployed, as it were, we would have achieved a setting in which a turning point is reached where and when history itself turns. For it would then be realistic and feasible to expect that the citizenry would generally and genuinely identify with the interests of the nation, be exceedingly patriotic and committed to excellence as required for enthusiastic participation in the task before all. All hands would then be expected on deck to bake the national cake such that it would be as large as possible for people to take their pie as they survive and prosper.

What is immediately required is to take a census of the unemployed youths and others in particular local government areas, ward by ward, and have reliable statistics to work with. While those who are engaged in one thing or the other would continue with what they have been doing for their upkeep, their unemployed compatriots would be rehabilitated according to prescription. Everybody must have something to contribute to the national effort towards wealth creation, as a matter of deliberate policy and practice.

Emphasis would be on wealth creation through the generation of employment via agricultural industry. This would involve arable farming where the local ecology is found favourable while animal husbandry would feature in savannah vegetation as fishery is concentrated upon in river-side areas. Since it is noted that there is no landless zone or state in Nigeria just as there is no useless land, such land that might not be good for a particular agricultural practice would be suitable for another as water-locked areas are reclaimed much like arid or desert-like zones are also rendered agriculturally productive through well organized irrigation.

This is to say that what would be happening in one particular local government area and in the whole state or zone under reference, by way of employment generation via agricultural industry, would be repeatable in other states or zones of the country, whatever the geopolitical division, since one form of agricultural practice or the other would be feasible therein. Nobody or geopolitical zone would correctly complain of marginalization or neglect in the scheme of things since people would be free to, and in fact, be enabled to respond encouragingly to the unfolding opportunities as applicable to their ecological situations. Healthy rivalry is called for as sections of the country endeavour to take advantage of environmental realities peculiar to them and make the best of same.

The noble goal of zero tolerance for unemployment is so significantly rewarding as a national or continental policy measure designed to liberate the black world from imperial and wicked designs that every effort should be made to make it work. This is the way to seek the greatest happiness of the greatest number of the people. For no citizen could

be really happy when he or she is unemployed or is engaged in precarious employment like finger nails cutting or shoe shinning which amounts to disguised unemployment. It is when hunger is banished from the land through the provision of employment for everybody who is willing and able to work that the men are separated from the boys while the women are isolated from the girls. As opportunities open up for more appropriate employment, people would move to them.

We are considering a scheme whereby land as a major factor of production is what is focused on for real wealth generation via agricultural industry involving comprehensive farming practices and agro-based industrialization. Since farmland exists in most of the 774 local government areas to which Nigeria has been divided for administrative ease, it should be convenient to operate the project under discussion throughout the country. Even the few local government areas that might belong to one municipality or the other also have sufficiently close or contiguous to them, rural zones that could be borrowed for farm use and cottage industrialization.

What is next required is to secure land resources from land speculators and estate grabbers who would want to take advantage of current general poverty to buy such land away from the indigenous people of the local government areas. To this end, the different local government area authorities should be officially encouraged to buy relevant farm land from the local people and hold the same in trust for present and future generations of the project farmers and sponsored cottage industrialists who might need such land for the scheme under reference. They would subsequently pay nominal land rent on the right of use for the specific project. Such land would be cleared for them by the state authorities, free of charge, while manure or

fertilizers would be given them at reduced rates.

Project participants would add to their land allocation grants of other inputs like seeds and seedlings of superb pedigree while itinerant state agricultural officers would train and retrain the sponsored farmers to equip them for the task ahead. Micro-credit finance houses would have been established and empowered to grant them soft loans as guaranteed by the neighbourhood co-operative societies which would also assist the project farmers over the sale of their products. Refresher courses would be mounted for them at state expense while record keeping, skill development and sponsored tours would enable the project farmers to compare and contrast their progress with the records made elsewhere.

Because they are not meant to replace the existing farmers in the different local government areas, they should work in co-operation with them while also sharing experience, exposure and facilities with them. Efforts concerning cottage industrialization would be coordinated in the local government areas while technicians and technologists on state government pay roll would move around to transfer expertise to the budding artisans engaged in agricultural product processing, tools manufacture and relevant maintenance duties. As value is added left, right and centre, the scheme should enjoy enthusiastic welcome in the communities of operation while the spread effect should reach-out far and wide. The consequence on the promotion of tourism would be considerable as people in the different local government areas open up places and inspire the production of varieties of goods and services of interest to local consumers as well as to tourists from here

and there, who would be prepared to spend their money, even hard currency, to view or purchase whatever they fancy.

Every effort should be geared towards making the scheme a success particularly in the formative years of operation to encourage others to join and be counted among the beneficiaries. The idea is to run an economy in which everybody is anxious to contribute something rather than be a parasite feeding on the contributions of others.⁸ For in the final analysis, the best benefactor or philanthropist is one's employment. It is also clear that when a man has money in his pocket, he is at home everywhere. And when he has no money in his pocket, he is not at home, even at home.

It is not that everybody who would be rehabilitated in agricultural pursuits and cottage industrialization would have been previously groomed in rural habitation and local environmental realities. There would surely be the need to adapt and adopt what possibilities necessarily unfold. That is why participants would need training and retraining that would be consistently provided to give life and health to the scheme over time. There would also be the need for re-orientation in rural habitation to familiarize participants with the demands of the new culture which they would subsequently appreciate as wholesome, sustainable, renewable, reliable and family friendly. For the rehabilitation envisaged is not just for the individual participants, it is also for their families.

The emphasis on zero tolerance for unemployment would transform the entire society from one local government area to another, and from one state to another, such that other African countries would find it desirable to borrow such a strategy that would also liberate their

people from the incubus of hunger and deprivation, which could lead to utter revolution. Especially as it is sustainable, such a strategy would not only impact positively on the current generation, it would also leave a legacy that would be enduring. That is the sense in which we would have reached a turning point where and when history itself turns.

If the strategy of zero tolerance for unemployment be faithfully prosecuted by our state, the rest of the country would, no doubt, see its certain and sumptuous benefits and they should need no further persuasion to want to follow the good model⁹. Such an example should subsequently be an unforgettable lesson for the emulation of brother African nations. The application of the strategy under discussion would then be our gift to mankind.

When policy measures are geared towards making a definite impact that would transform life and living for generations of people far and wide, the world would not remain the same again. Civilization would experience remarkable advancement such that the dynamics of change could be expected to have multiplier effect. That is the reasoning for noting the reality of reaching a turning point where and when history itself turns.

NOTES

1. Very exciting discussion of a turning point where and when history itself turned or refused to turn exists in Ralph W. Greenlaw and Duright E. Lee, (Eds.) 1848- A Turning Point? Boston, 1958.
2. The Holy Book says: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more: until he comes whose right it is, and I will give it him." Ezekiel, 21:27: KJV
3. See Wale Oyemakinde, *Transformation*, Ibadan, 2010.
4. A lot of studies exist on the Industrial Revolution in Britain and Europe, See for example, Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation*, London, 1969; R.M. Hartwell, *The Industrial Revolution and Economic Growth*, London, 1971; WO. Hendson, *Britain and Industrial Europe, 1750-1870*, London, 1972
5. The former are the countries of the North, so called, while the latter are the countries of the South.
6. That is the goal of positive economic policy formulation.
7. Discussed in Wale Oyemakinde, *Towards Policy Prescription*, Ibadan, 2009.
8. Veritable prescription for preventing a reoccurrence of global economic meltdown as counselled in Wale Oyemakinde, *Global Economic Meltdown*, Ibadan, 2009.
9. If this strategy is identified for positive and vigorous prosecution, the will would have been created for the way to victory to follow.