



SEMINAR SERIES PAPER 3

“Industrial Collapse: Textile and National Development in Nigeria”

By Professor Bjorn Beckman

This seminar focused on interrogating the collapse of a once successful textile industry in Nigeria. The seminar organized by Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), and the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), held on the 11th of July 2008, at Rockview Hotel, Abuja.

The main speaker was Professor Bjorn Beckman, a professor of political science, from the University of Stockholm in Sweden who has done a lot of work in the area of textile industries around the world.

Professor Beckman's presentation opened with a historical overview of the textile industry in Nigeria. It was sad he observed that what was once a flourishing industry in earlier decades has all but collapsed. The industry which is vital to the success of any economy

he ascertained, in the 1980's employed over 60,000 employees, a figure that has today dwindled to less than 20,000. There was a general collapse in the manufacturing sector in Nigeria, as importation has become the order of the day.

Solutions to the problems in the industry, he asserted can only be achieved, if the causative factors are analysed. He listed some of the problems as follows:

- The industry is incapacitated with the lack of adequate power supply. This is reinforced by the fact that, the industry lacks black oil, water supply, basic transportation, all ingredients required for

successful operation;

- The failure of the government to successfully manage its borders has weakened the state of the industry today. Porous borders have led to the smuggling into the country of textile from Asia and second hand clothes from Europe and America;
- The failure of the government to put in place effective policies that will protect local industries has immensely contributed to the dwindling fortunes within the sector;

Other issues raised in his presentation were that:

- The policies of imperialism and globalisation have in many ways impaired the development of industries, and in some cases even led to the collapse of existing ones;
- While in the past, unions to an extent successfully resisted market oriented reforms, the current phase of globalisation and its consequent policies, has made unions somewhat ineffective. Crumbling state institutions, massive indebtedness, and foreign intervention through liberal economic policies have contributed to a decline in industrialisation;
- Wage labour is also central to industrialisation and to the construction of the institutions capable of responding to the

needs of transformation. Regulations of employer and employee relations are necessary if progress is to be made;

- As both consumers and producers of public services, wage earners have a special stake in the modernisation project. In societies with weak states, weak institutions and bureaucracies, the working class feel particularly called upon to act as the custodian of the national project. This central position reinforces their sense of mission and a union based labour regime provides it with a vital platform of intervention;

Having laid down the factors responsible for state of the textile industry, Professor

Beckman made some recommendations that could remedy the situation. These were:

- There is the need for a union –based labour regime which will play a key role in protecting and advancing Africa’s industrialisation which in effect is crucial to Africa’s social transformation;
 - The building of institutional capacity is crucial, if Africa is to move forward;
 - There is a need for unions to shoulder greater responsibility in upgrading the capacity of civil Society to respond to prevailing and emerging global trends;
- At the end of the presentation, different participants highlighted several factors responsible for the collapse of the

industry. Solutions were also proffered by participants.

The session ended with a call from Prof. Beckman, for civil society to continue the process of engagement with not only themselves, but government as well to find a way forward towards the revival of the sector.

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