

SOCIALISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE : MEANING AND IMPLICATIONS.

Histories of socialism traditionally begin with an account of collectivist doctrines from Plato to Thomas More which can be linked to movements in Western thought since the American and French revolutions. This approach has the advantage of establishing a perspective in which the ideas of modern thinkers can be measured.¹

Socialism is a term which is very much talked about and debated in our time and its definition entails some amount of controversy. In company with other ideological concepts, socialism has a double reference. On the one hand, it refers to ideals, values, properties of what is often called the socialist 'vision'. On the other hand, it refers to empirical features of social and political institutions which are supposed concertely to embody the vision. Socialism stands for the values of freedom, equality, community, brotherhood, social justice, the classless society, progress, peace, prosperity and happiness. Sometimes the value component of socialism is stated negatively : socialists are opposed to oppression, exploitation, inequality, strife, war, injustice, poverty, misery and delumanisation. On the level of institution both adherents and opponents alike would say that socialism is opposed to the capitalist provate enterprise system which it seeks to replace by a system of control over wealth and property and the social supervision or organisation of economic activity; that is, 'common', or 'public ownership of the means of production.'²

Socialism is the heir to the Renaissance and the enlightenment deriving its values from humanism and classical liberalism, Individualism in the sense of self-assertion, secularism in the sense of the self-sufficiency of human reason and human society, materialism in the sense of seeking happiness and fulfilment in the possession and enjoyment of objects found in nature or extracted by human labour-these are the chief ingredients of the cultural complex of which socialism, is the most articulate expression.³

Socialism and utopia - these two words were once thought to be closely associated, if indeed not synonymous. The organic connection between socialism and utopia becomes more evident when we contemplate the contemporary scene. Seemingly, Socialism is the leading ideology of our age.⁴ In socialism the most important cultural, political, intellectual and ideological trends come together : socialism represents an aspiration to a future which is understood in terms of visions and prophecies enunciated by thinkers belonging to all creeds, and believed in by the masses of ordinary people in all countries. Socialism sets the style of politics and it deeply permeates other doctrines.⁵

Susobhan Sarkar writes : "True communism could arise only out of the material contradictions of a capitalist society. It is no wonder therefore that socialist thought took shape first only in early 19th century. The passion for equality for all men, economic equality, became a real force with men. In the task of formulating a modern socialist theory, the pioneers were Saint Simon and Fourier in France and Robert Owen in England."⁶

Socialism connotes some fundamental tendencies which together make up socialist thought. Socialism gradually emerges in the 18th and 19th centuries as a series of responses to a rapidly changing human world. Egalitarianism is the first tendency. It is the classical principle of socialism. The dominant notion here is 'equality.' Another is Moralism, it constitutes the christian principle of socialism. The chief values for moralism are social justice, peace, cooperation and brotherhood. Rationalism, the third tendency, represents the principle of the Enlightenment in socialism. The chief values are individual happiness, reason, knowledge, efficiency in production, the rational, purposeful organisation of human society in the interest of progress. Libertarianism, which could be termed the romantic principle of socialism, is the last one. Libertarianism is the demand for freedom in the sense of the total absence of restraints, external and internal.⁷

Socialism and communism are not two of a kind, but represent two incompatible ways of thought and life, as incompatible as liberalism and totalitarianism. There are several factors of antagonism between socialists and communists. First,

communists seek to bring about the end of capitalism by a single act of revolutionary upheaval and civil war. Socialists, on the other hand, adhere to strict constitutional procedures; they seek power by ballots, rather than bullets, and once in office they know they are not in for keeps, but are subject to be voted out in the next election.⁸

EARLY SOCIALISM

In the philosophy of liberalism freedom and equality were indivisible. But these guarantees soon found to be inadequate, especially for ensuring economic equality. The main reason was the radical change in the scale of production brought about by the technological transformation associated with the industrial revolution. Early socialism sought to resolve this dilemma. Early socialist thinkers sought to replace capitalism by some form of workers ownership or control of industry.

Some men rejected the injustices of the industrial revolution. Other even regretted the industrial revolution itself and wished to return to the pre-industrial era which they imagined as a golden age of happiness and prosperity instead of the life of endless poverty and toil it was in reality. The socialists made the most rigorous criticism of the new industrial society and were concerned to change it. The word 'Socialist' was first used in 1827 by disciples of Robert Owen in the British Co-operative Magazine to denote a person who rejected the laissez-faire theory propagated by the new entrepreneur class in favour of co-operation. To the socialists it was clear that the profit motive, left undisturbed by government action, did not and could not produce universal happiness, as the capitalists claimed.⁹

Robert Owen, Saint-Simon, and Fourier were socialists and they rejected laissez faire in favour of a system where the rewards of the new industrialism were shared by all rather than by a few. In brief, the early socialists like Robert Owen, Saint Simon and Fourier generally sought to restore the liberalist identity between freedom and equality through the replacement of capitalism by a system of broad-based productive associations and cooperatives and a libertarian political system

in which the state would aid and generally regulated the economic system without exercising too much control over it.

Early socialism of this type had certain special characteristics which were to distinguish it from Marxian socialism. In the first place, it was not backed by any 'philosophy of history' and was pragmatic and experimental in character. Secondly, it had religious and moral overtones. All the thinkers thought along utopian basis, so it is often branded as 'utopian socialism.' Thirdly, it had no sociology and no theory of class struggle. As a consequence, it believed in peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism.¹⁰

MARXIAN SOCIALISM

It was Marx and Engels who brought together the socialist ideal and the labour movement. The communist manifesto of 1848 proclaimed the union. In Marx's hands, socialist thought shed its utopian dreaming and turned into a scientific theory. He argued that the abolition of poverty can come only through the abolition of classes.¹¹

During the middle of the nineteenth century utopian socialism began to give way to 'scientific' or Marxian socialism. The economic interpretation of history, the theory of the class struggle, and the doctrine of surplus value were the cornerstones of the Marxian philosophy. Marxian socialism gave emphasis on the importance of the economic factor in the progress of society and the part played by the class struggle in order to establish an egalitarian social order.

With Marx socialism entered an altogether new phase. First, dialectical materialism sought to give a new meaning and inevitability to history and enabled Marxists to regard their ideology as historically inevitable. Socialism thus became 'scientific' as opposed to early socialism which the Marxists called 'utopian.' Secondly, Marxist socialism shunned all religious overtones and regarded religion as positively harmful to society. Marx developed a broad humanist sociology and prescribed a revolutionary method of upsetting the existing order of society. Beyond that he virtually contended himself by referring broadly to the "dictatorship of

the proletariat" which would eliminate the capitalist class and lead to the eventual disappearance of the state.¹²

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM.

Democratic socialism is used as an umbrella term to describe the principles, policies and institutions characteristic of European parliamentary socialism. A short definition of a Democratic Socialist - or more simply, a Socialist - is a person who believes in equality and freedom, and in the conscious, directed organisation of political, economic and social machinery to change society in accordance with these ideals.¹³ Democratic Socialism, like communism, began as a protest against the injustices created by the industrial revolution in Europe.

The link between democracy and socialism is the most important single element in socialist thought and policy. Looking at the history of socialism, it can be seen that successful socialist movements have grown up only in nations with strong democratic traditions, such as Great Britain, Scandinavia, Holland and Belgium.¹⁴

It is to be admitted that from Marx, democratic socialism derives some part of its inspiration. Modern social sciences have categorically rejected the deterministic approach to historical and social phenomena and deny the possibility of explaining such phenomena with any single irrevocable law or with any single unique factor. Consistently with this new development in the social sciences, democratic socialists take a plural view of history and society and do not consider it necessary to have a deterministic philosophy of history to buttress their socialist convictions. Democratic socialism does not accept the Marxian view of armed revolution.¹⁵

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Man is a social being as Marx puts it. His human existence acquires significance only as a member of society, as a social being. His development is conditioned by the social environment in which he lives. In the history of his development is mirrored the development of the society of which he is a member. It is the

way the society is organized, the values it cherishes and the ideals it pursues that determine not only the course of historical development of the society itself but the thought and behaviour pattern of its members. It is the social environment that determines one's entire psyche and culture in every epoch of history. The form of social organization under which man lives determines his very nature and genius.¹⁶

Social justice is a value-oriented term. The concept of social justice is inextricably linked with equality, freedom and the concept of ideology.

It would not be right to say that the values of freedom, equality, social justice and rationality of action are entirely new. But their meaning has undergone change, and the areas of life in which they are considered applicable have widened over the centuries. While equality is a value, differentiation in rewards as related to effort and ability seems to be essential for the organisation of social life.¹⁷ Values are socially embedded.

Democratic Socialists have always given high priority to government social services because they believe that, as part of the battle for social equality and justice, it should be a collective responsibility to ensure a fair share of the basic necessities of life for all citizens. Socialist governments pioneered many of the advances in social welfare; and most of the new thinking on welfare comes from Socialists. Perhaps the greatest tribute to Socialist achievement in this field is that most governments of the affluent countries support the idea of social welfare.¹⁸

Democratic Socialists believed in individual equality and freedom they were against the exploitation of one man by another and they wanted to develop society towards greater equality, freedom and social justice for all.

Democratic Socialism accords insistence on the importance of the individual and the recognition that his rights and opportunities can be protected and enhanced by collective decisions. Democratic socialism gives emphasis on the fullest development of human personality and a just and humane social order hav-

ing social justice. Individual freedom and equality are the cornerstone of democratic socialism. The OSlo Declaration says : 'Both freedom and equality are precious and essential to human happiness. They are the twin pillars upon which the ideal of human brotherhood rests.'¹⁹ There can be no freedom without equality or equality without freedom. The aim of socialism is to give greater freedom to the individual without freedom; equality is meaningless. In society, social justice cannot be established without equality and individual freedom. Only within a democratic framework can freedom, equality and social justice find their fullest expression.

Equality, freedom and social justice in a society should be analysed from the viewpoint and perspective of ideology. An ideology is a relatively comprehensive and organised pattern of values, beliefs and cognitive perceptions. Social movements espousing particular ideologies seek to provide strategies by which the existing system can be sustained or a new system brought into existence. Ideology serves not only as an explanation of life's phenomena but also as a goal-setter and an inspiration behind movements of social action.²⁰ Ideologies specify social-structural goals and the value as well as knowledge framework in terms of which the goals are justified. Perhaps the most important function of an ideology in a political system is to legitimise the political structures and the distribution of political power within that system. Alan Ball says that "the first steps in the development of the study of politics were motivated by the desire to find the best system of government."²¹

The theory of socialism, it is argued, is founded on principles of justice and right. For it abolishes the individual competition under the existing capitalist system and substitutes principle of co-operation under which equality of opportunity and equality of reward will be secured to the individual thus paving the way for the establishment of social justice in a society.

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