

MARXISM AND INDIVIDUALISM

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The collapse of the U.S.S.R and all European states based on an economy owned and managed by the State in 1991, and their replacement by privatized economies dealt a heavy (some say - mortal) blow to theories of Marx and to Socialism generally.

Socialism aimed to set up an economy owned and managed not by private owners but by society as a whole, hence the term "Social-ism". This aim was based on the realization that industrialized mass-production - its quantity and quality - affected entire societies, even the entire planet. Privately owned mass production is a recipe for unemployment, economic crises, pollution, arms production, and wars. Private owners are motivated by desire to maximize their profits. They ignore side-effects of mass-production like pollution and the impact of their products on humanity's health. Tackling pollution, employees' safety, and customers' health, increase costs and reduce profits. No wonder private owners strive to avoid them.

Industrial-mass-production - unlike manual production - continuously produces vast quantities of goods causing surpluses, which reduce demands, hence the quest for new markets. Surpluses cause conflicts between competing manufacturers trying to maximize their profits. These conflicts often erupt into catastrophic mass-violence. It was not by accident that the two biggest wars in human history - WW1 and WW2 - occurred a few decades after the industrial revolution. Both wars originated from conflicts between the two most industrialized countries - Britain and Germany - seeking markets

overseas for their mass-produced goods when their local markets became saturated. The German government built a powerful navy to acquire colonies overseas. But Britain - the world's major naval and colonial power at that time ("*The Empire where the sun never sets*") - opposed this. Eventually this conflict became World War 1. Germany was defeated and gave up its hopes of gaining colonies overseas. Hitler's solution to this problem was to acquire colonies on Europe's mainland, especially by conquering Russia. Britain feared that his probable victory will turn Germany - after possessing Russia's vast natural resources - into the world's most powerful state that will eventually threaten Britain. So Britain decided to oppose Germany again. The result was World War 2 ending in German's second defeat. Afterwards Britain's leader, Winston Churchill, considered both these wars as a single war interrupted by a brief interlude of peace [1918-1939] however, most people in 1918 believed that WW1 was "*The war to end all wars*". These wars were not an outcome of industrialization as such but of private owners of mass-production seeking profits rather than the welfare of humanity. The change of the political authority structure lagged behind the rapidly changing technology. Most people welcomed the industrial revolution which vastly improved people's economic existence. Few foresaw that privately owned industry brings WW1 and WW2 as a package-deal with it. The most prominent of them was Marx. He predicted this development decades before it occurred. His theories of society and history gained world-wide popularity and support after WW1 and more - after WW2.

Marx [1818 - 1883] was born in Germany but lived in England from 1848. It was the heyday of the industrial revolution and Marx noticed how farm workers turned - socially and mentally - into a new social group: the industrial working-class. Work in factories differs from work in farms in many ways. It implants new behavior, new attitudes, and new expectations, in its participants. Manual farm workers aspire to own some land but

no industrial worker dreams of owning the machine he uses. Unlike manual farm-work, work with machines inspires constant technical improvement, new skills, and group solidarity. It encourages change and innovation not repetition and stagnation. Manual farm-work repeated itself for thousands of years but industrial production is constantly innovating. It inspires a will - and confidence - to overcome constraints of nature, not of subservience to them. However, if industry is privately owned it generates surpluses, causing unemployment, and finally - wars. Eventually many in industrial societies are bound to demand that industrial production - its policy and management - be dedicated to benefit entire society, not to enrich a few private owners. Marx predicted that industrialization will produce economic crises of surpluses and unemployment, culminating in wars. This might generate a political revolution to introduce ownership of industry by entire society. It was obvious to him that this will occur - at first - in the most industrialized countries, where the surpluses of goods - and the industrial working class - are largest.

Axiology

Socialism generally, and the theories of Marx in particular, do not relate to personal morality, they ignore personal ethics. They assumed that if all in society are adequately fed, housed, dressed, educated, and medicated, all people will behave morally. Socialism considered as moral that which promotes the welfare of all in society, and as immoral whatever prevented this. Socialists believed immoral behavior originates from material scarcity and once material scarcity is overcome immoral behavior will vanish. Socialists ignored Ethics and Axiology - the philosophy of basic principles.

Axiology ["Axiom" - basic principle that cannot be justified] argues that although socialized hominids are - biologically - animals like all other animals, their responses to stimuli differ from those of animals. While animal response to a particular stimulus hardly varies, socialized hominids can - and do - respond to the *same* stimulus in a variety of *different* ways. Responses may differ from person to person and also by the same person. Animal response is mostly automatic while human response is mostly deliberate. People do not respond automatically to actual situations but do so according to their priority principles. During the first two years of WW1 most Europeans volunteered to the Army (Britain introduced conscription only in 1916). The priority principle of many Europeans in 1914 was: "*King and Country*". Most Europeans considered these more important than their own life. This changed as the war dragged on and many preferred to save their life rather than risk it. So governments had to introduce conscription.

Unlike animals people *decide* how to respond. Deciding is only possible when one has various options and a priority principle to prefer one of them. Priority determines decisions. Though it appears as if there are many priority principles they can be grouped in five groups: 1.Ego-centrism. 2.Ethno-centrism. 3.Anthropo-centrism. 4.Theo-centrism. 5. Bio-centrism.

Ego-centrism decrees: "Do what you consider best for yourself"

Ethno-centrism decrees: "Do what you consider best for your country, nation, tribe, class, group,"

Anthropo-centrism decrees: "Do what you consider best for Humanity".

Theo-centrism decrees: "Do what is best for God".

Bio-centrism decrees: "Do what is best for Nature".

None of these priorities is "Objective". All are arbitrary. None can be seen as superior as this would require another priority principle to decide between priorities and this is arbitrary as well. Contrary to widespread belief physical survival is not the ultimate criterion for "Objective" priority. This can be gleaned from anyone who prefers "*Death before dishonor*" or "*To die for King and Country*", etc.

Priorities overrule each other. One has only one priority at any given time. However, people can change their priorities. Imagine a person who is usually ego-centric jumping to rescue an unknown child from a fire. Even if that person reverts to egocentric behavior later, during the act of saving the child it forsook ego-centrism for Anthro-centrism.

The priority principle of Socialism [and of Christianity] is Anthro-centrism. Both consider the welfare of Humanity more important than one's own welfare. In case of conflict one has to act to promote the welfare of Humanity, rather than one's group or one's own.

The priority principle of Capitalism is Ego-centrism. One acts to promote one's own welfare rather than anything else.

Clearly Ego-centrism is in conflict with Anthro-centrism.

No wonder Socialism opposed ego-centrism while Capitalism lauded it. But the Socialist movement failed to distinguish between Individualism and Ego-centrism. Individualism is mental independence whereas Ego-centrism is selfishness. Socialism opposed both. This greatly contributed to its collapse.

Individualism implies personal independence in matters of thought and taste. It does not necessarily imply Ego-centrism. It

may just as well accept any other priority principle. Marx and Lenin were certainly individualists yet both upheld Anthropocentrism. They respected the mental independence of others. Being an individualist does not imply that one is bent on exploiting others, or on dominating them.

The failure to distinguish between individualism and egocentrism ruined Socialism.

Lenin's new regime set up in Russia in October 1917 achieved the following:

1. It took Russia out of WW1 a year before all other states.
2. It overcame Russia's destruction caused by WW1, and by change of the political system, and civil war [1919-1921]. It turned a backward agricultural society into a modern industrial one within 20 years. It was the first to send a satellite into space.
3. It abolished illiteracy.
4. It was the first to grant full legal - and job - equality to women and to legalize abortion.
5. It abolished unemployment and provided job security.
6. It provided all citizens with free housing, free education [from nursery to university], free medical care, free heating, free cooking gas and water. There was no rent - and no rates.
7. Maternity leave was three years with full pay and the right to return to one's former job.

Stalin's period of terror was publicly denounced as illegal and as grossly harmful to Socialism by the regime itself. Eventually even the ruling Communist Party was dismantled. All this was done without outside pressure, and was not a result of war or of an economic crisis. It occurred without bloodshed.

This peaceful collapse of the world's second superpower is unprecedented in human history.

When Lenin's revolution established the state-owned economy replacing the Tsar's semi-feudal regime, a civil war - lasting two years - erupted. Many tried to overthrow Lenin's regime. Yet in 1991 - when Lenin's regime collapsed and the state-owned economy was dismantled and privatized - there was no mass-resistance or attempts to resurrect the state economy or Lenin's regime. There was no civil war.

The most damning verdict on Lenin's regime is the fact that despite all the economic benefits which his regime conferred on its citizens, even twenty years after its collapse the vast majority of its former citizens do not want to resurrect it. Despite living in the current - corrupt - capitalist regime [which they despise] they do not want to replace it by Lenin's regime. Already in 1991 the majority of the inhabitants of Leningrad, Russia's second largest city, voted to change its name back to Saint Petersburg. They can vote to change its name to Leningrad but - despite hating the present privatized economy - they don't. WHY ?

To get some insight into this problem let us consider another case of a communal economy, that of Israel's collective farms - the Kibbutzim. ["Kibbutz" = ingathering]

In 2010 there were some 270 Kibbutzim in Israel. Most of them were fifty - or more - years old. The early ones were all agricultural but later they developed industry. All were founded by volunteers. Today they provide 9% of Israel's industrial output, worth \$8 billion, and 40% of its agricultural output worth \$ 1.7 billion.

These Kibbutzim were the spearhead of Zionist settling in Palestine. Their communal structure was very effective for carrying out work and guard duties. Being Zionist they did not accept Arabs as members. There was one kitchen and a communal dining hall where all members ate all meals and rotated in carrying out all kitchen and dining hall duties. It was not exceptional to see a kibbutz member who was a cabinet minister - or an army general - doing his turn as a waiter in his Kibbutz dining hall. All land, houses, tools, were communally owned. Work tasks rotated and all decisions were taken by all members in regular - general - meetings. All education, and medical treatment, was free. The laundry was communal. No one was paid. Members were allocated pocket money [and later even cars] to travel to cities, buy in shops. No man wore a tie or a suit, women rarely used makeup. Cases of members desiring to study in university, or in art - or technical - colleges were discussed by the general meeting and generally respected. The Kibbutz paid all their expenses. Members were given time - and means - for their hobbies. Many kibbutzim had a choir, an orchestra, various sports teams. Child care was carried out communally in a children's house rather than at their parents'. All needs of old members were taken care of. Members had no economic worries, many used to say: *"The Kibbutz is paradise for the very young and the very old"*. The Kibbutz second generation still continued like their parents, but many of the third generation and later ones left their Kibbutz for life in the cities. Nowadays most Kibbutzim developed industry and hire workers [50 years ago this was taboo]. Houses became privatized, the communal dining hall was abolished, Many Kibbutzim - though not all - became semi-villages.

Why do so many of the Kibbutz third generation onwards prefer city life - despite capitalist economic hardships and insecurity - to the secure and calm life in the Kibbutz ?

I asked many third-generation Kibbutz leavers this question. Their general consensus was that the Kibbutz ignored their individualism, and often treated it with contempt. The Kibbutz as an institution, and most of its older members, equated individualism with ego-centrism - and opposed it. There was no respect for the right of individuals to hold, express, and act, according to their own views and tastes.

Most traditional socialists reasoned that those who think for themselves ignore the community, and Humanity and wish to promote themselves rather than society. As this selfishness is the mental source of Capitalism they vehemently opposed it.

Individualism is not selfishness, it is mental independence.

Traditional Socialism equated mental independence with selfishness, and self-thinking with self-interest. This alienated future generations - even when most of their members despised privatized economy and admired the communal economy.

Individualism is not Ego-centrism. It must be respected by others - including by the political system.

Those who oppose individualism of others should not be surprised if those others reject them.

To be viable a political system must cater not only for its citizens economic welfare but also for their mental welfare, especially - for their individualism.