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A SOCIALIST CONCEPTION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE (A Study on Karl Marx's Thought)

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Abstract

Artikel ini membahas tentang pemikiran kaum Sosialis tentang keadilan sosial. Yang terutama dibahas di sini adalah pandangan Karl Marx. Demikian karena Marx dianggap sebagai pionir paling utama dari aliran Sosialisme. Dengan metode analisis kepustakaan, penulis mendapatkan bahwa Marx mempunyai pandangan yang strukturalis, yaitu bahwa keadilan sosial dapat tercipta apabila struktur masyarakatnya itu sendiri diubah ke dalam pola yang lebih sosialis, yaitu masyarakat tanpa kelas. Program transformasi struktural ini didapatkan, terutama dari program Marx sendiri, yaitu masyarakat komunis.

Key Words

Keadilan sosial, pemikiran sosialis, Karl Marx, transformasi sosial

Socialism actually grew in modern Europe, but it had not revolutionary effects,¹ until there was Karl Marx.² Marx's ideas have been admitted as an illumination of

Socialist Revolutions, including those Russian and Chinese Socialist Revolutions.

The spirit brought by Marx in criticizing capitalism was essentially coming from a moral philosophy of justice and the ideal of social change towards socio-economic justice. In his work entitled *Das Kapital* (The Capital), basically Marx utters on the case of how that the process of injustice happened in economic aspect. Marx's analysis focuses on the core of injustice hidden in the relationship between society within the system of Capitalism.

The core of Marx's viewpoint on Capitalism is how exploitation and structural injustice could be explained. Hence, Marx's analysis in his first volume of *Das Kapital* begins with unimpressive thing of Capitalism, i.e. the commodity. Marx admits that commodity has utility or *use value*, as it was well-known, but he adds that it has also *exchange value*, i.e., the nature to be merchandised. Commodity is useful as far as it has those two elements, but Marx chooses commodity as an exchange value to be his approach to understand Capitalism. Exchange value in a commodity is actually a basis of value judgment on a commodity. For a commodity, society does not exchange

¹In Europe, Socialism was indeed emerged before Marx. It was developed by such French and English thinkers as Babeuf, Saint Simon, Fourier, Louis Blanc, and Owen. All attacked the existing system of Capitalism, and proposed the way of living based on a form of collective control. Nevertheless, the offered solutions were far from reality, too utopian and very romantic, so that they cannot be regarded as successful movements. Their failure were generally caused by unfulfilled practical benefits for the workers. Schmandt, *op. cit.*, p. 384-5.

²Karl Marx (1818-1883) was born in Trier from a Jewish-German family who converted to be Christians. Having fulfilled his student years in Bonn and Berlin, Marx became a social philosopher, economic theorist, and a revolutionary. He lived and worked as a journalist in Cologne, Paris, and Brussels. After the revolutions of 1848 in Europe, he lived in London, did researches, and wrote, and got salary as a correspondent for the *New York Tribune*. Among his works are *Das Kapital* (1867), *The Poverty of Philosophy*, *Theories of Surplus Value*, *The German Ideology* and of course *The Communist Manifesto* written by his friend, Friedrich Engels. See *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Robert Audi (gen. ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, ("Marx, Karl" by W.L.M), p. 398; Marx, Karl, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* [hereinafter *Grundrisse*], (Rough Draft), translated with a Foreword by Martin Nicolaus, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973, p. i.

in a different ratio, as in barter.³ That is why exchange value became a locus of Marx's research in connection with how the value of commodity is determined and what is the reason. From his research Marx found that the principle being used by society to regulate and determine exchange ratio is based on the quantity of labour containing in a commodity, including the power comprised through machinery of production.⁴ It was for this reason that Capitalism brought about a new form of labour which can be merchandised as that of commodity. The labour being homogenized is called the *labour power*, which was in origin heterogeneous during the pre-capitalist mode of production.⁵

Marx, then, found that labour power has use value creating the "surplus." The use value was in the capitalist products produced by the workers. In Capitalism, one of requirements to sell "labour power" as a commodity was that the workers had not any right to claim the product being produced by their own hands. Here, Marx found the main secret of Capitalism, i.e., the profit had been attained before the products being brought to the market. So, the profit was not earned from trading, but it was before the product sold, that is, when it was being produced. The source of "profit" was stolen from the "surplus value," that is, the difference of value between labour power sold by the workers and the value of product in the end of production.⁶

By his research, then, Marx defines justice through injustice. To him, the injustices of Capitalism are:

1. Individualistic. Capitalism validated possessive individualist conception of justice used by the bourgeoisie to justify their rights of private property and market liberty. It was by this kind of individualism the bourgeoisie exploited labour power by the reason of "fair" wage, although at the same time the workers had surrendered their destiny to the Capitalists.⁷
2. Unequal exchange. Capitalist principle that "equal things to be exchanged equally" in reality was not applied. According to Marx, the wage system of Capitalism was 'only illusory', 'mere semblance', or 'form'.⁸ In saying that the Capitalists did cunning tactic in searching benefit by not giving proper wage to the workers, Marx uses the words of "without equivalent,"⁹ "unpaid surplus labour,"¹⁰ "theft,"¹¹ etc.
3. Exploitation. For Marx, Capitalist mode of production was not an example of liberalist claim that "liberty, with equal liberty for others," or that "liberty, but

⁷"Self-earned private property, that is based, so to say, on the fusing together of the isolated, independent labouring-individual with the conditions of his labour, is supplanted by capitalistic private property, which rests on exploitation of the nominally free labour of others, i.e., on wage-labour." *Capital I*, p. 762.

⁸*Grundrisse*, pp. 458, 509, 551, 674.

⁹"Hence, by virtue of having acquired labour capacity in exchange as an equivalent, capital has acquired labour time—to the extent that it exceeds the labour time contained in labour capacity—in exchange without equivalent; it has appropriated alien labour time without exchange by means of the form of exchange." *Grundrisse*, 674.

¹⁰"[H]ence surplus labour, labour without equivalent." *Grundrisse*, 457.

¹¹"The theft of alien labour time, on which the present wealth is based, appears a miserable foundation in face of this new one, created by large-scale industry itself." *Grundrisse*, 705.

³ Marx, Karl, *Capital* [hereinafter *Capital*], 3 vol., vol. I, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1887, p. 35-48.

⁴*Capital I*, p. 74.

⁵*Capital I*, p. 761.

⁶*Capital I*, p. 186-198.

not to bother others," because Capitalists were really free to exploit.¹²

4. Improper distribution. In the field of distribution, Capitalism hold to the maxim "each by his own contribution". For Marx, it is unfair because in doing contribution everyone has a different capacity. Also, in the field of need, everyone is unique because of different conditions, there are married and unmarried people; there are who had more children and they are who had not.¹³
5. Pauperization or emiseration. The existence of chronic unemployed groups, i.e. "reserve army" in industry, is a necessary condition for Capitalism. This reserve army of industry, the troops of which are the ascending amounts of workers caused by mechanization, provided a potential source as low-paid workers, and hindered any effort to improve their own destiny. So, while the Capitalists saved their own property, the wage of working class had never raised and cannot afford the basic necessities of life.¹⁴

¹²[T]he laws of private property—liberty, equality, property—property in one's own labour, and free disposition over it—turn into the worker's properlessness, and the dispossession [Entäußerung] of his labour, [i.e.] the fact that he relates to it as alien property and vice versa." *Grundrisse*, p. 674.

¹³Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in *Selected Works*, II, p. 21-24. As selected in *Essential Writings of Karl Marx* [hereinafter *Essential Writings*], selected by David Caute, London: Panther, 1967, p. 249.

¹⁴"But if a surplus labouring population is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this surplus-population becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalistic accumulation, nay, a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable industrial reserve army, that belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost. Independently of the limits of the actual increase of population, it creates, for the changing needs of the self-expansion of capital, a mass of human material always ready for exploitation." "Pauperism is

But Marx's examination of the injustice of Capitalism was not only an explanation, but it was an idea of change. Such is because, for him, the task of thinker is not only explain the condition of society, but change it.¹⁵ Here, then, Marx created the ideology of Communism or scientific Socialism.¹⁶ Justice, to Marx, can be attained if the order of Capitalist society is replaced by the order of Communist society. In the Communist order of society, people would not being suffered anymore because of exploitation, but all get their needs and all work for the society. The maxim for his social justice is "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." He says,

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly -

the hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the relative surplus-population." "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of soul, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, ..." *Capital I*, 632, 644, 645.

¹⁵Marx wanted to differentiate himself with other philosophers. In his famous words, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world differently, the point is, to change it. Marx, *German Ideology*, p. 199 as selected in *Essential Writings*, p. 43.

¹⁶According to Engels, it is because that Marx's findings in the conception of materialistic historicism and in the secret of Capitalist production through surplus value, Socialism became scientific. Engels, Friedrich, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), p. 45f, 48-52 as selected in *Dynamics of Social Change: A Reader in Marxist Social Science from the Writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin*, selected and edited by Howard Selsam, David Goldway and Harry Marrel, New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1970, pp. 41-2.

only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!¹⁷

By the above maxim of production and distribution, Marx, along with Engels, offered the programs for the order of social justice in the Communist society, which are:

- 1) Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes;
- 2) A heavy progressive or graduated income tax;
- 3) Abolition of all right of inheritance;
- 4) Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels;
- 5) Centralization of credit in the hands of the State, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly;
- 6) Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State;
- 7) Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State; the bringing into cultivation of wastelands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan;
- 8) Equal liability of all to labour. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture;
- 9) Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equable distribution of the population over the country;
- 10) Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labour in its present form.

¹⁷*Critique of the Gotha Programme*, (1875) in *Essential Writings*, p. 249.

Combination of education with industrial production, etc., etc.¹⁸

In addition, for the reason that the emiserized side by the injustice of Capitalism is the working class, and that the society is divided into two conflicting classes (the bourgeoisie and the proletariat),¹⁹ Marx viewed the necessity of the working class to do class struggle. He says:

Along with the constantly diminishing number of magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working-class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself.²⁰

What Marx's believes in this class struggle is:

- 1) that the *existence of classes* is only bound up with *particular historical phases in the development of production*;
- 2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*;
- 3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the

¹⁸Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich, *The Communist Manifesto*, translated by Samuel Moore (1888). Introduction and Notes by A.J.P. Taylor, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967, p. 104-5.

¹⁹"By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern Capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage-labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live." [A note by Engels for English edition of 1883]. *The Communist Manifesto*, pp. 79-80.

²⁰*Capital I*, p. 763.

abolition of all classes and to a classless society...²¹

Marx's idea is certainly ideal, or beyond justice. So, when it was applied by Lenin, there were handicaps being witnessed by the World, until finally the Soviet Union as a project of the application of Marx's theory collapsed. Such is because Marx's theory is reductionistic in nature, that is, only from the perspective of class analysis. Hence, after Marx there were Neo-Marxian theories of justice which were not merely focused in class theory, but widened into a theory of hegemony, a theory of justice for women (feminism), a theory of justice in education, etc.

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²¹Marx's letter to Weydemeyer in New York. Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich, *Selected Works*, (3 vol.), vol. I, Moscow: Progress Publishers, (1969), 1973, p. 528.

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