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A PERENNIAL QUESTION OF THE HISTORICAL EXISTENCE OF MANKIND

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Abstract

The article focuses on the existence of the age-old conflict between the individual and the collective. These categories are antagonistic, but at the same time complementary. The authors show that the entire economic and political history of mankind is a permanent dramatic search for a certain optimum, a kind of a public "ideal". According to the authors, wavering between capitalism and socialism has driven the creative thought to the intellectual trap, the way out of which can be found and has been found by Russian social philosophers within the framework of another paradigm.

Keywords: individualism, collectivism, socialism, libertarianism, the political economy of good.

Introduction

An acquaintance of ours, who had worked at various public utilities for many years, said literally the following: "We have a well-adjusted, well-functioning system; of course, there are some problems, but our main problem is people. If it were not for the people, we would work perfectly". At first, this idea seemed to us paradoxical, and then, after some reflection, symbolic. Communal economy without citizens! This paradox, coming from the depths of the consciousness of an experienced public utility worker, became the starting point of our reflection, which resulted in this article.

Can any of you recall being called "the customer" by public utility workers? "The customer is always right" – it is a commonplace economic wisdom. If we are not customers, does it mean that we are wrong? It turns out to be this way. We are made sensible of it everywhere. We are wrong when we complain about unsatisfactory repairs (or the absence of repairs), unsatisfactory cleaning, when we request the recalculation of rents, etc. We are always a

hindrance. We only impede their work. When a person comes, for example, to a hairdresser, he/she is asked a number of questions about the desired haircut. But who can say that public utility workers have ever asked him/her any questions, trying to make sure that you are satisfied with their work? Another aspect of the problem of “public utilities for themselves” is almost total penetration of municipal authorities into the city's economy, strict control over business and property, regulation of prices (not only for public services), establishing burdensome rules of conducting business in various fields.

Results and discussion

Is it possible to change the situation? Yes, it is. However, a serious question emerges on whether most citizens want to change anything. We admit that the nature of the existing relationships has certain attractiveness inherent in any form of paternalism. So what? Does it mean that we are not interested in any alternatives? Here, two diametrically opposite concepts are offered. The first one is based on individual freedom, while the second one – on the democratization of local life on the basis of the municipalization of urban infrastructure objects. The first concept is called libertarianism, the second – municipal socialism. Let the word “socialism” not deceive the reader. Neither concept has ever been implemented in Russia, even remotely. What has been implemented today can't be called a concept.

A principal, perennial question of the historical existence of mankind is the question about the relationship of a part to the whole, of an individual to the society, the issue of harmony or disharmony existing between an individual and the society. This common problem has not been raised by some particular historical epoch. It is rooted in the very fact of human existence. Personality and society are interconnected, but at the same time irreconcilable concepts. A personality exists in society and can only exist in society; here it develops and exercises its freedom. But at the same time society sets limits to this freedom, restricts personality, strangles and suppresses it. There are two forces – centrifugal and centripetal, always having opposite directions, two scales tipping alternately to one or another side, the constant instability of the equilibrium!

With regard to the economy, this perennial question can be made more specific: an individual can be regarded as an economic entity, a certain economic atom, while the state is presented as a coercive institution, absolute state sovereignty in the Hobbes's interpretation. In this structure, there is inherent antagonism. The representatives of both socio-philosophical schools of thought try to downplay it. But this is achieved at the expense of infringing upon the interests of some of the parties. According to Smith and Locke, as well as other representatives of this school of thought, the tasks of the state are minimized, and the main goal of a politician is their reduction. The expansion of the state tasks is the infringement upon natural freedom. There is always a

Social Science and Humanity #3 2016

danger that the state will extend its regulation to new areas. If we mentally continue the weakening of the state towards this state of liberalism, the further restriction of the tasks of the state means reducing them to a minimum, that is, in the end, to zero. Here liberalism already transforms into anarchism. In the latter case, any government is tyranny. After abolishing the state, people will not be isolated from each other, but will live in society, because society emerging from our needs is good, while the state is evil. After the abolition of the law and the state, the next thing on the agenda is then needed to abolish private property, and the abolition of private property is the basis of a new society, a society of atheistic socialism. However, the nature of such a society is characterized by the strengthening and even absolutization of the state. And so on. As can be seen in real life, in a real historical situation it is hard not to transcend the corresponding limit. Therefore, any established social formation is the result of an extraordinary combination of circumstances, and the experience of any country is unique and unparalleled.

However, the state, according to Locke and Hobbes, is based on a mutual agreement for the protection of natural rights and for the happiness of each individual. History is silent on when and with whom such treaties have been signed. However, this is a beautiful working hypothesis. The establishment of the state was preceded by the natural condition of mankind. According to Hobbes, this condition was characterized by the all-out strife and internecine wars. To stop this, the state was established (as if the entire history of the statehood was not a series of wars!). But in contrast to Hobbes, Locke believes that the state of nature was not the state of war; on the contrary, it was the state of natural freedom and equality. Among these natural rights, Locke ranks first the right to property, in particular, land ownership.

An individual as an economic unit is opposed to the state. Where individual rights end, the compulsory right of society begins, and this boundary continuously moves one or other way.

The entire diversity of economic doctrines and practices can be graphically represented as a scale, at the ends of which there will be diametrically opposed concepts: the regulated and unregulated economy; accordingly, Marxism and libertarianism. Between them, there are liberalism and socialist schools of all shades.

During the previous two centuries in Europe, these different worldviews regarding the methods and objectives of public reform sometimes came into violent collision. And all this was opposed to capitalism.

Thus, this is a state of constant unstable equilibrium.

What is the system of economic liberalism (voluntary cooperation)? We don't want to use the word "capitalism" because of its triviality and vagueness. It is the power of the entrepreneurial minority, based on ownership of the vast majority of capital in society. The rest of people are potential employees. There's nothing wrong in this situation. Objectively, as shown by

Social Science and Humanity #3 2016

sociological studies, only a few per cent of the society members may be entrepreneurs (4-6%). The others have to settle for wage labor. The distribution of produced goods is carried out by entrepreneurs. It results in a conflict regarding the equitable distribution of values. This is a serious contradiction. Human appetites are endless. Employees, let alone the unemployed, dream of a fundamental redistribution of wealth in their favor. This contradiction is partly smoothed by the existence of free competition. Entrepreneurs ruthlessly exploit natural resources. Entrepreneurs support the institution of church, extending the principles of competition also to this area. The existence of the state as a "night watchman" is considered to be justified. The problem of "little people", unable, due to their natural qualities, to achieve success in life, is solved in this system through the help of relatives, church and charity.

As for socialism, history knows a number of its transitional forms. Some of them may seem to be religiously innocent. But it should not be misleading.

The totality of socialist doctrines and practices can be grouped into three types.

Socialism, based on the principle of association and cooperation.

Socialism as a set of measures of social policy aimed to supplement the activities of private enterprises with the activity of public institutions.

Socialism as a movement aimed to transform economic and social order on the basis of the substitution of private property for public property.

To reveal the inherent nature of socialism and see the lies and evil that it brings to the world, it is necessary to focus on the ultimate socialism, i.e. collectivism. People of the twentieth century had an opportunity to find out that the extreme limit of collectivism is the worst thing that can happen to a human being and humanity.

What is the essence of the ultimate socialist system (chartism – Marxism) in its logical development? The majority, unable to entrepreneurial activity, becomes the collective owner of the main part of the capital. As a result, a number of problems emerge. The first problem is how to distribute manufactured goods. In this system, it is not important who carries out distribution. No matter to whom this authority is delegated, the result will be the same: distribution in favor of those who distribute. The fact that there are not so much goods to be distributed (entrepreneurs don't produce anything, and public production is always inefficient by definition) does not change the essence of the matter. The hope that employees will become better-off through the distribution of goods produced by entrepreneurs is a common and unsubstantiated illusion. After any revolution, the standard of living is reduced. The second problem is the state. Proceeding from the internal logic of socialism, it should be the opponent of statehood as an instrument of violence. Marx predicted the withering away of the state. But what happens? Democratically elected administrators of collective property feel uncomfortable.

The crowd is unpredictable. Administrators want to obtain legitimacy not from the crowd, but from the hierarchy. The word “appointed” is better than the word “elected”. The third problem is employing the displaced bourgeoisie. It is not necessarily true that a former entrepreneur will become a good appointed administrator. In the essence, an entrepreneur is alien to any hierarchy. Besides, according to J. Schumpeter, any socialist perceives the advent of socialism as his own rise to power. The victory of socialism means for him that “we have won”. Replacing the old administration is an important, perhaps even the most important part of this process. The most logical way out is to neutralize entrepreneurs, physically or in any other way. The fourth problem is that the administration hierarchy ruthlessly exploits natural resources. The fifth problem is that socialism is an enemy of the Church. “Little people” lose the opportunity to get help through the channels of the Church and charity. The system of public distribution of wealth is built not for their benefit, despite the hypocritical denial of this fact.

Conclusions

This is basically the essence of antagonistic social systems. Private property throughout the entire human history has existed side by side with public property. But the proportions between them have always been different. The dispute between the representatives of each scale mark has lasted for centuries. It is inconceivable that Marxists can ever agree with libertarians. There is a kind of fashion for a certain doctrine (or nuances of a doctrine), but logical extremes are currently unacceptable in the vast majority of countries in the world. This results from the fact that scientists and practitioners, while remaining within the economic paradigm, are not able to reconcile the irreconcilable, despite all the attempts to measure out with the thoroughness of a pharmacist the principle of private ownership and the principle of collectivism.

But could it be that a way out of the labyrinth of endless disputes about the pros and cons is to rise above them, introduce a new coordinate system, and transform a two-dimensional economic field into a three-dimensional one? And the third vector may be philosophy with a vast set of cognition tools. The idea of the reflection upon eternal economic problems using philosophical methods in modern times belonged to the Russians. Russians, due to their propensity for abstract reasoning, came up with an idea to combine philosophy with political economy, while Western thinkers tried not to do that. This was a breakthrough.

However, Russian writers V.S. Solovyov, S.N. Bulgakov and N.A. Berdyaev (they didn't call themselves economists) looked at things differently, and their view was certainly not canonical. These writers came to the idea that capitalism and socialism in the main, fundamental issue, namely in the “philistine” issue are the same. The circle has been closed. It is known that there are no simple recipes for the arrangement of society. But here it turns out that such recipes do not exist at all. It seems that we can draw a line under this issue

and later discuss only the specifics of the statement of the perennial question in various historical epochs and unprecedented opportunities of combining the incompatible things. However, according to the representatives of the Russian Renaissance, there is a way out, and it is to be found in the "violation" of rules.

In this case, the rules are violated by the transition in a three-dimensional space. Personality and society form two coordinate axes. Between them, an infinite amount of points, that is, the options of the arrangement of society, may be located. It seems impossible to understand which of them is better. In this system, they are all good. There is no additional evaluation criterion. As such a criterion, the notion of "dignity" can be used. This word is rather frequent in the pages of Bulgakov's works. It can be said that he insisted on using it (to the extent a well-bred person can insist on something). It may seem that is not an economic category. But that is not so.

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