

## Social Democracy as Transitional Phase of Scientific Socialism

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The Transition debate in Political Economy particularly between Maurice Dobb and Paul Sweezy is a classic example of an academic dispute that led left parties to incessant polemics and party directed strategies. The debate was about the transition of English economy from feudalism to capitalism under the Marxist mode of production approach. The echo was also received in great measure in India perhaps would never end up? Now academics and activists are looking at the developments that are seen happening throughout the World after Globalisation and the emergence of Imperialist institutions like WTO, World Bank, economic groupings like OECD, Group of 20 etc., strengthening it. However, there seem to be a minor group that is anxious to study the contemporary situation where once the so-called Communism or Socialism triumphed and later decayed leaving a wide gap in public discourse. Though some of the Marxist thinkers are now willing to revisit and join the group for a broader understanding of forging a united people's front to clash with the protagonists of corporate capitalism, there seem to be lukewarm response from the concerned subjects. It is time that a Forum like this should initiate a broad stance to bring different viewpoints against the onslaught of Imperialism and its cousin cultural grandstanding in India.

There are debates both in the past and in contemporary World about different forms of Socialism, notwithstanding Engels clear distinction between Utopian, Bourgeois, and Scientific socialism, the last being known as Communism. The number of countries that called as Communist is now limited to four, though many claim the title of Social Democracy. The fierce debate on the topic between the followers of Lassalle, Kautsky and others and Marxist-Leninists is well known. Therefore, we need not repeat it once again here. But, the basic element of class struggle and the changing nature of classes in general and in India in particular (with caste distinctions) should draw the attention of activists and scholars for a fruitful debate. Except the radical left, many shades of progressive forces are interested in using the term socialism and few of them firmly believe that all those who are interested in the future of the people must get united. Precisely for this reason and the internal ambiguities among these groups, it appears that a statement like "Social Democracy is only a Transition and not an end itself" might help to dispel the hesitation of some to join the group.

Social Democracy is a system of governance where market, free capital etc are allowed to operate within a public policy of an elected government. As academic Sheri Berman noted, " social democracy, at least as originally conceived, represented a full-fledged alternative to both Marxism and liberalism that had at its core a distinctive belief in the primacy of politics and communitarianism. The key to understanding its true nature lies

in the circumstances of its birth. With the onset of the industrial revolution, liberalism emerged as the first modern political and economic ideology. As capitalism spread across Europe during the nineteenth century, liberalism provided both an explanation of and a justification for the transformations the new system brought. Liberals promulgated a faith in progress, a belief that the market could deliver the greatest good to the greatest number, and the conviction that states should interfere as little as possible in the lives of individuals. Indeed, there was such a match between the times and the ideology that the nineteenth century has often been called the “age of liberalism.” Yet by the middle of the century the bloom was already off the rose. The practical consequences of early capitalism—especially the dramatic inequalities, social dislocation, and atomization it engendered—led to a backlash against liberalism and a search for alternatives”. Even Keynesianism could not save the day.

Despite of its weaknesses, the exponents claim that social Democracy has helped the nations to achieve stable growth with few social tensions. Inequalities in these countries are under tolerable limits, Human development Indicators are very high. It is impressive to note from the latest HDI-2015 report that the first ten countries under the very high HDI category claim that they belong to the Social democracy and mostly from the Nordic region. Similarly the OECD report on the happiest countries survey listed the same countries. It may not surprise many, some of Barack Obama followers claim that his policies do also come under social democracy. In other words, the countries that are involved in some kind of a welfare programme like the Obama Health care are now considered as Social democratic. This is problematic as the social tensions in the US in recent times particularly the African American marginalisation, Occupy Wall Street phenomenon etc. do not really augur well for the idea of SD. It appears that there is a correlation between social sector spending and the social democratic function. Now some of the former Communist countries including China, Cuba etc are in the league of Social democracy and not even Democratic Socialism where the means of production is controlled by the state.

Social democracy is now looks like a justification for those who failed as Socialist and equally for those who are apologetic to corporate capitalism. A country like India that declared in its Constitution as a Socialist and Secular democracy is aspiring to entreat Social Democratic with huge FDI and increasing privatisation of public properties devoid of concern for the needs of the poor. Yet, some argue that the amount of misery, suffering and social tension will be less compared to pure corporate exploitation. Now the issue is about Imperialism and its tentacles spread across the nations. The character of imperialism is changed. It is no more related to a country or a colony, but a group of countries and regions. It is also difficult to uphold the principles of Democratic Socialism where the national wealth and the economic operations within the country are not limited to one country but many like the Anglo-Saxon combine with Indo-European mind set. How do we address this problem?

The transition from neo-liberalism to Social Democracy as the first phase and to reach the Scientific Socialism as the ultimate to liberate all the oppressed within the region and in the World is a long drawn struggle. In the immediate future, what is crucial for the poor and oppressed proletariat is to join hands for a class struggle. Since Social democracy pretend ignorance about the class nature and changing character of classes, it is problematic item on the common agenda. 'On this point, finally, social democracy and communism are opposed with respect to their immediate practical aims: the first seeks the reorganization of the old bourgeois State; the second, a new political system'. The difference between Parliamentary Democracy and Proletarian Democracy need to be understood in the context of each country and its history. It is necessary to learn from the experiences of the SD. The economic chaos in Greece, Italy, and Ireland etc. the so called SDs alleged to be due to corruption particularly the corrupt practices of the ruling party members. It is reported that in some of these countries including India, bureaucracy played an important role both in theorising and sustaining SD. A German activist says , "In the personnel staffing the government offices, the popular will is to be found only—and there, in a weakened form mixed with other influences—alongside bureaucratism, which directly rules and dominates the people. But even the ministers are almost powerless against the organizations of the bureaucracy, who are nominally subordinate to them. The bureaucracy pulls all the strings and does all the work, not the ministers. It is the bureaucrats who remain in office and are still there when the next batch of elected politicians arrives in office. They rely on the ministers to defend them in parliament and to authorize funding for them, but if the ministers cross them, they will make life impossible for them. The bureaucracy, at the highest levels, belongs to the same class as the exploiters of the workers, and in its middle layers as well as in its lowest ranks its members all enjoy a secure and privileged position compared to the rest of the population. This is why they feel solidarity with the ruling layers which belong to the bourgeoisie, and are linked to them by a thousand invisible ties of education, family relationships and personal connections". Some of those who consider SD is the ultimate seem to have been influenced by these paid intellectuals.

It is instructive to note from the writings of a German scholar of 1927 that, "Perhaps the social democratic leaders have come to believe that, by taking the place of the previous government ministers, they could pave the way to socialism by passing new laws. In reality, however, nothing has changed in the State apparatus and the system of power as a result of this change of government personnel. And the fact that these gentlemen do not want to admit that this is indeed the case is proven by the fact that their only concern has been to occupy the government posts, believing that, with this change of personnel, the revolution is over". We can see the same thing happening now in India with the change of political regime, ministers have changed and the policy makers mostly from the World Bank, IMF etc have remained the same with shifted loyalty. The only human answer to it, according to Ram Manohar Lohia in a different context of Indo-China war that does not exist today is , "

leftism from bottom, that confines the social revolution in the shape of non-violent resistance against internal injustices with the national revolution”.

One of the weaknesses of the present socialist movement is alleged to be lack of literature and theoretical arguments against the present system and persuasive writings about the need for Socialism in the Twenty First century. Except some Marxist scholars and few academics, there is absolute dearth of theoretical and philosophical studies on the nature of the problem of corporate capitalism with collusion of Hindutva in India. It is time that Janata can publish more on these aspects and hope this is the beginning of a lengthy and fruitful exercise. (This is only a draft note)