

FROM SOCIALISM TO CAPITALISM: AN ANTITHESIS TO THE SYNTHESIS OF HUMANISM

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Abstract

Vestiges of Socialism as a political ideology have continued to endure and it has to a reasonable degree remained in conflict with free market realities and has become intractable such that global security appears to be threatened as exemplified in the South China Sea, Korean peninsula etc., this has resulted in the need to revisit the ideological divide of socialism and capitalism. This paper using the content analysis method identify socialism as an economic system based on state control and opposed to the institution of private property; it is also a political ideology and socioeconomic system, based on the popular workers control of power and major means of production, distribution and exchange and in concept, the transitory stage to communism as well as the opposite of capitalism. The primary goal of socialism is supposedly the promotion of prosperity, equality, justice, peace and perhaps victory over capitalism. However, the total control of economic activity of enterprises can only lead to the destruction of the commodity economy which is a demand and supply price-mediated economic process; if enterprises do not make profits, how then can the lofty goals of technological breakthrough and social welfare leading to improved general standards of living be funded? This paper recommends that ideologies cannot continue to becloud the sense of judgment of scholars and States as it has become imperative to seek common grounds in which Socialism and Capitalism both of which are contradictory and antithesis one to the other, can provide a synthesis to humanism which pervades all progressive ideologies, religious faiths, and ethical positions that will not only be a measure of the level of civilization of society, but also a convenient platform upon which programmes favourable to the people may be implemented to the guarantee of global peace and stability.

Keywords: Socialism, Political Ideology, Capitalism, Humanism

1.0 Introduction

Global security and peace seems to be coming increasingly under threat by the forces of ideology. For instance, the vestiges of Socialism have continued to endure despite ‘glasnost and perestroika’ especially in parts of what used to be the Eastern bloc. As a political and economic ideology, it has remained in conflict with free market realities and this has become intractable such that states of the opposite sides formulate policies of political and economic kinds that drive the ideological divide. It is in the pursuit of these policies based on ideology that currency is manipulated (by China as alleged by the US) including seeking and offering aid to less developed states that accept terms and conditions of the donors and above all, the efforts by state actors to penetrate such regions of the world they hitherto had no access. Because the behaviour and interest of these states are at variance with each other, their actions and relationships appears to threaten global security and tranquility. Examples abound between China and Taiwan in the South China Sea, between North and South Korea on the Korean peninsula and between Russia and the West over Crimea. This has resulted in the need to revisit the ideological divide of socialism and capitalism and to find a possible alternative.

Socialism is an economic system based on the state control and plan of production system. It is opposed to the institution of private property. Indeed, Zimbalist, Brown, Howard and Stuart (1988) and Aja Akpuru-Aja (1998) considers as its most profound feature, the fact that the economy is owned and controlled by the state. Hence socialism is chiefly defined by the state ownership of property. But more profoundly, it is as posited by Igwe (2005) a political ideology and socioeconomic system, based on the popular workers, peasants including their allies hold and control power as well as public ownership of major means of production, distribution and exchange especially in a planned and guided economy. It is in concept, the transitory stage to communism as well as the opposite of capitalism.

Rosser and Rosser (2003) are of the view that the primary goal of socialism is supposedly the promotion of prosperity, equality, justice, and perhaps victory over capitalism. However, coming to economic development, it was certain that neither the collectivization of poor peasant holdings that could have been assisted into voluntarily modernizing their agriculture nor a command economy in which administrative rather commercial principles guided economic policy was the

kind of socialism that the people envisaged. At any rate, building inefficiency and losses into the economy in the name of socialism certainly could neither prosper the people nor the best way to contend and compete with capitalism.

Mandel (2002) and Igwe (2005) contend that even at the level of scholarship, Marxist theory which seemed perfect was substantially demolished by some liberal scholar notable among whom is economics Nobel Laureate Friedrich von Hayek (1899-1992). The laureate posited that through market system, a trickle-down effect can ensure that prosperity gradually but ceaselessly spreads to the poor masses in the long run than it would in a forced socialist redistribution of wealth. In his 1944 work, *The Road to Serfdom* Friedrich von Hayek, showed how the restricted luxuries of today can be universally accessible tomorrow. Regrettably, the ‘apparatchiki and nomenklatura’ benefitted from the official under-development and exploitation of the people by equating state or bureaucratic capitalism to socialism.

2.0 Methodology

This study will rely heavily on qualitative content analytical method, which emphasizes identification of themes in texts and documents that focus on the major propositions under test. This is to provide a scientific understanding of the issues under investigation and it also emphasizes an integrated view of texts and their specific contexts. These forms the variety of techniques and metaphors employed in this study. It is in this regard that we put below various sub-headings to address specifically and scientifically, the major thrust of the study.

3.0 Socialism

Socialism according to Mandel (2002) appears to be subject to transformation both in quantitative and qualitative terms. By this we mean a growth in size, structure and functions and from the most simple to the most complex. By qualitative change is in part meant the efficiency and thoroughness with which socialism performs its task and these occur sometimes simultaneously with quantitative ones. From the simple to the complex and then to the much eulogized plural and hypothetical classless state occasioned by communism.

As a matter of fact mankind has traversed a long way in his historical development, from the primitive society to the feudal society through capitalism, which according to Marx and Engels

are discovered as a truly scientific political economy which proved that capitalism was historically challengeable and that given its laws of development, it was bound to give way to a new socialist society which exposes the class contradictions of the capitalist system as evil and exploitative with a view to creating an alternative path to growth and development fulfilled in socialism, whose last stage is communism (Akpuru-Aja, 1998).

Macmillan Dictionary of Modern Economics (1986) states that for Marx and Engels, the working class needs to be well informed that they are not, after all, helpless in their exploitative condition in the process of capitalist product. They can become managers of the wealth of the nation. Given the premium on workers' ownership of social property, the state becomes a public property, a social force. Therefore, the working class needs above all else, unity of purpose to overthrow the evil and exploitative capitalist order, which will ultimately be replaced with socialism.

Socialism according to Ambartsumov (1979) may therefore be seen as that political doctrine and economic theory whose vision is an ideal society or a description of an existing society organized along social lines that is for the benefit of all, rather than for the profit of a few. Similarly, Mandel (2002) and Emeka (2005) agree that socialism is defined as the organization of economic production distribution and exchange. Simply put, it is a system in which the major factors of economic production, distribution and exchange are in the hands of the state.

3.1 Some of the features of socialism include:

- a. Means of economic production, distribution and exchange are under the ownership, control and management of the state;
- b. Social services such as water, electricity, education, health etc are completely free and under the control of the state;
- c. Single party system where opposition is not allowed.

It should be noted that socialism cannot be discussed without recourse to such persons as Karl Marx (1818-1883) who contributed to the theory of socialism in several ways. Bhatia (2004) and Kalu (2004) agree that for Marx, all historic events are the result of continuous economic struggles between different classes and groups in the society. Marx insisted that 'the main cause

of this struggle is conflict between the modes of production'. As a result of the dynamics of the social relations of production, Marx postulated that socialism would ultimately advance to communism resulting into a stateless and classless society where each will receive according to his need and contribute according to his ability. This, from all indications, will occur after society has transformed from capitalism to socialism.

To appreciate the thrust of this discuss, it will not be out of place to also examine capitalism such that the antithesis will be properly situated. In their conceptual definitions, Akpuru-Aja (1998) and Heilbroner (2008) opine that 'capitalism is an economic system based on private property or freedom of economic enterprise'. Whereas, capitalism was a logical consequence of post feudal mercantilist Europe, its philosophical basis according to Bhatia (2004) was however laid by the renowned Scottish economist, Adam Smith whose work of 1776 *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, provided the needed theoretical impetus and policy framework for the practical realization of his ideal society. The central thesis of Adam Smith according to Igwe (2005) was that by giving the economic initiative to the individual, he and society would reap benefits far beyond the prospects of any other course of action. This assertion proved perfectly correct and accurate with the industrial revolution.

Howbeit, Capitalism according to McConnel (1975) and Ahuja (2015) is a socioeconomic system based fundamentally on private ownership in a free market economy, of the means of production, distribution and exchange; logically and practically translating into a political ideology favouring the economically more powerful and therefore, the bourgeois, otherwise the middle class, capitalist, including their allies to have control of political power. It is in short, free market economy and modern opposite of socialism.

However, in agreeing with Werhane, (1994) and Stilwell (2002), Igwe (2005) posits that for more than 2 centuries of its evolution, capitalism acquired characteristics including expressing forms which do not conform but instead contradict the original postulations. Examples are bound in the intervention of the state by creating monopolies which ultimately subverts the original competitive freedom of enterprise advocated by Adam Smith. Furthermore, the net effect of the continuous state intervention and inherent countless other metaphors is that there is hardly any

pure capitalist economy. Further, a new situation according to Igwe (2005) and Jhingan (2012) has arisen in which the individual, struggling as it were, the mighty Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and Transnational Corporations (TNCs), cartels, monopolies including the octopus that is the almighty state have all combined in different degrees to alter the original hypothesis of a free and unfettered enterprise. The most profound feature as can be seen is the private sector-led economic growth and development. Essentially, it is an economic and social system in which individuals and groups are allowed to own, manage and control any aspect of the economy.

Unlike socialism and communism, the state does not interfere in the private ownership, management and control of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Production as a matter of fact hardly undertaken by an individual. People essentially enter into a form of cooperation to meet production goals and needs. In essence, production is social. To that extent production is a form of social contract (Ake, 1985; Jhingan, 2012). In modern societies, labour has become highly social, cooperative or contractual arising basically from a complex division of labour in an age characterized by technology. The production of an automobile for instance may involve several workers, each working on a part in which he is best fitted. It is also possible to manufacture spare parts or components of machineries in overseas. In this way, the socialization of labour becomes internationalized.

Sequel to the above, the relations which people enter into with one another in the course of production are called the social relations of production (Ake, 1985). This takes several forms such as the relations between factory workers and captains of industry. These relations are differentiated not just by roles but also by rewards in the production process. It therefore needs to be added that there exists a relationship between the productive forces and social relations of production. In this understanding, it is therefore possible to appreciate the elements of this economic system. (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2014).

3.2 The Corollary

Suffice the above to say that capitalism according to McConnel (1975) and Werhane (1994) may not have a definite description but must have those attributes, elements or indeed features by which it is easily identified. These include but not necessarily limited to:

- a. Private ownership, management and control of means of production, distribution and exchange of goods and services.
- b. Economic competition in the economy
- c. Multi-party democracy
- d. Profit orientation/maximization
- e. Economic growth is fast in certain favoured sectors.

It can therefore be inferred according to Kalu (2004) that capitalism refers to that political, yet economic system in which individuals own and control the means of production. It is based on what is called free enterprise and rejects government intervention and control of the economy.

Encyclopædia Britannica (2014) observed that inasmuch as capitalism rejects government control, it does however, accept government intervention to a reasonable measure. To that extent, government may in certain cases decide to own and/or control some essential services, such as water, electricity/energy supply, postal, air and rail services. This situation is without prejudice to the fact that there is free market economy devoid of government or state control. Therefore, what is to be produced, distributed or sold and at what price is determined by individual producers and that is why capitalist states are usually called ‘open economy’. In like manner, the political aspect of capitalism cannot be complete without democracy coming into play. Other components of democracy are ideas such as multi-party system (as has been observed earlier), universal suffrage as well as periodic elections, indeed, mode of production in capitalist system is usually controlled by a few persons or groups, whereas the rest of the people will essentially have no means of production to control.

3.4 The Contradiction

Bhatia (2004) and Emeka (2005), agree with Akpuru-Aja (1998) who opines that Marx holds the opinion that the history of all existing societies is appreciable in class struggles. Again, Marx is noted as claiming that each mode of production has inherent contradictions which makes for class antagonism. Therefore, man’s search for a strong basis of hope and fulfillment inevitably leads to a social change from one unacceptable mode of production to another. This motion or

dynamism continues until a humane social economic system emerges. For Marx, this is fulfilled in socialism and/or communism.

It should be noted that Karl Marx identified five (5) major historically successive epochs in human history in the following descending order of magnitude:

- i. Primitive communal mode of production
- ii. Slave holding mode of production
- iii. Feudal mode of production
- iv. Capitalist mode of production
- v. Socialist mode of production whose highest and ultimate stage is communism that puts an end to self-greed and class conflict. This is the stage of classless society.

It follows, therefore according to Wikipedia(2015), that each historical epoch gives way to the other in a descending order with communism apparently considered to be the most pragmatic that ushers in a classless society.

It is on the basis of the foregoing that proponents of socialism argue that the driving force of the capitalist system is the production of maximum 'surplus value' (value created by workers over and above the value of labour power), which is usually achieved by the intensification of exploitation of the worker and by the expansion of production. To realize as much surplus value as possible, they argue that the worker is paid low wages while working extended hours (Armstrong, 1974; Ake, 1985). This, therefore, increases the wretchedness of the worker, while earning- power lags behind the general standard of living and their unsatisfied wants increases.

In furtherance of the above argument, Marx posits according to Kalu (2004) that as the wretchedness of the worker increases, his antagonism real and latent, to the capitalist system, particularly to the bourgeois class (those who control means of production) tends to increase and therefore will naturally want to destroy that which makes him prone to wretchedness. This seems to suggest that the capitalist system has an internal logic that tends to generate its own dialectical negation.

In line with current situation, proponents of socialism insist that society cannot therefore develop indefinitely in the direction in which an ever-increasing number of persons cooperatively produce for the appropriation of an ever-diminishing number of people. The consequence is that sooner than later, the developments of the forces of production will burst asunder the fetters, which the social relations of production impose. This bursting of the constraints is the so-called 'revolution' that puts an end to capitalism and will ultimately usher in socialism. Besides, this 'revolution' as it were, aims at bringing into being a new relation of production, one in which the social product belongs to all and not to a few. Perhaps, this is the aim of socialism, it seeks to usher in a time in which all cooperate to produce and what is produced belongs to all. (Armstrong, 1974; Ambartsumov, et al, 1979; Ake, 1985; Mandel,2002; Igwe, 2005)

4.0 The Antithesis

With the Gorbachev's reforms of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (reconstruction) in the mid-1989, it becomes clear that the postulations of Karl Marx as it concerns historical epochs was lowly yet steadily matching into the abyss of disproof. Marx had posited that socialism was to replace capitalism. That was not to be, rather, with the attainment of socialism notably in what used to be Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), there will be a return to capitalism as against a march into communism.

What could have accounted for this reversal in situation, one may be tempted to ask. Emeka (2005) opines that socialism is essentially authoritarian whereas ownership of means of production is concentrated in few hands in capitalism; power in socialism is concentrated in few hands. As a matter of fact, the reasons for this trend of events are many, yet varied. However, the single most important reason according to Igwe (1991), is the error in conceptualization and from which developed so many mistakes. Proponents of socialism saw it mainly in terms of state control of everything. The state does not have the capacity to control everything in society. Any attempt to do that will require a huge army of informers who will supply the information with which to organize and superintend over this system.

Similarly, for the state to control all things will require that nobody holds or expresses any contrary opinion, organizes or belongs to any other political party or establishes any reasonable

form of economic activity for in all these, possibilities of dissention and division will arise, together with their attendant consequences. Socialism, like other progressive ideas, is good but it certainly cannot achieve everything in society because it also has inherent limitations. As soon as the so-called 'revolutions' occur in the socialist states and is secured, socialist states believe they have arrived. They should and ought to have allowed contrary opinions and political parties to flourish such that their criticisms, errors etc could be immediately identified and corrections made.

In line with the above view, Igwe (1991) maintains that total control of economic activities led to the destruction of the commodity economy (a demand and supply price-mediated economic process) together with the associated collapse of genuine competition between enterprises, accountability and profitability. Prices were arbitrarily fixed by the state, and this invariably meant low charge for big service. If enterprises do not make profits, from where will the lofty goals of social welfare be funded? How will technology be funded and improved upon and how will general standards of living be improved?

It should be noted that there is no tool of economic activity ever invented by man that is half as good as 'demand and supply' (mediated price mechanism). It is not a perfect tool though, but suffice to say, that it is very useful. Indeed, it is relevant to any system be it feudal, capitalist, socialist etc. Therefore, to hold the view that it is solely a capitalist tool and so should be erased from the socialist ways is absolutely erroneous. In any case, even if it was capitalist and it is good thing, why not apply it irrespective of the ideology to which it belongs? It should be noted that state intervention in an essentially capitalist economy can however be beneficial depending according to Igwe (2005) on its level, timing and management. This is basically because such state intervention could bring about diffusion of policies and ideas thus resulting into such theories as the 'end of ideology' which has given rise to the 'mixed economy policy'.

Moreover, no person or organization has all the knowledge thereof for society to be good. It is right to permit and tolerate contrary opinions. Maybe, if such tolerance had existed, perhaps socialism would not have capitulated as was demonstrated in the collapse of Soviet Union, thus putting an end to the Marxian historical epoch postulation. Rather than go to Communism,

Socialism returned to Capitalism. It is in the realization that different ideologies cannot continue to becloud the sense of judgment of scholars that it has become imperative yet necessary to pursue and provide an alternative by seeking to know if Socialism and Capitalism both of which are contradiction and antithesis one to the other can provide or prove a synthesis of humanism.

5.0 The Synthesis to Humanism

Humanism is a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively, and generally prefers critical thinking and evidence (rationalism, empiricism) over acceptance of dogma or superstition. According to Nicolas (1997), the meaning of the term humanism has fluctuated according to the successive intellectual movements which have identified with it. Generally, however, humanism as opined by Bauman (1999) refers to a perspective that affirms some notion of human freedom and progress. In like manner, Ehrenfeld (2003) points out that Humanism refers to any perspective which is committed to the centrality and interests of human beings. In modern times, humanist movements are typically aligned with secularism, and today humanism typically refers to a non-theistic life stance centred on human agency and looking to science rather than revelation from a supernatural source to understand the world.

Although Wikipedia (2015) has noted that the term was coined by theologian Friedrich Niethammer at the beginning of the 19th century. It is rather germane and yet pertinent according to Mann (1996) to point out that the term 'umanista' was used, in fifteenth century Italian academic jargon to describe a teacher or student of classical literature including that of grammar and rhetoric. The English equivalent 'humanist' makes its appearance in the late sixteenth century with a similar meaning. Only in the nineteenth century, however, and probably for the first time in Germany in 1809, is the attribute transformed into a substantive: humanism, standing for devotion to the literature of ancient Greece and Rome, and the humane values that may be derived from them.

Humanism which has come to encompass a series of interrelated concepts about the nature, definition, capabilities, and values of human persons came into reckoning after the Enlightenment, occasioned by the 14 century renaissance which occurred as a reaction against

the religious authoritarianism of Medieval Catholicism and the attendant Protestant Reformation. Which was further made worse in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when there was again religious authoritarianism, which according to Lamont (1997), arose from among Lutheranism, Calvinism, Anglicanism, and the Counter-Reformation. Therefore, Renaissance and Reformation propelled Enlightenment humanism which naturally emerged as a movement against it.

What is important for us in this discuss, is the humane value derivable from the study of capitalism and socialism and not how much contradictions they portend. Igwe (1991) agrees with Lamont (1997) and Said (2004) when he posited that humanism is a philosophy extolling the good of man as the purpose of all action and an active concern for his welfare as central object of policy. Furthermore, as an ideology, it encourages the best in the evolution of society and the treatment of man and in the exploitation or use of his natural environment. Of particular importance to humanism is the creation of the conditions that are favourable to the practical exercise of man's fundamental rights and the treatment of his pains and tribulations as a direct concern of the collectivity.

As a matter of fact, the principles of humanism pervades all progressive ideologies, religious faiths, and ethical positions, it is not only a measure of the level of civilization of the society, it is also a convenient platform upon which those ignorant of specific ideologies of an epoch or who choose to be neutral to such contentions may still implement ideas or programmes favourable to the people. In crisis or severely antagonistic conditions according to Igwe (2005) such as mankind witnessed during the cold war or is constantly faced within various local and regional wars, when each side extols its ideological position, demanding its pound of flesh and giving the other side not an inch of credit. Humanism can become an essential tool for moderating the positions and seeking a resolution based on common standards. Little wonder African leaders including President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, in an attempt to equidistance themselves from the then capitalist-socialist antagonism, simply declared a choice for humanism and within it, sought for the welfare of their peoples. There is indeed, hardly any great leader in history, whether in politics or elsewhere, that is not ultimately distinguished by his serious belief in the welfare of others and that is his humanism.

Nonetheless, the major problem or pitfall with which humanism is associated appears to be being a friend to almost all ideologies and creed, it may not be clearly defined or systematically implemented by either and with its attendant definitional weakness, it lacks an objective basis for determining its level of realization except it is linked to a certain ideology which may result into elevating it to either of class issues or factionalizes its interpretation and applicability and this could unfortunately lead to destroying the very ingredient of universality which made it popular in the first instance thus resulting indeed into a somewhat dilemma for humanism.

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