

The Difficult Dialogue: Post-Marxism and Political Ecology in the Context of New Protectionism

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Abstract: *Post-Marxism which refers to the reformulation of the classical Marxist theory in terms of the changing conditions of the world, not only emphasizes the class politics in contrast to the past, but also is aimed at involving all forms of new social movements within its scope. Green politics is one of these contemporary trends and it gained considerable strength all over the globe especially in the last quarter-century. Political ecology as a relatively new field that focuses on the relations among political, economic and social factors with environmental issues and changes, became one of the principal concerns of the post-Marxism throughout the process of globalization, and thus, it paved the way for further rise of the school of eco-socialism. However, with the recent decline of globalization, failure of its some basic principles and emergence of the examples of new protectionism which projects effective international trade restrictions around the world, this relationship may be in danger in the forthcoming years. Because, decline of globalization means the decline of global civil society at the same time and it is likely to be more difficult for the Marxists to sustain their influence over the environmental policies of the states while these governments are giving much more priority to protect themselves against the negative effects of potential economic problems. This paper aims to deal with these developments and problems, and also make some estimations about the future of the dialogue.*

Keywords: *Post-Marxism, Political Ecology, Green Politics, Eco-socialism, New Protectionism, Globalization*

1. Introduction

Marxism and political ecology are two crucial political movements opposing the current political-economic world system. These movements which are internationalist in character, have many followers and a wide network of action all over the world. However, these approaches have been separated from each other for a long time in terms of their political activities. Especially during the Cold War, two lines have been in quite different positions and have only converged in the 1990s, which could be regarded as the beginning of the globalization process. This convergence accelerated the development of a school called eco-socialism, which aims to reconcile the fundamental ideas of Marxism and Green Politics. But the global economic problems experienced in recent years and the continuous staggering of globalization process seem to bring an end to this alliance. This study aims to provide a brief analysis of the present and future relationship between these two lines. In this context, firstly, Orthodox Marxism's priority to class politics is going to be dealt with, secondly the place of environmental movements in post-Marxism will be elaborated and finally, how the decline of globalization can affect eco-socialist policies will be discussed.

2. Classical Marxism and Its Economic Base

The Marxist way of thinking, with its various forms, has had a serious impact on the history of thought in the world for the last 150 years and has important implications in the field of actual politics. Marxism differs from other movements of thought put forward until that period as it gives privilege to the concept of class instead of state or the leader in the analysis of political system. According to this approach, the whole world history should be understood as a history of class struggles and this fact would determine the future of societies as well [1]. The class struggle between the slave and the master, or overlord and serf in the previous periods was now between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and the current social order presented a system characterized by the bourgeoisie's exploitation of the proletariat in every way. But this system would change as the proletariat, which

would act with revolutionary consciousness, seizes the means of production and evolves the capitalist system first into socialism under its own dictatorship and then into communism, a classless and stateless society.

From this perspective, class position is the sole real identity in people's lives and masses need to politicize themselves in terms of this concept. Other forms of belonging such as nation, race, ethnicity, religion or sect are fictional and secondary, and all of them fundamentally depend on class position and relations of production. Therefore, it is necessary for people to acquire the class identity instead of such temporary fictional identities and act within the framework of class struggle. The end of class exploitation would mean the end of the debates and disputes over these issues, because class exploitation is the root cause of all other types of exploitation and, with its dissolution, real justice will be established in society. Therefore, Marxism evaluated the solution of all forms of exploitation, which people were disturbed in, in the end of class exploitation and called people to join the class struggle, not in such "secondary" struggles.

The leader of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, Vladimir Lenin, added some new interpretations to this theory. According to Lenin, capitalism has become increasingly stronger and has reached the stage of imperialism by crossing national borders and exporting the capital itself [2]. In this case, the contradiction between capital and labor has diminished in the industrialized countries, since capitalists have seriously exploited the rest of the world, giving their working classes more opportunities for wages and comfortable working conditions. Thus, the revolutionary consciousness in the workers, who became some kind of profit partner, decreased in a considerable scale. Therefore, in order for the world revolution to take place, this order of imperialism has to be destroyed by national wars of liberation. However, despite this important contribution, in Lenin's view of socialism, namely Marxism-Leninism, the main focus is still on the class, and the nationalism draws attention as a temporary phenomenon. Following the liberation of the countries from the yoke of imperialism, socialist regimes would take office in these countries and manage to turn people towards a class identity.

3. Post-Marxism and Political Ecology in the Globalization Age

Socialism with its classical and Leninist interpretations maintained its effectiveness for a long time, and became one of two main ideologies common throughout the world, especially during the Cold War, but severely lost its cogency after the defeat of the Eastern Bloc. Now, in this new era, partly as a result of the intellectual effects of victorious liberalism, the main theses of Marxism began to be intensively discussed and the criticisms about their "failure" to analyze world history or the current system strengthened. The most important examples of these criticisms were made against Marxism's unconditional priority to the class politics and traditional forms of socialism came under increasing attack [3]. The emphasis on the supposition that the class is the basis of all forms of exploitation was frequently criticized in the new period. And accordingly, it is widely defended that each question could be evaluated within its own framework and no hierarchy should be established between them, setting class issues to the top. Therefore, it is argued by many scholars that the solution of ethnic, religious, gender and other forms of exploitation is not necessarily tied to the abolition of class exploitation and it is accepted that people can righteously struggle also for these non-class problems [4]. This approach paved the way for the emergence of a new school called post-Marxism.

Post-Marxism is an approach based on the acceptance of multiple forms of exploitation and multiple responses to them. As in Orthodox Marxism, it predominantly includes not only class politics, but also other fields such as ethnicity, religion, woman and gender issues or global disarmament, all of which are known as "new social movements". One of the most important examples of these new issues is environmental politics. Issues regarding the use and abuse of nature have not received the necessary attention for many decades, as such concerns were accused of deflecting the socialist aims and even considered as bourgeois sensitivity. It is noteworthy that first movements of opposition in the late period of Eastern European socialist regimes were ecological movements [5]. But in the course of time, environmentalist ideas began to be frequently placed in the focus note of contemporary socialist analyses in the post-modern era and seen as a new component of social

substructure just as class itself. This area, known as eco-socialism, establishes a proximity between political ecology and Marxist philosophy and emphasizes the the increase of environmental degradation along with the proliferation of capitalism in the age of globalization [6].

The process of globalization has spread the capitalist system throughout the world and globalized the financial movements, as well as the globalization of the oppositional movements. So paradoxically, globalization has strengthened its own opponents. Anti-globalization movements have been on the rise all over the world, and post-Marxism has been able to spread widely. Although it is often said that post-Marxism is in essence incompatible with classical Marxism, approaches to merge Green Politics with Marx and Engels' thought, seized an important opportunity for action [7]. Through the communication revolution, ecologist movements managed to find more followers to pursue their cause, and the eco-socialist movements around the world have created a network of solidarity. Particularly, basic thoughts and concerns of some global environmentalist NGOs like Greenpeace had considerable impact on the agenda of contemporary Marxist movements.

4. Decline in Globalization and the Future of Eco-Socialism

2008 Financial Crisis can be considered as a turning point in the course of globalization. In this year, the chained problems that started in the U.S. mortgage markets, brought about a major economic crisis which affected the whole world, marking the greatest global recession since 1929. The neo-liberal principles that globalization continuously promoted for decades, began to be publicly questioned, and thus the arguments defending that globalization would bring prosperity all over the world were further discussed. Some statist measures that the United States resorted to in order to avoid the crisis were described as "Neo-Keynesian" and seen as the retreat of the United States from the liberal line [8]. The anti-protectionist theses of globalization were vigorously discussed around the world and globalization has been condemned in the context of inequalities and income distribution injustices, especially in developed countries.

In the electoral campaign of the U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump, the harsh criticism of the open trade which is the core dimension of neo-liberalism, expressing the damages it has caused in the U.S. economy and his taking office as a result of this campaign, the withdrawal from globalization became more clear. Today, while the United States has been heavily criticizing the phenomenon of globalization, of which it was standard bearer a while ago, China as a Southern country emerges as the main actor that supports globalization. The "trade war" between these two countries is seen as an indication that the future of globalization could be even darker, because the U.S. new tax tariffs on products from China and China's counter-measures can be seen as a clear example of "new protectionism" [9]. Furthermore, it should be underlined that this is not a process involving just these two countries, but also a globally effective trend. Thus, the most fundamental principle of globalization, open trade, is rejected in many cases, and a new process begins in which countries consider their short-term interests and behave in a selfish way instead of pursuing some common global ideals and commitments.

It has been discussed above that globalization has strengthened global opposition movements. Likewise, while globalization is declining, the global civil society it has accelerated, is also weakening [10]. Global ideals are losing their credibility and are being replaced by narrow-scoped and nation-wide goals. This trend naturally diminishes the consistency and sustainability of post-Marxism, which has an internationalist vision. Especially, because of serious economic problems in the global scale, the sensitivity to the abuse of nature is losing ground both on the levels of states and peoples [11],[12]. As states pursue a more profit-oriented policy, the environmentalist concerns of Marxists are less likely to influence governments. In this way, interestingly, the eco-socialists are losing power in terms of organization as well as in the sense of activity with the weakening of globalization which they had acted against for several years.

In the forthcoming years, if the global economic problems are not solved in the proper way, it may be expected that socialist movements would take the concrete interests of the working class into account as their focal point in the face of increasingly difficult living conditions. In the period of globalization, socialism

seriously intertwined with the new social movements and it significantly disregarded its essence, that is class politics. Now it is highly possible that the socialist movements are going to focus on the relations of production again in the current conditions, where the withdrawal from globalization has gained momentum, economic problems have become more intense and distribution of wealth in developed countries has been disrupted. Therefore, even if states or corporations abandon their commitments to environmental protection, it remains controversial whether these ideals will be embraced by socialist groups. This problem may mean that eco-socialism, an important dimension of post-Marxism, will also lose its remaining effectiveness in actual politics in the near future.

5. Conclusion

In the light of what has been described so far, it can be said that the recession of globalization process is bringing negative effects on environmental politics like all other global civil society movements. It is clear that post-Marxism, which has been using ecological arguments for a quarter of a century to indicate the destructive effects of capitalism on nature, is one of those groups which are most likely to suffer from this process. It should not be surprising, however, that post-Marxists, although seen as interesting, have to make a proper analysis about current conditions and turn to advocate for the globalization which was their long-standing rival. Because, a new wave of globalization, where internationalist ideals are regaining strength and will benefit not only companies but also low-income people, is the only way to create a new opportunity for eco-socialism to refresh in this difficult global atmosphere created by economic problems.

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