

Essential results of international scientific workshop: The thought of K. Marx on distributive justice and its present significances

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Abstract: *The thought of K. Marx on distributive justice is an achievement of human thought history. It struggled against social inequity, defended human rights as well as the needs, the conditions and opportunities of human development in various activities of social life. At present, when the fast economic development of countries in the world is sometimes accompanied by social injustices and inequalities, the problem of social justice in general and distributive justice in particular must be seriously raised again. The international workshop “The thought of K. Marx on distributive justice and its present significances”, held in 17-18 May 2017 by Institute of Philosophy (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences) together with Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Representative Office for Vietnam) and Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (Representative Office for East Asia) at Buon Mê Thuột city, Đắk Lắk province, was to confirm scientific values and practical significances of the K. Marx’s thought on distributive justice, to interpret the problems of implementing distributive justice in the countries of the world and in Vietnam, finding the positive solutions corresponding to Vietnam. This paper generalizes the essential contents of the workshop.*

Keywords: K. Marx, Thought, Social justice, Distributive justice.

Return to heritage of K. Marx

Opening the workshop, Prof. Phạm Văn Đức affirmed: The thought of K. Marx on distributive justice is an important achievement of human thought history, and returning to study of the thought of K. Marx on distributive justice not only has an

academic significance but also a pressing practical significance in present day. In fact, social justice in general and distributive justice in particular are the instinctive and legitimate aspirations of humans. In the history of mankind, the struggle for justice has taken, is taking and will take place in most

of countries. This is not only a historical problem, but also a topical question. Reconsidering the process of effectuation of social progress and sustainable development, we can see that many countries in the world, including Vietnam, Germany and China, have applied the principle of K. Marx on income distribution according to contribution of labour as an essential form of distribution besides other diverse forms of distribution, corresponding to their concrete socioeconomic conditions. Although K. Marx is not the first who spoke of distributive justice, but, his thought on distributive justice has a great significance, not only being valuable in criticism of capitalist production relations, but also orienting towards construction of a free and just society. This urges us to return incessantly to heritage of K. Marx in order to find the suggestions for abolition of injustices, ensuring social justice in general and distributive justice in particular in present time.

In this spirit, making speech in workshop, Associate Prof. Nguyễn Tài Đông pointed out that in the contemporary world, the economic and scientific development haven't been accompanied by social justice. In fact, the injustice and inequality between the rich and the poor are still a great challenge that is facing the mankind, and as long as poverty, injustice and oppression exist worldwide, causing war and violence, the working class must struggle for a better future, and thence Marx' theory is still valuable.

Thought of K. Marx on distributive justice

K. Marx is one of great economists who pointed out that one of the features of capitalism is exploitation, leading to

inequality and unfair distribution of income and asset, contrary to the interests of workers. The inequality of distributive relations in capitalist production can only be overcome when the private ownership of the means of production is abolished and when the means of production belong essentially to society. Thence, according to K. Marx, there will be another distribution of consumer means, that is the *distribution regime according to labour contribution*. The implementation of distribution according to labour is the foundation to ensure that the human may enjoy his labour results corresponding to his contribution in order to further contribute to social development and not to be exploited by those who own the means of production. Once the distributive justice is established, it will abolish the alienation of forces of labour, at the same time creating conditions for human to be a perfect man.

Seen from theoretic view, the reports in workshop have clarified many issues related to the thought of K. Marx on distributive justice such as: the concept of distributive justice and principles of distributive justice of Marx in the report *On some modern principles of distribution in comparison with conception of distributive justice of K. Marx* (by Associate Prof. PhD. Nguyễn Thị Lan Hương); the conception of Marx of distributive justice in the historical periods from primitive communism to socialism and communism in the report *Viewpoint of K. Marx on distributive justice through the historical periods* (by Associate Prof. PhD. Nguyễn Minh Hoàn); comparing the conception of Marx with

some modern theories of justice in the report *On the two abstract principles of distributive justice - an issue on socialist reform* (by Prof. Wei Xiaoping), and *Concept of justice in theory of K. Marx - seen from historical and political views* (by Prof. Lutz Brangsch), etc...

Besides that, some other important questions are also put, that are the identification of challenges in implementing the theory of Marx on distributive justice when production relations have changed. On this point, Prof. Wei Xiaoping made the interesting remark that, unlike the time of Marx, today we are witnessing the fact that besides the going traditional industrial capitalist system, the financial capitalist system with its derivative products is redistributing and gathering social assets with great speed and scale in comparison with traditional industrial capitalism. The fact that neoliberal capitalism is regulated by market and finance will lead to increase the inequality of income and of asset distribution. The richest will earn profit from investment, from non-labour income. The trend of income distribution in the world shows that the assets are more and more gathered into a small group. Prof. Wei Xiaoping said that, in concomitance with the development of global capitalism and the application of modern information technologies, the spontaneous capitalism has reappeared worldwide. There is still no political system for the global control, so question of global equity and justice is more than ever becoming common and difficult. As for the relation between distribution and ownership, between distribution and economic development, the application of

principle of fair distribution in some countries such as China, Vietnam, Germany and Korea was also discussed by scholars. They affirmed that the choice of diverse types of ownership is a reasonable choice in development, ensuring the equality; that while different countries have the different issues, features and limitations of distribution model, but the theory of Marx is always an important direction for the way towards justice in distribution of these countries.

Thought of K. Marx on distributive justice and the experiences of Laos, China, Korea and Germany

With practical perspective, some reports focused on application issues of the thought of K. Marx on distributive justice and the experiences of countries, such as: The relation between equal distribution and payment distribution; The relation between private economy and State economy; The relation between distributive justice and economic development; The factors ensuring distributive justice. These are great questions whose solutions might bring suggestions for ensuring the distributive justice in Vietnam today.

As for the relation between equal distribution and payment distribution according to labour, there is a paradox, that while the egalitarian distribution (as in China before 1978 and in Vietnam before 1986) would lead to annul the motivation of labour and weaken the economy, the payment distribution according to labour contribution although might promote economic development (as showed by reality), but it risks to lead to accumulation of riches,

to apparition of private economy, and to business of production means.

As for issue of State economy and private economy, all the participants confirmed the important role of private economy, but they didn't forget to warn that, the contribution of private businesses to social benefits is still limited, on the other hand the formation of strong private groups will give birth to free capitalism, leading to the risk of manipulation of economy, as the cases of China and Germany. Hence, the State management and construction of mechanism of supervision are some of solutions to these contradictions, as the case of Korea which gave importance to the role of State and limited the capitalism.

In discussing *the factors ensuring distributive justice*, all participants unanimously considered that these factors are those instruments such as: social insurance, health care, education system, construction of active labour market... Experiences and solutions of each country in effective use of these instruments will help the countries to draw the lessons from their development.

As for relation between distributive justice and economic growth, the scholars focused on discussing some questions such as: Whether or not there is the parallel between economic growth and distributive justice? Whether it must sacrifice justice to economic growth? In analysing and discussing, the scholars pointed out some problems of countries. This is for example the case of Laos: Growth ratio does not exactly reflect the distributive justice; Policies on market economy renovation and distributive justice are not perfect yet;

The authorities of different levels do not clearly understand market mechanism and distributive justice; The State management is still weak, not ensuring the economic growth, leading to more spreading the negative phenomena nationwide, impacting on distributive justice; The possibility of Laos to break out from the less developed countries group in prospect for 2020 is very fragile, not ensuring the distributive justice. Although there are still different opinions on the issue of relation between economic growth and distributive justice, but all of the participants affirmed that economic growth is a prerequisite for implementation of distributive justice and this must go in parallel with ensuring distributive justice. This is a possibility, and also a target to reach for.

In addition, the reports of workshop still put many questions on relation between State and market, discussing the question on who determines the distributive justice in society, based on the conception of Marx that it must protect the State, this being the instrument for implementation of justice to people; On the fact that whether there is conflict between economic growth and inequality or not? And the question that promoting economic growth in parallel with increasing social welfare is an effective solution for many countries to day to implement justice and ensure economic growth.

The situation of effectuating distributive justice in the world, with different levels in various countries, based on essential distribution principle according to labour besides other diverse distributive forms, are precious lessons for Vietnam.

Application of the thought of K. Marx on distributive justice in Vietnam

Before Renovation Day, Vietnam applied mechanically the theory of K. Marx on distributive justice, leading to egalitarianism, causing the economy to fall into crisis. After Renovation, the establishment of market economy and distributive mode according to contribution (labour force, capital) has created the driving force to develop economy, assuring the better justice of distribution.

Like other countries in the world in the context of fourth industrial revolution, Vietnam is being faced by the increase of injustice and inequality in distributing the achievements of development. So, in today strategy of economic development, instead of distribution according to labour products as previously, Vietnam must focus on distribution according to resources in order to reduce the injustice and inequality among regions.

All of the scholars participating in workshop considered that Vietnam must effectuate economic justice from the view of equality in opportunities and in principle. Economic justice is the demand for formation of an environment allowing all types of ownership to participate equally in various economic activities, from being equal in face of law to equal in access to policies, capitals, credits and lands. This understanding means that in Vietnam, State must have a role of overcoming the defects of market, and besides that, it must create a fair economic environment as an important prerequisite for social justice.

On the basis of analysing the real situation of distributive justice in

Vietnamese economy, the scholars have identified the challenges as well as the problems that are facing Vietnam. Besides confirming the achievements of Vietnam in distributive justice, some reports pointed out the shortcomings. In the report *Just distribution of income in Vietnam - reality and problems*, PhD. Nguyễn Chiến Thắng showed that the income in salaries bears a deep imprint of egalitarianism, because the difference between the salary levels is very little; that although the inequality of income is not high yet, but it has the trend to increase. The report *Distributive justice: From the thought of Marx to reality of Vietnam* by Associate Prof. Bùi Văn Huyền showed clearly that the social security system is developing, but its coverage occupied only a small ratio of Vietnamese population; the taxation of Vietnam was twice reformed and many times modified, but now it hasn't covered all sources of revenue yet and the equality is not high; the Law of State Budget was promulgated in 1996 contributing considerably to development of country, but in implementing this law there have appeared not less problems; the State management apparatus was weak, corruption developed, giving birth to the distribution according to power and the phenomenon of "interest group".

In relation to real situation of social justice, the report *Some problems on economic justice and the economic justice in Vietnam today* by Associate Prof. Nguyễn Tài Đông pointed out that, together with economic growth, in Vietnam there exist injustices in economic activities: *First*, injustice in

production that produces the fakes, the unsound foods, products under the shield of interest groups... *Secondly*, injustice in distribution that causes the gap between the rich and the poor and between various regions to be wider. *Thirdly*, injustice in exchanges of labour market related to positions and interests of workers; exchanges of commodities that cause the harm to market economy or impact on national security when there is an association with foreign businesses. *Fourthly*, injustice in consumption; the waste in consumption impacts seriously on national natural resources, harming the interests of people, of future generations; the gap in consumption causes harm to the disabled in society and impacts on social morality...

These above-mentioned challenges show that in reality to ensure the distributive justice in socialist countries like Vietnam is always not a simple question at all. Although the Renovation has changed considerably the economic physiognomy of every country, but economic growth not always is able to assure the justice in distribution. In solving this problem, the thought of Marx still has great significance for ensuring distributive justice in Vietnam. To construct socialist society in Vietnam is just to construct a fair society. To reach this target, Vietnam must apply the thought of K. Marx on distributive justice scientifically, flexibly and corresponding to contemporary time.

Other approaches to distributive justice based on theory of K. Marx

Besides the issue of evaluation and application of theory of K. Marx on

distributive justice, the Workshop also referred to question on other approaches based on theory of K. Marx, as showed in some reports such as *State and revolution - some reflections on reading the book "The Empire" by Negri and Hardt* (Prof. Kim Sang Bong) and *The right to be protected to the end of life and after death - the movement of aging and death in Japan* (GS. Katsumi Shimane). The contents of these two reports focused on the problem: How might we be satisfied with a society? The ways of development of Korea and Japan are really pessimistic? What societies would do to assure the justice?

As for each country, the scholars have put forth their interpretations, among which there was a trend of emphasis on the role of State management in assurance of social justice, while other opinions were specially interested in the role of cultural foundations and social relations. Prof. Katsumi Shimane said that behind the economic strong development, Japan has also lost much, while the cultural foundations and traditional social structure have been undermined, leading to limitations of assurance for actually happy life of everybody, and that now the Japaneses must pay more attention to the so-called cultural capital, or the development capital of social relations.

These are the problems that are not only related to above-mentioned countries, but also are the lessons and sometimes the warnings to Vietnam, a developing country.

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It can be said, the subjects to discussion of the workshop have important significances

both theoretically and practically. The contents discussed referred to many hot questions in Vietnam and Asian countries as well as other countries in the world. Although there remain many problems that didn't received unanimity, but the participants in workshop had the common opinions that assurance of distributive justice is a goal that all societies must go for, a condition for a better society, and in realizing this goal, the thought of Marx on distributive justice is a scientific theoretic prerequisite that is important for finding the solution to social crises related to the right of equality of workers in the world, including Vietnam.

From the practical experiences in effectuation of distributive justice in some countries, the workshop suggested the positive solutions corresponding to Vietnam, which are: Intensifying the role of State in order to limit the negative impacts of market economy; Promoting economic growth by mobilizing various types of ownership in society; Increasing social welfare by widening policy of social security, effectuating policies of hunger abolition and poverty reduction; Implementing the essential principle of distribution according to labour contribution besides other diverse distribution forms; At the same time, preparing the resources to respond to the changes of social structure in order to assure the policies on justice to be corresponding to various subjects. These are solutions that would make the implementation of justice effective with assurance for economic growth in Vietnam today.

The workshop marked a new landmark of relations between Institute of Philosophy (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences) and Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Representative Office for Vietnam), at the same time continued to suggest many ideas for economic development and assurance of social justice of Vietnam in the conditions of market economy. Success of the workshop is the basis for further development of deep and wide future cooperative relations between the participating parties □

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