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**CONCEPTION OF JUSTICE IN LIBERAL IDEOLOGY: UTOPIA  
OR REALITY?**

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***Abstract***

Even a superficial glance at the current political situation in Western countries is sufficient to understand an ambiguous position of modern liberalism. The liberal ideology advocates for social justice through the priority of individual freedom in society. Moreover, liberalism defines freedom as independence of an individual, which is limited by the very freedom of autonomous individuals and by self-control only. The conception of economics in liberalism depends on the initial formal equality of existing opportunities. Liberalism itself stands for economic equality. All individuals as owners and citizens are vested with equal formal political and legal rights. At the same time, actual economic inequality is unambiguously declared as a legitimate result of an individual's efforts. The conception of social justice of liberalism was a new impetus to a discussion on further development of liberal ideology and political strategies. The consequences of practical implementation of the theory are currently difficult to predict accurately, however liberal practice incontrovertibly lags behind theory. Modern liberalism does not obviously believe in civilization of productivity, but it cannot dispute its hegemony either. This fits the description of the provisions of current liberalism that put forward attractive ideals, which require reforms that are more global in nature.

The relations between modern liberal theory and traditional liberal politics are becoming obscure. In most aspects, they are not interrelated, although contrary to theories (radical and critical ones), liberalism itself is often referred to as a "dominant" political theory.

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## 1. Introduction

The study of the problem of justice is relevant due to an expressed need to create new conceptual approaches to study social, political, religious and other problems associated with social justice, and to develop a conceptual framework for making political and managerial decisions aimed at building an effective social state.

At the same time, it should be realized that considering any social, economic or political phenomena and processes as "fair" or "unfair", an individual always resorts to a subjective, moral evaluation, which is partly rooted in the unconscious sphere. However, the interpretation of justice as a moral category is of paramount importance for all social processes, the conception of justice defines basic political ideas and ideals, and, consequently, the development of political processes, and the formation of institutions and social systems.

However, the opinions about justice or injustice in relation to certain social (economic, political) phenomena can be very similar in social groups or even in broad social strata and classes. In this case, a specific interpretation of justice becomes an element of a complex of ideas, conceptions and beliefs characteristic of the entire social structure. This mechanism can lead to conceptualization of ideology – a phenomenon with a wide variety of interpretations made by scientists.

Modern philosophy distinguishes Western philosophical models of justice that are represented in the studies of J. Rawls, R. Dworkin, M. Sandel, R. Dahrendorf, A. Honneth and other philosophers (Rawls, 1991; Dworkin, 1978; Sandel, 1982; Honneth, 1992). Modern Russian philosophical works in which the problem of justice is studied include those by Z. A. Berebeshkina, E.L. Dubko and M.M. Rutkevich, who considered justice as a moral and ethical category revealing its genesis and evolution and determining its role in the formation of social relations. In terms of law and legal conscience, justice is analyzed in the studies of V.A. Borisov, N.S. Malein, G.V. Maltsev, V.V. Lapaeva, V.S. Nersesyants, A.V. Polyakov, and others (Berebeshkina, 1983; Borisov, 1995; Dubko, 1989; Lapaeva, 2010; Rutkevich, 1986; Maltsev, 2005).

## 2. Problem Statement

The nature of justice implies that it can never be achieved. The discourse of justice can arise only in an unfair situation and it causes dissatisfaction, which usually occurs during distribution of the results of joint activities. Thus, any ideology in one form or another exploits dissatisfaction of people and puts it into a "fair" – "unfair" dichotomy form.

A person initially needs justice as a criterion for assessing activities performed together with other people, and in any collective unconscious is adhere to one or another archetype of justice narrated in social and political myths. The ideology aims not really to create a new paradigms of justice, but rather to render the existing myths and to form attitudes in more or less rationalized constructions (models) suitable for political-ideological discourse.

The liberal ideology employs ideas of justice free of group, nationalist and other prejudices. It is based on the ideas of cosmopolitanism, tolerance, humanism, progress, democracy and individualism.

The liberal ideology asserts social justice through the priority of individual freedom in society. Moreover, freedom is seen by liberalism as the independence of an individual, which is limited only by the freedom of other autonomous individuals and self-control.

The liberal conception of economics depends on the initial formal equality of existing opportunities. Liberalism itself stands for economic equality. All individuals as owners and citizens are vested with equal formal political and legal rights. At the same time, actual economic inequality is unambiguously declared quite clearly as a legitimate result of the individual's efforts. Liberalism thus stands for "equality of opportunities", and not for "equality of results".

The philosophical basis of liberalism is the conception of vested "natural rights" of an individual, which must be realized by society. The American Declaration of Independence penned by T. Jefferson, says 'All men are born equally free and independent and have certain inherent natural rights of which they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; among which are the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety'(Jefferson, 2005). The tangible embodiment of individual freedom is the right of possessing property. Legal protection of private property is a guarantee not only of economic well-being, but also of the social independence of an individual. The self-regulating market and competition mechanism are offered as an ideal economic system. Liberalism denies the right of an individual to paternalistic expectations: no one limits an individual in his actions, but no one helps him and no one is responsible for the results. The state is considered not as "senior", but as a servant of an individual to defend his rights.

Liberalism assumes that there is only one model of "normal economy" and distinguishes national economies in the degree of their proximity to this "norm" only. National specificity is recognized rather as an annoying restriction. Liberalism regards the state of the developed market economy as a universal ideal, the highest phase of any economic development, and the society based on this economy is considered to be the pinnacle of social evolution and an optimal social system for individual well-being.

### **3. Research Questions**

The global changes resulted in the formation of neoliberal ideology, which differs from the classical version of the liberal conception since it advocates for a greater degree of state guarantees to individuals in conditions of increased social inequality and unfettered market forces, and real rather than declarative protection of human rights regardless of their material security. The conception of the "welfare state" was formed, where the freedom of economic activity was complemented by the guarantee of social assistance from the state to those who are unable to provide for themselves a sufficiently high level of subsistence. This was one of the winning priorities of the liberal ideology.

The conception of liberalism returned to the Russian political vocabulary in an updated form: from the one labeled as an alien ideology it gradually turns into the object of focus research. Our interest in liberalism is still indisputably of predominant theoretical and historical character: we turn to the development of liberalism in pre-revolutionary Russia, trace liberal traditions in Western countries and evaluate the results of its nearly three-hundred-year existence. In this context, interpretation of liberalism by modern Western philosophers is of great interest. In the 1970s and 1980s, after a rather long period of silence, the philosophers made the political issue the focus of the most heated and intense debates. This

revival of interest in political philosophy was largely due to discussions about liberalism and its place in the modern Western world. Having arisen in the USA, these discussions very soon went beyond one country and turned into a dialogue between representatives of various political and philosophical traditions.

Even a superficial glance at the current political situation in Western countries is sufficient to understand the ambiguous position of modern liberalism. Liberalism has existed for three hundred years, and it defines the policies of many Western countries as a time-proven ideology. The history of liberalism is seen as a history of achievements and success in the field of social justice. The proclaimed principle of toleration has become a real protection for European countries from religious wars. Great success in the field of liberalism can be associated with the protection of individual rights, with elements transforming fundamental human rights and freedoms into an important indicator of the political life of the currently existing states. Liberalism is developing through the extension of individual rights. Many new rights and freedoms appeared are related to the right to education, social security, etc.; and the number of bearers of rights increased when restrictions associated with race, class and gender were eliminated. Liberalism was tremendously successful in eliminating hierarchical barriers that restrain individual freedom and choice and ensure equality of opportunity. The language of political rights has become an integral part of the culture and psychology of people, and an individual in the present Western world considers himself as a bearer of certain rights. Deprivation of rights is regarded as refusal to perceive a man as a personality. Material security of members of the liberal society increased due to the policy of economic growth can also be attributed to historical merits of liberalism.

To date, there are many people who assert that liberalism has reached its limits and experienced a deep decline; however, the significance of liberalism cannot be underestimated. Liberals can be blamed for the ineffectiveness of the policy pursued; liberalism can also be the source of destructive actions that lead to social and cultural disintegration and unsolvable problems. They can be accused of weakness and inability to maintain order and unite citizens for collective actions under conditions of indifference of the policy pursued to the moral consequences and moral education of citizens.

Among the problems arising from the implementation of the principles of social justice and liberal policy are as follows. Firstly, liberalism inevitably faces the problem of resolving conflicts between diverse and contradictory demands of rights due to the extended individual rights. This problem is particularly acute in the implementation of the liberal principle of equality of opportunity. These conflicts lead to social conflicts and give rise to dissatisfaction among people who treat this as an unfair attitude towards them. Secondly, the liberals relied on the economic growth as a means of resolving these problems (since a growing economy provides more opportunities for people) but it failed to meet their expectations and became the source of the current crisis of liberal policy. As it turned out, the economic growth can be a strong destabilizing factor and a source of new injustice in society.

Suffice it to say that a growing economy exhibits a declining demand for many professions, the economic decline of a number of industries and regions, etc. Another important source of problems stems from the fact that modern democracy allows every citizen to influence or ignore the politics that affects his interests. Based on this, people merge into groups in order to protect their interests. This attitude has negative consequences since the groups defend interests of their members, but do not care about those who are beyond the group and make up the broadest segments of the population. As a result, unfair inequality

prevails in society, and the success of the liberal economic growth policy causes an increase in consumer sentiment in society. Spiritual and cultural life is increasingly under the impact of economic factors, and marketing manipulations of people's needs lead to the emergence of "consumer society". People increasingly assess justice in terms of income and consumption; well-advertised goods become a symbol of happiness.

New coalitions that do not belong to the liberals, conservatives or socialists have recently been formed in Western countries, which worsen the ambiguous position of modern liberalism. The ideological boundaries that exist between the parties are blurred, because their programs include rather heterogeneous ideas. Under these conditions, the ideology of liberalism seems to be an amorphous entity without clearly defined principles.

These are not the only problems faced by modern liberalism, but they are often referred to by Western authors when they talk about its crisis state.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Considering the importance of justice as a tool for assessment of reality by a person, it is necessary to take into account the existing differences in the interpretation of both individual and public justice.

This relates to the systems of values, norms and methods of behavior suggested by society. The predominance of public consciousness over the individual one is an important and effective mechanism associated with the consolidation of people and cohesion in society. However, this narrows the opportunity required for the occurrence of alternative behaviors.

The justice or injustice can be assessed not only under the impact subjective factors, but also under objective historical conditions of society, personal experience, psychological and moral properties and qualities.

#### **5. Research Methods**

Various phenomena occurring in society are assessed as fair and unfair by various social groups and segments of the population, as evidenced by empirical research data on the model of justice in the context of the social realities of modern Russian society. The results of the sociological study Perception of the Conception of Social Justice by Chechen Youth under Conditions of Current Reality conducted by the authors of this paper give a visual representation of the perception of various aspects of the state policy aimed at realization of social justice.

#### **6. Findings**

When identifying the most important measures to achieve social justice, 27.7% of respondents reported "Ensuring one's social responsibility in his place (school, work, family)". The second place in the hierarchy of the measures is occupied by "Provision of elementary medical services" (26.1%). "Creating conditions for the compliance of the profession to education and qualifications" was also significant for students (20.4%), and 19.6% of respondents noted that "Everyone should take care of his own well-being" (Shamileva, 2017)

## 7. Conclusion

If politics is focused on the interests of a person provided with favorable conditions for all-round development, an increased activity of each individual (which is an absolute factor in the realization of justice) contributes to the dynamic development of the economy and moral potential of society.

People use the conceptions of justice or injustice, which were developed in the human consciousness by the social groups and society and consolidated in the experience of morality. These ideas can be reflected in both public and individual opinion and behavior.

The conception of justice developed by the collective social subject is reflected in consciousness with certain amendments, which show the individuality of a person. Society develops the conception of justice, which serves as a certain objective social measure to form individual judgments about justice or injustice that can be vaguely observed in the programs of theorists of liberalism.

It can be noted that the crisis of liberalism led to intensified attacks from its opponents, but at the same time it revived interest in liberal theory and triggered critical reconsideration of liberalism to develop its new version. In the West, there are many works devoted to liberalism with the headings Poverty of Liberalism, End of Liberalism as well as those with the headings New Liberalism, Liberalism Revised, Real World of Liberalism, etc. (Terchek, 1986; Spitz, 2003). Thus, liberalism is the focus of the Western political thought.

The need to develop a new version of justice by liberalism inevitably raised the issues of its philosophical and theoretical foundations, its unifying principle that ensures continuity of liberal ideas, and the future of liberalism in the modern world.

In practice, Western theorists have tried not to bind themselves with precisely defined uniform criteria of justice in the sphere of distribution. In theories, including the liberal one, the problem of criteria has always remained unresolved. Most of the theorists consider it possible to choose one main or a number of criteria, which should be used to determine the share of each criterion in the distribution situation. The essence of modern distributive justice implies treatment of all people as equal (for example, with the exception of negative distribution, for example, punishments); in accordance with their needs; in accordance with their abilities, merits and achievements; in accordance with their efforts and sacrifice; in accordance with actual production contribution; in accordance with the requirement of the common good, public interest, the good of humanity or the greater good for a larger number of people (utilitarian principle); in accordance with the assessment of socially useful services due to their scarcity, insufficiency, etc.

The liberal ideology has acquired such a maxim: justice requires equal treatment of all individuals, equal respect for their dignity and abilities to achieve a certain distributional result. The second formula implies the equality as a state which should be considered by the distributor in any distribution situation. The principle of "treating people as equals" is an egalitarian attitude, which can include "equality of chances" and the possibility of "equality of results" to convey the equalizing meaning. Depending on the interpretation of the requirements of equal treatment of people, two forms of egalitarianism are sometimes distinguished: substantive and procedural. The first form is based on the material principle of equality, which can ultimately be reduced to "equality of results" that is treated as the need to provide all distribution participants despite differences between them with absolutely equal shares, or as adjustment and alignment to minimize the difference in individual instructions. In terms of substantive egalitarianism, social

inequalities are not justified, are not permissible and are subject to unconditional elimination from public life. As for procedural egalitarianism, it implies a formal principle of equality and demonstrates flexibility in solving problems arising from social inequalities. This kind of egalitarian doctrines gave rise to the scheme of inequality classification (fair and unfair, legitimate and illegitimate, etc.). Egalitarians of this type put forward the principle "the equal should be treated equally and the unequal should be treated unequally" and do not exclude either the inequality itself or the possibilities of its legalization. They only reserve the right to choose equality when choosing forms of treatment if unequal treatment is not inevitable.

This results in the principle that is referred to by the Western social theory as the procedural egalitarian principle of justice. Generally, it may require equal treatment for individuals, with exceptional cases when unequal treatment is imposed by considerations related to morality or to justice itself which are significant in certain circumstances. The need for development of a new version of justice inevitably raised the issue of its philosophical and theoretical grounds, the unifying principle that ensures continuity of liberal ideas, and the future of liberalism in the modern world

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