

Economic and Political Equality as Socialist Ideals

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Abstract

The paper evaluates Nielsen's second principle of justice and compares it with Rawls' difference principle. The conclusion arrived at is that their difference is one of degree and not of substance since they both promote inequalities. The paper also argues against Beiner's perspective regarding political citizenship as the sole end worthy of pursuit. It concludes that economic equality also ought to be pursued as an end itself.

Introduction

Socialism is a political theory that is unfortunately commonly misinterpreted by liberals, especially those on the far right. Williamson, for instance, holds the view that "Socialists and communists themselves acknowledge that socialism is not separate from communism" (Williamson, 2011: 1). He further maintains that "Communism is utopia – everyone is equal, there is no money, everyone just gets what they need" (Williamson, 2011: 18).

Briefly, socialism is a political theory that regards political and economic equality to be the basic ideal. Socialism justifies only those coercive institutions that promote equality. On the other hand, communism is a political system whose final end is a classless society. Marx himself never identified socialism with communism. In his *Philosophy of History*, Marx identifies six stages of the evolution of the human society, namely: primitive communalism; slavery; feudalism (which is a refined form of slavery); capitalism (which is also a refined form of feudalism and slavery); socialism (the intermediate stage between capitalism and communism); and communism. According to Marx, communism is the last stage when most of the work that the workers perform becomes its own reward. At this stage differential monetary reward will generally become unnecessary. Correctly conceived, socialism simply aims at drastically reducing inequalities that enables some people to be rich enough to buy others and some poor enough to sell themselves. It also aims at achieving political equality for all citizens of a socialist society. So, it is inherently wrong to think that socialism and communism are not separate. Although I concur with Marx's principle that from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs, I am a socialist who does not regard himself falling on the communist camp.

1. Nielsen's Critique of Rawls' Egalitarian Liberalism

In his celebrated *Equality and Liberty*, Nielsen argues that Rawls' own interpretation of his second principle, that is, the difference principle, is such that it allows inequalities which undermine any effective application of the equal liberty principle. Nielsen also argues that given Rawls' own interpretation of his difference principle, it is nearly impossible that citizens of Rawls' well-ordered society can obtain a fair equality of opportunity. Nielsen does not only criticize Rawls' principles of justice, he also provides an alternative.

Nielsen's two principles of justice: his first principle runs as follows:

Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal Liberties and opportunities (including equal opportunities for meaningful work, for self-determination and political and economic participation) compatible with a similar treatment of all. This principle gives expression to a commitment to attain and/or sustain equal moral autonomy and equal self-respect" (Nielsen, 1985: 48).

In as far as the first principle is concerned; Nielsen holds that his principle and Rawls' are basically the same. Concerning the equal liberty principle, Nielsen maintains that "there is no serious difference between

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us and I am plainly indebted to Rawls here” (Nielsen, 1985: 49). For Nielsen, “the crucial thing about the first principle is its insistence that in a through and through just society we must all... be in a position to control the design of our own lives and we must in our collective decisions have right to equal say” (Nielsen, 1985: 49). In this sense, Nielsen and Rawls have the same conception of equal liberty principle since they respectively maintain that citizens of a just society must be in a position to control the designs of their own lives. Their first principles respectively seem to be derived from a Kantian background since they similarly, in their own words, give expression to the value of moral autonomy.

But, there already exists serious differences between the two since Nielsen places the principle of fair equality of opportunity on the same footing with equal liberty principle. Perhaps this is because Nielsen holds that although he shares the same conception of equal liberty principle with Rawls, he does not however claim the strict priority for his first principle over the second principle as Rawls does. But if Nielsen is indebted to Rawls is as far as the liberty principle is concerned, he must agree with Rousseau’s and Kant’s arguments for liberty, arguments which Rawls relies on when saying that liberty is most important. If Nielsen shares these arguments with Rawls, arguments that make liberty so important, it is hard to see why he cannot claim the strict priority for the principle of liberty.

Nielsen formulates his second principle such that,

After provisions are made for common social (community) values, for capital overhead to preserve the society’s productive capacity, allowances made for differing manipulated needs and preferences, and due weight is given to the just entitlements of individuals, the income and wealth (the common stock of means) is to be so divided that each person will have a right to an equal share. The necessary burdens requisite to enhance human well-being are also to be equally shared, subject, of course, to limitations by differing abilities and differing situations (Nielsen, 1985: 48).

What distinguishes Nielsen’s second principle from Rawls’ is his emphasis that the distribution of our resources must be such that they are to be divided such that each person will have a right to an equal share. Nielsen puts more emphasis on the common social values. He stresses that the community has a right to an equal share to the common stock of means. On social and economic values, Nielsen maintains that income and wealth must be shared equally as far as possible. I presume that it is because of his insistence and emphasis on social communal values that Nielsen maintains that there exists sharp differences between his second principle and Rawls’ difference principle.

Nielsen’s claim that the community has a right to an equal share of resources depicts his second principle of justice as being more egalitarian than Rawls’ difference principle in as far as the commitment to equality is concerned. While acknowledging the importance of equal basic liberties in his first principle of justice, Nielsen correctly includes equal opportunities for meaningful work. This inclusion can be instrumental in the pursuit of equality. If the state could make providing equal opportunities for meaningful work to all one of its priorities, perhaps citizens themselves could play a vital role in our pursuit of equality.

However, when explaining his principles, Nielsen does not tell us why citizens must feel obliged to commit themselves to communal responsibility. Undoubtedly, the pursuit of equality will necessarily oblige some people to sacrifice some of the belongings they are entitled to. But this attitude is vehemently opposed by the right-wing liberals who maintain that individuals are entitled to what they have legitimately acquired, and that no one has a right to claim it without violating their right to personal property. In defence of his liberty principle, Rawls maintains that sacrificing some for others is injustice. But a serious commitment to equality unavoidably involves sacrifice of some for others. Nielsen seems to be taking his commitment to equality seriously by maintaining that income and wealth must be shared equally as far as possible. However, given that this sharing involves more sacrifice on others, he should have justified why they must sacrifice what they are entitled to. He seems to have omitted an explanation that his liberal critics demand.

Nielsen also owes us an explanation as to how he will handle the different types of the worst off people in his pursuit of equality. A more thorough classification of the worst off people is as follows: some people are worst off because they are naturally disadvantaged, least talented, involuntarily unemployed, and others because they chose to be so. The last category is that of those who are unemployed voluntarily, have a sense of expensive taste, and those who voluntarily develop a risk-gambling habit such as smoking. I assume that Nielsen will deploy a generally accepted income tax scheme to pursue his commitment to equality. Given, that people are worst off for different reasons, Nielsen should explain to us how he will handle the situation in his pursuit of equality while bearing in mind the liberty principle that he respects.

1.2 The impact of Rawls' difference principle on the liberty principle

Nielsen's main argument against Rawls' difference principle is that Rawls' own interpretation of the difference principle is such that it allows and justifies inequalities that undermine any effective application of the liberty principle. According to Nielsen, Rawls subordinates the second principle to the first in order to secure equal basic liberties of all the free and equal citizens of a well-ordered society. But it is precisely this subordination, Nielsen maintains, which in practice undermines an effective application of equal liberty principle. The present inequalities justified by the difference principle beget unintended inequalities of liberty rights between the well off and the worst off.

Presumably, Rawls would respond by restating his main claim for the difference principle, a claim that Nielsen would undoubtedly concur with. For Rawls, inequalities are allowed primarily to alleviate the least fortunate members of society from their unwanted conditions. If entrepreneurs are given their just entitlements, they will advance their skills and so provide more jobs for unskilled labourers. Of course, they will consequently become wealthier. However, this arrangement which unavoidably leads to the disparity of economic standing is advantageous to the worst off people because in the long run they will become better off. Should inequalities not be allowed, Rawls would argue, either the least advantaged would remain where they are or they will end up being in a more miserable condition. So, it is preferable to allow inequalities and make them better off, than not allow them and make them more miserable.

However, Nielsen's main complaint is that it is the very disparities allowed by the difference principle which beget unintended consequences with regard to the most important liberty principle. Rawls gives priority to the liberty principle and maintains that each citizen must have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for all. But the allowed inequalities, Nielsen argues, are such that the worst off cannot effectively exercise some of their basic liberties because of some external constraints. The rich members of society, for example, have more access to exercise their right to the freedom of speech through the media than the poor because in a capitalist society one must pay in order to convey one's message through the media. In this case, the least advantaged members of society have in principle a right to the freedom of speech and press, a right which in practice is inoperable. So, Nielsen correctly holds that "a liberty that we cannot effectively exercise, particularly because of some powerful external constraints, is hardly a liberty" (Nielsen, 1985: 52). Opting for the difference principle, Nielsen argues, makes it hard for people to actually achieve equal liberty. According to Nielsen, regardless of the claim that the allowed inequalities are likely to make the worst off better off, if they make the equal liberty principle inoperable, even Rawls would not opt for the difference principle.

A similar critique of the inadequacy of Rawls' difference principle is made by Daniels. According to Daniels, "inequalities of wealth and accompanying inequalities in power tend to produce inequalities of liberty" (Daniels, 1975: 256). Daniels supports his claim by citing instances whereby the allowed inequalities in wealth tend to lead to a disparity in treatment between persons. Both the rich and the poor, Daniels maintains, are equal before the law and are equally entitled to have a fair trial. However, the rich have more access to a better legal counsel, and as a result stand in a better position to have more influence in the administration of justice in the determination of what crimes will be prosecuted, and they stand a better chance of securing the laws that will suit their own interests. Again, if an unskilled parent is unable to freely choose which school her child will attend, it means she is not free to do so. Her failure to afford

to send her child to the school of her choice means she has no freedom of choice. But nothing prohibits an entrepreneur to send his child to the school of his choice because he has the money required. However, some may argue that failing to send her child to some chosen school, particularly a private school, does not mean that she has no freedom of choice, instead, she has freedom among fewer choices. But, my point is that if her economic situation is such that she cannot send her child to a private school, even if she would have preferred, it is hard to see how we can still maintain that she has a choice between send her child either to a private school or a public school. If by saying that she has fewer choices we mean choosing between public schools only, then, the wealthy have more choices because they can either send their children to private or public schools. But Rawls' citizens are entitled to have equal basic liberties, and in this case they do not have equal basic right of the freedom of choice. It follows, therefore, that inequalities of wealth tend to produce inequalities of liberties. The least fortunate cannot effectively exercise some of their basic liberties due to the disparities allowed by the difference principle.

For Rawls, the representatives in the original position are exposed to a variety of principles of social justice, that is, principles required for making a choice among the various social arrangements which determine the division of advantages and for underwriting an agreement on the proper distributive shares. The parties in the original position, Rawls maintains, will choose the two principles of justice.

In response to the criticism brought against his difference principle, Rawls is not unaware that inequalities in some basic liberties are likely to emerge due to the inequalities in wealth allowed by the difference principle. With regard to education, for instance, Rawls holds that "the difference principle would allocate resources in education, say, so as to improve the long term expectation of the least favoured" (Rawls, 1971: 101). In order to meet the urgent needs of those born in the less favourable social conditions, the difference principle requires that greater resources be spent on their education more than on those born in wealthy families. The differences still exist, of course, however, the difference principle is arranged such that everyone, particularly the least fortunate, benefit from economic and social inequalities.

Rawls acknowledges that the worth of liberty is not the same for everyone. Entrepreneurs possess more wealth, and consequently have more opportunities to attain their goals and secure their liberties. However, Rawls claims, "the lesser worth of liberty is compensated for, since the capacity of the less fortunate members of society to achieve their aims would be even less were they not to accept the existing inequalities whenever the difference principle is satisfied" (Rawls, 1971: 204). The difference principle encourages and allows entrepreneurs to acquire more wealth primarily in view of raising the long term prospects of the representative man who is worst off. The entrepreneurs' better prospects act as incentives to produce a more efficient economic process. As the process runs its course, ultimately the conditions of the less fortunate members of society are improved. Should inequalities not be justified by the difference principle, Rawls argues, either the situation of the least fortunate will remain where it is, or it will be worse than it is. So, it is better to opt for half a loaf than for no bread at all.

However, despite the fact that the difference principle is beneficial to the worst off people, it hampers some of their basic liberties. It is the case, as Nielsen and Daniels have shown, the allowed inequalities tend to undermine some of their basic liberties, Rawls fails to attain one of his most important goals, namely, liberty. Now, Nielsen holds that with his second principle of justice, a principle which differs sharply with Rawls' difference principle, liberty can be attained. For me, the serious difference consists in that Nielsen places more emphasis on common social values. However, there exists a similarity between Rawls' second principle of justice and Nielsen's second egalitarian principle of justice.

A notable similarity consists in that their respective second principles are committed to reducing inequalities and have equality as their end. For Rawls, unless there is a distribution that makes persons better off, an equal distribution is to be preferred. Since inequalities are unavoidable, the difference principle justifies only those inequalities that will make the worst off better off. If his difference principle is committed to making the worst off better off, it is not implausible to claim that it has equality as its ultimate goal. Similarly, Nielsen states that after just entitlements are made, the distribution must be such

that each person has a right to an equal share. He emphasizes that resources must be shared equally as far as possible. The notable difference in this regard is that of degree that determines whose theory appears more egalitarian.

Nielsen correctly holds that there exists a serious difference between his second principle and Rawls' difference principle. The following apparent similarity between their second principles will lead us to the fundamental difference. Nielsen maintains that the primary aim of his second principle of justice that is more egalitarian than Rawls' is to reduce inequalities in primary social goods. But at the same time he specifies that his radical egalitarian principle does not claim that wealth should be divided equally like dividing up a pie equally (Nielsen, 1985: 53). It seems to me that the main claim of Nielsen's radical egalitarian principle of justice is that it argues for a distribution of income and wealth which is such that its outcome will be compatible with people having different abilities and needs, and that such benefits and burdens be equally shared as far as possible by all citizens of a just society. But it seems to me also that there is an apparent similarity between Nielsen's second principle of justice and Rawls' difference principle.

First, there seems to be a similarity in that the second principles of both theorists respectively permit inequalities. Rawls' difference principle states that while the distribution of income and wealth need not be equal, they must be to everyone's advantage. For Rawls, the talented members of society are entitled to receive the wages their labour deserves. The advantage of just entitlements of individuals is that while the society's productive capacity is preserved, the talented rich people are encouraged to utilize all their abilities, in the long run they improve the long-term expectations of the least talented members of society. As I have shown, these allowed inequalities serve as incentives that render the economic process to become more efficient. In the last analysis, the inequalities justified by the difference principle make the worst off better off.

In a similar fashion, Nielsen's second principle states that 'due weight is given to the just entitlements of individuals'. To preserve the society's productive capacity, individuals are first entitled to receive just wages. Presumably, this will serve as an incentive for them. If due weight is not given to the just entitlements of individuals, there will be no motivating factor for them to produce more.

According to Nielsen, it is only after 'due weight is given to the just entitlements of individuals' that 'the income and wealth is to be so divided that each person will have a right to an equal share'. In my view, when an equal distribution is made, inequalities still exist because all simply share the remaining pieces of bread while some have already received their full just entitlements. It is unlikely that the talented individuals will sacrifice their just entitlements so that all may have an equal share. Presumably, the talented individuals will demand their just entitlements which act as incentives for them to produce more so that their production can be arranged so as to meet the needs of the community. Inequalities between the talented individuals who receive their just entitlements and the least talented individuals of Nielsen's just society seem to be unavoidable. If inequalities allowed by Rawls' difference principle fail to secure some basic liberties of the least advantaged members of a well-ordered society, are not unavoidable inequalities in Nielsen's second principle failing to secure some basic liberties of the least talented members of a just society? However, as noted earlier, Nielsen's second principle of justice is more egalitarian than Rawls' difference since his second principle posits more emphasis on common social values.

Surprisingly, without revoking what he said in one of his earlier writings, Nielsen opposes the idea of providing incentives. In his "Impediments to Radical Egalitarianism", he emphatically maintains that the talented people need not to be awarded inequalities of differential incentives. He holds the view that in an egalitarian society everyone is materially secured; and if talented people regard additional training as a form of sacrifice that deserves special reward, then the years of training could be prolonged. According to Nielsen, if the pace in additional training is slowed down, this should no longer be seen as a form of sacrifice. Therefore, there is no need to provide special incentives.

Elsewhere, I have thus responded to Nielsen's abolition of incentives: "Absolute abolition of incentives is a high risk for the entire social economy. People who are naturally endowed with exceptional

talents, talents which, if deployed could bring about a tremendous contribution to the growth of the economy of their society, could easily change careers in Nielsen radical egalitarianism” (Manyeli, 2010: 330). Inevitably, if it is the case that in an egalitarian society everyone would be materially secured, most people would abandon their careers to avoid stress and strain. I have therefore, suggested that incentives be drastically reduced, not absolutely abolished to ensure the stability of the economy in an egalitarian society. In other words, I opt for a moderate socialism. Unlike in Rawls’ apparent egalitarian society where provisions of incentives to the talented people is encouraged, drastic reduction of inequalities of differential incentives will at least be useful to all members of an egalitarian society in that they themselves will be in a better position to protect their own basic liberties.

2. Liberal citizenship

In his *Social Justice in the Liberal State*, Ackerman conceives a citizen as any creature capable of engaging in a mutual dialogue about power. According to Ackerman, in the liberal state any person who can claim a legitimate right to the distribution of resources qualifies to be a citizen. In this sense, Ackerman’s conception of citizenship is primarily based on active participation in political dialogue and having a say in the distribution of material resources. Individuals merely compete for individual goods. In fact, this is in accordance with liberalism’s main claim that individuals as citizens should pursue their own plans and projects.

Beiner correctly maintains the view that Ackerman’s citizens are exclusively individualistic in the sense that economic dialogue about collective resources is such a crucial and important issue that they shun. Their main concern centres around the distribution of material resources for exclusive individual ends. Their community is so shallow that they neglect to debate collectively about important topics such as political conversation. Deliberation about the substance of civic ties that can in fact enrich their community is as a matter of fact the least they can do. I concur with Beiner’s critic taking into consideration the fact that the conception of liberal citizens is such that individuals are prior to the community to which they belong. But this view is hard to come in terms with when we take into consideration an undeniable fact that individuals are born and grow in communities. It is inconceivable that they can survive without their respective communities.

Discontent with the liberal conception of citizenship, Beiner defines his ideal conception of citizenship as: “active participation in a dialogue that indeed weighs the substantive merit of competing conceptions of the good and that aims at transforming social arrangements in the direction of what is judged, in this active public dialogue, as the best possible (individual and collective) good” (Beiner, 1995: 104). In contrast to Ackerman’s conception of citizenship, a conception that runs along monadological lines, Beiner’s definition of citizenship has a social dimension. His ideal conception of citizenship is that of members of a political community participating actively in the shaping of a shared collective destiny. In my view, this ideal socialist conception of citizenship correctly empowers members in a political community to be involved actively in a political dialogue when social arrangements geared towards a shared collective goal are being deliberated upon. I regard this view to be ideal as community values are inclusive to all members of a social political community.

2.2 Socialism and citizenship

Socialism is a political theory that posits equal emphasis on equality and liberty. While acknowledging the importance of the liberty of individuals, socialism equally asserts the equality of human beings. It follows, therefore, that equality and liberty are essential constituents of socialism. It is worth noting that by ‘equality’ socialists refer to both economic and political equality. It is precisely the inclusion of the former element, that is, economic equality that entitles socialists to claim the political theory they cherish as being strongly egalitarian.

Fundamental to socialism is the claim that given the proper interpretation, liberty and equality are mutually supporting. Liberty requires equality (Nielsen, 1985: 20), in particular, an equality of power.

“Freedom and equality, far from being opposed ideals, actually coincide” (Daniels, 1987: 133). In arguing for a coincidence of liberty and equality, socialists pave the way for the claim that strongly egalitarian democratic governments enhance freedom. Socialists do not regard private property as the enemy of freedom. But they correctly do regard some private enterprises producing inegalitarian concentrations of property as being the enemy of freedom. In this sense, the view that socialists place equality (particularly economic equality) in a supreme position, relegating liberty to secondary status, is clearly flawed. This mode of thought may be due to the serious error that since liberalism and socialism are opposed theories, as standard bearers of equality, socialists uphold equality over liberty.

While not discounting the concept of equality (in particular, economic equality) in defining socialism, Beiner sets out to construct what he regards as a preferable alternative case for socialism. He constructs “an alternative case for socialism that revolves around citizenship rather than social justice, around political enfranchisement rather than economic entitlements, and that substitutes the concept of solidarity for that of social equality as its pivotal term” (Beiner, 1995: 143). According to Beiner, making a case for socialism strictly on social and distributive justice runs the risk of leaning towards liberalism as a political theory that centres on the language of rights and entitlements.

Beiner further clarifies his case by maintaining that his point “is that it is quite intelligible to assert the priority of politics over economics, which in this context means that as citizens we are prepared to subordinate questions of social and economic distribution to questions of political membership” (Beiner, 1995: 145). He contends that the questions of economic distribution and entitlement claims are contingent. Given that economics is contingent, he sets out to establish an independent argument for egalitarian political commitments. Therefore, following this mode of thought it can be concluded that politics is prior to economics. According to Beiner, social equality is not an end in itself, but rather, a means to an end. His contention is that social equality is simply sought to make us better citizens and to share experience of a political community.

For Beiner, “A major turn toward socialist ideals and the corresponding political objectives would not come about unless people in very large numbers took an extremely active interest in politics and seriously concerned themselves with problems of political change. In short, they would have to exercise citizenship in the fullest way” (Beiner, 1995: 147). When defining socialism I have specified that by ‘equality’ socialists refer to both economic and political equality. If people are considered and do regard themselves as equals, they are in a better position to collectively engage themselves in enhancing in political change. In the case whereby politics is reserved to the government and the few exceptionally wealthy, the remaining majority is deprived of their right to exercise citizenship in the fullest way.

But, Beiner’s contention that ‘the standard case for socialism turns on an argument about distributive justice... and that it has the concept of equality as its defining term’, implies that socialism is a homogenous concept. The standard case of socialism that Beiner talks about, that confines the concept of equality to economic equality is not the only one universally accepted definition of socialism. As a matter of fact, there are many variations in the concept of socialism, depending on points of emphasis. When defining socialism, I specified that by ‘equality’ socialists refer to both economic and political equality. It is unfortunate that the concept of equality be confined to economic equality. But the fact remains true that the term equality encompasses politics and economics. It may be the case that due to the prevailing disparities of wealth, some socialists may have overemphasized the concept of economic equality at the detriment of undermining the importance of political equality. Given the alarming existing inequalities of wealth, especially in the developing nations, it is possible that some socialists may mistakenly posit more emphasis on economic equality while explaining socialism. But that does not rule out the fact that political equality is also a defining concept in as far as socialism is concerned. Socialists are pioneers of political equality. So, I do not cherish the standard case of socialism that revolves around social justice or economic entitlements since it is confined to one concept of socialism.

While elaborating his standpoint view on socialism and citizenship, Beiner asserts the priority of politics over economics, and maintains that, that is quite intelligible. He holds the view that citizens of a socialist society are ready to 'subordinate question of social and economic distribution to questions of political membership'. At this juncture, I want to recall Rawls' theory of justice. Rawls expressly states that "the principles of justice are to be ranked in lexical order and therefore liberty can be restricted only for the sake of liberty" (Rawls, 1971: 302). The lexical order of Rawls' two principles of justice is such that the liberty principle is prior to the principle of distributive justice. Rawls does not permit an exchange between basic liberties and economic and social gains. But, the lexical order of Rawls' principles of justice is detrimental to the liberty principle itself. It must be borne in mind that wealth and power are inseparable. Rawls' subordination of his second principle to the first, and his allowing social and economic inequalities creates a society of rich powerful individuals and that of poor and powerless ones. Consequently, the wealthy powerful individuals are more privileged to exercise political liberty, while the poor powerless individuals simply talk about political liberty that in actual fact they cannot effectively exercise.

Similarly, Beiner's subordination of economics to politics is destined to inequalities in citizenship. Beiner must admit that in the real world of politics the inseparability of wealth and power is inevitable. The inequalities of wealth and the accompanying inequalities in power will tend to produce unwanted inequalities of citizenship. Political liberty comprises, for instance, the right to be eligible for office, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and so on. In the case whereby questions of social and economic distribution are relegated to the secondary status, Beiner must admit that citizens cannot fully participate in effective political voice. So, instead of asserting the priority of politics over economics, I propose that questions of social and economic distribution and questions of political membership be regarded as ends that must be pursued. Social equality must be sought for its own sake since it enables citizens to have a common experience of political community. It is worth noting that it is useless to talk about citizens having political voice while because of financial constraints they cannot effectively exercise citizenship fully. Beiner holds the view that socialist ideals and political objectives could be realizable if people in great numbers actively participate in politics. But if the problem of economic inequalities is not adequately addressed, people cannot exercise citizenship in the fullest way.

However, Beiner makes an important observation. He correctly notes that there is "one important respect in which egalitarian social conditions certainly do foster citizenship and civic solidarity. If there exists substantial disparities of wealth and opportunity, the common exercise of citizenship will be blocked by social divisions and feelings of relative deprivation" (Beiner, 1995: 148). Inevitably, the prevailing substantial disparities of wealth is the main barrier for people to exercise citizenship in the fullest way. In the real world of politics it is useless to talk about people having effective political voice if they are economically constrained. There is a tight link between wealth and power. Given the utmost importance of economic equality, it ought not to be subordinated to politics since it is precisely this subordination that is an impediment for people to have an effective political voice.

Discontent with the socialist contention that regards politics as the means and economic equality as the end, Beiner reverses this perspective and suggests that economic equality be regarded as the means and greater exercise of political citizenship be conceived as the end. I propose that both economic equality and politics be regarded as ends. Economic equality ought not to be pursued merely for the greater exercise of political citizenship. It is above all most crucially needed for the general welfare and well-being of the people. With the existing economic inequalities, only the chosen few wealthy people are privileged to exercise political citizenship fully and can afford to meet nearly all their basic needs. I believe that the pursuit of economic equality as an end can enable the masses living below poverty line, whose task currently is to further enrich the well off, live a normal life and exercise political citizenship too. In my view, by relegating economic equality to secondary status Beiner is unaware restating the position of the right-wing liberals who are comfortable with the situation of the worst off people. Beiner misses the point by regarding politics as the sole end worthy of pursuit. Economic equality too ought to be pursued as an end.

I want to end this discussion with a right-wing liberal who is vehemently opposed to the idea of economic equality. In his *Shakedown Socialism*, Atbashian holds the view that:

Since economic equality cannot be attained by bringing everyone up to the level of the achievers, the achievers will have to be brought down to the level of mediocrity, with most of their earnings and property taken by the government. Even the most “progressive” achievers wouldn’t submit to this voluntarily..., so it has to be a forced measure. To do this on a national scale, the state must assume supremacy over private citizens and limit certain freedoms. What’s more, forced extraction and redistribution corrupts the government by giving it arbitrary powers to determine various people’s needs, for which there can be no objective standards... A complete economic equality is unattainable. Since all of us have different talents, experiences, knowledge, skills, ambitions, and physical characteristics, the only way to make us equal is to bring us down to the lowest common denominator (Atbashian, 2010: 86, 87, 89).

First, that a complete economic equality is unattainable is a fact that is inevitable. That is why I have suggested drastic reduction of differential incentives. The kind of socialism I have construed and argued for is such that a complete economic equality cannot be attained. My standpoint view is that allowing economic inequality can be detrimental to the dignity of the worst off since poverty is such that people can accept any offer for survival. As I have said, the rich can end up being rich enough to buy others and the worst off poor enough to sell themselves

Second, Atbashian holds the view that the only way for socialists to attain economic equality is to bring down the achievers to the level of the have-nots. But, socialists do not aim at impoverishing the rich in order to attain economic equality. Contrary to Atbashian’s assumption, socialists maintain the view that the achievers ought to work hand in hand with the least talented in view of bridging the gap between the two groups. That is why I have suggested reduction and not absolute abolition of incentives. Reduction of differential incentives cannot bring down the achievers to the level of mediocrity.

Third, Atbashian maintains that bringing down the achievers to the level of mediocrity in view of attaining economic equality can only be done by the government by forcefully depriving the achievers of their personal property. I have already shown that socialism cannot aim at equating the achievers with the worst off without heading towards the decline of the economy. In a socialist society private ownership is permissible in the area of personal property. Fundamental to socialism is that there is no moral right to the private ownership and control of private productive resources since they beget large unwanted economic inequalities if handled by selfish talented individuals.

Fourth, for Atbashian, given that people have different talents, the only way to attain equality is to bring down the successful naturally endowed to the lowest common denominator. It is a fact that some people are more talented than others. But it is by sheer luck that some people happen to be more talented; and it is by brute bad luck that some people are born less endowed, it is not a matter of choice. So, if internal endowments are morally arbitrary, the naturally advantaged have no reason to complain if we can distribute resources such that those who do not deserve to have been born with less talents can also enjoy the benefits. I am not surprised that Atbashian does not even mention the people who are naturally disadvantaged since for liberal capitalist survival of the fittest is a normal practice. Real socialist talented citizens cannot complain when partaking in the endeavour to work towards coming closer to economic equality.

Conclusion

I have shown that Nielsen’s second principle of justice differs slightly with Rawls’ difference principle. Rawls’ difference principle allows inequalities under the umbrella and pretence of making the worst off better off. Nielsen’s second principle permits inequalities by giving just entitlements prior to sharing

equally the common stock, it is just a difference of degree. I have proposed drastic reduction of differential incentives as a preferable solution that can at least lead to the socialist ideal of equality.

I have argued against what Beiner regards as the standard case of socialism that confines socialism on an argument about distributive justice. I have also rejected Beiner's own claim that economic equality be regarded as a mere means of political citizenship. Socialism correctly construed has both economic and political equality as its defining concepts. Contrary to Beiner's view, economic equality is worth pursuit for its own sake for the general welfare and well-being of a socialist society.

I end this paper responding to Williamson's unfounded claim that socialism promotes large inequalities. He holds that "The planners are the biggest beneficiaries of socialism... there is another group of people with an even stronger set of incentives: the central planners themselves" (Williamson, 2011: 85, 89). Elsewhere (Manyeli, 2012: 44-54), I have plainly shown that the task of what Williamson calls central planners is to monitor incentives which induce people to work harder, not to be beneficiaries of socialism. If central planners are a group of people with an even stronger set of incentives and are at the same time entrusted with the task of drastically reducing differential incentives, amounting to a contradiction that can lead to the destruction of socialism itself. If Williamson has seen central planners in socialism with an even stronger set of incentives, they must be liberal capitalists who pretend to be socialists. Capitalists cannot perform if not offered stronger set of incentives. Real socialists who are convinced of equality as the socialist ideal of equality cannot provide themselves with huge set of incentive without contradicting themselves

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