

Methodology of Marx for Ecological Justice

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Historical materialism provides a methodology for solving the problem of ecological justice, that is, consciously constructing the socialist power system is the prerequisite and foundation for realizing ecological justice. In essence, the fundamental nature of the socialist power system, namely, “affinity to the people”, determines the realistic possibility of ecological justice.

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Instruction

Question: How to deal with the fundamental problem of “the conspiracy by political power and vested interests” in contemporary environmental justice governance? The mainstream environmental theory defines the concept of ecological justice as the distributive balance of environmental benefits and burdens between the rich and the poor, between the developing countries and developed countries, between the modern and future generations, and between human and non-human species (Wenz, 1988). However, the political logic of the distributive balance is realistically challenged in the 21st century under the new historical conditions of the advanced stage of globalization and the ecological imperialism pattern, especially facing the fundamental problem of “the conspiracy by political power and vested interests”. In the final analysis, the mainstream theory cannot resolve the problem of ecological justice essentially because it is metaphysical methodology.

Answer: I argue Marx’s methodology of historical materialism grasps the nature of social power system so that it can solve contemporary ecological justice problem. In essence, the fundamental nature of the socialist power system, namely, “affinity to the people”, determines the realistic possibility of ecological justice.

Methodology of Marx for Ecological Justice

Historical materialism provides a methodology for solving the problem of ecological justice, that is, consciously constructing the socialist power system is the prerequisite and foundation for realizing ecological justice. Historical materialism adheres to the principle of dialectical unity of totality and concretization, that is, giving priority to the overall nature and the evolutionary trend of social power system, and pays attention to the effect and influence of the specific factors over the specific stages, structure, form, and degree of development of social power system on realistic problems. Based on the above considerations, Marx must approve of the following ideas: If the overall nature of a social power system is unjust, then its local ecological justice can only

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be formal justice rather than substantive justice. Similarly, if the overall nature of a social power system is just, even though it may have a lot of unfairnesses on the part of it, but

these defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society. Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby. (Marx & Engels, 1995, p. 305)

But the more fundamentally, “these defects” do not affect the justice nature of the primary stage of socialism, but can gradually overcome through the conscious construction of the socialist system of power, so as to provide a fundamental premise and a solid foundation for completely solving the problem of ecological justice. Following the above ideas, we can reasonably deduce the methodology of historical materialism for addressing contemporary ecological justice issues: The conscious construction of the socialist power system is the prerequisite and the contemporary path to achieve ecological justice the ecological justice.

The Possibilities of Socialism Ecological Justice

When we transcend the narrow vision of distributive justice and examine ecological justice problem from the grand perspective of historical materialism, it is switched to the critique of the modern social power: how to abandon the capitalist power system in order to achieve the “human liberation” of the two levels, i.e., the complete solution of the contradictions between human beings and nature, and human beings among themselves. An in-depth analysis from this perspective can find that the realization of “ecological justice” is neither a change of radical system advocated by many left-wing scholars, nor is a simple problem of ethical construction or distribution design, but subordinate to a wider social history planning, that is, the historical movement of the self-sublation of the modern social power system: The first stage is the political liberation, through the revolution of capitalist political power to provide the system requirements of ecological justice; the second stage is a transitional stage, through the conscious construction of the socialist power system to contain the alliance of capital and political power and shape the justice relations of ecological distribution based on the justice of production; the third stage is the human liberation: When the ex-communist social power system is completely sublated, ecological justice will go beyond its narrow interests and interlink with the liberation of human beings to the extent that liberal communities between man and man, man and society, and man and itself develop together, sustainable and harmoniously. “This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man” (Marx & Engels, 1972, p. 120).

In contemporary times, the fundamental nature of the socialist power system, namely, “affinity to the people”, determines the possibility of ecological justice. “Affinity to the people” has a double meaning: both human liberation in the value level, and people interests in the reality level. On one hand, the nature of social power will undergo a gradual qualitative change, and the production of society as a whole is no longer due to the maximization of surplus value, but for the common well-being of all the workers, entering the advanced stage of communism in which “all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly” (Marx, 1875) and achieving the substantive justice in the value pursuit of free development of human beings; on the other hand, the nature and structure of the political power will also be adapted to the demands of social power. The people’s democratic dictatorship based on public ownership in the primary stage of socialism is “the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority” (Marx & Engels, 1848).

In general, within the socialist power system, based on the supremacy of the people's social power, capital will certainly fall or return from the purpose of production to a means of creating social wealth, as well as political power is truly the realization mechanism of public value and people's livelihood. That means capital and political power will no longer be major obstacles to ecological justice, but the way to achieve the justice between human beings and nature, and human beings among themselves. In a word, the fundamental nature of the socialist power system determines the real possibility of ecological justice.

The Importance of Construction of Socialist Power System

However, this does not mean that ecological justice will be achieved spontaneously in the socialist phase. As the capital still has "historical legitimacy" for a certain period of time, the contradiction between capital logic and ecological justice will exist for a long time in the primary stage of socialism. The socialist power system plays a key role in counterbalance of the contradiction. However, history and reality continue to prove that the socialist power system itself is faced with the risk of being alienated or even disintegrated due to the complexity of its actual structure, the diversity of form, and the imperfection of development. Whether the tragic lessons of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the drastic changes in Eastern Europe, or the monopoly and corruption of political power in contemporary socialist countries, it can be seen that everywhere is in the alienation crisis of socialist power. In this regard, Marx and Engels have warned us in a hundred years ago that socialism must will be a realistic, long-term historical movement:

Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence. (Marx, 1845)

"The so-called 'socialist society' is not anything immutable. Like all other social formations, it should be conceived in a state of constant flux and change" (Marx & Engels, 1848).

Conclusion

To sum up, methodology of Marx for ecological justice enlightens us; the key to the question of contemporary "ecological justice" is transformed to how to ensure its "affinity to the people" through the conscious construction of the socialist power system, so as to make full use of the "civilization" of capital to create the subjective- objective conditions of communist in the context of globalization, in the meantime maximizing to overcome the "alienation" which leads to ecological injustice and other negative effects.

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