

As a Matter of Social Justice.  
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It has been a long time now, and things have changed. Though, sometimes the years past seem like a blink of an eye – a minuscule spark within a room of total darkness. No longer do I see the starving families, struggling to survive in the surreal project of a grandeur utopia. There are not as many beggars – eighty year old WWII veterans, sitting on the side of the freezing street, still wearing their medals of honor that were now lightly peppered with the crystalized breath that fell upon them occasionally, in between the gusts of unforgiving Baltic winds. There are no more lines to get milk on Sunday mornings; an event that drew together the entire Bogotirsky Prospekt, with families and children awaiting patiently as the milk truck approached its weekly scheduled stop. I no longer live in a one bedroom apartment, with a total of six family members sharing three generations between them, rationing food and other general necessities just to make it to the next month. Yes, times have changed.

In my attempt to make sense of the ineluctable conditions of the day, I remembered listening a short story my great grandmother told us once. It took place in a village outside of Moscow, where she grew up with her large family. The family had some livestock – a cow and a few chickens. Her father was a reliable farmer, and could feed all of his children without having them starve. However, one day, the Soviet soldiers stormed the house, forced everyone outside and took all their livestock away in front of the 8 crying children. I remember asking her “why would they do such a horrible thing? Didn’t they know you would starve?” To which she calmly replied with “they said it was done as a matter of social justice”.

As a Russian born immigrant, I find it difficult to venerate the modern application of the concept of social justice. The voluminous history of my country is filled with too many pages stained with blood and too many chapters written in ink of gruesome despotism – all in the name of this “grandiose” idea. However, there is a monumental difference in the manner in which the problem exists in different societies. In America, the concept of social justice is alien to its founding; while in the Soviet Union, the same concept was an essential structural feature from day one. Consequently, while the Soviet society was sculpted by social justice through a blueprint drawn by Karl Marx, the American society is being infected by this ideology in direct contrast to positions of classical liberalism held by her Founding Fathers. The problem in America is also increasingly alarming due to the nature of the infection. If social justice was a weak trend with a life span of a few years then it would be incapable of bypassing the constitutional firewalls designed to succumb the pressures of factious movements. That not being the case, the support for social justice has grown to such a degree that it now threatens to replace the wisdom of the American founding altogether.

In order to prevent this ideological catastrophe from consuming yet another country that is now so dear to my heart, I propose an approach that is perhaps the most reliable of all when it comes to questions of fundamental magnitudes; that is, an appeal to historical experience. After all, even in Federalist 20 the Framers observed that “experience is the oracle of truth.”<sup>i</sup> It is an oracle that’s capable of showing the path from the despotic darkness into the liberating light – all we have to do is open our minds and listen.

The concept of social justice, in its most original form, is a concept that is full of wisdom and exceptional insight. It was introduced to us by Plato, who firmly believed that the parallel between a well-balanced soul and the well-balanced city must be sharply visible in a society that seeks to establish justice.<sup>ii</sup> Consequently, just as elements of the soul must follow their proper

functions to sustain ordered harmony within an individual, so too must the citizens of a just society labor according to their best ability to sustain a harmony of the whole city<sup>iii</sup> – “A city is a soul writ large.” However, this beautiful concept of social justice was sabotaged, hijacked and corrupted. The evidence of this ideological crime is best seen by examining the evolution of the general rule of justice that states “To each his own”, to a famous Marxist slogan: “From each according to their ability, to each according to their need”. However, before we indulge ourselves in the negative, let us first take a look at the justice that has brought us liberty and freedom.

Classical liberalism was the concrete foundation upon which much of America was built. Within this foundation was a mixture of two critical elements: religion and property. Very few great authors have observed the role religion played in early America with as precise an effect as Alexis de Tocqueville. “Religion is the cradle of liberty”<sup>iv</sup> – wrote Tocqueville, thereby establishing an observation of the most important necessity for a flourishing nation of freedom. Without religion, liberty is liquefied and formless. It appeals to no standard shape but the shape that is set as a standard by men themselves. Henceforth, justice that produces liberty is justice that must originate from the pillars constructed by its highest form; whether it be divine, or philosophical in nature. Societies that choose to reject the application of religion as a teacher of morality often do so while paying the ultimate price. In such societies, there is nothing but human law to keep the liberty of its citizens from tempting a desire to do harm to others. Russian author Dostoevsky famously argued this position in *Brothers Karamazov* – “where God is not, everything is permitted.”<sup>v</sup> The irony created by such an adverse effect on a society is of the most grotesque kind; for one must truly wonder how the mechanism of justice evolves to justify the utterly unjust.

Luckily for America, her justice is of the sort that cradles liberty, not tyranny. When observing the American court system, Tocqueville writes another passage that sums up the relationship between the Judeo-Christian moral teaching, and justice:

“While I was in America, a witness who happened to be called at the Sessions of the county of Chester (state of New York) declared that he did not believe in the existence of God or in the immortality of the soul. The judge refused to admit his evidence, on the ground that the witness had destroyed beforehand all the confidence of the court in what he was about to say.”<sup>vi</sup>

The second crucial element of American justice is the protection of private property. For the Founders and the Framers, this was the most important role of government. When the problem of diverging interests and factions confronted these enlightened statesmen, they wrote a memorable response that has since become the most famous work on the ideological nature of the Constitution – *Federalist 10*. In it, James Madison touched on the importance of private property to the new American government:

“The diversity in the faculties of men, from which the rights of property originate, is not less an insuperable obstacle to a uniformity of interests. The protection of these faculties is the first object of government. From the protection of different and unequal

faculties of acquiring property, the possession of different degrees and kinds of property immediately results...<sup>”vii</sup>

However, there is yet another message in Federalist 10 that is wholly relevant to the question of social justice. When writing Federalist 10 some 61 years prior to the publication of the Communist Manifesto, the Framers considered equality as a possible solution to injustice caused by natural human division. Needless to say, they found this approach incompatible with human nature: “There are again two methods of removing the causes of faction: the one, by destroying the liberty which is essential to its existence; the other, by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests... The second expedient is as impracticable as the first would be unwise. As long as the reason of man continues fallible, and he is at liberty to exercise it, different opinions will be formed.”<sup>viii</sup>

Therefore, the American model of justice was designed to operate upon these founding pillars. With faith, human norm would not be held as the highest standard, changing rapidly with every breath of wind that comes across the face of civilization. With protection of private property, no citizen was stripped of his liberty and individual interest for the sake of achieving equality and uniformity. This was the view of justice that prevailed during our founding. This was the heart of a nation that once inspired the entire world.

However, just like no real heart can beat for eternity, the existence of any nation is by no means perpetual. Historical experience, if we still choose to listen to its teaching, can easily demonstrate a case in which the view of justice is entirely reversed; and unfortunately for me and my family, this type of experience was not just felt by reading a history book.

The view of social justice upon which my homeland was established took an opposite position to each end every element of justice envisioned by the American founding. Private property, which was so dire and crucial for diversity of mankind, was stripped from everyone as a matter of necessity. This was due to the central position of Marxism, which Karl Marx articulated in Chapter 2 of the Communist Manifesto: “the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.”<sup>ix</sup> Just as Framers viewed private property as a first object of protection, Marx sought to achieve justice by viewing property as a first object of elimination.

While individual property was the target of Marxism, equality was its deadly weapon. To submit an individual to a uniformity of interests and thoughts and in the next place equalize his conditions of living – such was the goal of the Soviet totalitarianism, and other tyrannical regimes that preceded it. Russel Kirk made this similar observation in 1989: “One can trace far back into antiquity the fallacy that justice is identical with equality of condition; for human folly is as old as human wisdom”<sup>x</sup>.

Lastly, there is a question of religion. In the Soviet Union, the idea that justice is ordained by a set of laws above humanity was bluntly inconceivable. A major reason for this position lied in the quest for total power of the totalitarian government. If, after all, the people were allowed to believe in a higher authority they would no longer only answer to the state. Consequently, the total state became a total tyrant; and the murder, starvation, and political genocide of millions was perceived as a matter of social justice of which the government was the sole judge.

Yes, things have changed. The major difference between America and my former homeland is simple: Russia already made the colossal mistake that eradicated liberty from the veins of its people, while America is making that mistake as I write these very words. The Judeo-Christian tradition is left nearly defenseless against modern secularism; the government continues to prey on private property as it grows in scope and size; and the equality of condition

is steadily constitutionalized one Supreme Court decision at a time. It may be true that a farmer and his family are safe now, and the heart of this magnificent society still beats with liberty and freedom... But history is a “gallery of pictures in which there are few originals and many copies.”<sup>xi</sup> Will we be ready for a time in which the state will storm our homes, and take our food, and starve our children... as a matter of social justice?

The future is ours for the making.

## References:

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- <sup>ii</sup> Kirk, Russell. "The Question of Social Justice." *Prospects for Conservatives* (n.d.): n. pag. Web.
- <sup>iii</sup> Kirk, Russell. "The Question of Social Justice." *Prospects for Conservatives* (n.d.): n. pag. Web.
- <sup>iv</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis De, and J. P. Mayer. *Democracy in America*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969. Print.
- <sup>v</sup> Dostoevsky, Feodor. *Brothers Karamazov*. Moscow, 1970. Print
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- <sup>vii</sup> Madison, James. "The Federalist No. 10." *The Federalist #10*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Nov. 2013. <http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm>.
- <sup>viii</sup> Madison, James. "The Federalist No. 10." *The Federalist #10*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Nov. 2013. <http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm>.
- <sup>ix</sup> "Communist Manifesto (Chapter 2)." *Communist Manifesto (Chapter 2)*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Nov. 2013. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm>.
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- <sup>xi</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis De, and J. P. Mayer. *Democracy in America*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969. Print.