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# Social and Political Theory of Liberalism, Socialism, and the Social State

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## Abstract

The idea behind the creation of the social state has its roots in the concept of welfare (pronia in Greek). However, the creation of integral, institutionalized and based on legislation state intervention in Europe can be traced to the need to address social problems during the 19th century. Furthermore, the intervention manner was based on the theoretical approaches and the political/ideological principles of governance of economic activity models, the correlation of power between social groups and interest groups, but also on the need for social balance and development. Social movements and the intellectual political theories of liberalism and socialism played a primary role in state intervention. Over time and as national and global conditions changed, the prevalent ideological political systems would also change; specific approaches linking society with the market and production prevailed, thus influencing the design of the applied social state policies. Under those conditions the so-called pluralistic forms of the social state emerged bearing a different structure and content depending on the social, political and ideological orientation of each country.

**Keywords:** Liberalism, Political Theory, Socialism, Social Theory, Social State

## 1. Social and Political Influences on the Emergence of the Social State and the Particularity of Greece

The concept of the social state<sup>1</sup> is related to the significance attached to state intervention, i.e. the implementation of its institutional framework of application during the provision of services to citizens in order to cover their needs. To begin with, the social state recognizes its political and moral obligation to assist the citizens. At the same time though it represents the everyday aspect, which is oriented to human values, to the person himself as value (Preller, 1962), the practical dimension, that is the way in which the policies applied are implemented based on the specific political ideology in regard to the manner, extent and duration of the intervention. “The institutional operation of the social state developed as a result of claims made by social groups and in the context of political struggle of various movements with the authorities. The establishment of

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<sup>1</sup> Article 25 of the Constitution of the Hellenic Republic states that “the rights of human being as an individual and as a member of society and the principle of the rule of law welfare state are guaranteed by the State”. Tsatsos D. presents the opinion that the social state constitutes the historical response to the rule of law state by intervening in existing ownership relationships of individuals in order to redistribute goods and thus ensure social justice (Tsatsos, 2004, p. 259).

social intervention measures in the social sector as a citizen right was done consciously in the state's effort to adapt to citizens' demands to cover specific needs and through the synergy of the social and economic sectors. As such, it was the result of political planning and the subsequent self-evident connection and harmonious continuity of the political relationship of the state and the citizen, and was thus established in citizens' minds" (Koffas, 2011, p.202).

The main characteristic of the social state is the political ideology followed as a shaping factor in the institutional establishment of the social state's right to redistribution. The manner in which the forces of the economy and the market are linked with the families, the informal networks and the activities of the subjects are directly connected and interwoven with the provision of services of social care, insurance and protection with different textures in different ideologies, and with most likely similar formal legal institutionalization, but not always actual. The distinguishing difference lies in the sociopolitical culture and more specifically the extent to which the institutional framework is applied (in its entirety or selectively), the resources used (state or own), who applies it (institutionalized agents or the free market) and how (by right or in reciprocity) (Koffas, 2011, p.203 ; Sdrolias et.al. 2016, p.42-44).

Hence, the theoretical approaches<sup>2</sup> of the social state even though they are linked with the expected perception for, usually, official state support, differ according to the prevalent socioeconomic ideological view. Therefore, in the conservative/corporatist view<sup>3</sup> it is understood as a redistributive policy for those in need and for financially dependent workers, in the liberal view<sup>4</sup> it signifies state intervention that aims towards regulations that will ameliorate financial poverty in general, while in the socialist approach its significance is understood as a policy of equal opportunities for all and especially disadvantaged and socially powerless vulnerable groups which require greater social attention (Sanmann, 1975, p.189). In the socialist-democratic approach<sup>5</sup> it is even more evident that the social state should orient its actions as a form of general policy having society at its centre and more specifically to consciously aim to realize liberty and justice for the entire society (Lampert & Althammer, 2001, p.3).

In the case of Greece the creation of the social state was devoid of ideological structure and political motivation as the result of social movement claims, and was not the product of any long-term planning. Institutional state intervention was shaped belatedly in a piecemeal manner as a consequence rather than a major factor in the gradual development process of the social state. It was created on the logic of short-term electoral/political considerations and the corporatist modus operandi of guild interests, as well as the particularities of formal and informal care networks in Greek society (Venieris & Papatheodorou, 2003, p.44 ; Koffas, 2009, p.37). Claims for social measures by labour movements in Greece promoted guild and union related interests instead of measures for the broader community. These claims followed a subjective/individual form of incentives "which is related to the emotional satisfaction of needs and its positive impact on the work and personal life of the worker" (Sdrolias & Skouri & Sirakoulis & Leventi, 2006, p.125), by endeavouring to cover personal needs and insecurities of specific groups. This is the residual form of the social state, which is based on the principles of solidarity and mutual help as practices of mutual support among people rather than an institutional principle of

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<sup>2</sup> Various classifications of countries have been developed based on specific characteristics of the social state. The following works by Esping-Andersen (1990), Titmuss (1974) and Ferrera (1996) analyze both older and newer classification efforts and explain social state models, as well as the concepts they are based on such as corporatism, pluralism, decommodification and the residual state.

<sup>3</sup> Controlled state intervention with the provision of support through the exercise of the redistributive function on a reciprocal basis is the philosophy of corporatism. The welfare state, through its political-economic operation, protects workers from impoverishment and disparagement and at the same time contributes to the maintenance of specialized backup labour forces for the uninterrupted reproduction of capital. By its socio-political function it contributes to the creation of conditions of social cohesion, stability and legitimization of the system; conditions which were constantly threatened by the anarchic and spontaneous action of market and competition forces (Offe, 1984 ; O'Connor, 1973 ; Cough, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> The liberal model favours the market at the expense of central regulations and redistribution. In this case the state subsidizes benefits through the market on a means-tested basis. Transfer payments are limited and so are national insurance programmes. Social intervention contributes to the reproduction of wealth polarization and social inequality as the equality it provides points downwards to poverty (Sakellariopoulos, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> The principle of total decommodification of social benefits prevails in the socialist-democratic model. The central redistribution mechanism of state resources is decisive. All needs are covered while full-time work and equality are the invariable goals of social policy. The principle of the universality of benefits is related to the attribute of citizen and not a work position or need (Sakellariopoulos, 1999).

state organized intervention.

## 2. The Political View of Liberalism

Since the end of the 18th century political liberalism had a favourable effect on the industrialization of production and brought significant changes to many sectors of social activity. From a social point of view it spurred individual rights, which up until that time were quite limited and under the control of the aristocratic elites, and also contributed to the creation of isonomy among citizens. People, as free citizens of the state now, acquired civil rights, the capacity to determine their lives themselves and to pursue their own financial, political and cultural interests. Viewed from an economic/production angle and in the context of a new, more intense liberal competitive economic activity among people, correlations among productive forces changed resulting in the emergence of winners and losers, rich and poor. Significant differences between social groups made their appearance, in regard to social status, prosperity and quality of life which reflected the new interrelationships of the socioeconomic process (Informationen zur politischen Bildung, 1992, p.3ff). The changes brought on by the early capitalism of liberalization resulted in the emergence of a massive number of unskilled labourers, known as the proletariat, who led a life of suffering and destitution in poverty and misery; this situation became known as social issues. Addressing those pressing needs of financial and social nature, and logistics prompted, among others, the development of the first state care interventions, which were also the outcome of dealing with the organized social movements and the dynamic form of the demands of destitute population groups (Lampert & Althammer 2001, p.14 ; Holtmann, 2000, p.650 ; Schmidt, 1981).

From a political aspect, liberalism developed as a general spiritual and at the same time political movement against the totalitarian and arbitrary dominance of the authoritarian state. It was the response/reaction of ordinary citizens against the absolute dominance of the ruling elite, who despite being the minority enjoyed everything and had numerous benefits unlike the majority of workers who lived in conditions of hand-to-mouth misery. The ideology of liberalism stood up to the authoritarian rule of power by advocating that people are by nature free and equal. The intellectual roots of liberalism can be traced to the philosophical movement of the Enlightenment<sup>6</sup>. As an ideology, the Enlightenment recognized man as a rational and gifted being, who is constantly evolving and rising spiritually thus leading himself, as well as the world around him, to greater fulfillment on condition of the free development of his abilities and personality. Insight in regard to the rational evolution of the human spirit and his achievements are part of the perception that basic human rights exist naturally and as such take precedence over any law of the state (Röd, 1996, p. 167; Antonopoulou, 1991, p. 27). The implementation of the Enlightenment philosophy of liberty and equality of men imposes a universal demand on the state to not only support citizens with the discretionary use of the necessary resources and means, but to go further by guaranteeing the right of each and every person the potential to freely develop his personality. In the classical form of liberalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries this mandate takes a specific shape, which along with state intervention includes in practice (not just theoretically) the concepts/values of personal freedom and self-determination, equality before the law and personal property. Through these fundamental values one may discern a particular view of the state's role in its relationship with the citizens. The state ought to guarantee the free development of its citizens by providing them: first, as many (identical) rights as possible to all, especially the right to the unfettered development and use of one's personal property, and second, the protection of those rights from both external and internal factors, and especially from state intervention (Neumann & Schaper, 1998, p.19ff).

Within this type of structured legal framework any person may freely develop his potential and pursue without hindrance his own personal political, financial, social and cultural interests and aspirations. Competition in the aforementioned process constitutes the regulatory force which ensures that individuals do not act uncontrollably

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<sup>6</sup> The philosophy of the Enlightenment had as a goal the liberation of man from fear and prejudice. Inspired by natural sciences it advocates the view that the dominance of man can be found in knowledge and his ability to recognize the truth. The true state of man based on knowledge liberates him from obscurantism and submission to totalitarian authority and allows him to build a new social order based on the truth, and freedom of thought and knowledge (Antonopoulou, 1991, p.27-28)

in the pursuit of their goals but serve the common good at the same time. The reason is that during competition for social accomplishment and status, income and property, hierarchical rank and prestige, production and consumption there will be a choice either more or less intense. The choice is made for the benefit of all, in the sense that through competition the fittest will survive in regard to effectiveness, the best ideas and products, the political view of the majority and its representatives. Since a competitive process has by default not only winners but also losers, by the end of the selection there will be significant differences in the social position and particularly the social circumstances of the participants. This is how freedom and equal opportunities may be accompanied by social inequality. For the liberal ideology this inequality is basically the consequence of varying effectiveness and that is why it is considered acceptable. Competition is considered to be operating properly only when opportunities for profit co-exist with risk and loss, thus providing increased incentives for the best possible results (Zerche & Grüdger, 1982; Siegel, 2002, p. 38ff). The liberal ideology as an element of social and economic development evolves by taking into account the opportunities available in the free market while facing minimal state intervention, and was established as a model of activity in most western societies. Especially after the 19<sup>th</sup> century it became the decisive force which propelled the gradual elimination of the totalitarian practices of the regime and the economic administration, and promoted the greatest possible equal distribution of political and social power. The primary political agent of the liberal approach was the ambitious urban class. Through social movements it managed to gradually oblige the systems of constitutional monarchy and limited political activity to grant specific rights of individual freedom and to link the exercise of state power with the implementation of laws (Koffas, 2019). Hence, the central political element, in regard to the exercise of legislative power, gradually expanded beyond the purview of nobility to actually include the elected representatives of the people, despite the fact that the latter could not introduce in parliament any beneficial legislation changes on their own.

The urban class, which now possessed political presence and education, stood up for social issues to a great extent and forcefully participated to bring about significant changes. It was need which led to the birth of the liberal thought and especially equal participation of all social strata in politics, with participation in decision making being the greatest achievement of those struggles. The establishment of the right to vote for the majority of the citizens prompted legislative regulations for the protection of workers by introducing specific rights and at the same time it constituted the basis for the creation of the official social state (Brück, 1981).

As time passed and state intervention permeated almost all sectors of human activity to cover needs that citizens could not on their own, and by linking interventions in the social sector with all other sectors, especially in the neo-liberal view of economy and administration, gave rise to the pluralistic mix of the social state as is currently known. The impetus for the original liberal market economy, besides social movement claims, was complemented by views of social collectivity and solidarity, co-perception of personal responsibility and selective redistribution (Koffas, et. al. 2016).

### 3. The Political View of Socialism

The political view of socialism<sup>7</sup> tried to contribute to the solution of social problems and address the poverty and destitution of the population within the context of the Marxist view, by pointing out the power of the labour asset when they rally and claim their rights from the manufacturers—their exploiters. Class struggle as a concept would dominate and be used as an interpretative key in regard to the succession of historical political systems; each socialist analysis had as its foundation the said redress of the imbalance in the relations of production. As a prerequisite for reinstating balance in social life, socialism advocated the actual implementation of the principles of political liberalism and the ideas of the French Revolution in regard to the principles of equality, solidarity and liberty of people. Equal rights for citizens could only be realized by state intervention. Hence the state, as

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<sup>7</sup> Politically, socialism has been linked to decision making systems based on both direct democracy, as well as combinations of direct and representative democracy. The basic characteristic of socialism is the commencement of a long and difficult process to transcend the capitalist form of production. The process begins the moment urban class authority/dominance is overthrown and power taken over by the working classes and the people. Incidental to this characteristic is the participatory administration of the economy either by wider groupings or by the state with central planning (Holtmann, 2000, p.633ff).

supreme authority, should exercise control over the means of production to prevent exploitation and at the same time develop a central plan for the redistribution of goods and services, thus ensuring social justice (Kreft/Mielenz, 1996, p.539ff). The pressing needs of the citizens of the early industrial era, known as social issues, which political liberalism treated rather with detachment and with a view to maintain the status quo and power, marked the beginning of the political ideology of socialism in regard to state intervention.

Ideologically and historically the roots of socialism, like neo-liberalism, are based on the view that men are by nature free and equal. Further, it attaches special importance and rational ranking to the three ideals of the French Revolution, i.e. liberty, equality and solidarity/fraternity. By comparison though, the political ideology of socialism stresses more intensely and radically the view of equality. More specifically, the view of equality in socialism is not only understood as equality before the law, but more as actual equal opportunities in people's lives. According to this view, the concept and attainment of equality becomes the fundamental principle of political socialism. The mandate for the exercise of actual equality is reflected in socialism as the eradication of differences in education, professional opportunities, income, living conditions as well as other characteristics of people's social position. By achieving social equality, the wider sociopolitical goal of social justice and a just system of social intervention are set in motion (Röd, 1996, p.299ff).

However, attainment of social equality presupposes the existence of the second ideal of socialism: solidarity<sup>8</sup> among people. "In everyday practice this suggests the mutual cohesion among people or social groups (families, unions, communities) in the sense of a mutual moral responsibility and when coping with life events" (Koffas, 2017, p.629). For the social state and state interventions the principle of solidarity practically expresses the need to provide support/assistance which should be reflected at the planning, decision-making and operational levels, and in the effectiveness of those systems. That is, common interests which exist as a manifestation of common sentiment of belonging to the same society, but also as a product of compliance to the same needs, should be regulated on the basis of reciprocity in order to cover the needs of the entire society (Engelhardt, 1981, p.62).

As for the third ideal of socialism, liberty, it does not result from regulatory forms of freedom rights in relation to the state, but primarily from the actual opportunities in people's lives and actions. In this sense liberty presupposes the actual equality of opportunities in life. Therefore, the doctrine of liberty stems from the mandate of equivalent opportunities in the life of all. In the socialist ideology, striving for greater social equality has been addressed from the beginning to the state, primarily, as a political claim. That is why the state should not only guarantee the free operation of all forces; rather, it is obliged to embody the idea of protecting and monitoring the exercise of everyone's right to free and unimpeded development of their activities and safeguard the operational mechanisms of those rights. In the socialist view the state has to have an active and material role by intervening in social relationships in order to attain greater social equality and social justice (Informationen zur politischen Bildung, 1992, p.5f). This intervention mandate spreads across all sectors of human activity such as the common state education system, the state planned economic production which averts unequal amassment of private property, centrally regulated social policy operation for uniform social, insurance, welfare and health services for the entire population.

The political socialist view for the participatory administration of the means of production by the state and the citizens and the centrally planned interventions in the social sector created the state models<sup>9</sup> of universal benefits. This means that resources and benefits are jointly owned by the entire population and everyone has free access to goods and services, which in their turn are designed to cover immediately and uniformly the human needs. The statement "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" (Marx & Engel, 1973) describes the rationale of state intervention in socialism.

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<sup>8</sup> "The most widespread simple definition of the principle of solidarity is the one that describes its implementation process as one for all and all for one" (Raiffeisen in: Schoenig/L Hoest, 1996, p.101). Solidarity is a concept which has been significantly influenced by the social didache of Christian teaching and is used to describe mutual support among people as the principle of social harmony (Fuchs et.al., 1994, p.205).

<sup>9</sup> In the state or centralized model the dominant administrator is the state; on the one hand as supplier of necessary resources and on the other as a control mechanism. In the case of goods considered to be public goods their supply depends on the economic robustness of the state, the resources allocated and their manner of utilization (Souliotis, 2010, p. 192-193).

A particularly crucial point in the socialist ideology for the social state is the relationship between social equality and individual incentive. Usually each person makes an effort individually because he considers it to be worth it and has a positive result for him. A state policy for society as a whole, identical for all, may lead however to lower motivation to perform. People are by nature dissimilar and those who possess the capabilities and skills may not use them to their full extent and limit themselves not to the maximum, but to the state determined lower performance level. As such, the system's total performance and production decreases and leads to a lower aggregate of supply of goods and consequently to a diminished degree of redistributive capability. Socialism tries to avert or limit the potential conflict between social equality for all people and welfare for everyone through the education of citizens and the cultivation of behaviours characterized by solidarity. The better each individual person performs for the social good, under state guidance, the more society can offer to everyone (Marx & Engels, 1997; Röd, 1996, p.231ff; Fuchs-Heinritz, Lautmann, Rammstedt, Wienold, 1994, p. 618f).

In the case of the Western industrial countries with capitalist systems of economy and production already in place, socialism tried to address the problem through a transformative approach. It endeavoured to provide solutions to social issues and needs by using peaceful solidary self-help as a tool to further reinforce the potential and choices of people beyond state provided services. Solidary self-help means two things: first, the creation of production co-operatives by workers both to avert exploitation by employers/manufacturers and to create common property which will offer the capability and means to intervene when necessary, in addition to those already in place; second, the joint presence of workers' unions for the universal and identical with the employers' right in decision making. In this manner, workers who are anyway in greater need and face more problems find themselves in the favourable position, through the designated processes of direct democracy, to be equal interlocutors with the state and to promote their views of social justice and manner of intervention. The idea of social transformation through solidary self-help and direct democracy is known as the concept of democratic socialism (Hartwich, 1978).

#### 4. Conclusion

The study of the political and social ideology of liberalism and socialism for the creation of the social state reveals that it is a conquest of social movements and a concession of political importance by the power centres in an effort to both maintain their power and to address pressing needs of their citizens. The founding and operation of the social state contributed, from both the liberal and socialist point of views, to the establishment of people as citizens with rights, as well as the incorporation of all productive forces (formal and informal) in the economic process. In essence, the creation of the social state is a product of the institutionalization of competition at the political, economic and social levels. In both ideologies the social state is created in a dual manner stemming, first, from the economic correlation in the relationship between capital and labour, and second from the political correlation of participation in the distribution of authority. As such, the social state is constructed based on the political need to manage the production process either as an exploitative process in the case of liberalism or as a co-production one in the case of socialism. Furthermore, the liberal ideology in the capitalist economic system applies the individualistic perspective by using human resources in terms of performance and efficiency in the process of capital creation. Alternatively, the socialist ideology uses the collectivity in terms of social solidarity and a system co-managed with the state, in order to achieve a more just and as much as possible equitable redistribution of resources.

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