

GROUP INTEREST AS A SOCIO-PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPT

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Abstract: Group interest is what to meet the common demands of all members in a certain group of people. In this sense, the group interest is an inevitable social phenomenon. In any society, there are always different groups of people. Each class can be also seen as a group. Each group has its own interest. The relationship between the group interest, individual interest and social interest may suit or contradict each other. Group interest can be found in the State policies, since many policies are advantageous for these groups, but disadvantageous for others.

Key words: Interest, group, group interest.

Introduction

In academic and socio-political publications and newspapers in Vietnam as well as abroad, the concept of group interest has been widely used in recent years. Some people use this concept to imply illegitimate (or negative) interests of a group of people. In the meanwhile, others use this concept to imply common interests of a group of people, although the interests may be legitimate or illegitimate (positive or negative), depending on specific cases⁽¹⁾. The term “group interests” in the latter implication are seen as a socio-philosophical concept. This paper describes some issues relating to group interests from the perspective of socio-philosophy.

1. Indispensability of group interests

Though the concept of group interests has been used widely just recently, it does not mean that the phenomenon of group interests has just occurred. Everyone has

needs (such as food, clothes, houses, means of transportation, knowledge, honor, and cultural values, etc...) and they require what to meet the needs; interest is the very thing that meets the needs of man; and, group interest is the very thing that meets the common interests of all people in a certain group.

There are indispensably different groups in society. A group (or a group of people) is a community of those who have some similarities. In society, for instance, there are group of men and group of women; group of young and group of old people; group of rich and group of poor people; group of workers and group of farmers; group of urban and group of rural people; group of this local and group of that local people; group of non-religious and group of

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(1) To Phan (2012), “Negative Group Interest – A Dangerous Depravation”, Newspaper *Ha Noi Moi*, 15 Oct., p.7.

religious people; etc... A social class or a social stratum can be seen as a group, too. People in a group may not be cohesive to each other, but they share certain similarities; they therefore have a common interest.

As there are different groups of people in society, group interests certainly exist. In every society, there is always distinction between groups of people. Correspondingly, there are always different group interests in every society. Thus, group interests constitute an indispensable social phenomenon. In the primitive communist society, there was distinction between group of men and group of women; between group of old people and group of young people; and, between group of farmers and group of animal breeders. In addition to the above-mentioned distinction, for the society with different social classes, there is also differentiation between group of rich people and group of poor people; between group of the brainworkers and group of manual workers; and, between group of ruling people and group of oppressed people; etc... People in the same group always have several similar needs, due to which group interests are formed.

Studying the development laws of mankind society, Marxist classic philosophers paid a very special attention to analysis of interests, since it directly impelled activities of man generally and groups of people specifically. According to Karl Marx, "all what people struggle to seize are involved with interests"⁽²⁾. V.I. Lenin also wrote about the significance of group interests, when he argued that it was necessary to

"find out the roots of social phenomena within relations of production and place the phenomena in the linkage with interests of certain classes"⁽³⁾. When ones "cannot recognize interests of a social class that are hidden in some ethical, religious, political and social statements, proclamations, or promises, they will still remain foolish and sooner or later will be politically duped as well as self-duped"⁽⁴⁾. Above-mentioned notes made by K. Marx and V.I. Lenin show that the phenomenon called group interests is attached closely with development of mankind society, although the concept has been used recently.

2. Classification of group interests

On the one hand, group interests can be classified into many different types, based on the interest criteria. Interests, for instance, can be classified into legitimate or illegitimate; group interests are therefore classified into legitimate or illegitimate ones. Legitimate (or positive) group interests are suitable to requirements of social development. When interests of a certain group are legitimate, the interests are also suitable for legitimate interests of other groups. On the contrary, illegitimate (or negative) group interests are not suitable to requirements of social development. Theoretically, legitimate and illegitimate group interests are obviously differentiated

⁽²⁾ Marx and Engels (1978), *Complete Works*, Vol.1, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, p.98.

⁽³⁾ V.I.Lenin (1974), *Complete Works*, Vol.1, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p.670.

⁽⁴⁾ V.I. Lenin (1980), *Complete Works*, Vol.23, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p.57.

from each other, based on the fact whether they are suitable to requirements of social development or not. In reality, nevertheless, it is sometimes very complicated to identify whether a group interest is legitimate or illegitimate.

Interests can be classified into material or spiritual. Similarly, group interests are classified into material or spiritual ones. Interests can be classified into economic or political or cultural; group interests are therefore classified into economic or political or cultural group interests. These two types of classification are basically the same, as economic group interests can be viewed as material group interests; whereas political and cultural group interests can be viewed as spiritual group interests. Human needs consist of material and spiritual ones. At that time, material group interests are things that can satisfy material needs (such as food, clothes, houses, means of transport, etc...); whereas, spiritual group interests are things that can satisfy spiritual needs (such as knowledge, honor, cultural values, etc...). Material and spiritual group interests are not always differentiated from each other clearly, because some phenomena cannot be classified completely into a particular type. For instance, national independence, freedom, democracy, positions and titles in the governmental apparatus or social organizations can be seen as both material and spiritual interests. Ones carry out certain activities in the hope of achieving something that they considered an interest for them; i.e. it satisfies their need. The interest can be material or spiritual. In some cases,

however, interests are both material and spiritual. Honor is also seen as an interest. It is a spiritual interest, but many people have to sacrifice a lot of material interests (they even sacrifice their life) for it. Interests can be classified into short-term or long-term as well as fundamental or non-fundamental. Hence, group interests are also classified into short-term or long-term ones as well as fundamental or non-fundamental ones.

On the other hand, group interests can be classified into many types, based on the group criteria. For example, groups can be classified into group of rich and group of poor people; group interests are, therefore, classified into the rich group interests or the poor group interests. Similarly, groups can be classified into the group of intellectuals, the group of manual laborers, the group of workers, the group of farmers, the group of State servants, or the group of businessmen etc... Group interests are, therefore, classified into group interests of intellectuals, group interests of manual laborers, group interests of workers, group interests of farmers, group interests of the State servants, or group interests of businessmen etc... Every group of people has its corresponding group interests.

3. Relations of group interests with individual interests and social interests

Individual interests are the interests of a specific person. The relation between group interests and individual interests is similar to that between a part and the whole. Why? It's because each member of a group has his/her own interests; furthermore, the

interests may be different, as ones always have many different needs. Of all needs and interests of an individual in a group, some are his/her particular needs and interests, but some are common to the needs and interests of other group members. Only common interests of all the group members are considered the group interests. Group interests are, consequently, a part of all interests of a member. Moreover, a person can be a member of different groups at the same time, so he/she has different group interests. For instance, a person can be a woman, a servicewoman, a teacher, and a young person at the same time. Consequently, interests of an individual include interests of the group, and even interests of different groups. When an individual achieves all his/her interests, it also means that he/she achieve the group interests (they are not only interests of one group, but perhaps also interests of many groups). In the relation between group interests and individual interests, contradictions sometimes may occur. Due to the contradictions, an individual sometimes has to sacrifice some of his/her interests, in order to achieve the group interests; or vice versa, he/she has to sacrifice the group interests, in order to achieve his/her own interests. When one has to make the choice, he/she should sacrifice the smaller in order to achieve the greater or sacrifice material ones in order to achieve spiritual ones.

Social interests are the common interests of all people in society and suitable to requirements of social development. When the whole society gets an interest, not only

an individual but also people of all groups will also get the interest. Such social interests are, therefore, a part of group interests. Besides, group interests may be suitable or unsuitable to social interests. When group interests are legitimate, the interests are suitable to social interests. On the contrary, group interests are unsuitable or contradictory with social interests, when they are illegitimate. Exploiting class is a group, of which the interest is to exploit other classes. Their interests are, therefore, illegitimate and contradictory with social interests. In the case that group interests are contradictory with social interests, the group interests are considered illegitimate.

4. Interest relations among groups

Each group has its own interests. The group interests are always related to each other, since people always have relations with each other; and, activities of an individual always cause more or less, direct or indirect impacts on activities of all others. When a group gets an interest, other groups more or less will get some advantage or disadvantage. Interests of different groups may be suitable or contradictory with each other. When the fact that a group gets some interests will result in advantage or at least it causes no disadvantage for other groups, the relation is considered suitable for all the groups. On the contrary, it is considered contradictory, when interests obtained by one group will result in disadvantage for other groups.

The existence of contradictions between group interests (also called as contradictions of interests among different groups) is

indispensable in society. In the society, where both exploiting class and oppressed class are found, the interest relation between the exploiting and the oppressed classes is contradictory, in which interests of the exploiting class are considered illegitimate and unsuitable for social development requirements. Even in the society that has neither exploiting nor oppressed classes, contradictions between group interests will not disappear. For instance, the interest relation between the group of employers and the group of employees is also contradictory, because employees want to get higher wages; whereas employers do not want it. If the employees benefit from the wage rise, the employers will get some loss. The interest relation between the group of buyers and the group of sellers is also contradictory, because one group wants to buy commodities at low price, but the other group wants to sell them at high price; the more advantage the buyers get, the greater loss the sellers will have and vice versa. In future, there may be no longer differences between the group of exploiting and the group of oppressed people; between the group of brainworkers and the group of manual workers; and between the group of urban and the group of rural people. At that time, however, differences between some groups (for instance, occupational groups) will still remain. Different occupational groups have different interests. The group interests are somewhat suitable to each other (since they all are necessary for society), but they are

also somewhat contradictory with each other. The contradiction is shown in benefiting from havings of society. Havings of society are certainly limited, but all groups want to benefit much from them. The more havings one group gets, the less havings other groups will get.

Contradiction of group interests is indispensable and it will never disappear. When one contradiction has been solved, other contradictions will occur. Once ones find out and deal with contradictions timely and properly, social stability and rapid development will be achieved. An appropriate solution to the contradictions is to combine harmoniously all group interests so that they all become legitimate and suitable for social interests.

5. Group interests shown in the State policy

The State is an apparatus that performs social management through promulgation and implementation of policies. Theoretically, the State policies aim at achieving social interests, instead of aiming at interests of a certain group alone. In reality, however, this is not always true! In a society, where exploiting and oppressed classes are found, almost all policies of the State aim at creating advantages for the exploiting class; whereas they cause disadvantages to the oppressed class. This is the most obvious expression of group interests in the State policy.

Group interests are clearly shown in the State policies related to not only the interest relations between the exploiting and the oppressed classes but also the interest

relations between other groups. In many cases, the State policies are advantageous for some groups, but disadvantageous for others. For instance, the policy to increase import taxes of agricultural products is disadvantageous for agricultural consumers, but advantageous for domestic agricultural firms. Another example is the policy to increase allowances of a specific occupational group. With this policy, people of the occupational group get some advantage; whereas, people of other groups, who also benefit from the State budget, will get a disadvantage.

Although policy-making agencies deliberately aim at getting interests for the entire society, some policies still remain advantageous for certain groups and disadvantageous for others. For such policies, the groups that get advantage will be in favor of the policies; whereas the groups that get disadvantage will take objection. The extent, at which the groups advocate or oppose the policies, depends on how much advantage or disadvantage they get. A policy is really considered sound, when it brings interests for the entire society, meets requirements of social development, although it may cause a loss for some groups. Every policy of the State causes an impact on interests of social groups. When evaluating a policy of the State to see whether it is really sound or not, therefore, we need to analyze the interest relations among different groups in order to identify which groups the policy is advantageous and which disadvantageous for; at the same time, we have to see whether

the policy brings interests for society.

Conclusion

The concept of group interest has been used widely in scientific and political publications just for recent years. In terms of its content, however, the concept of group interest reflects an indispensable social phenomenon. In every society, there are always different social groups, of which each has its own interests; and, they always have interest relations with each other. We cannot get judicious social understanding, if we do not recognize correctly social groups with their corresponding interests. Although we may use the concept of group interest to imply a negative social phenomenon, we need to clarify fundamental contents of the concept from the socio-philosophical perspective.

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