

# Ho Chi Minh's thought on social progress and social justice, the current situation of implementation and solutions in the new era of development

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● **Abstract:** Social progress and social justice are important criteria to “measure” the superiority of a social regime. President Ho Chi Minh, with the desire to bring happiness to everyone, always cared about social progress and justice. Based on the analysis of Ho Chi Minh Thought, this article evaluates the implementation of social progress and social justice in the renovation period and proposes solutions for implementation in the country's new era of development.

● **Keywords:** Ho Chi Minh; social progress; social justice; renovation period; development era.

## 1. Introduction

Building a progressive and equitable society has always been the aspiration of humankind. With ardent patriotism and rejection of injustice and corruption of colonial and feudal society, Ho Chi Minh left to find a way to salvage the country and gradually established a progressive and equitable society in Vietnam. Inheriting his thought, during nearly 40 years of renovation, the Communist Party of Vietnam developed new awareness and made efforts to build a progressive and equitable society in our country. The country is entering a new era of development, creatively applying Ho Chi Minh's thought on social progress and social justice to bring happiness to the people is a necessary and objective requirement.

## 2. Content

### 2.1. *Ho Chi Minh's thought on social progress and social justice*

Social progress and social justice are concepts that reflect the level of development of society to meet the needs of the people for freedom and happiness. To speak of social progress means to speak about the movement of society from a low level to a high level, from backward to civilized, modern in terms of production methods, infrastructure, superstructure, social consciousness and the level of enjoyment of the people. Social justice in the most general sense is the equality in the relationship

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among people in terms of development opportunities, development conditions and income distribution based on the symmetry between obligations and rights, contributions and enjoyment. Social progress and social justice are closely related to each other. Social justice is a basic criterion to reflect social progress; social progress is the fundamental condition for ensuring social justice.

Ho Chi Minh's thought on social progress and social justice are expressed in the following points:

*Firstly*, Ho Chi Minh highly appreciated the importance of social justice and the State's responsibility in implementing social justice. Injustice is the source of struggle and revolution, while fairness and equality are conditions for development. Justice in distribution is the key point of social justice, and Ho Chi Minh affirmed: "Do not fear shortage, only fear injustice; Do not fear poverty, only fear the people's restlessness"<sup>(1)</sup>. Social justice is important because only with it can there be national unity, social consensus, and the people's trust in the ruling regime. Therefore, Ho Chi Minh wished to build a society where "everyone has food to eat, clothes to wear, and education"<sup>(2)</sup>. That "ultimate desire" of Ho Chi Minh was the aspiration for a society where everyone is equal in enjoyment and development opportunities. Since within society exist communities with differences in conditions, development resources, and capacities for enjoyment, ensuring social welfare well is a clear manifestation of social justice. Therefore, after the August Revolution, Ho Chi Minh set out the responsibility of the Government: "must immediately implement: 1. Make sure the people have food/ 2. Make sure the people have clothing/ 3. Make sure the people have housing/ 4. Make sure the people have education"<sup>(3)</sup>. Here, "the people" means each individual and the entire community.

Ho Chi Minh believed that the struggle of the Vietnamese people against colonialists and imperialists was "a fierce battle between justice and injustice, between civilization and barbarism"<sup>(4)</sup> aimed at eliminating the oppression of imperialism and colonialism, and bringing equality among nations. Thus, implementing social justice in Vietnam is to eliminate injustice, bring prosperity and happiness to the people, and contribute to the common progress of humanity.

*Secondly*, Ho Chi Minh pointed out that the nature of social justice Vietnam is aiming for is socialist justice. Ho Chi Minh pointed out that the root cause of social injustice is the private ownership of means of production: "Why is there this injustice? Because a few people have taken private ownership of the means of production of society"<sup>(5)</sup>.

Having experienced all three types of regimes (feudal-colonial, capitalist, and socialist), Ho Chi Minh concluded: “Only socialism and communism can liberate oppressed peoples and the working class in the world”<sup>(6)</sup>. Affirming that justice is an essential characteristic of socialism, he wrote: “Socialism is reasonable justice: those who work more enjoy more, those who work less enjoy less, those who do not work shall not enjoy”<sup>(7)</sup>.

Thus, the social justice that Ho Chi Minh sought to achieve was socialist justice. Only the socialist regime can “help the working people escape poverty, help everyone have jobs, be well-off and lead a happy life”<sup>(8)</sup>. Therefore, in order to achieve social justice, we must fight for national independence, eliminate national oppression, build a people’s democratic regime and advance to socialism.

*Thirdly*, Ho Chi Minh pointed out the comprehensiveness of social justice in the new regime. According to him, in the people’s democratic regime, social justice must be implemented in all areas. It is political justice when “the working people are the collective owners of all material and cultural wealth and are equal in rights and obligations”<sup>(9)</sup>. It is economic justice with the existence of many economic sectors and the practice of distribution according to the principle of “those who work more enjoy more, those who work less enjoy less, those who do not work shall not enjoy”<sup>(10)</sup> or through the form of “contracting”. In terms of society, it is justice in the implementation of ethnic and religious policies and gender equality. To solve the ethnic problem in a multi-ethnic country, Ho Chi Minh declared: “Our country is a unified country consisting of many ethnic groups. All ethnic groups living in Vietnam are equal in rights and obligations”<sup>(11)</sup> and “The government will abolish all old evils; all previous grievances will be corrected”<sup>(12)</sup>. He also affirmed that in Vietnam, religions are equal, united and all believers are allowed to practice their faith, to practice their beliefs according to their doctrines and according to the provisions of the law. As a country suffering from many consequences of the ideology of “male superiority and female inferiority”, Ho Chi Minh advocated the liberation of women because “if we do not liberate women, we will not liberate half of humanity. If we do not liberate women, we will only build half of socialism”<sup>(13)</sup>. In terms of culture, after the August Revolution, Ho Chi Minh issued a decree to establish the Popular Education Department to achieve the goal of “teaching all citizens to read and write”<sup>(14)</sup>. It is also the equality between rights and obligations when the people “are the masters” and must have the responsibility to “be the masters”. The policy of ensuring social justice in all aspects demonstrates the radical and revolutionary nature of Ho Chi Minh’s view on social justice.

*Fourthly*, Ho Chi Minh pointed out the way to implement social justice in Vietnam. According to Ho Chi Minh, institutional creation and justice enforcement are the responsibility of the State. After the August Revolution, Ho Chi Minh declared: “The Government strives to follow three policies: People’s livelihood, People’s rights and National Independence”<sup>(15)</sup>. He clearly stated: “The work of the

Government must aim at a single goal: to strive for freedom and happiness for everyone”<sup>(16)</sup>. To ensure people’s livelihood, the Government abolished the unreasonable taxes of the old regime, implemented policies to reduce rent and interest, and made efforts to solve key issues of life such as food, housing, and clothing. To ensure people’s rights, the State promulgated and enforced laws according to the principle of “all citizens are equal before the law”<sup>(17)</sup> and created regulations and standards for citizens to regulate their behavior in accordance with reason, ensuring equality and social order. Ho Chi Minh made efforts to build a State of the people, by the people, for the people, and resolutely fought against corruption, wastefulness, bureaucracy, privileges, and special interests. He required cadres and party members not to abuse their power or be arrogant but to be “servants” of the people and to be exemplary in practicing the principle of “hardship first, enjoyment later”, especially in the distribution of benefits. He also educated the people in the spirit of sharing the same fate, uniting to strive to build a fair and civilized society according to the philosophy of “one for everyone, everyone for one”, eliminating selfishness and individualism.

Alongside the above, Ho Chi Minh’s thought on social justice is also unique in other viewpoints. He affirmed that absolute justice is not equalization or egalitarianism, thus he explained: “What is egalitarianism? It means everyone is the same, equal... Egalitarianism is against socialism, that is not right”<sup>(18)</sup>. On the other hand, justice does not exclude mutual assistance, help, and preferential treatment because if we consider that people and ethnic groups with different circumstances and different contribution capabilities must perform the same obligations and rights as fair and equal, then “that equality is very unreasonable, very bad, we must resolutely oppose that kind of equality”<sup>(19)</sup>. Therefore, it is necessary to “pay special attention to war-torn areas, orphans, the elderly, and families of martyrs, war invalids, soldiers, and youth volunteers”<sup>(20)</sup>.

The distinctive point in Ho Chi Minh’s thought on social justice is that, on the one hand, he always aimed at the goal of successfully building socialism in our country; on the other hand, he understood that our country was in the transitional period to socialism; when “absolute” justice could not yet be achieved, there would still be a certain degree of injustice during development: “making the poor have enough to eat, those who have enough to eat become well-off, those who are well-off become richer.”<sup>(21)</sup>

In his work *Common Political Knowledge* (1953), Ho Chi Minh stated that in Vietnam there exist many economic sectors, and regarding the private capitalist economy, capitalists “exploit workers, but at the same time they also contribute to economic development”<sup>(22)</sup>. Therefore, he put forward the principle of public and private mutual benefit, where both employers and workers benefit. He explained: “Capitalists cannot help but exploit. But the Government prohibits them from exploiting workers too much. The Government must protect the rights of workers.

At the same time, for long-term benefits, workers also let their employers get a reasonable amount of profit, without making excessive demands<sup>(23)</sup>. Thus, Ho Chi Minh's thought on social justice is dialectical suited with Vietnamese reality.

## ***2.2. The reality of applying Ho Chi Minh's thought on social progress and social justice in the renovation period***

Ho Chi Minh's thought on social justice has not always been fully understood. In fact, in many places and at many times, "justice" has been transformed into "leveling" and "egalitarianism"; the socialist reform with the aim of eliminating the multi-sector economy took place somewhat hasty and voluntaristic. Entering the period of renovation, the Party has renewed its thinking on the path to building socialism in Vietnam, including thinking about progress and social justice.

In terms of theory, over the past 40 years, the Party's perception of social justice has changed dramatically and has been increasingly improved. At the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress, for the first time, "social issues" were elevated to "social policies" and placed in relation to the economy: "The level of economic development is the material condition for implementing social policies, but social goals are the purpose of economic activities"<sup>(24)</sup>. The 6<sup>th</sup> Congress determined that it is necessary to "implement social justice in accordance with the specific conditions of our country"<sup>(25)</sup>. At the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Party affirmed that "implementing social policies well is the driving force for economic development"<sup>(26)</sup>, not just an economic goal as in the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress. In the Platform adopted at the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress (1991), the Party clearly recognized the need to "combine economic growth with social progress". At the 8<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Party emphasized the connection between economic growth and social progress, justice must be implemented immediately in each step of development, not waiting for the economy to develop highly before solving social problems. The Party has a new understanding of social justice, that it is not only based on labor but also on other contributions (capital, intelligence, experience) and social justice is also equality of opportunity, at the "input" of the production process: "Social justice must be reflected in both the reasonable distribution of means of production and the distribution of production results, in creating conditions for everyone to have the opportunity to develop and make good use of their capacity"<sup>(27)</sup>. Also at the 8<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Party identified "social justice" as a characteristic of socialism in Vietnam and this characteristic was further affirmed in later Party documents.

By the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress, the phrase "social security" was officially used with the policy of "gradually and steadily expanding the social insurance and security system"<sup>(28)</sup>. By the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Party emphasized "implementing social progress and social justice in every step and every development policy"<sup>(29)</sup>, that is, implementing social equity must be through State policies, especially "policies to ensure the provision of essential and equal public services to all people in education and training, job creation, health care, culture - information, physical education and sports"<sup>(30)</sup>.

At the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress, the new point in the Party's perception is the connection between social progress, justice, and social security. Therefore, in addition to distributing mainly based on labor results, economic efficiency, and capital contributions and other resources as before, the State also "distributes through the social security and social welfare system"<sup>(31)</sup>.

At the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Party identified socio-economic development as the central task<sup>(32)</sup>, meaning that social issues were placed on par with economic issues. In order to effectively implement social progress and social justice, the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress advocated "renovating mechanisms, mobilizing, allocating and diversifying resources to implement social policies" and "developing a comprehensive social security system, moving towards universal coverage with policies to prevent, minimize and overcome risks for the people, ensuring assistance for vulnerable groups"<sup>(33)</sup>. The way to implement social equity in our country is: "Do not wait until the economy reaches a high level of development before implementing social progress and social justice"; "Do not "sacrifice" social progress and social justice to pursue mere economic growth. On the contrary, every economic policy must aim at the goal of social development; every social policy must aim to create a driving force to promote economic development and ensure social progress and justice; encouraging legal enrichment must go hand in hand with ensuring social security, hunger eradication, poverty reduction, and care for those with meritorious services and those in difficult circumstances"<sup>(34)</sup>.

In terms of practice, the implementation of social progress and social justice has made achievements in all areas. In the economy, the State recognizes a multi-sector economy with many forms of ownership and distribution. In terms of living standards, people's lives have been constantly improved as GDP has increased and reached USD 4,700 in 2024<sup>(35)</sup>. The State has well implemented the "Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction" program, and the poverty rate in 2024 is 1.93%<sup>(36)</sup>. In education, universalization of lower secondary education was completed in 2010, and on February 28, 2025, the Politburo decided to implement a tuition-free policy for students from preschool to high school in public schools from September 2025. This decision creates a step forward in implementing the motto "No one left behind". Regarding health, the State has developed a national strategy to improve people's health, provide health insurance services and health insurance subsidies for the poor; children under 6 years old receive free medical examination and treatment; the health insurance coverage rate in our country has increased rapidly, from 60.9% (in 2010) to 91% (in 2022)<sup>(37)</sup>.

The State ensures the provision of essential public services, builds a diverse social security system, and strongly develops the insurance system to support people in risky situations. The work of gratitude and support for people with meritorious service has been increasingly improved; the social welfare fund is constantly expanding. These achievements have contributed to raising Vietnam's Human

Development Index (HDI). In the 2024 rankings, Vietnam's HDI is 0.727, increasing by 8 places from 115<sup>th</sup> to 107<sup>th</sup>, continuing to be among the developing countries with a high HDI index<sup>(38)</sup>.

Alongside these achievements, the implementation of social progress and social justice still faces many difficulties and limitations. Because of the pressure of economic growth targets, many sectors and localities have not paid due attention to the implementation of social progress and social justice. Poverty reduction has achieved impressive results, but the risk of falling back into poverty is still high, and the poverty and near-poverty rates are concentrated in remote areas, especially in ethnic minority areas, making it difficult to implement the great national unity bloc.

Politically, the state of "formal democracy" still exists in the Party; negative manifestations in personnel work have eliminated equality of opportunity.

In terms of economics, the private economy still has difficulty accessing capital and land compared to the state economy and FDI enterprises; the role of the business community has not been fully recognized.

In society, gender equality has been affirmed in legal terms but in practice still lacks the conditions for full implementation of rights; as a result, the rate of women's participation in social activities remains lower than men's. In education, the limited number of public schools in the public education system causes inequality in the opportunity for children to receive free or low-cost education. In terms of health care, the overload and quality disparities in health facilities have not been overcome; people's life expectancy has increased but their quality of life is not high. The salary system is still egalitarian, unfair to those who contribute a lot of intelligence and effort to society. The social security system is still rudimentary.

The above persistent problems are due to the fact that Vietnam is in the transition period to socialism. To become a developed country following the socialist path, the Party and the State need to continue to renew methods of implementing social justice to create momentum for the development of all aspects of the country.

### ***2.3. Solutions to promote social progress and social justice according to Ho Chi Minh's thought in the new era of development***

Ho Chi Minh always affirmed that our Party has no other interests than the interests of the country and the people. History continuously develops and the country is entering a new era of development. At this time, implementing social progress and social justice not only affirms the superiority of the regime and creates social consensus, but also contributes to maintaining political stability and enhancing the prestige of the Party. To turn resolutions and policies into reality, it is necessary to have a system of correct solutions and determination to implement them in the spirit of "only discuss doing, not discuss retreating".

*Firstly*, raising awareness of the entire political system, first of all of the team of leadership and management cadres, policy-making agencies and policy implementation monitoring agencies, about the importance of progress and social

justice. At present, not a few grassroots units and individuals still underestimate social goals, not paying due attention to studying and making strategic forecasts on the trends of social change; the goal of social justice has not been concretized into suitable indicators for each field, each population group, each region, etc. Therefore, the entire political system must deeply realize that the superiority of the regime, the quality and talent of the ruling force, are ultimately “measured” by the people’s lives, the level of progress, and social justice. At this time, we must both fight against the “leftist” tendency, that is, pursuing economic growth at all costs, and fight against the rightist tendency, populist ideology, and solve social problems beyond the capacity of the economy. Social justice requires addressing many tasks, so the Party must both diversify resources for this policy and clearly identify the key tasks that need to be carried out, such as maintaining national target programs on sustainable poverty reduction, building new rural areas, supporting socio-economic development in ethnic minority areas, border areas and islands... to ensure the principle of leaving no one behind.

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*Secondly*, institutionalize the Party’s policies, perfect policies, and the legal system on social progress and equality. Nowadays, equality is not only in distribution but also in opportunity. Therefore, the State must create a legal framework so that all people can enjoy equality “from the starting line” and in all aspects of life. In the economy, there needs to be a Business Law to create opportunities for everyone to do business and enrich themselves legitimately. In politics, there needs to be mechanisms and policies so that many non-Party members with suitable capacity have the opportunity to run for election, self-nominate, and be elected to the people’s representative bodies. To achieve gender equality and ethnic equality, there needs to be legal regulations on higher proportion of women and ethnic minorities in the people’s representative bodies. Equality is also the evaluation, treatment, remuneration, and reward commensurate with each person’s contribution in many forms such as labor, capital, intelligence, talent, etc. Therefore, it is necessary to build a system of evaluation criteria and incentives through actual results, especially in honoring outstanding intellectuals and businessmen.

*Thirdly*, promote the process of economic restructuring and streamlining the political system. Economic growth is the condition for implementing all social policies. For sustainable development, Vietnam must aim to develop a green economy and a circular economy to have solid resources for implementing social goals.

The streamlining of the organizational apparatus needs to be carried out quickly. First of all, it is necessary to transfer capital resources for a cumbersome apparatus to implement social security policies. Streamlining the apparatus creates the basis for institutional reform, creating convenience for people and businesses when accessing public services.

*Fourthly*, promote the regulatory and leadership role of the State. The market economy, especially the market economy in its early stages, will not automatically move towards progress and social justice. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the regulatory capacity of the State to overcome the negative impacts of the market economy and ensure the interests of the people. The State must stabilize the prices of essential goods and impose a special consumption tax on high-end goods; use tax policies to regulate income. The State also needs to continue to expand and diversify insurance systems, promote the socialization of health and education services. Excessive social stratification, harassment and abuse of power by public officials, and the disease of wastefulness all have negative impacts on the implementation of progress and social justice. Therefore, the State must strengthen the control of power and fight corruption and wastefulness. The State needs to have appropriate policies to promptly respond to the consequences of climate change and “population aging” because these issues are creating many challenges for social security. In the context of streamlining the apparatus and rapid shifts in the labor market, the State needs to develop a strategy for vocational training and retraining people. Promote the construction of social housing and have a fair distribution policy as people’s “settling down” becomes increasingly difficult.

*Fifthly*, reform the judicial system to ensure fairness and legal equality for every citizen. Fairness in the judicial and criminal fields is of particular importance because it involves the honor, life, and property of individuals and families, and if mistakes occur, they are often difficult to correct, or even impossible to correct. Therefore, Resolution No. 27-NQ/TW dated November 9, 2022, of the 6<sup>th</sup> Central Conference of the 13<sup>th</sup> tenure emphasizes the requirement to “build a democratic, equitable, humane, complete, timely, synchronous, unified, public, transparent, stable, feasible, and accessible legal system”. Fair implementation of the law is understood as all organizations and individuals must comply with the law, especially with regard to their legal obligations; legal entities must not violate the law, and people’s courts have the duty to protect justice, human rights, and civil rights. To avoid injustice in judicial activities, it is necessary to perfect the legal process and improve the quality and responsibility of the judicial staff.

### **3. Conclusion**

President Ho Chi Minh once affirmed: Truth is what benefits the people. The rightness or wrongness of the Party’s guidelines, policies, leadership and governing capacity are ultimately “measured” by the level of social justice, progress and

happiness index of the people. To bring the country into a new era of development, the Party must first of all “strive” to have a greater vision, will, determination, and more creative ways of implementing social progress and social justice, thereby creating sustainable development for the country and contributing to the common progress of humanity ■

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● **Endnotes:**

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