

Mid-nineteenth century liberalism critical essay



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In the early 19th century, societies of the world struggled to establish equity of rights for both the proletariats and the bourgeoisie. This struggle led to the emergence of liberalism. The proletariats constituted the peasant people who were also property-less.

The bourgeoisie owned all factors of production besides exercising control over the proletariats. The bourgeoisies were known to be materialistic who constantly strived to gain respectability from the proletariats.

Essentially, the bourgeoisie established the production systems and employed the proletariat in the capacity of what historian termed as slaves. Liberalists were against this kind of economic relationship between the two.

Consequently, over the nineteenth century, liberalisms became an ideology, which later culminated into a reform movement in Europe advocating for both economic and political equality and equity among members of different social classes.

In this analysis paper, the author investigates the liberalists' achievements by 1851 through an analysis of two articles on liberalism appearing in the British liberal magazine: *The Economist*.

The articles are "The Exhibition -The Crystal Palace" (*The Economist* 93-97) and "The First Half of the Nineteenth Century: Progress of The Nation and Race" (*The Economist* 97-100).

Although both articles talk about the great exhibition of 1851, they have an incredible focus on the self-image coupled with the worldview of liberal and liberalism in the mid 19th century.

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In *The Economist*, it is evident that, by 1851, when the great exhibition was held, the liberalists had begun to celebrate the achievement of their belief that politics has central roles in preservation coupled with maximization of people's freedoms of choice including making a choice to work or not.

Although the Bourgeoisie of 1850 needed to have their industries run by people from the lower social classes who owned no property, they could not force people to work for them or even exploit them at the advantage of their individualistic gains in the threshold of the 18th century.

The Economist supports this argument when it reckons, " in the early ages, when labor that was necessary to procure subsistence was performed by the slaves with the work of slaughter being the only toil performed by the free men, most kinds of useful industries were considered degraded and degrading" (94).

In this extent, it is arguable that the machineries, works of art, and other things that were being showcased at the great exhibitions were produced with minimal exploitation of people within the past half century.

In this end, *The Economist* informs, " the proposed exhibition marks the great fact that useful industries have now wholly escaped from contamination of slavery, and is raised to post of honor" (94).

Therefore, although the bourgeoisies' way of thinking in 1950s was still driven by their economic materialism coupled with philistinism, there was a limitation for violation of human rights to satisfy these key drivers of bourgeoisies.

This limitation was brought by force due to embracement of liberalism ideologies in many nations including the United States and the nations located in Europe in the 19th century.

Within the first half of the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie encountered several achievements. The achievements were related with integrating liberalism in their economic, legal, material culture, and political operations. Some of these achievements are discussed below.

Liberalism advocated for peaceful political regimes as the basis of economic growth.

This view is conspicuous in the argument, “ the convocation of all nations to meet in London in 1851 has already had, in part, some of the best effects expected from it, and has contributed to dispose men’s minds to peace, and secure political response to nations” (The Economist 94).

In this context, it is arguable that, through enactment of constitutions and political representations, political harmony was the key driver of economic success of the bourgeoisie.

This new dimension of thought driven by paradigms of liberalism was central in the evaluation of the impacts of political-driven warfare on production systems.

Liberalists agree that appropriate government representatives who foster peace was necessary since “ increased friendly communication between distant and too-often hostile communities had some influence on the minds

of those who were lately sharpening their words to go for war” (The Economists 94).

In the past, the wars were caused by disagreements in the allocation and distribution of resources among the bourgeoisie. Thus, in the liberalist view, constitutions and government representatives are critical in ensuring equality and equity in resource distribution and accessibility.

Any nation operating on liberalism ideology needs to have strong legal frameworks that make provisions for equity among all people. In terms of law, liberalists accept that incredible strides were made by mid 19th century in terms of protection of individual rights.

The Economists support this assertion by further informing, “ a great improvement in this respect is obvious in all classes” (96) and that “ the poor are not so rude, the rich not as arrogant as they were” (The Economist 96).

In this perspective, it is arguable that bourgeoisies had flexed their stands on equality to permit progression of the low class persons towards economic independency as a fundamental human right. Property right is yet another phenomenal issue that surrounds the ideologies of liberalism.

The Economist argues that, by 1850, a progress was recorded so that “ another and a larger class are ever prone to seek refuge from baffled exertions, disappointed hopes, and dissatisfied desires in a distant future in which all expectations, reasonable and unreasonable, are to have their fulfillment” (98).

This effort was a major stride in enhancing protection of property rights irrespective of social classes of people. From this discussion, liberals emphasize issues of defending private property. They are also interested with the impacts of concentrations of various private properties on the operation of the economy.

Liberals are not engaged in the laissez-faire policies in all times because, to them, market systems never guaranteed various conditions that define their existence.

Within the first fifty years of the 19th century, a shift was observed from the norm in which “ economists were supposed to be, by nature and occupation, cold, arithmetical, and unenthusiastic” (The Economist 98).

Being arithmetical implied focusing on the facilitation of free trade, stock markets, and establishment of commercial codes to increase returns to bourgeoisie.

Consequently, the call of the liberal was to ensure economic equity among people of different classes. In the 19th century, a major progression was made towards this effect.

The liberalism of 1950 paid much interest. They celebrated changes in the material culture of people. There was an increased production of materials both economically and in large quantities.

This increment pulled down the cost of materials thus making it possible for people in low social economic backgrounds to afford material culture, which was essentially a reserve of the bourgeoisie.

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For example, The Economist argued that the change of state of art and production systems would make it possible for the crystal palace to “adopt ordinary dwellings, and may be applied to improve the houses of the poor” (98).

Liberals also celebrated the achievement of improvement of urban and monumental architectures, which included improvement in railway transport system in which both bourgeoisies and proletariats could be equalized by the fact that they would board the same trains.

From the liberalists’ perspective, cultural hegemony of the bourgeoisie is characterized by mass consumption of luxury goods that were mass-produced. Such goods are of high quality.

The Economist describes the achievement of such a cultural hegemony, “while preparing the house for our residence during the last winter and spring, it was filled with all sorts of furniture, books, pictures, and piano... nothing received any injury” (95).

Comparing this description of bourgeoisies’ Darley with the palace where the exhibition was to be held, it is clear that an incredible transition in the cultural hegemony of the bourgeoisies and proletariats had been achieved within 19th century.

Although the elegance of crystal palace reflected a typical bourgeoisies house, The Economist claims, “the light and elegant, the cheerful and airy, the cheap and whole some style of building the crystal palace may be

adopted for ordinary dwellings , and may be applied to improve the houses of the poor” (95).

In this context, the view of liberalism on aspects of equality is explored. Creation of methods of making housing similar to those occupied by the higher class people in an economic way gives the proletariats an opportunity to attain equality with the with bourgeoisies.

Indeed, even by 1850, differences in the consumptions of mass-produced products were still valid on the grounds of economic capabilities of different people.

This argument is evidenced by the position held by *The Economist*, “ as the ease and comfort of the increasing multitude will be more cheaply and better provided for, lands will be everywhere adorned with crystal palaces” (95). At the time of holding the great exhibition, there was only one crystal palace.

Its state of art was arguably affordable for the bourgeoisies. Making it possible for the low-class people to have equal accessibility to means of putting up similar palaces was a subject of equality and equity in the distribution of resources including land.

Unfortunately, the application of liberalism concepts was a challenge since land remained a reserve of bourgeoisies. This argument means that production of materials to suit the elegance of cultures of the bourgeoisies' elegant dwelling places would continue to be a cultural artifact of the bourgeoisies.

As opposed to the liberalism perspective, there needs to be equality in the society so that people would have an equal accessibility to all materials and items that constitute cultural artifacts of a particular group of people.

Advocating for equality based on perspectives of economic balance driven by concepts of “ sense of social charity and justice, religious freedom, and political wisdom” (99) opens liberalism and its followers to criticisms. These challenges are discussed below.

From the position of the liberalism, all societies need to transform collectively to attain social success in which all people ought to be equal in all key pillars that define a society such as politics and economic endowment levels. However, the old age hangs on.

It is hardly incorporated in the worldview of the liberals. In this context, The Economist argues, “ too many of us are disposed to place our golden age in the past especially the tendency of the imaginative, the ignorant, and the old” (99).

The old here implies the resistance to alter aristocratic thoughts and the materialism culture of the bourgeoisies to permit liberalism culture to flourish. Indeed, in any social system, there must be producers and a class of workers who provide services to the bourgeoisies who own the factors of production.

This perspective is explored even by the modern-day capitalist nations following the failure of socialism.

Although liberalism attempts to create a justified society, which promotes equity and enjoyment of moral rights, religious rights, political rights, and protection of private property, in the economic sense, the old hangs on.

To promote equity economically, liberalism and its followers needs to demonstrate how bourgeoisies would be economically equal with proletariats while at the same time maintaining their status and performance of the economy.

While the adoption of liberalism concepts in the formation of the 1950s' governments guaranteed equal rights for all people irrespective of their social classes, the working class grew though it was not assimilated in the liberal worldview.

The Economist makes this point clear when the magazine argues, " another class and larger classes are ever prone to seek refuge from battled exertions with disappointed hopes and dissatisfied desires in a distant future" (98).

The larger class constitutes the working class or the proletariats.

From The Economist's position, even though the 1850 liberalism developments brought up the living conditions of the working class, it was still hard to incorporate them fully into the liberal worldview. In fact, The Economist asserts, " we confess that we cannot share their disappointment nor echo their complaints.

We look upon the past with respect and affection as a series of stepping stones of that high and advanced position, which we actually hold, and from the future, we hope for realization of those dreams" (98).

Consequently, even amid the achievements of the working class in the 1850, they were still entangled in class struggles.

Under the surface of liberalism, perspectives of capitalism and meritocracy existed. This case challenged the liberalism advocates coupled with its followers.

The Economist informs that production of materials cheaply had the overall impact of making sure that the working class would afford both cultural artifacts and other elegant things that were in the past a reserve of the bourgeoisies.

This argument perhaps explains why “ in 1850, population of nearly 30, 000, 000 paid 50, 000, 000 pounds of taxes while, in 1801, population of 15, 000, 000 paid not less than 63, 000, 000 pounds” (The Economist 100).

For the materials to be cheap such that the proletariats could afford them, there was high deployment of machines for mass production.

This attempt meant that the bourgeoisies would continue reaping large profits from the sales of the material now not from the small wealthy class but from the larger less wealthy class by virtue of economies of scale.

Therefore, even though major strides seemed to have been attained at the surface, fostering equality of the bourgeoisies and the proletariats in terms of buying power was problematic since capitalism and meritocracy was still persistent.

The Economist. “ Early liberal thought and practice.” The economist 9.
1(1851): 93-100. Print.