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SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE CONSIDERATIONS OF CLASSICAL ECONOMISTS

KWESTIE SPOŁECZNE W ROZWAŻANIACH KLASYKÓW EKONOMII

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Summary: For many years, social security was motivating not only individuals but also researchers to act, however a new approach to the problem was associated with the rise of capitalist reality, i.e. the processes of the economy and society's modernisation. The process of modernisation was closely related to transformations in two spheres: economic, i.e. three revolutions: agrarian, commercial and industrial, and social, i.e. the formation of an industrial society and the ongoing process of democratisation of social life. Capitalist reality forced a new approach not only to the management process but the position of Man in this process (the new reality revealed deficiencies in the existing system of values and thus in the perception of personal and interpersonal relations). While exalting humanity and its needs, the new social and economic reality has forced a different view of social issues and thus the role of the state in the simultaneously occurring process of growing wealth and the impoverishment of society. This left its mark in the approach of classical economists and their successors to social issues.

Keywords: classical economics, social issues, market, the state.

Streszczenie: Bezpieczeństwo socjalne od wieków motywuje do działania nie tylko poszczególne jednostki, ale także badaczy. Nowe spojrzenie na ten problem związane było z narodzinami kapitalistycznej rzeczywistości – z procesami modernizacji gospodarki oraz społeczeństwa. Proces modernizacji był powiązany z przeobrażeniami w dwóch sferach: w sferze ekonomicznej (z trzema rewolucjami: agrarną, handlową oraz przemysłową) oraz w sferze społecznej (z budową społeczeństwa przemysłowego i postępującym procesem demokratyzacji życia społecznego). Kapitalistyczna rzeczywistość wymusiła nowe spojrzenie nie tylko na proces gospodarowania, ale i na miejsce człowieka w tym procesie (nowa rzeczywistość ujawniła niedomagania w dotychczasowym systemie wartości, a tym samym w postrzeganiu człowieka oraz relacji międzyludzkich). Nowe realia społeczne i ekonomiczne, wywyższając człowieka i jego potrzeby, wymusiły odmienne spojrzenie na kwestie społeczne, a tym samym na rolę państwa w postępującym równolegle procesie bogacenia się i ubożenia społeczeństwa. Dlatego odcisnęły piętno na podejściu klasyków ekonomii (a później ich kontynuatorów) do kwestii społecznych.

Słowa kluczowe: ekonomia klasyczna, kwestie społeczne, rynek, państwo.

1. Introduction

In the second half of the 17th century the concurrent process of pre-industrial transformations in the following three spheres started in Western Europe:

- economic; the process of transition from feudal system towards an industrialised system (to a capitalist way of production),
- social; the process of transition from a rural society to an urban society, which was automatically associated with a departure from the traditional family model,
- political; the process of the political emancipation of society was activated, which contributed to the slow democratisation of political life.

Economic and social transformations inevitably led to society's polarisation and the intensification of the financial and income diversity of the population. At the same time, while modifying the system of values and social standards, this process emphasised the ethical and moral conduct of individuals in their striving for the maximisation of individual benefits.

The ethical and moral approach of classical economists, such as Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill and Jean Ch. Simonde de Sismondi, defined the view not only on the market and state, but also on pressing social issues. Classical economists approached the interpretation of the goal of economic policy in a dual way, either as a repair of the market errors (Smith) or of state errors (Mill and Sismondi). This dualistic approach to the interpretation of the goal of economic policy gave rise to discrepancies in their perception of the social issues and methods through which essential social issues are solved.

The objective of the paper is a comparative analysis of the dual view of classical economists (Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill and Jean Charles Simonde de Sismondi) on social issues that directly resulted from capitalist reality. Differences in viewing social issues affected the methods in which they were solved, yet considered an acceptable ethical and moral system.

2. Economic transformations – the path to capitalist order

A capitalist economy (economic liberalism) emerged in England and its origins were related to the agrarian revolution that first prompted a commercial revolution and later an industrial revolution. The first two “revolutions” accelerated the process of capitalisation of socio-economic relations in villages and cities, and the third started the mechanism of technological progress in the textile industry, iron industry, coal mining as well as in transport and communication. Technological progress contributed to the dissemination of factory production and the emergence of free labour power, capital and production concentration, the separation of ownership and management, and the growth of productivity as well as changes in the system of values.

The agrarian revolution was related to the system of the so-called enclosures, i.e. the creation of big, commercial farms oriented not on agricultural production, but on

sheep farming and wool production (breeding favoured the maximisation of profits because it brought a larger income and demanded less workload) [Cameron, Neal 2004, pp. 195-198; Kaliński 2008, pp. 45-49; Maciejewski, Sadowski 2007, pp. 71-81; Topolski 2003, pp. 17-29; Zins 2001, pp. 101-109]. Thus, the capitalisation process in the country contributed to the commodification of agricultural production and the development of trade in goods, and also to liberation of the surplus of workforce (capitalisation contributed to the abolishment of serfdom) that was moving from villages to cities in search for a livelihood. A growing economy and the decentralisation of politics set the stage for industrial revolution, the rise of industrial capitalism and industrial society [Baldwin 1990, pp. 44-54; Głąbicka 2001, pp. 51-75; Gray 1994, pp. 30-39; Semkow 1988, pp. 12-13; Szpak 2007, pp. 125-182; Topolski 2003, pp. 73-74; Wickham 2018, pp. 179-182; Zagóra-Jonszta 2000, pp. 9-12].

Shaping the capitalist method of production was accompanied by the conflict of interests between employers and workers, i.e. between individual freedom and social freedom, individualism and collectivism, private ownership and socialised ownership, labour and capital, as well as the market and the state. The above conflict of interests was noticed by philosophers and “economists”, including David Hume, Jeremy Bentham, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Jean C.L. Simonde de Sismondi, where:

- Smith spoke about individual freedom, i.e. about freedom that is an individual issue of a person, and the principle of personal freedom resulting from dominance, including freedom of management.
- Mill spoke about socialised freedom, i.e. about freedom ceding the responsibility to protect (help) an individual against the destructive mechanisms of an uncontrolled market to the state.
- Simonde de Sismondi spoke about socialised freedom, i.e. freedom supported by the state ensuring the protection of interests of economically the most vulnerable groups [Dahrendorf 1993, pp. 48-53; Piątkowski 1978, pp. 61-95; Zabiegalik 1994, pp. 487-488].

Despite different views on the “deficiencies” of human nature (freedom and private ownership), Smith and Mill agreed that the market mechanism, institutions, law, as well as habits and morality would soften the antagonisms because free competition would encourage people to act, to grow wealthy and improve living conditions. “Rivalry and competition make the achievement of perfection even in humble professions the object of ambition, which often stimulates towards a really strong effort” [Smith 2007, vol. 2, p. 494]. Therefore, market and free competition would contribute to the elimination of the negative consequences of economic inequalities (injustice) and thereby, to an improvement in the economy’s efficiency. Sismondi, on the other hand, presented a different approach to the above issue, because he noticed the source of growing economic disparities and increasing social problems in free competition and the motives of individual profits: “(...) existence of social classes of the rich and the poor, capitalists and workers whose interests were (...) in continuous mutual conflict” [Galbraith 1991, p. 110].

While glorifying individual liberty, private ownership and free competition, English classical economists pronounced for market dominance and the marginalisation of the state both in the economic and social sphere. Therefore they agreed that free competition and an efficiently operating market mechanism guaranteed the maximisation of profits in the individual as well as the global aspect [Drozdowicz 2008, pp. 135-136; Rau 2000, pp. 87-91].

In France, however, absolutism and feudal relations favoured economic protection, including regulations and extensive control, and they restricted liberty and freedom of actions. Therefore, absolutism in connection with the policy of protectionism were preserving the feudal order and they guaranteed the privileged position of the Church. Thanks to this, they postponed the process of transition to capitalist relations of production and to the reconstruction of social governance [Baszkiewicz 1999, pp. 70-75; Gray 1994, pp. 30-31].

Hence the different approach of the French to the issues of socio-economic life resulted from specific local determinants of a socio-economic, as well as an ethical and moral character. French philosophers and the authors of the *Great Encyclopaedia* (the advocates of anti-feudal ideology and at the same time the forerunners of liberalism) agreed that socio-economic life should be based on the idea of equality and freedom. Thus they also believed in the reform actions of an enlightened monarch that would activate the process of reconstruction of society and the economy and contribute to the rise of the society of smallholders living in equality and justice. The ideal of a wise and effective government inspired Jean Ch.L. Simonde de Sismondi [Black 1997, pp. 258-276].

3. English classics – view on social issues

Despite his faith in the “perfection” of the market mechanism (in the theoretical approach a free market guaranteed not only the optimal allocation of resources in economy, but also the optimum level of production and income, including salary), Smith noticed social conflicts resulting from free competition and the domination of private ownership, which in practice contributed to financial and income diversity in society. However, in Smith’s opinion, diversity was a necessary and natural source of social development. This view finds confirmation in his concept of history in which he showed the social results of the marketisation of the poorest workers through labour division. “Servants, labourers and workmen of different kinds, make up the far greater part of every great political society. (...) But what improves the circumstances of the greater part can never be regarded as an inconveniency to the whole. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, clothe and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed and lodged [Smith 2007, vol. 1, p. 101]. Therefore he opted for higher salaries for workers: ”a man must always live by his work, and his wages must at least be sufficient to maintain him. They must even

upon most occasions be somewhat more; otherwise it would be impossible for him to bring up a family, and the race of such workmen could not last beyond the first generation” [Smith 2007, vol. 1, p. 81]. According to Smith, higher wages determined the speed of natural growth but also motivated the workers to more efficient work as well as to the improvement of the already possessed skills and to gain new ones. In this way, the level of labour advancement and specialisation, that determined the pace of economic development was growing: “The liberal reward of labour (...) increases the industry of the common people. (...) A plentiful subsistence increases the bodily strength of the labourer (...) animates him to exert that strength to the utmost (...): where wages are high, accordingly, we shall always find the workmen more active, diligent, and expeditious, than where they are low” [Smith 2007, vol. 1, pp. 104-105]. Furthermore, higher wages positively affected production and consumption, and this, in turn, translated into decent living conditions (living conditions determined procreation) and the acceleration of the speed of capital accumulation, i.e. into economic growth.

However, the reality was far from the Smithsonian vision and therefore in disputes between workers and hired labourers, employers were in the privileged position because they had the right to organise and reach a common position concerning wages and working conditions (workers were deprived of the right for a long time), and the institution of state safeguarded their economic and political interests. “Masters are always and everywhere in a sort of tacit, but constant and uniform combination, not to raise the wages of labour above their actual rate” [Smith 2007, vol. 1, p. 80].

Despite his “pro-employee” attitude, Smith reluctantly referred to social legislation, including work and wages-related legislation. He took the view that the state interference in labour matters would contribute to a decline in the rate of profit and a slowdown in capital accumulation, i.e. a violation of the economic balance and slower growth of wealth. In a situation of imbalance, production (national income) is declining, employment is decreasing (unemployment grows as a result of decline in profitable capital investments) and wages are smaller, which, in turn, leads to the deterioration of living conditions of hired labourers (and a slowdown of population growth). Therefore, support for hired labourers and the poor from the state not only disturbs natural economic processes (the free play of market forces), but also damages the spirit of entrepreneurship and de-activates workers, which only makes their poverty more severe and intensifies social conflicts [Elliot, Peters, Motamadi 2001, vol. 28; Eltis 1975, pp. 426-454; Farmer 1997, pp. 246-255; Zabiegalik 2002, pp. 123-130].

J.S. Mill worked on social issues in a more comprehensive way. He noticed the conflict between private interest and the public good as well as the wealth of an individual and the poverty of many people, and therefore opted for support for the poor (he created the foundations for social liberalism within which he linked the principle of utilitarianism with the principle of justice). Mill separated efficiency

from equality, and in his approach a fairer division of social income was determined both by the mechanism of free competition as well as the state. Thus, Mill writes: “(...) what is fair is useful, justice is a collective name for the most important social utilities, which are socially of great importance” [Mill 1959, p. 110].

While noting the negative effects of the operation of the mechanism of the “invisible hand”, Mill drew attention to the quality of life and the role of the state in the fight for the improvement of the living conditions. “Government activity is never too broad if it does not hamper but supports and stimulates efforts and development of an individual. Evil only starts where it is replaced by its own activity” [Mill 1959, p. 286]. Thus, while not being a supporter of the concept of the minimal state (he approved the Smithsonian vision of the tasks of the state in the sphere of fiscal policy, legal system, judiciary and enforcement measure applied by the police), he noted the “growing up of capitalism” at the same time, and therefore he redefined the tasks facing the state: the unification of the system of weights and measurement to facilitate exchange; the legal protection for economically weaker people; the protection of freedom of all individuals in the society; the organisation of employment services for the poor and those deprived of work; care for the disabled and the diseased by workers adequately prepared by the state; control over the employment of children and youth; the protection of women against moral and economic tyranny; support for scientific discoveries significant for future generations and the appropriate management of state property [Mill 1995, pp. 61-75; Mill 1966, vol. I, pp. 552-560, vol. II, pp. 798-800]. Furthermore, he wanted the state to take care of public education in which he saw the tool of poverty elimination. “(...) the government of good will and sufficiently civilised can believe with no conceit that they have or should have a higher level of culture than an average level of the society they rule and that therefore, they are capable of providing the population with better education and upbringing than they would demand by themselves. Thus, education is one of the things that actually government can provide to the people” [Mill 1966, vol. II, p. 798].

While noticing the problems resulting from the dominance of the *laissez-faire* principle and no interference from the state in the economic sphere, Mill supported the specifically approached intervention of the entity and therefore he distinguished two of its kinds:

- authoritative – he rejected this type of intervention because it was related to restricting the freedom of management with the weakening of the motive of individual profit,
- non-authoritative – he accepted this type of intervention because it did not destroy the spirit of entrepreneurship and was limited only to giving advice and formulating recommendations supporting the improvement of the efficiency of economy and society functioning [Mill 1966, vol. II, pp. 778-781].

While presenting a new view on the state and its functions, Mill automatically addressed the problem of poverty. Mill’s analysis showed that it was a result of irrational economic choices of specific individuals, and thus resulted: “(...) either

from indolence, or carelessness, or because people think it is fine to pay and ask no questions, (...) three-fourths of those who can afford it, give much higher prices than necessary for the things they consume; while the poor often do the same from ignorance and defect of judgement, want of time for searching and making inquiry, and not infrequently, from coercion, open or disguised" [Mill 1966, vol. I, p. 583]. Thus, insufficient knowledge resulting from the lack of education, especially of hired labourers, was the main reason for the irrationality of the actions of individuals and the consequent poverty. To limit the extent of poverty and increase the general level of labourers' wealth, it was necessary to introduce compulsory education. According to Mill, educated, healthy and not demoralized people were economically and socially more productive, and thus they did not threaten the existing social order [Ludwikowski, Woleński 1978, pp. 78-107].

4. Social issues in Jean C.L. Simonde de Sismondi's approach

The specific nature of the French determinants of the growth of capitalism affected Simonde de Sismondi's views. In his approach, Sismondi considered unfavourable social and economic trends, i.e. the decline in employment and wages, the progressing process of population pauperisation and the pursuit of profit (exploitation intensified the divergencies between consumption and production and brought a crisis of overproduction), that were revealed in the 1830s [Danowska-Prokop 2014, pp. 47-48; Zagóra-Jonszta 2016, pp. 92-96]. The new reality forced Sismondi to redefine the subject of economics, and so "*Political economics should teach us the theory of general well-being* [Simonde de Sismondi 1955, vol. 2, p. 296] or *Material well-being of Man so far as it depends on the state, is the subject of political economics* [Simonde de Sismondi 1955, vol. 1, p. 25]. According to Sismondi, political economics took together into account two components:

- objective, related to wealth production,
- axiological, related to the just division of produced wealth between the people.

A new look at the subject of economics was associated with the departure from cognitive individualism and with the application of the universalist approach with an emphasis on the social aspect [Piątkowski 1978, pp. 173-187]. Thanks to this, a new opportunity emerged for the modification of division relationships but with no violation to the essence of capitalist production relations.

Analysing the social and economic results of the development of capitalist production relations, Sismondi stated that public authority is established to create production and division conditions and thus the dissemination of common wealth, i.e. a reduction in the extent of poverty. "Government is instituted for the collective protection of each citizen, against harm from others. It opposes public good to any private interest" [Simonde de Sismondi 1955, vol. 2, p. 266]. It was no longer a Smithsonian society composed of identical individuals, seeking to achieve personal profit in conditions of natural freedom by means of an "invisible hand" that would generate beneficial effects for the whole society.

The approach proposed by Sismondi resulted from the evolution of socio-economic conditions. Therefore he supported the system of guaranties from the state authorities and employers. In the system of guaranties, the employer (entrepreneur) obliged themselves to:

- employ workers and provide a regular income,
- pay the worker benefits in case of their incapacity for work (due to health reasons),
- provide security for the worker in case of permanent incapacity to work,
- provide security for the worker for old age [Simonde de Sismondi, vol. 2, pp. 278, 285-286].

The benefits of the system of warranties also included landowners (according to the concept, they obtained the right to a pension in return for the sale or lease of land), tenants, craftsmen and the employers themselves [Zagóra-Jonszta 2016, pp. 92-96].

Economic instability, growing social conflict and dynamic technological progress encouraged Sismondi to reject the principles of liberalism and the new approach to the state as a coordinator of both economic and social life. Thus, with the use of legal and fiscal, tools this entity should:

- legalise operations of trade unions,
- regulate women's and children's working time,
- reduce the working time and increase wages,
- introduce labour and social laws,
- determine conditions for the fair division of produced wealth,
- introduce protection of the poor (system of benefits),
- stimulate the level of production and trends of desired industry development (he supported the elements of planning on a macro-economic level),
- protect small-scale production,
- organise public works.

According to Sismondi, an active state will restrict the imperfections of a capitalist economy based on free competition and motives of individual profit on the one hand, and on the other hand it will reduce property and income divergencies, and thus will increase the level of wealth of the whole of society.

5. Conclusions

The first wave of industrial revolution contributed not only to modernisation, i.e. the development of a capitalist economy and the emergence of industrial society, but also to the reconstruction of social relations. This, in turn stimulated the increase of expectations of individuals towards the state in terms of social issues, i.e. taking responsibility, by the state, for the level of social security.

Except for Sismondi, in the opinions of classical economists, the state was a bad manager because in its operations it was not guided by the motive of private interest

and thus it could not control and coordinate its own activity. This attitude was related to the reluctance to social legislation, including labour and salary legislation. According to classical economists, the social activity of the state would negatively affect the rate of profit and the speed of capital accumulation and thus the pace of economic growth. This would violate the economic balance.

While not sharing the optimism of the English classical economists, Sismondi opted for the modification of capitalist production relationships (state interventionism) in the sphere of the structure of division of produced national income which would contribute to the establishment of social legislation, the reduction of unemployment, the increase of salaries and the improvement of living conditions of small-scale producers and hired workers. Therefore, state activity in the process of meeting the socio-economic needs was to prevent the social exclusion of economically weaker individuals.

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