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SOCIAL CONTRACTS NOT SEMANTICS



I HAD INTENDED to approach this follow-up to my previous article on the disparity between rich and poor from an entirely different angle, but mindful that today as I write is May 1st, International Labor Day, led me to thinking how the misassociation of a word can lead to other problems.

It is only since 2014 that Labor Day has again been officially recognized in Indonesia, of course, the previous casual celebrations coming to an end after 1966 due to it being linked to socialism, which was erroneously equated with communism. That this misassociation exists in much of the US till today is classic evidence of how ignorance can enable fake news to become entrenched in people's minds.

Britain's long-time Labour Party leader, Clement Attlee, was an avowed socialist and during his terms as prime minister from 1945 to 1951 greatly expanded welfare state benefits in many areas, as well as nationalizing various industrial sectors believed to be vital to the public interest.

He was strongly averse to communism, however, and when Russia began its blockade of West Berlin in June 1948, joined the US in facilitating aircrew from the UK, US, Canadian, French, Australian, New Zealand and South African armed forces in flying over 200,000 sor-

ties to supply the citizens of West Berlin with food and other basic essentials of life during the 15 months until Russia lifted its blockade in September 1949.

Meriam-Webster's prime definition of socialism is: "any of various economic and political theories advocating collective or governmental ownership and administration of the means of production and distribution of goods". Even Marxist doctrine only defines it as an intermediate stage between capitalism and communism.

Yet in many parts of the world "socialism" continues to be a dirty word when it comes to describing economic or political beliefs, especially among the older generation. Even in countries where left-wing governments have come to power, alternative terms have been used: labor, social democrats, democratic socialists, etc.


There is hope though, as in the US, plus elsewhere one suspects, that the younger generation will not be as weighed down with this political baggage from the past. To them, socialism has a greater connection with social contracts being made with society.

On that score they are right, for social contracts need to be entered into, and honored, in the fields of

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education and health, among others, if the millennial generation is not to become the first to see lifetime earnings fall below those that their parents enjoyed.

Already they are falling on hard times in the industrialized world, as job opportunities diminish even for those with university degrees, while limited earnings are forcing professionals to take a second part-time job to make ends meet. No wonder a growing percentage of millennials are being forced to live with their parents, close to 50% across EU member nations.

We haven't reached that point in Indonesia yet, although one doubts that many millennials could afford to buy property in Jakarta. What we need are social contracts not semantics! 



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