

**COMMON PROPERTY UNDER THE TRANSFER TO A MARKET ECONOMY: Lessons of Soviet Practices of Common Property Management**

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Fascinated by Marx's interpretation of political economy, revolutionaries of the beginning of the twentieth century believed that nationalization of capital, natural and human made, is a better and more efficient way of using all resources for the common good. In the twenties and early thirties there was hardly anybody in Soviet Russia who realized what was going to happen to common property and common good decades later. After the system presumed to be socialistic has collapsed, hardly anybody is likely to consider seriously what is going to happen to the common good and property, when it is denationalized or "privatized". There is a strong belief again that changing the proprietorship will make any use of whatever more efficient. Everybody seems to be convinced that a private enterprise is managed more efficiently than a public one just because it is private. Common proprietorship is commonly rejected as being bad and inefficient by definition.

Under the circumstances of total nationalization the management of natural resources and the administration of industrial production inevitably become centralized. The structure of subordination and required coordination become too inert and slow to be effective. The personal liability appears to be diluted and feeble - a government official representing the owner, and the manager is the same person and is not deprived of anything essential as a result of sloppy or inefficient management. Ultimately, the government takes all the responsibilities for any possible consequences. However, if political opposition is made illegal, the government is responsible to nobody but itself.

The system devised for rational and efficient use of resources and industrial facilities did not work as expected. As a rule, political decisions were made with little respect for the warnings and recommendations of scientists and were poor substitute for studying the problems and finding feasible solutions. Political arguments were often used when discussing science, a typical case being the debate of genetics. Hereafter political priorities of social groups represented in the governmental structures determined what decisions were made about the use of the common property. In the USSR, since World War II, the military complex attained the strongest political influence and control over the national economy, enhancing its inefficiency and wasteful use of resources.

The transfer to a market economy, started by Gorbachev's "perestroika" program, revealed a number of other problems about common property and its management. First of all, it brought up the evidence that there is a lack of people who have the will and knowledge to care for the commons. The change to a market economy, driven by greed rather than common sense or the common good, is strongly influenced by criminals and corrupted officials. These social groups of the former Soviet Union are the most active in and adapted to the emerging market economy. The common property is now unprotected, regarded as belonging to nobody and accessible for individual profit. The lack of democratic practices and the lack of experience in public participation become threatening to the commons. The risk of misuse is enhanced by the unconditional rejection of everything related to the soviet ideology without even trying to think of the reasons why the system failed to keep the social priorities it announced. Restraining the individual greed and individual profits did not benefit the commons - the military strength and might were made priority of priorities.

Individual greed, ignorance, and lack of truly democratic practices of public participation are the common roots of both the inefficiency of the soviet system and the destructiveness of the transfer to a market economy. The market imposes its own values which are different from the ecological, ethical, and aesthetic ones. A growing tree may have all the latter important as a common benefit for the neighbourhood. Its market value, if important to the owner, is acquired when it is cut and turned into timber. Money received for the timber is not the true measure of any of the values of a living tree because of having a different dimension. It may be, however, regarded as the price which the neighbours pay for the benefits the

living tree provides, if they are rich enough and willing to pay the owner to leave it growing.

Democracy and democratic practices are essential for participation in the management of commons. The soviet system did not support the announced democracy by advancement of mechanisms to make it work. There is still the problem of providing social structures and conditions in which the democratic practices like public participation, crucial for sustaining common property and protection of common good, can be exercised. The social development from absolute (state) monopolism to a market economy makes it more and more obvious that public access to information including basic education as well as current data, and understanding of fundamental principles are necessary before any public participation can be effective in the protection of the common good regardless of whether it is a part of common or private property.

Democracy is rather commonly oversimplified as the submission of the minority to the vote of the majority which really is just a democratic way of making a choice --- it cannot guarantee that no mistakes will be made. Expertise and public discussion, however, are more likely to lead to a better option. Where the common good is concerned, the will to obey the law and keep agreements is important. Agreements are achieved by reasoning, and reasoning rests on information and common sense.

The common property is managed by delegating the administration to protect, sustain and provide the assets of that property. Public participation is necessary to ensure proper management. Restrictions on the use of private property and compensation to the owner may be necessary to protect the common good. More important than property rights are environmental literacy and the awareness of the owner or the administration, and a democratic system.