

Why is Social Equality So Difficult to Establish and Maintain?

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Social inequality is an economic, social, and political problem that is pertinent all over the world. Many people experience injustice at least once in their lifetime. Social inequality has been around for a long time, found between the cracks of nobility and peasantry during the French Revolution, to the suffrages of Women's rights, to racism in America today. One may ask how society can establish equality, however, before we look for ways to get rid of inequality, we must first look at the root of the issue and ask: why is social equality difficult to establish and maintain in the first place? In all societies, inequality is established is given due to the division of labor, social conflict, private property, and the interplay of power, prestige, and privilege. Understanding the relationship between the development of social institutions and the societal roles of people may hold a key into why inequality may be inevitable. Once the development of inequality is established, it becomes difficult to change it for the better. Powerful people, social institutions, culture, socialization, and instruments of force keep the inequal structure, which makes equality difficult to maintain. Due to these constraints, inequality can never be abolished nor altered, therefore making social equality extremely difficult to emerge.

During the French Revolution that ran from 1789-1799, philosophers sought to explain why there was a huge divide between the nobles and peasants. The noble had access to food, healthcare, and power. Peasants often led difficult lives without access to basic needs. Philosophers agreed that the nature of society itself was the reason for inequality (Charon, 2013, p. 67). Naturally, it simply exists because a society exists. The moment an individual is born, he or she has predetermined ranking in society. A noble son is automatically born into a thriving society and a peasant daughter lives out her life in poverty. Some instances may change in an individual's life- a noble man can lose his status in society if he is outed as a traitor and a peasant

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girl may find favor in a noble man's eyes enough to be wedded. However, these occurrences are rare today because the social gap is wider more than ever. The rich seem to get richer, and the poor remain poor. In 2007, the top 1% in America owned 34.6% of total wealth while the least wealthy 80% owned 15%. Another study found that in 2007, the median white household had a net worth of \$143,000 while the black household had \$9,300 and Spanish households had \$9,100 (Charon, 2013, p.67). This disparity has been prevalent even in modern times.

Social structures are placed on a society in every aspect of an organization, group, and even relationships. One reason, the division of labor, shows why social structure becomes unequal. In an organization, people fall into their place based on their social status and occupation. This division of labor has always been around throughout history. Social status within the division of labor includes men and women, leaders, priests, followers, defenders, landowners, slaves, soldiers, generals, and more (Charon, 2013, p. 69). Social rankings between male and females, white Americans and African Americans, privileged class and new working class, and more are split unevenly. Another reason for inequality is due to social conflict. According to Charon (2013), conflict happens when people monopolize valued goods in society (p.74-76). This kind of scarcity allows an unequal division of goods between those with power and those without. Those with more power gain more than those without power. Once there is a "winner" or victory in a society, they can seize more opportunities that may benefit them. Private property is another social institution that makes social equality difficult to establish. There is an unequal sharing of privilege. Not only do people want to monopolize on their goods, but they also want to own property and increase their power and privilege (Charon, 2013, p.76). Those in powerful positions can do more with their influence and can determine which positions determine which privileges. Due to their importance in an organization, the amount of training

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and sacrifice for the organization, and the scarcity of the position, people obtain these privileges. As privilege is collected, individuals have more power. Their power, privilege, and prestige go hand in hand. Power and privilege are linked. The more power a power has, the more privilege they gain and vice versa (Charon, 2013, p.78). Both power and privilege bring prestige, which acts as an influencer. It is a position of honor and high regard and determined by those who know what is valuable. Examples of prestige include high priests, executives of big companies, president, and the rich. Due to the social structure of power, privilege, & prestige, division of labor, social conflict, and ownership of private property, there is no room for equality to grow. It is inevitable whenever there is an organization set up in a society.

Social equality is difficult to maintain. One might ask: Why does inequality continue? There are five mechanisms that prevent equality from flourishing: efforts of the powerful, prevailing social institutions, culture & acceptance, socialization, and society's instrument of force (Charon, 2013, p.79). Efforts of the powerful will always remain if there are people in power. Once they have a taste of their power and privilege, they are not as likely to let it go- at least without a fight. They will always protect themselves with the resources they have and the position that they are in. Company owners have control over people's jobs, the communities they live in, the products that go into production, and the economic decisions made by the elite. Creating institutions is another reason why social equality is difficult to maintain. When people have control over others, they create institutions to keep laws and government. Political institutions are created to make laws (p.81). They are made so that it would benefit the rich. Culturally, social institutions become an influence over people so that they can accept inequality as natural. Usually, people accept inequality because they are born into it and it is all that they know. It becomes a given to most and they are more reluctant to question it because of culture.

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By speaking their language, going by their rules, following their values, and their expectations, an individual is already conditioned to believe that the ruling class must be obeyed, or one will suffer consequences. Socialization leads people to accept their unequal system. The wealthy expect their children to marry other wealthy elites and take over the family business. The children grow up to believe that that is their place in society, and they eventually embrace their forced identity. Working class students learn how to obey and heed to their bosses or superiors. Finally, society's instruments of force keep institutions running. Prisons, police officers, and judges are there to make sure an individual does not try to rebel (p.88). Some may call them revolutionaries; others may call them outlaws. Anyone who tries to threaten the established system is seen as a criminal.

Coming to terms with inequality may not sound ideal to some. Social equality is difficult to establish and maintain because of how the social system works. Inequality exists and it will not go away easily. However, we should strive as a society to keep a healthy balance for all people. A society encourages people to follow the norm and to do their part. Although there is no freedom in inequality, people still have a voice. Perhaps there may be a solution to end inequality one day, but until then, people can never escape the unfairness in a social organization.

References

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