

Thailand and Challenge of becoming 'Welfare state'

Under the uncertain circumstance of democratic issues, there are many conflicts between groups of people that are rooted from inequality in society. Thailand is one of the countries that have obviously had problems in wealth distribution for many decades. To solve this rooted problem, many political parties have 'Welfare states' that have been successfully been adopted in high equality states such as Germany and The Scandinavian countries. Even Europe has used this model to solve the cleavage that happened in the past from social gaps around the late 19 century. The system that embraces and encourages people since we were born seems really impressive for Thais who faced the conflict for many years which become the obstacle to country development. Undoubtedly, this concept becomes one of the new hopes to make Thailand solve the inequality problem, as most Thai people think their 'Utopia' should be, where everyone is equal. We can see from the recent protests that request and demand for the better welfare of the society. However, the challenge of becoming a 'Welfare state' in Thailand is not that easy as it was. It is the right time for Thailand to fully adopt this idea?

Some might question 'What is the welfare state?'. The concept is ideally about the states playing the role to protect and promote the well-being of people based on human rights and freedom. It's trying to highlight the significance of equality, wealth distribution and responsibility to the public to support those who are unable to access and make them have a better well-being. Before considering the welfare system in Thailand context, we have to learn more about how european countries turn to adopt this idea and what is the principle they use. Initially, We have to look backward to the welfare state system role model as Germany, the country that has been faced with inequality conflict the same as Thailand or even worse in the late 19 century. Germany faced many protests from labour toward employer exploitation and high monopoly power. Since the industrialisation revolution, the employers have replaced labour with machines which make labour have lower income. This is the beginning of causing the inequality conflict in political issues. But, Germany has survived the crisis and become one of the strongest economic countries in the world because of the welfare system model. The states adopt a taxation system to distribute wealth with the belief that to let each

person help themselves is not the sustainable solution, but to weaken the unity of the nation. The welfare system helps Germany to enhance social relationships at the same time as stability in political, economy and culture, after this model spread throughout the European Union (Pongpaichit, 2019). The key essence of the welfare system in Europe is the acceptance that everyone has the same right and liberty to access the basic needs e.g. education, welfare, unemployment insurance or household as every person can. However, to strengthen the welfare system we need the help from many actors in the society in the supply side (Government, Politicians, Technocrats), also the cooperation from the private sector and the rich, to invest in the country and make it go in the right direction. In other words, everyone in society has to agree to pay the high tax in terms of maintaining the welfare system.

However, establishing a welfare state is not easy. In the case of the United State, stepping into the "welfare state" is different from the European state. Even during the economic downturn in the years 1929-1935, the government of President Roosevelt (Franklin D. Roosevelt) used the new deal to create welfare programs by the state to address the economic downturn of the unemployed and enacted the Social Security Act. In the United States, it is not all over the place and not as comprehensive as the European welfare state. Undeniably, Thailand has mainly influence from the United States economic system. 'Neoliberalism' has been fostered and encouraged in Thailand for many years. In the case of Thailand, when it comes to calling on the state to provide welfare for certain groups of people, then some argue that creating a welfare state makes people lazy and waiting for help from the government. In fact, some of the welfare that the state needs to provide to its citizens is still very far from being a welfare state. Some of the welfare that the Thai government provides for the people For example, the social security system only covers workers, and education and medical welfare are not all-inclusive, there are people with disabilities, minorities, marginalized people. Many of these benefits are inaccessible. It is difficult for the Thai state to create a "Welfare State" because of the current state authority transformed into taking over the state power all are capital or business groups that do not have the courage to sacrifice their benefit and monopoly power in taxation benefit. For people in society most taxes in Thai society are still indirect taxes. Most taxpayers are lower-class consumers and middle-class consumers who pay VAT on their purchases. And

income from taxes in Thai society is not enough to provide universal social welfare like in Europe.

Even Thailand does not fully adopt this concept of welfare system, but undeniably that welfare systems are not the new thing in Thailand, but have been attempted to establish in Thailand for many times. Looking back in the past, Pridi Panomyong and Puey Ungphakorn tried to propose establishing the welfare state in Thailand for equality of people, unfortunately the propose have been neglect many time from unstability political. Also, It was found that in 1993 the government had started social welfare programs that are the foundation of the initial establishment of the program in Thailand. From this, all the programs are mainly focused to help the poor as a target group, which requires the method to prove that people who get the benefit are truly poor. However, the problem occurs from this weakness of the program, that is the distribution of the program is not thorough enough and stuck with some interest groups that make the group that need the welfare can not easily access the program. Also, this creates the perspective toward people that the 'welfare system' is only for 'poor' but not for 'everyone' in the society. In the year 2001, the Thai Rak Thai government took over the country and imposed a village fund of 1 million baht that everyone has the right to borrow. Still, the problem remains the same: people who borrow money are not really poor. There are many people who are not poor enough to get the benefit card. This project was transformed into a universal, called 30 baht to treat all diseases. Another project is Living Allowance for the Elderly It is a relief for the poor and abandoned, but there are the elderly who are not poor enough to receive a living allowance. When the Democrat Party took over the country in 2009, it expanded the rights to all elderly people to receive a living allowance. The question is that the state tries to reduce inequality, but the problem seems to be worse, what is the rooted problem for that?.

From this we can not deny that the government cares about social welfare. But is that the government chooses to do universal welfare? Or the welfare of the poor?. There has never been a clear measure for a welfare society. Therefore, it seems that the government wants welfare for everyone, but fear that it will be a burden on the budget. Anyway, as we look at the welfare state system, there are pros and cons from the state being adopting this concept to govern the nation. Positively, the idea try to pull down the resource from the rich to the poor, and the welfare state is for everyone with the same right. From the Sweden case, when the

power of consideration in economy and political spreading more in community level. So, this will help the community's economic activity growing. Increase the privacy and stability in their life. When people have more power and can broadly participation in political, which will finally lead to 'Democracy' in the state. However, some might argue that it is will make the government more power to intervene and causing the corruption. Or high tax will reduce the investment from foreigner. But undeniably that, the welfare state system is one of the interesting ideal concept in nowadays high inequality society.

The challenge for Thailand is still remain, as long as Thailand continues to rule with capital groups, it is impossible for Thailand to be a welfare state. Thailand is therefore the only welfare society that all sectors in the society have to providing welfare for oneself because they cannot be dependent on the state. However, the acquisition of welfare by creating a joint group (ex: Volunteer activity) is not quite right. Ideally, because the state must have a duty to take care of people's welfare by providing quality, thorough and fair social security and social work services in all aspects. So, driving Thailand as a 'welfare society' is not a responsibility, that is social welfare matters only for people to take responsibility for themselves. But the state has to play another role to strengthen the community by expanding the community dimension to include a large number of workers communities, so that rural groups and communities urban slum and the working community, which is the foundation community, has strong welfare and care for each other. In the meantime, The state must continue to play a role in the provision of welfare state system that covers the entire country and must not block people from claims of non-inclusive welfare and right.

In conclusion, equal society does not mean that everyone has equal income or equal property. Rather, it is a society where no people are below the poverty line. Including richness and poverty is not a condition in determining a person's future life. And most importantly, everyone has the rights and freedoms that the people should have. In which a good welfare state must meet the needs of equality.

References:

- Lecture materials

http://www.nikomfoundation.org/autopagev4/show_page.php?topic_id=36&au

<https://prachatai.com/journal/2016/06/66531>

https://www.matichon.co.th/article/news_1341454

http://www.voicetv.co.th/read/ZN1O_Ho3W

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1650792/will-welfare-state-promises-be-honored->

<https://www.nationthailand.com/news/30361875>

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.2190/9AFY-KQHL-BT6T-J7G4>

<https://www.the101.world/the-liberal-thai-state/>