

## **SOCIALISM AND OUR GREAT NEED TO STUDY OUR OWN HISTORY**

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I receive e-mails from friends and listeners alike. And lately, they have expressed this idea that the United States is/might be turning into a Socialist state. With President Obama at the helm, they fear a leader committed to expanding the role of government in our daily lives. But, the convenient, head-line grabbing comparison between increasing government spending or regulations and the socio-political reality of socialism warps an honest contemporary look at America and it glosses the history and identity of Socialism.

As my mother is fond of saying, “we want what we want.” And the truth is, not one of us are willing to do away with the government services that we now take for granted. Whether its garbage collection at the local level or hazardous waste disposal at the Federal level through the EPA, we are a Nation of people

In my opinion, a discussion on this subject demonstrates how important it is to study history and economics in order to understand the problems that now concern us today. To be a good citizen is to be a well informed one. And the education one receives in the process turns simple words and phrases on their head, making it apparent that we suffer from a short term memory of our own U.S. History.

For example, what Europeans have called "liberalism," Americans refer to as "conservatism": a deeply anti-statist doctrine emphasizing the virtues of a laissez-faire marketplace. Think Ronald Reagan and Milton Friedman. Conversely, Conservatism in Europe and Canada, derived from the historic alliance of church and government, is associated with the emergence of the welfare state. Think Bismarck and Disraeli. Both were leaders of the conservatives (Tories) in their countries. They represented the rural and aristocratic folks who disdained capitalism, disliked the bourgeoisie, and rejected materialistic values.

Weird isn't it? Liberal in one place and time is conservative in another. The point of all of this is: we Americans do not know our own history. And so, we suffer with the fear that things like “socialism” will (or did) take over and ruin the contributions of Our Founding Fathers (who were classically “Liberal,” as the Europeans use that term).

Another fascinating point of the study of history and economics is the fact that the U.S. has refused to embrace socialism – especially during the rise of worker's rights and unions and the emergence of labor laws from 1900 through the early 1940's. If ever there was a climate ripe for socialism this was it. This was the time for Americans to unify and to embrace the teachings of those European intellectuals who, like Lenin and Trotsky, were banking on America becoming the first pure socialist state. Even at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, they were afraid that the U.S was not becoming socialist because the logic of Marxism as stated in *Das Kapital* dictated that America would turn socialist. Yet it never happened.

The German socialist and sociologist Werner Sombart dealt with this fact in a major book published in his native language in 1906, *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* As we have seen, H. G. Wells, also addressed the issue that year in *The Future in America*.

The social-political climate of the Great Depression focused on government intervention as a regulator, on planning, and on the welfare state. Fondness for the state also occurred immediately prior to World War I, as evidenced by the significant support for the largely Republican Progressive movement led by Robert LaFollette and Theodore Roosevelt. And note, at that time and through the 1920's there was increasing support for the Socialist Party. In 1920 Eugene Debs, the Socialist Party of America presidential candidate, received 919,799 votes while still in Atlanta Penitentiary!!

But none of these socialist folks or their platforms changed our political system. We remain to this day, American. We even have our own "ism". It's called "Americanism." This term is a unique way of defining ourselves, and it comes from the Declaration of Independence where we state what we hold dear. As noted there, our nation's ideology can be described in five words: liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire. And I suggest these concepts, as presented in those five terms, have infused our nation – even today – with a sense of itself that will not tolerate or permit a socialist complexion. It's just not possible in a place that defines itself the way we do. And history has shown this to be true.

History and economics show that America simply does not have a viable, class-conscious, radical political movement interested in shifting wealth in the name of a "worker class." Americans, for God's sake, don't think that way. Our trade unions, which have long been weaker than those of almost all other industrialized countries, have been steadily declining since the mid-1950s. And even today with the Almighty Obama (the great socialist evil-doer) at the throne, it does not look like this will change.

Bailout or no Bailout, we're not seeing – and we won't see – the workers of our Country racing to get their union/socialist cards.

As always . . .

Think before you fear.