



Is Barack Obama a Socialist?

Is Barack Obama a socialist? Ron Paul says he's not. A lot of you insist he is. The national director of Democratic Socialists of America claims that "the most socialistic candidate in the 2008 election was Sarah Palin." (Don't ask me what he's been smoking.)

And in a famous cover story a year ago, *Newsweek* magazine insisted, "We Are All Socialists Now."

I don't much like political labels, for a couple of reasons. Too often, they are used not to encourage a helpful discussion, but to end it. And for another, I've never found a political label that I'm comfortable wearing. So I hesitate slapping one on someone else.



More on this in a moment. But first, let me tell you a story from my checkered past that may shed some light on the present debate.

Does anyone remember the *first* Mr. Jane Fonda? No, I'm not referring to Ted Turner, but to Jane's first husband, a radical agitator named Tom Hayden. Tom gained fame as a crusader for the SDS — the Students for a Democratic Society — a very left-wing group on college campuses back in the '60s and '70s. By the time of our encounter he was a state representative in California.

Tom and Jane were quite a couple back then. She was by far the more famous of the two — a movie star who achieved considerable notoriety for her efforts in support of a communist victory in Vietnam. She even posed astraddle an anti-aircraft battery in Hanoi — a weapon whose only purpose was to shoot down American planes.

Not to be outdone, Tom made as many outrageous statements as Jane. Along with his buddies Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, Tom was convicted of inciting riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Later, he and Jane made several trips to communist North Vietnam. As I said, they were quite a pair.

I had tried for years to get Jane as a guest on my radio program in Atlanta, but no dice. Frankly, I couldn't blame her. It's no fun to be called a traitor. Even if she trusted me to avoid name-calling, she knew that she would be excoriated by most of the callers to "The Chip Wood Show."

So I was really surprised when I was contacted by Tom's publisher and asked if I would like to have him as a guest on my show. He wouldn't be there in person, but would join us by phone to plug his new book.

I quickly said "yes." I assured the public relations lady I would insist that every caller behave politely, even when they disagreed with her client — as we both knew they would.

So, a few weeks later Tom was a guest on my show. And sure enough the second or third caller to get



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through started off by accusing Tom of being a communist agitator. Tom scoffed at the accusation. He said he had heard it many times before, but all it showed was his attackers' ignorance of political systems.

To the surprise of many, I promptly agreed with him. I said that to most people, "communism" meant a total takeover by the state of everything — factories, farms, schools, etc. Not just the means of production but the means of distribution as well. And he wasn't advocating that, was he? Tom said "of course not."

"No, if I understand you correctly," I continued, "you're okay with ownership remaining in private hands, so long as government steps in to make sure things are done fairly. Is that right?"

Tom said absolutely, that was precisely what he wanted. And he went on to give several examples of how government must make sure that jobs and education and healthcare, among many other things, are distributed fairly to every citizen.

Then came the denouement. "What you've described isn't communism or socialism," I continued. "Isn't the system you want — where ownership remains in private hands, but its use is controlled by government — actually a form of *fascism*?"

There was a stunned silence as I continued, "In fact, Tom, isn't it fair to say that the economic system you want to impose on us in the United States is actually classical fascism, as practiced in Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy?"

With that there was a click on the other end of the line. Tom had ended the discussion by hanging up the phone. Can't say I was very surprised.

So is Barack Obama a socialist? A fascist? Or something else?

Paul says the president is not a socialist, he's a "corporatist." He explains the difference this way:

Socialism is a system where the government directly owns and manages businesses. Corporatism is a system where businesses are nominally in private hands, but are in fact controlled by the government. In a corporatist state, government officials often act in collusion with their favored business interests to design policies that give those interests a monopoly position, to the detriment of both competitors and consumers.

Hard to disagree with much in that last paragraph, is there? My only problem with the argument is getting the public to accept Ron's description. I don't think corporatist will ever become a popular catch-phrase in this country.

On the other hand, I've never been happy with any of the words and phrases used to describe my position on the political spectrum. Most of the world today would call me a "conservative." But I'm certainly not trying to "conserve" the present status quo; I want to change it rather drastically.

But to what? A century or two ago, I would have been proud to have been called a liberal. For the first two-thirds of our country's history, "liberal" meant someone who wanted the maximum amount of liberty for every individual. But in the past hundred years, that meaning got flip-flopped. Today, a liberal is someone who favors more and more government intrusion into our lives and our economy. That sure isn't me. Right-winger is even less descriptive — especially the exaggeration favored by many on the left, an "ultra-right-winger."

Before settling on a label, let's see if we can agree on a political spectrum. And let's make the criterion



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the amount of government power over its citizens. On the far left, you have total government control of everyone and everything. In our lifetime, the closest thing to that description has been the various communist dictatorships.

What about the Nazis? They were a pretty fierce dictatorship, too, weren't they? Absolutely. That's why they belong right next to communism on the political spectrum. After all, the very word "nazi" is a contraction for "national socialism." There is nothing right-wing about it — despite decades of brainwashing to the contrary by the mass media.

Okay, if total government belongs on the far left, what belongs on the far right? How about no government? There is a word for the complete absence of government and that is anarchy. Historically, anarchy has occurred when an existing system has collapsed. But it doesn't last for long; it is usually replaced by a strong, even brutal, totalitarian form of government.

So where does this place us? I like to think I'm somewhere in the middle between anarchy and totalitarianism. Or as a friend of mine put it many years ago in a book, we're slightly to the right. But what's the best word to describe that?

Not "conservative," as I've already said. Not right-wing or ultra-right-wing, which are pejoratives our opponents like to use.

For many years, I tried to get others to accept the word "Americanist" to describe someone who believed in the same system of government as our Founding Fathers. I still like the idea, but the word never caught on. Neither did an alternate, "constitutionalist."

What about "libertarian"? Even though it's been used for several decades, and as a political party it has fielded candidates for public office on the state and national level, it has never gained broad appeal or acceptance. Too bad, because the root word "liberty" is a good one.

So it looks like the debate will continue. Is Obama a socialist? Is Chip a conservative? I think the policies we promote are more important than the labels we are given.

I believe government is not the solution, it's the problem. Barack Obama and his allies believe the opposite.

What do you say?

Until next time, keep some powder dry.

Chip Wood was the first news editor of *The Review of the News* and also wrote for *American Opinion*, our two predecessor publications. He is now the geopolitical editor of *Personal Liberty Digest*, where his *Straight Talk* column appears twice a month. This article first appeared in [PersonalLiberty.com](#) and has been reprinted with permission.



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