



There He Goes Again: Bernie Sanders' "Good" Socialism

Whatever his other deficiencies, no one can accuse Bernie Sanders of insincerity. In a landmark speech delivered Thursday at Georgetown University, he said what everyone else in Washington already knows, but is afraid to admit publicly: America already is a socialist country, and has been for many years. Invoking FDR, Sanders pointed out that the entire New Deal was part of the socialist program:



Almost everything he [FDR] proposed was called "socialist." Social Security, which transformed life for the elderly in this country, was "socialist." The concept of the "minimum wage" was seen as a radical intrusion into the marketplace and was described as "socialist." Unemployment insurance, abolishing child labor, the 40-hour work week, collective bargaining, strong banking regulations, deposit insurance, and job programs that put millions of people to work were all described, in one way or another, as "socialist." Yet these programs have become the fabric of our nation and the foundation of the middle class.

Sanders is absolutely correct about the pedigree of such programs. Many of these ideas were being proposed at the very beginning of the modern socialist movement, more than a century before the New Deal. The fact that they have typically been characterized as "progressive" or "welfare" programs does not make them any less socialist.

Moreover, nearly all Big Government programs since FDR's day — from Medicare to environmental regulations to OSHA to student loan subsidies to ObamaCare — are socialist as well. America has not had anything resembling a free market economy since before the Second World War; in this mid-second decade of the 21st century, there is very little economic activity that private citizens can embark upon without having to satisfy a welter of government regulations, licensure requirements, fees, taxes, and the like. This is properly called socialism — the antithesis of a laissez-faire free market economy.

The federal government may not yet administer collective farms nor issue production quotas for every manufactured item — but it does have complete control over the money supply, the banking, financial, and insurance sectors, the manufacture of automobiles, agricultural productions, and on and on.

Sanders defended socialism in much the same terms as FDR: Socialism, judiciously applied, confers freedoms that the free market allegedly cannot:

People are not truly free when they are unable to feed their family. People are not truly free when they are unable to retire with dignity. People are not truly free when they are unemployed or underpaid or when they are exhausted by working long hours. People are not truly free when they have no health care.

Of course such "freedoms" cannot be guaranteed without compelling people to provide the services insisted upon. If people are determined to have a "right" to health care, for instance, someone must be enlisted to provide it — by force, if necessary.



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on November 22, 2015

The reliably leftist *Salon*, in an adulatory [article](#) on Sanders, claims that he is no revolutionary, but only wants to return America to the sensible socialist standards of the mid-20th century:

What [Sanders is] demanding is a return to the midcentury norm, to the country of FDR and Eisenhower and Johnson, to a country with a thriving middle class and democratic checks on corporate power. Ultimately, the question isn't whether we want to be a socialist country — we've been a quasi-socialist country for nearly a century. The question is whether we want to be an oligarchy, which is what we've become. Call a nation in which "the top one-tenth of 1 percent owns as much as the bottom 90 percent" whatever you want, but it isn't a democracy. This is all Sanders is arguing, and his speech yesterday laid out his vision in the clearest of terms.

Such sentiments no doubt reflect the beliefs of Sanders and his followers, not to mention his countless ideological fellow-travelers among the fashionably liberal and "moderate" Washington elite. So normalized has socialism become that none dare call it radical or anti-American any more.

But that does not make it any less harmful. In point of fact, the idyllic America of the mid-20th century that *Salon* rhapsodizes about is an illusion; it is a portrait of America before socialism had destroyed it. The modern-day oligarchic inequalities are the product of generations of socialism, just like the heavy taxes, the massive government debts, and the disappearance of the American dream. The fact that a single middle class (or even working class) salary could support a family, pay a mortgage, buy a family car, and send kids to college in the 1950s, whereas two middle class salaries can barely accomplish the same today, is a consequence of decades of market distortion occasioned by socialism.

Housing prices have soared — because of government subsidies. College costs have skyrocketed — because of subsidized student loans and all manner of other government grants. Flush with easy money, colleges and universities have massively inflated the numbers of superfluous administrators, spent lavishly on new buildings, sports programs, and the like, while students, presented with subsidized loans at far below market values, have less reluctance to pay the outrageous new costs of higher education. Thousands of dollars are tacked onto the price of new cars — because a combination of government regulatory requirements and government-subsidized credit drive prices up. And on and on. This is how socialism — not the free market — creates oligarchy. As long as it continues, the rich will continue to get richer (and fewer), while the poor get poorer.

The biggest problem with the "democratic socialism" of Sanders is that it ruins the economy across several generations, encouraging people to call for more socialism to remedy its ills. Thus is total socialism brought about by stealth instead of by violent revolution.

Americans are wise to be wary of Bernie Sanders and his socialist program. But we must also recognize that in modern-day Washington, almost everyone is a socialist already, differing only in degree amongst themselves. For example, the Republican mainstream tends to oppose raising the minimum wage, while Democrats — typically the more ardently socialist of the two major parties — can be depended upon to support it. But almost no one talks about *abolishing* the minimum wage — the only position consistent with a free market.

Bernie Sanders is unwittingly doing America a favor by calling a socialist spade a spade. America now needs to repudiate socialism in its entirety if she is to get off the long road to serfdom that we have followed for so long.

Photo of Sen. Bernie Sanders: AP Images



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