

RAWSTORY

The Scary Ghost of Ayn Rand Looms Over the Trump Cabinet

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Ayn Rand was a terrible person who wove a philosophy of selfishness and greed out of the threads of her own psychopathy. Rand's writings and speeches should be recognized as rantings suited for an audience of a well-trained therapist, instead of inflicted upon millions of English students.

Rand, who declared "altruism" a national disease, wrote admiringly of child-murderer William Edward Hickman's callous indifference toward others and his "immense, explicit egotism." Her contempt for the poor and middle-class are pronounced by anti-Robin Hoods who brag about stealing from "the thieving poor" to give to "the productive rich." Rand defended Native American genocide and murderous white supremacy, once stating "any white person who [brought] the elements of civilization had the right to take over this continent." Objectivism, Rand's refutation of basic human decency in favor of pathological self-interest and ruthless capitalism, was correctly identified as "perfect in its immorality" by Gore Vidal more than half a century ago. Today it's the prevailing ethos of the GOP, embraced by Republicans going back to Ronald Reagan and especially beloved among the incoming Trump administration.

As James Hohmann of the Washington Post notes, Trump pledged his affection to Rand in an interview earlier this year with Kirsten Powers. Trump, who proudly admits he doesn't read—neither books nor intelligence briefings that might slow his roll toward starting a nuclear war—told Powers he relates to Howard Roark, the architect protagonist of *The Fountainhead*. Roark espouses the warped belief that selfishness is a virtue ("Man's first duty is to himself") and commits a violent sexual assault. Without specifics, it's hard to know precisely where Trump thinks the resemblance begins and ends.

Trump shares an affinity for Rand with several other members of his cabinet—though that's not the worst thing you can say about them, considering the group is a motley assortment of Islamophobes, white supremacists, alleged wifebeaters, and anti-worker .1 percenters.

Hohmann writes that Trump's labor secretary pick Andy Puzder "is the CEO of CKE Restaurants, which is owned by Roark Capital Group, a private equity fund named after Howard Roark." When the New York Times asked for a few personal insights about Puzder from one of

his business cohorts, the fast-food titan was described only as an “avid reader who love[s] Ayn Rand.” Puzder recently told the Wall Street Journal’s Jennifer Grossman that he’s advised all six of his kids to read *The Fountainhead*, in the hope they’ll “lead the kind of lives of achievement, integrity and independence that Ayn Rand celebrated in her novels.”

Trump’s choice for secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, who’s as famous for being the CEO of ExxonMobil as for his coziness with Vladimir Putin, is also a Rand adherent. Hohmann discovered the oil baron “listed [*Atlas Shrugged*] as his favorite book in a 2008 feature for Scouting Magazine.” Trump’s choice to head the CIA, Mike Pompeo, previously indicated to the Washington Post that many of his political views are the result of “a long interest in libertarian and conservative thought, first formed at age 15 when he read Ayn Rand’s novel *The Fountainhead*.” John A. Allison IV, the former CEO of BB&T Bank and Cato Institute who had a closed-door meeting with Trump late last month, reportedly gave his executive staffers copies of *Atlas Shrugged*, calling it “the best defense of capitalism ever written.” Paul Ryan and Donald Trump have had some friction, but maybe now they can now bond over their mutual love of Rand and the belief that “money is the creation of the best power within you.” After years of saying Rand inspired his whole career, Ryan has more recently claimed he no subscribes to objectivist philosophy. His policy proposals beg to differ.

“The fact that all of these men, so late in life, are such fans of works that celebrate individuals who consistently put themselves before others is therefore deeply revealing,” Hohmann writes. “They will now run our government.”

Ayn Rand finally hit a wall through which her delusions could no longer pass; by the time of her death in 1982, she was enrolled in both Medicare and Social Security. After a lifetime of pushing a fever-dreamed philosophy, she was forced to reconcile with reality by old age, illness, and the boundaries of her own personal wealth. The GOP was all too happy to pick up the torch. Trump’s team of millionaires and billionaires, bonded by a philosophy of cruelty, are now running with it.