



#NeverTrump Movement's View of Trade Would Have Made Them #NeverReagan

Julia Hahn

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The members of the #NeverTrump movement cite, in part, Donald Trump's position on trade as a reason why they cannot support their party's presumptive nominee, chosen by Republican voters.

They argue that Trump's position on trade represents a betrayal of the Ronald Reagan legacy that defines virtually all thinking and rhetoric among the professional conservative class in Washington, D.C.

However, there is one significant problem with this line of attack: namely, Reagan's record on trade far more closely resembles Trump's position than it resembles the view of those in the #NeverTrump movement. In fact, by their own definition, Reagan would have been a radical "protectionist"—meaning professional conservatives who are #NeverTrump would also have been for #NeverReagan.

Two of the most vocal members of the #NeverTrump movement are the *Daily Caller's* Jamie Weinstein and talk radio host Mark Levin.

In a Wednesday CNN interview explaining why he is now backing Hillary Clinton over Trump, Weinstein cited Trump's position on trade:

He's no conservative and neither is Hillary Clinton. She's been terrible on domestic policy her entire career. There's probably not a single issue I agree with, but she's never proposed a 45% tariff on Chinese goods coming into the United States, which may be the single worst economic proposal proposed during this election season that would be economic catastrophe.

Weinstein told viewers that his own declaration is “amazing:” He said, “I would have to cast my ballot for Hillary Clinton, which is amazing that I’m telling you this, over the Republican nominee who is Donald Trump.”

Weinstein — who previously advised beltway Republicans not to read too much into Eric Cantor’s ousting and its implications for the 2016 Republican primary, along with other predictions that did not bear out this election — has repeatedly warned that a President Trump’s trade policy could doom the nation.

“Imposing a 45% tariff on China won’t promote job growth,” Weinstein wrote on Twitter.

“Has there been a worse economic idea proposed than a 45% tariff?” Weinstein asked.

Like Weinstein, Mark Levin has similarly attacked Trump’s signature position on enforcing trade deals and cracking down of foreign trade cheating. “A tariff is nothing more than a tax on the consumer,” Levin said last month on LevinTV. “If you put a 45% tariff on something, that means the consumer is paying 45 percent more for an iPhone, for a Toyota, for whatever it is that they’re purchasing ... it’s not going to create and protect American jobs. It never does. In fact what it creates is economic contraction. That’s just Mark’s view,” Levin said.

Levin then proceeded to praise Ronald Reagan for creating a “massive explosion of free enterprise.”

“Reagan created an economic environment where we created 25 million jobs through his administration, Bush’s, into Clinton’s,” Levin said.

However, neither Levin nor Weinstein mention that President Reagan did not hesitate to impose duties, tariffs, and other trade fairness measures to enforce trade rules — the same measures which they now criticize Trump for supporting.

Indeed, Reagan was harshly rebuked by so-called “free traders” for taking “protectionist” actions such as a 45% tariff on Japanese motorcycles to save the Harley-Davidson Motor Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Reagan’s action seems similar to Trump’s call for a 45% tariff on Chinese imports. Our trade deficit with China today massively dwarfs any trade imbalances with Japan in Reagan’s day. Indeed, the U.S. trade deficit with China recently hit a new record of \$365 billion. The United States lost one-third of its manufacturing jobs in the NAFTA-WTO era— in other words, in the years following NAFTA’s enactment and China’s subsequent entrance in the World Trade Organization in 2001.

President Reagan also imposed a tariff of 100% on Japanese semiconductors. As the *L.A. Times* wrote in 1987: “President Reagan on Friday imposed tariffs of 100% on medium-sized Japanese color televisions, powerful lap-top and desk computers and certain hand power tools, to retaliate for Japan’s failure to allow more American products into its markets and to halt the underpriced ‘dumping’ of Japanese semiconductor computer chips in other nations.”

By 1991, the total U.S. trade deficit had fallen to \$66.2 billion. In 2015, the total U.S. trade in goods deficit was \$736 billion.

In fact, in a blistering condemnation of former President Reagan, the “free trade” Cato Institute helpfully published a list of actions President Reagan took to protect American jobs and manufacturing. The analysis, published in 1988, described Reagan as “the most protectionist president since Herbert Hoover, the heavyweight champion of protectionists.”

The analysis states that Reagan did the following:

- Forced Japan to accept restraints on auto exports...
- Tightened up considerably the quotas on imported sugar...
- Negotiated to increase restrictiveness of the Multifiber Arrangement and extended restrictions to previously unrestricted textiles. The administration unilaterally changed the rule of origin in order to restrict textile and apparel imports further and imposed a special ceiling on textiles from the People’s Republic of China...
- Required 18 countries—including Brazil, Spain, South Korea, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, Finland, and Australia, as well as the European Community—to accept ‘voluntary restraint agreements’ to reduce steel imports, guaranteeing domestic producers a share of the American market...
- Raised tariffs on Canadian lumber and cedar shingles...
- Removed Third World countries from the duty-free import program for developing nations on several occasions.
- Pressed Japan to force its automakers to buy more American-made parts...
- Redefined ‘dumping’ in order ‘to make it easier to bring charges of unfair trade practices against certain competitors.’

In fact, in 2011 Robert Lighthizer, a deputy U.S. trade representative during Reagan’s administration, penned an op-ed explaining how Trump’s position on trade aligns with President Reagan’s. In his piece entitled, “Donald Trump is no liberal on trade,” Lighthizer wrote:

Mr. Trump’s GOP opponents accuse him of wanting to get tough on China and of being a protectionist. Since when does that mean one is not a conservative? For most of its 157-year history, the Republican Party has been the party of building domestic industry by using trade policy to promote U.S. exports and fend off unfairly traded imports. American conservatives have had that view for even longer. [...] Every Republican president starting with Lincoln – and for almost 100 years thereafter – generally supported tariffs, while Democrats tended to promote free trade.

Lighthizer cited the records of Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon, William McKinley, William Howard Taft, and Calvin Coolidge, writing:

Do you think that any of the conservatives and Republicans listed above would allow a foreign adversary to use currency manipulation, subsidies, theft of intellectual property and dozens of other forms of state-sponsored, government-organized unfair trade to run up a more than \$270 billion trade surplus with us and to take U.S. jobs? [...] On a purely intellectual level, how does allowing China to constantly rig trade in its favor advance the core conservative goal of making markets more efficient? [...] When viewed in this context, the recent blind faith some Republicans have shown toward free trade actually represents more of an aberration than a hallmark of true American conservatism.

All of these facts about Reagan's record were excluded from Levin's condemnation of Trump's "economic protectionism."

Levin's attack of Trump came during an interview with Sen. Marco Rubio.

Prior to joining the #NeverTrump movement, Levin had accused Rubio of being a "liar" guided by "unprincipled ambition" who ran a "deceitful" campaign that relied upon "unseemly Alinsky tactics." Levin said that Rubio "lied his way to get elected to the United States Senate," has "no significant accomplishments other than his election to various public offices," and was the chief architect of an amnesty bill, which would have "created permanent open borders."

However, after joining the #NeverTrump movement, Levin warmly hosted Rubio on his program — describing Rubio as a "great" and "wonderful guest." Throughout the interview, Levin asked Rubio questions that seemed to invite Rubio to attack Trump's position on trade. Levin said:

I've been speaking out against this notion of economic protectionism, massive tariffs. We've been through that before. Hoover did it and the Republican Congress did it. It exacerbated a terrible recession, helped create a depression, gave an opportunity for the left and FDR to really change our constitutional system, our economic system. And yet there is, I would argue, still a minority of people— but they call themselves populists, or what have you, who aggressively push this agenda.

Levin's suggestion that the Smoot-Hawley tariff caused the Great Depression has been repeatedly debunked. As Pat Buchanan has explained:

It was a tariff enacted in June 1930, nine months after the Crash of 1929, which occurred, as Milton Friedman won a Nobel Prize for proving, when the stock market bubble, caused by the Fed's easy money policy, burst. Smoot-Hawley had nothing to do with a Depression that began in 1929 and lasted through FDR's first two terms. This is a liberal myth.

Buchanan has been debunking this liberal myth for over two decades, writing in 1994:

Americans today are being indoctrinated in false history. And high among the falsehoods is that 'free trade' with foreign nations made America prosperous, and protectionism always made her poor. This is the catechism of the One Worlders, but it is politically correct history — not truth. All four presidents on Mt. Rushmore were protectionists... No nation has ever risen to pre-eminence through free trade... Smoot and Hawley aren't responsible for America's decline. Rather, it is those who make constant sport of them, and who need to be driven from power, if America is to reclaim the lost dream.

Contrary to Levin's suggestion that "economic protectionism" is only supported by a small minority, polling data shows Republican voters are among the most skeptical of so-called "free trade" deals, more so than Democrats. According to Pew, by a nearly five-to-one margin GOP voters believe so-called "free trade" lower wages rather than raising them. Similarly the latest exit polls from Wisconsin's primary showed that a majority of Wisconsin GOP voters believe that foreign trade kills jobs. However, despite the views of Wisconsin Republican voters, Wisconsin's Paul Ryan has been one of Congress's most vocal advocates for trade globalism. In 2015, Ryan acted as President Obama's "partner" in their effort to fast track the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Interestingly, exit polls revealed that a majority of Wisconsin Republicans (51%) say they feel betrayed by the party, which is currently led by Speaker Ryan.

Moreover, taking the Levin-Weinstein argument at face value, the United States would quite literally be unable to enforce the terms of any trade deal, ever. The remedy prescribed in trade deals for improper foreign subsidies — whether it be product dumping, currency manipulation, or other unfair government subsidy — is to apply a countervailing duty or a tariff to negate the cheating behavior. Thus, if one opposes any action that makes a cheap foreign product more expensive, then all cheating is permissible all of the time. Since any foreign country can use its central bank or government to unfairly produce cheaper goods, then, carried to its logical conclusion, there would be no manufacturing left in the United States at all.

However, many in the #NeverTrump camp do not seem particularly bothered by the collapse of American working-class communities.

For instance, *National Review*'s Kevin D. Williamson has said that he believes these communities "deserve to die":

The truth about these dysfunctional, downscale communities is that they deserve to die. Economically, they are negative assets. Morally, they are indefensible. Forget all your cheap theatrical Bruce Springsteen crap. Forget your sanctimony about struggling Rust Belt factory towns and your conspiracy theories about the wily Orientals stealing our jobs. Forget your goddamned gypsum, and, if he has a problem with that, forget Ed Burke, too. The white American underclass is in thrall to a vicious, selfish culture whose main products are misery and used heroin needles. Donald Trump's speeches make them feel good. So does OxyContin.

In a subsequent piece attempting to defend this controversial declaration, Williamson says that his answer to people living in "a community or a family that offers you little or nothing" is to simply say "F*** 'em" and move. Williamson explains that if they have nothing to offer you, these communities — and thus presumably all the memories, culture, values, and institutions therein — "have it coming":

My answer to what to do about a community or a family that offers you little or nothing and that may be actively working against your real long-term interest is for me the same today as it was 25 years ago, when I first was forced to consider it and answered in the argot of my own downscale tornado-bait community: 'F*** 'em.'... If there's nothing for you in Garbutt but penury, dysfunction, and addiction, then get the hell out. If that means that communities in upstate New York or eastern Kentucky or west Texas die, so what? If that's all they have to offer, then they have it coming.