

Why Is the American Right So Reluctant to Defend Capitalism?

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Which "political belief are you scared to share with friends?" So asks a March survey at FiveThirtyEight. What a strange question -- particularly in a prosperous nation born out of coffeehouse debates and political pamphleteering. I can't imagine why any thoughtful adult would be reluctant to share their politics with a true friend. Furthermore, since opinion shapes politics through voting, we should want to discuss our opinions. However, that poll question doesn't hold a candle to the reluctance of many pundits and political figures on the right to speak up for capitalism on moral grounds. With socialism en vogue on the American left even as its latest iteration is obliterating Venezuela, this is an ideal time to make the case for the only system that justly rewards creativity and hard work, while simultaneously making us richer.

Granted, Trump said, "We will never be a socialist country," during his State of the Union; and Mitch McConnell defeated the Green New Deal 57-0 in the Senate. But how persuasive was Trump's taunt, or the Senate debate? Mike Lee's (R-UT) remarks were possibly the best. He rightly noted that the Green New Deal is unserious, but his jokes were tame compared to the ridicule it so rightly deserves. Unfortunately, in the rest of his remarks, he accepted the questionable premise that "climate change is no joke," and iced the socialists' cake by suggesting that people who can't manage a simple press release shouldn't run the national economy.

Instead of implying that Alexandria Ocasio Cortez's biggest flaw is incompetence, Lee should have asked, "By what right does anyone presume to order Americans about?" The best answer to our crop of socialist ingénues since Ocasio-Cortez's office wafted its first press release came from a freshman representative in her own party, Although she is no Ayn Rand, Vietnam-born Stephanie Murphy, in one sentence, gave the Green New Deal all the consideration it deserved: "The idea that in the greatest ... capitalist system in the world, we're having [a] casual conversation about socialism, offends me." Murphy also described herself using two terms, neither of which occurred in Lee's quarter-hour time on the floor: proud capitalist. Sadly, she almost immediately raised the possibility of "undo[ing] the whole system." I'd be on board for reforming our actual system too, the sclerotic mixed economy, to make it truly capitalist, but I doubt this is what she had in mind.

Speaking of Rand, her book, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, explains in the last two words of its title why so few proudly call themselves capitalists. Murphy is exhibit A. She shows her imperfect understanding of capitalism when she speaks of making "sure everybody, no matter what zip code they're born in, has a fair shot." -- as if the right to pursue happiness isn't that fair shot. But Murphy is a Democrat. We shouldn't expect her to make a positive case for capitalism. And as for the right, we increasingly see a failure to appreciate capitalism and an abject one to speak of it as an ideal. Conservatives seem willing to attack socialism for any number of non-

essential reasons rather than speak up for capitalism. Ocasio-Cortez is incompetent, as Mike Lee is quick to point out – but that implies that her plan to rob and enslave Americans might be hunky dory in better hands. Countless other pundits rightly decry socialism as impractical, citing the many times it has impoverished nations and people. Unfortunately, warning only that socialism is impractical has proved ... impractical ... as its advocates rely on moral grounds. (Spoiler alert: Socialism is impractical because theft and injustice are immoral.) One pundit declares in the Wall Street Journal that, "Climate alarmism isn't popular with the public," and concludes, "Republicans don't need an alternative." It is true that climate change is not a good excuse to adopt socialism but consider how little of the Green New Deal is about climate. These other issues aren't going away, and if people think that socialism is a moral way to solve them, guess which solution they will choose?

A recent editorial by the Cato Institute observed that young adults who claim to support socialism don't know what it is. In fact, they seem to favor capitalism, when offered the choice in terms they can relate to freedom and an improved life on a personal level. "[R]espondents gave very high marks to small business, entrepreneurship, and free enterprise, and 56 percent approval of capitalism." Socialism was favored by 37 percent, and only 8 percent thought the government had too little power over their lives. John Sexton of the conservative blog Hot Air correctly identified ending capitalism as the "skeleton key" that makes sense of the otherwise incomprehensible laundry list of demands in the Green New Deal. Even if the Green New Deal is dead, its parts live on politically. Knowing what animates the left, and seeing that capitalism wins when the cards are on the table, what are conservatives afraid of? Proudly upholding the only system of justice and prosperity?