



## Henry Olsen: ‘Libertarianism Is a Marxist Heresy’ that Subverts Nations to Markets

Robert Kraychik

August 1, 2018

Henry Olsen, author of *The Working Class Republican: Ronald Reagan and the Return of Blue-Collar Conservatism*, described the “libertarian ideology” as a “religious faith” that dehumanizes people as commodities.

“You can argue that libertarianism is a Marxist heresy, that where Marx said that the capitalist commodifies everything, the libertarian says, ‘Darn tootin,’” Olsen told Breitbart News Senior Editor-at-Large Rebecca Mansour on Monday’s *Breitbart News Tonight* on SiriusXM.

Olsen framed libertarians as prioritizing economics over all other considerations: “Try and find somebody that doesn’t think tariffs are an abomination. You can’t find that person on the right [or] the left. I think this fundamental agreement about the international nature of the economy that seems to put politics, community, nation, and — dare I say — humanity as irrelevant concerns.”

Mansour examined the undermining of national identity via leftism and libertarianism, reflecting on Daniel McCarthy’s recent op-ed, “Conservatism isn’t dead,” She drew on the following passage:

It’s not that liberalism in any form—left, libertarian, or neoconservative—does not have useful things to say or lessons to impart. But liberalism never knows when to quit. The left liberal expands government and attacks traditional social institutions to the point of undermining liberalism’s own pre-liberal foundations in common citizenship and Western values. The libertarian would not only put everything on the market—from sex to human organs, everything commoditised—but he would put it on the world market at that, dissolving the economic ties that bind every social institution from the household to the nation.

Mansour added, “The idea of the nation-state seems to be lost.”

Olsen credited Trump with connecting to American considerations beyond mere economics: “I think what Trump tracked into was, in part, the fact that average people don’t believe that. They

think that being American means more than paying taxes to Washington as opposed to Ottawa. It means more than something that's abstract. I think it means something real, and that Americans need to care about Americans first."

Olsen continued, "Part of what What Donald Trump tapped into was the very real sense that left or right — or as Daniel McCarthy called it, 'different strains of liberal' — just don't care about the communities have been gutted and the people whose lives and expectations have been upended by their schemes. One of the things I try to tell people who are opposed to tariffs is, 'Okay. Maybe you've got economic logic on your side. But what are you going to do to help these people?' And the answer is always silence."

Olsen contrasted libertarianism's relationship to conservatism in the post-Reagan era and Trump's role in delineating the two within the GOP. Mansour noted that McCarthy's article, as well as Olsen's book on Reagan, argued that Reagan's conservative legacy was "taken over by liberals" in the form of neoconservatives on the foreign policy side and libertarians, like the Koch-funded Cato Institute, on the domestic policy side. However, Olsen's research shows that Reagan's fiscal policies were aimed at dismantling LBJ's dysfunctional Great Society programs, not FDR's New Deal, which Reagan supported all of his life.

The current libertarian strain of the conservative movement is so far from Reagan's position that Mansour asked Olsen if Reagan would be considered a conservative today.

"The question is: Does conservative equal libertarian?" Olsen replied. "The arguments that we've been hearing for the last 25 years have, at the bottom, an understanding that conservatives and libertarians don't disagree fundamentally about the role of government; they just disagree about the practicalities of how to get there."

Olsen added, "I think what Donald Trump and Ronald Reagan would have agreed on ... is that that's not the case, and I think the majority of Republican voters showed that that's not the case because the people who think they're conservative voted for Donald Trump over the people who said that they are true conservatives. People are actually interested in conservatism with a human face and a human heart."

Olsen remarked, "Donald Trump believes that government should be there to help people, and in that respect represents the clear vast majority of thinking from the center-left to the center-right."

Olsen added, "Libertarians have made Ronald Reagan into something he never said he was, which was a supply-sider dedicated to cutting taxes for the rich as a primary way of advancing the economy. That wasn't what Reagan was about, and yet most people under the teachings of the libertarians have come to think that that's what Reagan really was about."

Olsen contrasted the status quo of American-Chinese trade with that of America's restrictions against the former Soviet Union: "During the Cold War, we didn't trade serious technology with the Soviet Union. They had to try and steal it. But now, it seems that we're quite willing to allow our ideas, our money, and our markets fuel the rise of a Chinese regime that doesn't seem to be interested in liberal democracy or confining itself to the borders of China."

Olsen warned of socialist ascendance as a reaction to the reductionism of people to economic units: "You should expect these people to vote for socialists. If the only answer of the people who seem to care about the lives of average people are people like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez,

you should expect them to vote for the left, because people aren't going to vote for people who obviously don't care about their own lives. That's a central problem for the right and was never a problem for Ronald Reagan, because Ronald Reagan always cared about average people before ideas, even though he loved ideas and he was somebody who believed in principles and not ideology."

Olsen also described the "donor class" of Republicans as at odds with the GOP's grassroots base. "The libertarian ideology is akin to a religious faith for many, and it's just going to require a lot of time, argument, and political organizing [to overcome]."

He quipped, "I am convinced that if Donald Trump came out tomorrow against the divinity of Jesus, he would have more approval than his position on tariffs, because we know tariffs are wrong, but they're a lot of doubt about that guy from Nazareth."

Mansour concurred, "It's like the high church of free trade. It's taken as a matter of faith."