



Polls: Sanders-loving millennials have no idea what socialism actually is

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We've had a theory around here for some time - and we're certainly not the only ones - that most of the young people who are gaga over Bernie Sanders and his socialist ideas are completely oblivious to the real history of socialism because they didn't live through it. They were born after the Cold War (or right at the tail end of it such that they don't remember it), and they're taken in by notions like "fairness" and "equality" without really understanding what happens when you invest the kind of power in government that politicians tell you is necessary to make all this happen.

A very well-written report in *The Federalist* by Emily Ekins and Joy Pullmann backs that up with some fairly recent polling, and offers some eye-opening insight on what millennials think socialism is:

First, millennials don't seem to know what socialism is, and how it's different from other styles of government. The definition of socialism is government ownership of the means of production—in other words, true socialism requires that government run the businesses. However, a CBS/New York Times survey found that only 16 percent of millennials could accurately define socialism, while 30 percent of Americans over 30 could. (Incidentally, 56 percent of Tea Partiers accurately defined it. In fact, those most concerned about socialism are those best able to explain it.)

With so few able to define socialism, perhaps less surprisingly a Reason-Rupe national survey found college-aged millennials were about as likely to have a favorable view of socialism (58 percent) as they were about capitalism (56 percent). While attitudes toward capitalism remain fairly constant across age groups, support for socialism drops off significantly when moving to older age cohorts. Only about a quarter of Americans older than 55 have a favorable view of socialism.

Conservatives often use the word "socialist" like an epithet, but they don't realize that neither their audience nor even their political opponents really know what the word even means. This may help explain the inability of free-market advocates to communicate with them using phrases like "big government," "socialism," and "collectivism."

So what do millennials think socialism is? A 2014 Reason-Rupe survey asked respondents to use their own words to describe socialism and found millennials who

viewed it favorably were more likely to think of it as just people being kind or “being together,” as one millennial put it. Others thought of socialism as just a more generous social safety net where “the government pays for our own needs,” as another explained it.

If socialism is framed the way Sanders does, as just being a generous social safety net, it’s much harder to undermine among millennials. This narrative says government is a benevolent caretaker and pays for everybody’s needs (from everybody’s pockets), along the lines of the Obama administration’s Life of Julia montage.

Defenders of Obama have often claimed he can’t be a socialist because he doesn’t favor government ownership of the means of production, and some say Sanders doesn’t either as he hasn’t actually made that a staple of his campaign platform. My response would be to ask, who says they don’t favor it? It’s one thing not to emphasize it in your campaign, or to recognize it’s a bridge too far legislatively, but does anyone seriously believe that either Obama or Sanders would hesitate to make it happen with the stroke of a pen if they could find a way?

As to the oblivious nature of millennials with respect to socialism, I’m sure part of it is the lack of personal memory, but there is this thing called history that you can study. Why haven’t they done so? If it’s really true that they get most of their news from the Huffington Post and the Daily Show, then they’re not learning the true nature of socialism there. Obviously the mainstream media won’t tell them. And they probably didn’t learn a lot about it in school, either, as social studies/history has either been eliminated completely from many schools or re-focused on more politically correct type content favored by the left.

There is also this: Socialism is perfectly engineered to appeal to those who are both naive and resentful. A 20-something who has never run a business or had to meet a payroll can be convinced that the “1 percent” are a bunch of evil robber barons because he or she has no context for what it takes to earn and accumulate wealth. And when you have personally never had a lot of money, and you’re not sure how you would get it, it’s easy for someone to convince you of the popular left-wing bromide that the economy is “rigged” in favor of the rich.

That’s not true at all, of course. Anyone can become rich by doing the right things, and doing enough of them, and doing them well enough. But if you’re too young to know what the right things are, or you’re too self-absorbed and petulant to understand the effort it will take, you’re probably pretty open to the idea that the whole thing is just a big racket and you’re better off trusting a politician to get you what you need.

Yet having said that, I actually know hard-working young people - some of whom run their own businesses and do so rather successfully - who are completely enraptured by Sanders. How can that be? Part of it is social liberalism, but I also think a lot of it simply owes to the relative lack of life experience that leaves you open to resentment because you really don’t understand how much another person had to do to become richer than you are, nor do you understand that you could also do it, and what’s more, it’s a much better bet for you to try than it is to invest your confidence in an all-powerful government that won’t bring about any sort of equality unless it’s equal misery.

Right now, the socialist model is collapsing in Venezuela amidst shortages and scarcity, precisely because the powerful government that was supposed to make everything fair took away

all incentive to productivity and hard work, laced with plenty of graft and corruption, as is inevitable whenever government is allowed to amass that much power. But you don't hear much about Venezuela in the news these days. You should. It's exactly what Bernie Sanders wants to implement here, and a disaster like they're experiencing down there would be far more cataclysmic if we allowed it to happen here.

If young people don't understand that, maybe we should raise the voting age so we don't have so many ignorant morons helping to choose our next president. The only thing wrong with that is that it would probably help Hillary win the Dem nomination, and amazingly, that would be even worse.