



Don't be a sucker for socialism

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From the USSR to Venezuela, experience reveals Sanders's socialism wouldn't enrich anyone but a ruling elite.

It is a common misconception that socialism is about helping poor people. Actually, what socialism does is create poor people, and keep them poor. And that's not by accident.

Under capitalism, rich people become powerful. But under socialism, powerful people become rich. So when you look at a socialist country like Venezuela, you find that the rulers are fabulously wealthy even as the ordinary citizenry deals with empty supermarket shelves and electricity rationing.

The daughter of Venezuela's socialist ruler, Hugo Chavez, is the richest individual in Venezuela, worth billions and billions of dollars. In Cuba, Fidel Castro reportedly has lived — pretty much literally — like a king, even as his subjects dwelt in poverty. In the old Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as Hedrick Smith reported in his *The Russians*, the Communist Party bigshots had lavish country houses and apartments in town stocked with hand-polished fresh fruit, even as the common people stood in line for hours at state-run stores in the hopes of getting staples.

There's always a lot of talk about free health care, but it's generally substandard for the masses and fancy for the elite. (The average Cuban or Venezuelan peasant — or Soviet-era Russian — doesn't get the kind of health care that people at the top get.)

In the old Soviet Union, the new Communist nobility, whose positions and influence seemed to run in families somehow, were called the *Nomenklatura* (from the Latin word for a list of names). Despite all the talk about equality, etc., they generally did a lot better than people who didn't have the right connections. Dissident Milovan Djilas referred to these managers

and *apparatchiks* (another Soviet-era word) as the “New Class.” Where socialist equality was supposed to eliminate the distinction between exploited workers and peasants and their capitalist exploiters, it instead produced a new distinction, between exploited workers and peasants and their “New Class” socialist oppressors.

Well, this is old news: George Orwell explained the phenomenon in his *Animal Farm*, many decades ago. But people keep falling for it: Like Ponzi schemes, socialism is an evergreen form of fraud, egged on by suckers eager to believe the lies hucksters tell them.

Which brings me to Bernie Sanders. *The Washington Post* recently ran a piece originally entitled "Bernie Sanders's plans have surprisingly small benefits for America's poorest people." Among other things it noted that “In general, though, Sanders's health-care plan would benefit affluent households more than it would poorer ones.”

Likewise, a paper from the left-leaning Brookings Institution notes that the biggest beneficiaries of Bernie's free-college proposal would be rich kids: “Under the Sanders free college proposal, families from the top half of the income distribution would receive 24% more in dollar value from eliminating tuition than students from the lower half of the income distribution.”

Well, America isn't socialist — though, these days, we're not really capitalist either, if by capitalist you mean a free-market economy without much government direction — but we do have our own New Class. And those people tend to be Bernie supporters.

America's New Class isn't the super-rich (they tend to donate to Hillary), but the upper-middle-class employees of nonprofits, universities and government agencies. They benefit twice from the kinds of programs that Bernie supports: Often, they're employed to administer them, or receive funds for providing services (think college administrators who, unsurprisingly, heavily support Bernie and Hillary), and then they also receive the benefits, since their kids are more likely to go to college than, say, a Kroger cashier's. (And if we ever wind up with government-run health care, ask yourself who'll get the hip replacement first — a woman who works as a cashier at Kroger's or a senior bureaucrat in the Department of Health and Human Services).

Higher up the political scale, of course, the powerful really do become rich: Bill and Hillary Clinton are likely worth about \$45 million, paid a lot for boring speeches given to people who are really just buying influence. But at least in America, becoming powerful isn't the only way to become rich. Under socialism, you're either powerful, or you're poor.

But poverty isn't a by-product of socialism: It's a requirement, as illustrated by Cato Institute analyst Juan Carlos Hidalgo's report concerning Venezuela:

But a couple of years ago, the then minister of education admitted that the aim of the regime's policies was “not to take the people out of poverty so they become middle class and then turn

into escuálidos” (a derogatory term to denote opposition members). In other words, the government wanted grateful, dependent voters, not prosperous Venezuelans.

As The Rainmakers sang, back in the 1980s, “They’ll turn us all into beggars ‘cause they’re easier to please.” That’s socialism in a nutshell. The “equality” talk? That’s just for the suckers. Don’t be a sucker.