



Saving neoliberalism in the age of Trump

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Socialists have created quite an alliance of most everyone across the political spectrum in recent broadsides against "neoliberalism." The socialist Left's problem with Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party is that they are "neoliberals" ? that is, that they believe in at least some version of markets and capitalism and do not actively pursue government takeover of all industry.

New York Magazine's Jonathan Chait, one of those center-left writers who has been derided as a neoliberal by the socialist-left, wrote of this phenomenon and his perception of its uselessness:

In the international context, "neoliberal" means capitalist, as distinguished from socialist. That meaning has rarely had much application in American politics, because liberals and conservatives both believe (to starkly differing degrees) in capitalism. If "neoliberal" simply describes a belief in some role for market forces, then it is literally true that liberals and conservatives are both "neoliberal."

It is strange, though, to apply a single term to opposing combatants in America's increasingly bitter partisan struggle.

Chait is right, and it's likely exhausting to fend off these semi-interneccine attacks on the Left. But his critics have a point, and in the Trump era, it's useful to think of the neoliberal frame in this broad way. The socialist left and their champions believe in moving American politics so far left that Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and others are capitalist sellouts.

President Barack Obama didn't break up or take over the big banks in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Hillary Clinton wouldn't nationalize the health insurance industry. To the socialist left, Democrats and Republicans are indeed closer to each other than to socialism.

President Trump has presented a challenge to the neoliberal consensus as well. Neoliberalism favors freer movement of both people and goods across borders than a Trumpian nationalism does. Trump attacked the Gang of Eight Washington consensus on immigration and the NAFTA-driven Washington consensus on trade. This is an ideology that attacks neoliberalism from the right as socialists do from the left.

Recognizing these trends, a small cohort of moderate libertarians - no, that's not an oxymoron - have also been attempting to reclaim neoliberalism, defined as managed capitalism with a welfare state. In the United Kingdom, the Adam Smith Institute rebranded from "libertarian" to "neoliberal" in October 2016. The U.S.-based Niskanen Center - employer of many refugees

from the libertarian Cato Institute - wrote of "revitalizing liberalism in the age of Brexit and Trump" and of giving "neoliberalism a chance to save the world."

Neoliberalism, broadly defined, has been under attack from the right and the left across the world in the wake of the 2008 financial meltdown. It may be distasteful for some on the center-left ? who we may in less label-obsessed times call "liberals" ? to have to admit they have common cause with libertarians and even Republicans, but in the age of Brexit and Trump and Jacobin and the New Communist Left, it may be necessary to admit that there is indeed a common cause to make in defense of capitalism.