

# How Socialist Contributions to Civil Society Saved Capitalism from Itself

By T.Collins Logan

In today's political frenzy of calculated spin, disinformation and alternative facts, it's easy to forget what actual history looks like. And this, combined with decades of carefully crafted anti-socialist propaganda, seems to be why we are suffering collective amnesia around some very important issues. In particular are the enduring shared objectives, mutual support and ideological linkages between *progressives, socialists, labor movements* and *civil rights activists*, which have become muddy, questioned or disconnected over time. So it seems long overdue that we set the record straight, and clarify the many positive contributions socialism has made to civil society – in the U.S. and around the globe.

In the mid-1700s, at the dawn of the industrial revolution, a number of toxic conditions began to amplify among the working class in ways the world had never seen – conditions which then persisted and worsened for nearly a century thereafter. These included 10 to 15-hour workdays for six days a week; a blistering work pace driven by factory mechanization; hazardous work conditions that led to high worker mortality and injury rates; widespread employment of very young orphans and poor children, ruthlessly driven to maximum productivity; extremely low subsistence wages, with even lower wages for child workers; and very little opportunity for any of these workers to combat, resist or improve any of these conditions.

Socialism arose specifically in response to such dire issues, and the genuine concern at the heart of socialistic proposals is: *how can such callous and destructive tendencies in capitalist enterprise be reduced or mitigated?* These origins of socialism are part of what is being deliberately “forgotten” in modern discourse. What is also being forgotten is the role socialism

played in remedying all of the most deplorable worker conditions – which, in turn, led to supporting improvements in civil rights for all of society – during the following centuries. So our collective amnesia about socialism is part of what this essay seeks to remedy.

Tracking down the sources of socialist sentiment is not difficult. From to William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1791), to Thomas Paine's *Agrarian Justice* (1797), to Charles Hall's *The Effects of Civilization on the People in European States* (1805), to the writings of Charles Fourier, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Robert Owen, Henri de Saint-Simon, Pierre Leroux, Louis Reybaud, and others in the late 1700s through the mid-1800s, the dominant themes and narratives of socialism are consistent: **the industrial revolution combined with factory-owner greed was dehumanizing civilization through the poverty, inequality, exploitation and abuse of its workers.** How to approach these problems also offered some surprisingly consistent remedies, *which centered mainly around the more equitable distribution of both wealth and power in society.* In terms of power, a stronger and more representative democracy was most often portrayed as part of the solution – for example, extending the right to vote beyond those who owned property was a major development advocated by early socialists. In some instances, abolishment of the State altogether in favor of self-rule and more direct democracy was the more popular fix. In terms of protecting workers and improving worker conditions, the first unions coalesced around what would later become the enshrined socialist principles of worker-empowerment and worker-ownership in the means of production (mills, factories, etc.). And egalitarian wealth distribution was either an implicit or explicit aim of all socialist proposals: no one should be privileged with all political power or all material wealth in society, as this was the formula that always led to oppression and exploitation of everyone else. As Adam Smith famously opined in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776): “All for ourselves, and nothing for other people, seems, in every age of the world, to have been the vile maxim of the masters of mankind.”

In terms of broad-based socialist movements, Chartism in Great Britain was probably the first, and flourished from about 1838 to 1857. By the late 1800s, socialism had already established

itself as a champion of workers' rights and unions across the Western world, and there was broad cooperation between different schools of socialist thought that aimed towards those ends. By the early 1900s, the meteoric rise of the influence of the ideas of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels was cemented first in Europe, and then around the globe, as one communist revolution after another began upending the social order. At around the same time, anarchistic versions of libertarian socialism were also taking root across Europe – sometimes in cooperation with communist revolutionaries, and sometimes in conflict with them. There were also successful efforts to incorporate socialist ideas into conventional political participation (such as the SPD in Germany). It is important to recognize that, by this time, socialist ideas had inspired many variations, including social democracy, democratic socialism, libertarian (anarchist) socialism, mutualism, utopianism, and communism. The differences, advantages and disadvantages among and between these threads of socialism were hotly debated and, frankly, never settled. But nearly all of them were put into practice for different lengths of time – some quite successfully, and others less so. Suffice it to say that each thread had its own emphasis on either sustaining or abolishing private property, maintaining or eliminating some form of central government, encouraging competitive markets or removing them entirely, retaining the function of wages and money or rejecting that function, and so on. But – and this is a critical point to appreciate – *all of these proposals were created specifically to correct the highly destructive consequences for the working poor that capitalism had either introduced or amplified during the industrial revolution.*

At this point, historical narratives popularized by neoliberals in the U.S. often diverge radically from the truth, echoing the propaganda of the Red Scares after World War I and World War II. But rather than focusing on that departure from fact, let's take a look at what actually occurred. First, let's consider many of the worker protections and civil rights advances of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries around the globe, and how socialism played a key role in their inspiration and reification.

**Where did the 8-hour workday come from?** It was first put into practice by the socialist Robert Owen. He also was the first to abolish child labor and corporeal punishment of workers in all of his mills, and the first to provide free health care, education, savings accounts for sickness and old age, clean living quarters, and affordable meals to worker families. Owen's vocal advocacy of worker rights was also instrumental in the first labor reforms in England – the Factory Act of 1819 – though he saw these efforts as taking too long, doing too little, and far too compromised by politics and the influence of wealthy factory owners.

**How did the early women's rights movement progress?** In William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1791), he advocates for "abolition of the present system of marriage" – a position even more radical than what his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft (a founding feminist philosopher) promoted in her writing. And why does Godwin advocate for this? Because, he writes, "so long as I seek, by despotic and artificial means, to maintain my possession of a woman, I am guilty of the most odious selfishness." A few years later, the socialist Charles Fourier was one of the first to promote women's liberty and equal opportunity as the forerunner of all social progress in his book *Theory of the Four Movements* (1808). Robert Owen advocated for the necessity of women being "equal in education, rights, privileges and personal liberty" throughout his lifelong socialist activism. Friends Anna Wheeler, Flora Tristan and Desirée Veret were supporters and acquaintances of Owen, Fourier and other socialists of the time, and led the way in women's rights activism in England and France. Anna Wheeler was also co-author with William Thompson, arguably the first Irish socialist, for *Appeal of one Half of the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the other Half, Men* (1825). Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who founded the women's rights movement in the U.S. in 1848, was a democratic socialist. Likewise, Susan B. Anthony also embraced socialism. And it was socialist Clara Zetkin who was so instrumental in the International Socialist Women's Conferences of the early 1900s, which popularized International Women's Day and a worldwide women's suffrage movement.

**Who advocated for government protections and services for the poor?** In the vast majority of early adopters (Australia, Great Britain, Germany, etc.), the earliest instances of welfare programs were legislated into existence through the efforts of socialist labor parties, workers unions and socialist movements. In other cases, such as France, the idea of “social protection” evolved out of a longstanding cultural values hierarchy (*liberty, equality, justice, fraternity*, etc.) that predated socialism – but was nevertheless avidly supported by French socialists.

**What about socialist economic policies?** In the U.S., probably the greatest single victory of socialism was the Presidency, rhetoric and policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the midst of the Great Depression. Roosevelt began as a fairly mainstream Democrat for his time, but in order to undermine the threat of an emerging progressive third party, he quickly adopted the rhetoric and leadership from progressives much further to the Left in his “New Deal coalition.” This coalition included Democratic party organizations, but also labor unions; blue collar workers; Left-wing intellectuals; racial, ethnic and religious minorities; farmers; big-city political machines; and some 3.5 million people on relief. Among the policies and rhetoric he coopted from the far Left included major elements of Senator Huey Long’s “Share-Our-Wealth” program: equalizing wealth distribution with higher taxes on the rich and large corporations, *and decrying extreme concentrations of capitalistic wealth*. Once elected, FDR pushed Congress to create 16 new agencies and laws in his first 100 days in office – New Deal initiatives that stabilized and secured banking, subsidized agriculture, encouraged formation of unions and collective bargaining for higher wages and safer working conditions, and created massive public works programs that ended mass unemployment and developed much-needed public infrastructure. This was followed by FDR’s “Second New Deal” in 1935, with more public works programs via the WPA, the inception of Social Security and unemployment insurance, more worker protections, and government support for dependents and the disabled. From the perspective of social democrats and the most progressive elements of the New Deal coalition, *this was socialism in the main*. And of course FDR’s critics also cast him as a socialist. In a speech at Madison Square Garden in 1936, FDR declared:

“The forces of organized money are unanimous in their hate for me – and I welcome their hatred...I should like to have it said of my first Administration that in it the forces of selfishness and of lust for power met their match; I should like to have it said of my second Administration that in it these forces have met their master.”

As we well know, the ‘forces of organized money’ are still unanimous in their hatred of FDR...and of the victories for socialism he represented. Conservatives are still hell-bent on ending Social Security, welfare programs for the poor, unions and collective bargaining, worker protections, and anything else that smacks of social democracy. Again, *the aim of socialism has always been to diffuse and distribute all concentrations of wealth and political power.* And what FDR essentially accomplished was a “mixed” political economy of capitalism and socialism. A mixed economy was a primary initial aim of social democracy, which itself arose as a peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism. And this hybrid of socialism and capitalism has, in fact, been extremely successful all around the globe during the past century: the strongest, most thriving economies are mixed economies. These include the U.S.; the “Nordic model” states; most other Western European countries (inclusive of the “German model” and “Anglo-Saxon model”); Australia; India; Japan, Korea and other “East Asian model” countries; and of course the newest member of the mixed economy club, China. Although these countries often arrived at a mixture of socialism and capitalism through very different routes – expressing it in diverse regional configurations – this fundamental combination is what has proven so successful.

**What about the abolition of slavery?** This is where more complex historical and philosophical issues intersect, but where socialism still played a prominent if not pivotal role. To appreciate how these intersections existed, we need to clamber up a level or two in our analysis, into the metaethics of socialist principles. The driving force behind socialist ideals is the belief that all human beings must be free of oppression and enslavement by anyone else. Some might argue that this attitude was a prominent feature of the Enlightenment, whose thinkers and proponents are often credited with revolutionary sentiments and rejections of monarchies in the American Colonies, France, and elsewhere around the globe. Others like to point to deeply held Christian beliefs and compassionate activism inspired by New Testament stories and

prescriptions. In this vein, it is somewhat ironic that Marx, a decrier of religion, clearly echoed sentiments of Jesus and the practices of the early Christian Church when he promoted the idea: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” But this leads us to the more specific promotion of human equality among socialists: *a primary objective of nearly all forms of socialism was to attenuate or eradicate inequality between classes, genders and races.* So although racism and sexism weren’t always specifically addressed, the idea that economic equality and equal political participation would lead to gender and racial equality was inherent to discussions around socialist activism, self-emancipation and revolution. Whatever the underlying inspiration for emancipation of slaves may have been at any given time – and those motivations were likely layered, multifaceted and complex – the metaethical frame of socialism promoted the abolition of all oppression, exploitation, inequality and injustice, regardless of its source. Thus slavery of all kinds – direct slavery, indentured servitude, and indirect wage slavery – was correctly laid at the feet of capitalism, and vehemently opposed by socialism.

We can also draw a more direct line between socialism and the abolition of slavery. First, we have Thomas Paine’s 1775 essay, “African Slavery in America,” the publication of which was followed by the founding of the first anti-slavery society in America just a few weeks later. Paine was a socialist by any measure for his time, and supported several core tenets that would later be formalized in socialist philosophy – for example, Babeuf’s program of agrarian reforms, the necessity of worker benefits from worker-produced wealth, and collectively provided welfare for the poor. And the connection between Paine’s attitudes about slavery and his attitudes about liberal democracy are also made clear in much of his writing. Here is an excerpt from his *Dissertation on First Principles of Government* (1795):

“To take away this right [to vote] is to reduce a man to slavery, for slavery consists in being subject to the will of another, and he that has not a vote in the election of representatives is in this case. The proposal therefore to disfranchise any class of men is as criminal as the proposal to take away property.”

In reviewing writings of subsequent thinkers who contributed to socialism's development, we have many illustrations of socialism and abolition of slavery being fundamentally synonymous. To illustrate, here are some samples from Fourier, Owen, Proudhon and Marx:

"I was encouraged by numerous symptoms of the aberration of reason, and particularly by the spectacle of the calamities afflicting social industry: poverty, unemployment, the success of knavery, acts of maritime piracy, commercial monopoly, the abduction of slaves, finally other misfortunes too numerous to mention and which give one cause to ask whether civilized industry is not a calamity invented by God in order to punish the human race."

— **Charles Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements* (1808)**

"The human faculties, for the last century, have been most actively engaged in bringing forward new inventions and discoveries; and they have already succeeded to so great an extent that society knows not what to do with the surplus wealth which these improvements can supply. *And so great is the magnitude of this new scientific power, that, although it is in its infancy, a small population, with its aid, can supply the wants of a very large population; and, ere long, the inhabitants of a small portion of the earth will be enabled to supply the wants of the population of the whole world.* The amount of this new power already created, exceeds the imagination of ordinary minds — it is in its extreme infancy — but it is the foundation on which the Millennium is destined to be erected. For it will soon be superabundant to provide for all the wants of man, without human slavery or servitude.

This is the first step towards the attainment of the Millennium; because, in that state, there can be no human slavery, servitude, or inequality of condition except the natural inequality of age and experience, which will, forever, preserve order and harmony in society."

— **Robert Owen, *A Development of the Principles and Plans on Which to Establish Self-Supporting Home Colonies* (1841)**

"In a federal republic, the proletariat and slavery both seem unacceptable; the tendency must be to abolish them both... Instead of rejecting and humiliating those people [ex-slaves], must not all Anglo-Saxons, both northern and southern, receive them in harmony and hail them as

fellow citizens and equals? However, the consequence of that measure would be to grant equal political rights to both the emancipated blacks and those kept in servitude until now.”

— Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *The Federative Principle and the Necessity of Reestablishing the Party of the Revolution, Part III (1863)*

“In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralyzed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.”

— Karl Marx, *Das Kapital, Vol. I, Ch. 10 (1867)*

At the same time, there were also a few overt racists among early socialists. Perhaps most notoriously was Henri de Saint-Simon, who criticized French revolutionaries because they had “applied the principles of equality to the Negroes,” who were, in Saint-Simon’s estimation, of inferior intelligence. Saint-Simon also opposed women’s rights. So equating socialism with a fuller sense of racial and gender equality does not hold *universally*. But the vast majority of socialist thinkers did support universal emancipation – and consistently so over many decades.

**What about Black rights and equality?** Despite early detractors like Saint-Simon, we can’t underestimate the contributions of socialism to the African American civil rights movement. To begin, we can easily connect the associations and mutual aid between the first black union (the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters), the Niagra Movement, AFL unions, the NAACP, the U.S. Communist Party and Socialist Party, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and countless socialist civil rights activists, artists, writers and philosophers over many decades. These folks were all working towards similar ends, supporting the progress of civil rights and each other, and among them we find some very prominent socialists – including George Washington Woodbey, Eugene Debs, Cyril V. Briggs, Claude McKay, William English Walling, Mary White Ovington, and W.E.B. Du Bois. The influence of W.E.B. Du Bois in these efforts was particularly important and enduring. I think we could say our modern understanding of race relations in the U.S. has arisen to a large degree out of his work and the work of Cedric Robinson, and that

both of these thinkers were operating from socialist principles, thought and language from the very beginning. In their discussions around “racial capitalism,” we learn to identify both the commonalities between direct Black slavery and a more indirect White wage slavery, and the distinct difference of privileges and paths to emancipation between these two groups as determined mainly by race. Further, we learn that racism was inherent to capitalist enterprise from the very beginning. Initially, these insights flew in the face of conventional Marxist ideas about universal exploitation under capitalism – that is, exploitation that was undifferentiated by race and gender, and only by class. Thus Du Bois and Robinson added subtle arguments to expanding socialist insights. But the underlying socialist observations are the same: absent socialist ideas and institutions, capitalism has always been – and will always be – devoid of justice, equality, freedom, and collective well-being.

But do these socialist sentiments percolate through later manifestations of the civil rights movement in the U.S.? Well, Martin Luther King wrote in a letter to Coretta Scott that “capitalism has outlived its usefulness,” and viewed democratic socialism as an obvious avenue for America to solve the problem of poverty. Here are the relevant excerpts:

*To Coretta Scott in 1952:* “I imagine you already know that I am much more socialistic in my economic theory than capitalistic. And yet I am not so opposed to capitalism that I have failed to see its relative merits. It started out with a noble and high motive, viz, to block the trade monopolies of nobles, but like most human systems, it falls victim to the very thing it was revolting against. So today capitalism has outlived its usefulness. It has brought about a system that takes necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes.”

*To the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1966:* “...there must be a better distribution of wealth and maybe America must move toward a democratic socialism. Call it what you may, call it democracy, or call it democratic socialism, but there must be a better distribution of wealth within this country for all of God’s children.”

Malcom X believed “You can't have capitalism without racism...you have to have someone else's blood to suck to be a capitalist.” Rosa Parks was intimately involved with labor unions and Leftist organizations for most of her life – before and after she refused to relinquish her seat on a bus in 1955. And, just prior to this, the list of civil rights activists, organizations and entertainers targeted by Senator Joe McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee certainly reflected a lot of socialist ideology – whether they were card-carrying members of the Communist Party or not. Unfortunately, this meant that a lot of Black rights organizations and leaders lost political currency during the second Red Scare – because many of them were tied to Communist and Socialist parties in the U.S. that had supported Black rights for the early 1900s. This is how W.E.B. Du Bois, at age 82, was arrested under suspicion of being “a foreign agent.”

What other evidence do we have that socialism has helped correct the failures of capitalism? Various approaches to socialized medicine around the globe – including Medicare in the U.S. – have effectively solved problems created by capitalist fee-for-service models; problems like affordability, access, denial of care, poor health outcomes, chronic diseases, premature death rates, and a host of other issues that the profit motive simply hasn't effectively conquered. Non-profit, worker-owned, and member-owned cooperative businesses inspired by socialist philosophy have been thriving for many decades as well, often outperforming competitors that funnel all profits to a few owner-shareholders. In a rather bitter irony, the “space race” that is sometimes credited with hastening the economic collapse of the U.S.S.R. produced the Soviet Soyuz rocket – a rocket that has been regularly relied upon by the U.S. and other major countries to deliver critical payloads into orbit. The Open Source movement, which has resulted in many widely adopted technologies and innovations (Android phones, Apache web servers, etc.), was inspired and instigated by socialist-minded folks like Richard Stallman and Linus Torvalds, and embodies the socialist ideals of collective effort and common ownership. And wherever we see the State take on civic infrastructure and essential services that require huge investments with little hope for a profitable return – public transit, communications infrastructure, the postal service, military forces, etc. – that is socialism at work.

So we can, with a little remembrance of history, remind ourselves of the indisputable linkages and mutual support between *progressives, socialists, labor movements* and *civil rights activists*. We can easily observe how women's rights and suffrage, child labor laws, worker protections, public welfare programs, abolition of slavery, Black rights and countless other evolutions in civil rights and civil society itself owe their emergence and operationalization to socialist thinkers and activists – especially when we go back to their origins in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. There were other threads and contributions, to be sure. Cesar Chavez, for example, was not a socialist – though his cause and the UFW itself were certainly supported by socialists. But the fact that some elements of civil rights were not the direct products of socialism does not diminish an overwhelming conclusion: without the infusion of socialism into capitalist society, capitalism would likely have self-destructed – tearing itself to pieces from sheer cruelty, deprivation and oppressive abuses.

## **The Conservative Neoliberal Counternarrative**

It is important to understand why American forgetfulness and confusion around socialism has persisted and deepened. By evaluating evidence of the last fifty years of neoliberal thought and activism (see <http://level-7.org/Challenges/Neoliberalism/>), it becomes clear that neoliberal ideology has played a central role in distortions and misinformation regarding anything “socialistic.” Why? Simply put, the primary objectives of neoliberal policy are to funnel more wealth and power to those who already have it – that is, to fulfill Adam Smith's ‘vile maxim.’ *In essence, this means removing all socialist influence from capitalist systems and civil society.* In order to achieve this end, neoliberals have persuaded voters and consumers to invest in false assumptions about what best serves their own values and interests, so that we unwittingly fulfill the agenda of the richest owner-shareholders instead. One method that has proven effective in this vein is to keep people confused and skeptical about what is actually true, and then provide them a continuous diet of inaccurate, *but ideologically compliant*, “alternative facts.” Thus neoliberal-backed think tanks, PR firms, media outlets, talk show hosts, celebrities and politicians will deliver carefully crafted misinformation that sounds plausible, but misleads people about both the reasons a given situation exists, and the best ways to move forward.

And because socialism is such a direct threat to neoliberalism – because it seeks to strengthen civil society through *diffusing* wealth and power rather than concentrating it – it must be vehemently rejected and snuffed out. Unfortunately, U.S. culture seems inherently primed for such manipulation, mainly because we have been conditioned to be “sold” – to be willing and compliant consumers – through generations of commercial marketing and calls-to-action. We have, essentially, become hard-wired to give away our agency, and to all-too-often accept incomplete or misleading information as our guiding light. (For more elaboration on this topic, please consult the essays [“The Underlying Causes of Left vs. Right Dysfunction in U.S. Politics”](#) and [“The Problem of Virtual Causality.”](#) )

In the case of the history of socialism – and especially as it pertains to the U.S. – the neoliberal propaganda machine has been in overdrive for many decades, gaining new momentum after the McCarthy era with the famous [1971 memo by Lewis Powell](#). The Powell Memo incited panicked strategies to counter an imminent threat to a plutocratic status quo – threats issuing from college campuses, consumer advocates and mainstream mass media. As a consequence, both the impact of socialism’s influence on American government and its capitalist system, and socialism’s importance in mitigating the most negative behaviors of successful capitalists, have been aggressively dismissed and downplayed over time. Today, the reality of socialism’s saving capitalism from itself has rather effectively been muted or silenced. However, as with most propaganda, it isn’t enough to undermine or reject the truthful narrative of history...it is also essential that a competing and contrasting *counternarrative* be created to replace what is real. This is, in effect, the best way to focus collective energies among consumers and voters towards a desired objective. Here, then, are some of the key components expressed by what is now a dominant neoliberal counternarrative:

1. **“Socialism has always failed wherever it was implemented.”** This is almost entirely false. Socialism is part of every thriving mixed economy in the world today, and has been successful in anarchist mass societies as well (Free Territory of Ukraine, Shinmin Prefecture, Guangzhou City Commune, Revolutionary Catalonia, Rojava, etc.). In fact, the anarchist/libertarian socialist versions of socialism have usually did quite well until

they were crushed by authoritarian governments. And although large State socialist experiments were a failure in terms of their ability to compete with U.S. global dominance, those experiments still have fans: according to PEW<sup>1</sup> and Gallup<sup>2</sup> research on the subject, a majority of folks in former U.S.S.R. Eastern Bloc countries thought their lives were better under that form of Communism than today, even after decades of free market reforms. China's authoritarian State socialism of course did eventually succeed – and may soon surpass the U.S. in its global influence – but only by introducing a more mixed economy. The only forms of socialism that have more frequently failed on their own were utopian versions in the 1800s (Owenites, Saint-Simonianism, Fourierism, etc.). Even here, however, the kibbutz movement in Israel and other smaller scale utopian socialist experiments continue to endure.

2. **“Supply-side, trickle-down economics works.”** It does not, and never has – wealth has never “trickled down” beyond the top 1% on its own. Everywhere supply-side economics has been attempted (under the G.W. Bush administration, in South American countries influenced by Milton Friedman and the Chicago School, via IMF/World Bank structural adjustment policies, during the Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan administrations, etc.), poverty has either increased or remained the same, economic inequality has expanded, real wages have either decreased or remained stagnant, worker and consumer health has declined, and markets have not been any more resilient to instability and downturns. Supply-side approaches do indeed enrich wealthy owner-shareholders, that much is true...*but it does little or nothing for the poor.*
  
3. **“Keynesian economics is outmoded, and we should listen to Milton Friedman’s prescriptions instead.”** This appears to be magical thinking. The salient insights of John Maynard Keynes about government interventions at the macroeconomic level have consistently saved large capitalist economies over and over again (most recently after the 2008 economic crash). Keynes has proven to be more than 90% correct in his predictions and assumptions about what which macroeconomic tools are most effective

over time. Milton Friedman and his Chicago School, on the other hand, have consistently ruined every economy they've touched – with a failure rate approaching 90%. There couldn't be a greater *factual* contrast between the two approaches. Has Milton Friedman ever been right? Sure, elements of his monetarism have proven useful. Ironically, these elements have become part of the strong government intervention that creates effective Keynesian macroeconomic levers – the kind of intervention that is anathema to neoliberal rhetoric.

4. **“There is no such thing as a ‘mixed’ economy – it should be called ‘welfare capitalism’ or ‘welfarism’ instead.”** This seems to be a crafty sleight-of-hand, attempting to hide the success of socialist interventions in mixed economies with an alternative label of “welfare” that, frankly, is much less popular. We shouldn't fall for this word trick.
5. **“Markets are more efficient than government.”** Actually, regulated markets are much more efficient than unregulated ones; as negative externalities, perverse incentives, and high-risk private speculation with public funds are reigned in a bit, economic growth is sometimes slower, but it is more stable. Meanwhile, unregulated markets tend to exhibit more extreme boom/bust cycles.
6. **“Unfettered capitalism is responsible for wealth creation, innovation, technological progress and lifting people out of poverty.”** Actually, it isn't – at least not by itself. Publicly funded research at Universities, or via the military and NASA, or through government grants to disruptive entrepreneurs, has accounted for the lion's share of innovations and progress in technology and medicine in the U.S. Sure, for-profit companies will often mass-produce those innovations for consumption...but they weren't the ones who funded the research that led to initial discoveries. Likewise, it's robust, governmental civic institutions that have helped raise folks out of poverty – the elegant formula of a “mixed economy” again, where certain industries, infrastructure and services are “socialized” to provide collective benefits for all, and distribute wealth

more broadly. In contrast, in every modern society where civic institutions are underdeveloped or weak – and capitalist enterprise is strong – there are just a handful of wealthy winners, and a lot of poverty and oppression for everyone else (look into [“resource curse”](#) countries for potent examples of this phenomenon).

7. **“Neoliberal ‘market fundamentalism’ equates desirable laissez-faire capitalism.”** This is a compound deception. The first part of the deception is that neoliberalism has anything to do with laissez-faire – or excision of government influence over markets. On the contrary, neoliberals consistently capture government in order to steer wealth towards themselves – promoting regulation that helps dominant corporations expand their dominance, structuring trade deals that allow greater exploitation of workers and natural resources to increase profits, and encouraging institutional abuse of public funds for private corporate owner-shareholder gains – all of which is classic crony capitalism. The second part of the deception is that laissez-faire is desirable. Laissez-faire has been attempted to varying degrees many times around the globe, and has only proven successful under specific favorable conditions, such as those in Sweden between 1850 and 1950. Even in Sweden’s case, the strongest period of economic growth occurred *after laissez-faire was abandoned in favor of a mixed economy* (from 1950 to 1975). Much like supply-side trickle-down theory, laissez-faire is just another form of unicorn economics that conforms to neoliberal ideology and rhetoric, but not to how the real world economies (or neoliberals themselves) actually operate.
  
8. **“Academia and academic research cannot be trusted, because it is infected by a conspiracy of cultural Marxism.”** In actuality, nearly all educational institutions in the U.S. – private or public – have increasingly been tailoring their curricula and research to serve the needs of business: to create workers with skills in high demand. The liberal arts are languishing in comparison. Among the social sciences, there is a thread of “grievance studies” whose biases were recently exposed by the Sokal Squared scandal, and this tiny minority of studies is a poster child for neoliberal complaints. But apart

from that extreme exception, what really bothers conservatives is that more mainstream academia helps discredit conservative neoliberal propaganda – it promotes critical thinking skills and access to good research that are the real threat to neoliberal hoodwinking. Neoliberals cannot allow a well-rounded education – or the most rigorous scientific research – to generate informed, thoughtful voters and consumers.

9. **“The ‘liberal media’ cannot be trusted for truthful news or information either.”** Here again, when reviewing any credible fact-checking resources<sup>3</sup> regarding the voracity of news media, *it is only the conservative news outlets that consistently fail*. Is there liberal bias in mainstream news? Sure, in terms of which stories are selected, and often who is interviewed (recently exacerbated by conservatives declining to comment or be interviewed by news outlets they “don’t trust”). But in terms of accurate information – especially when investigative journalism is in play – the Left-leaning media is really the only game in town right now. And if Right-leaning folks need someone to blame for a perceived lack of even-handed reporting, they would do well to remember it was Ronald Reagan who ended the FCC’s “Fairness Doctrine.” That action alone opened the door to erosion of public trust in news organizations more than anything else.
  
10. **“Socialized healthcare is terrible!”** On the contrary, health outcomes in countries with socialized medicine exceed those in the U.S., and with much lower administrative overhead and costs. When we look at the statistics instead of rhetoric, health outcomes in Switzerland, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, Australia, Japan and many other countries with socialized systems of guaranteed healthcare exceed anything the U.S. has produced. In essence, U.S. citizens pay many times more for healthcare, but this isn’t helping them live healthier, longer lives.
  
11. **“Libertarian socialism is an oxymoron.”** Actually, libertarian socialism predated U.S. Libertarianism by a century or more. Nearly all libertarian thought *prior* to the coopting of the term by Milton Friedman, Murray Rothbard and other neoliberals late in the 20<sup>th</sup>

century was actually Leftist, anti-capitalist and anarchist philosophy. Two excellent resources for information about the history of libertarianism are Peter Marshall's book, *Demanding the Impossible* (2010), and [An Anarchist FAQ](#).

12. **“Open Source has nothing to do with socialism.”** This claim is pretty laughable. Open Source embodies socialist ideals and arose specifically in response to the failures of competitive capitalist enterprise. Read the and the [GNU Manifesto](#), [The Cathedral and the Bazaar](#), and [Two Bits](#). Although it would be accurate to say that many of the primary contributors to Open Source have been either apolitical or indifferent to its socialist underpinnings, it is really the poster child for how a socialist, not-for-profit “commons” should function.

13. **“We can't trust science!”** This is probably the most underhanded neoliberal propaganda tactic of all. Of course we can trust science...but once again actual facts tend to undermine or eviscerate conservative neoliberal rhetoric and narratives. And that's a serious problem for them. Which is why so much money and effort has been spent persuading folks that science itself is just part of a vast liberal conspiracy. Take a look at the chart on the next page for examples of how science skepticism has been generated and sustained by neoliberals for a host of high-profit cash cows.

There are many more rhetorical building blocks in the neoliberal vocabulary. And when these concepts and phrases are repeated endlessly and emphatically, over decades and across all media, ordinary folks without fluid access to accurate information often begin to believe them. Falsehoods become reality.

Which is how we arrived where we are today.

# The Neoliberal “Self-Protective” Anti-Science Propaganda Process

(often utilizing the same players & resources...funded by the same individual & corporate stakeholders)



TCL\_V1.0

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Moving forward, it is not clear how a destructive spiral in global capitalism will be forestalled or transformed. As easily obtainable natural resources and low-cost labor become increasingly scarce, and massive negative externalities like climate change become more severe, it may very well be that mixing socialism and capitalism will no longer be an effective means of ameliorating the inherent pitfalls of capitalist systems. Humanity is, by any measure, approaching a point of extraordinary crisis. The irony of our situation is that neoliberal attempts to deny or distort the positive contributions of socialism around the world will likely only hasten capitalism's demise. But is there another way forward? I have offered some proposals to transition out of a seemingly inevitable self-destruction, along with a multi-pronged approach to activism to initiate that change, and you can find them here: <http://www.level-7.org>. One of those prongs of activism is "Exposing Misinformation & Pro-Corporatocracy PR Campaigns," and I hope this essay may serve that purpose to some small degree. Perhaps in our collective rediscovery of socialist ideals and approaches, we can at least slow the inevitable. Although we can't know for certain what new forms of political economy will save humanity, this moment in history certainly seems like a very good time to evaluate some proven, evidence-based alternatives.

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