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Liberal Delusions about Freedom

by Jacob G. Hornberger

To combat the town-hall protests that sprang up around the nation against President Obama's health-care plan, one of the favorite tactics employed by liberals was to question the sanity of the protesters. Anyone who showed up at such meetings angrily protesting Obama's plan to socialize medicine was termed a crazy.

That was especially true if a protester happened to be combining freedom of speech with the right to bear arms, as some protesters in New Hampshire and Arizona did. That drove liberals up the wall, given their deep antipathy toward gun rights and the Second Amendment.

But who really are the crazies around here? Let's examine the issue. Among the points that liberals made to buttress their claim that the protesters were crazy was the comparison that some of the protesters made between Obama's economic philosophy and that of the National Socialists under Hitler.

Indeed, according to the liberals, the notion that Obama's plan for America was socialistic was itself just crazy. After all, everyone knows that America has a free-enterprise system, one that was saved by Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, an economic program that Obama, like other liberals, extols and wishes to build upon.

Yet, let's analyze that comparison that some of the protesters were making and the insanity and irrationality that liberals claim it represents. I believe we'll find that when it comes to sanity and rationality, those protesters had a much firmer grip on reality than the liberals who are criticizing them.

Contradictions

First of all, let's talk about the economic system that existed in the United States from the inception of the nation to the latter part of the 19th century. The principles are simple to enumerate: No income taxation (except during the Civil War), Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, welfare, economic regulations, licensure laws, drug laws, immigration controls, or coercive transfer programs, such as farm subsidies and education grants.

There was no federal department of labor, agriculture, commerce, education, energy, health and human services, or homeland security. There was no SEC, DEA, FEMA, OSHA, or EPA.

There was no Federal Reserve System and no paper money or legal-tender laws (except during the Civil War). People used gold and silver coins as money.

There were no foreign military bases and no involvement in foreign wars. The size of the military was small.

Now, I ask you a simple question: Does that way of life resemble even in the remotest way the way of life under which Americans live today? Of course it doesn't, because the way of life under which we live today is precisely opposite to that under which our American ancestors lived. Today's Americans do live under all those programs, departments, and agencies, and principles that were absent during the first 125 years or so of American history.

Why is this important? Because both sets of Americans — our ancestors and Americans living today — operate under the same assumption when it comes to freedom. Our ancestors prided themselves as a free people. But modern-day Americans pride themselves on being free, too.

But how likely is it that people who live under economic and political philosophies and programs that are contradictory to one another can both be free? Not very likely at all! In fact, the likelihood is that one of them is suffering a very serious case of self-deception and self-delusion bordering on what psychiatrists might call psychosis.

American freedom

Why did early Americans consider themselves free? The answer is rooted in the principles enunciated in the Declaration of Independence. As Thomas Jefferson observed in that document, people have been endowed by their Creator with certain fundamental and inherent rights. These include, but are certainly not limited to, the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The reason that people call government into existence is to protect the exercise of such rights. But Jefferson recognized that sometimes government becomes worse than the murderers, rapists, thieves, invaders, and marauders that it is supposed to protect the people from. In such a case, it is the right of the people to alter or even abolish the government and institute new government. Since violent revolutions inevitably involve massive death and destruction, Jefferson observed that people will often choose to put up with lots of tyranny before they finally decide to revolt.

A critical question arises: What do the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness connote?

For our American ancestors, such rights meant more than the absence of physical constraint, e.g., not being incarcerated in jail.

Freedom also meant the right to criticize government officials and protest their actions without being punished for it.

It meant the right to worship, each in his own way, or, on the other hand, not to worship at all.

It meant the right to keep and bear arms, not only as a protection against criminals and invaders but also to ensure that the right to resist tyranny was retained by the people.

It meant the protection of centuries-old procedures in the event of federal criminal prosecutions, including habeas corpus, right to counsel, trial by jury, bail, due process of law, and protection from coerced confessions, unreasonable searches, and cruel and unusual punishments.

To our ancestors, however, freedom meant even more than that, and there arises the rub with today's liberals. Freedom, our ancestors maintained, also meant the right to keep everything you owned and to decide for yourself what to do with it. Everyone had the right, they contended, to pursue an occupation or trade without seeking the permission of the government. They had the right to enter into mutually beneficial trades with others who were doing the same thing. They had the right to accumulate unlimited amounts of wealth as part of that process. They had the right to decide for themselves what to do with their own money — spend, save, invest, speculate, or whatever. They, not the government, were responsible for how they lived their lives and how they used their money. For our American ancestors, freedom entailed the right to handle their own retirement, health care, food, clothing, transportation, charity, and other parts of everyday life.

Now obviously that's precisely opposite to what today's liberals believe. They say that freedom entails the power of government to take whatever portion of a person's income or wealth it deems appropriate and give the money to people who government officials feel need it more. They say that freedom entails the power of government to require people to secure governmental permission before engaging in many occupations and trades. They say that freedom entails the power of government to control and regulate the trades that people make with others. They say that freedom entails the power of government to take care of people, especially with respect to retirement, health care, unemployment compensation, housing, and welfare.

American socialism

How did liberals arrive at a conception of freedom that is so different from that which our American ancestors had? A clue lies in the comparison that people were making between Obama's economic philosophy and that of the National Socialists in Germany.

Take a look at this URL: [http:// www.ssa.gov/history/ottob.html](http://www.ssa.gov/history/ottob.html). There you will see an engraving. It is not an engraving of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, or any of the Founding Fathers. Instead it is an engraving of Otto von Bismarck, who served as chancellor of Germany from 1862 to 1890.

You may have noticed that the URL has the letters “ssa.gov” in it. That is the Internet domain name for the U.S. Social Security Administration.

You might then ask, What in the world is the U.S. government doing glorifying a chancellor of Germany rather than America’s Founding Fathers?

The answer is provided on the SSA’s website itself: Bismarck was the world’s first political ruler to adopt a social security program. On that web page, the SSA states, “Despite his impeccable right-wing credentials, Bismarck would be called a socialist for introducing these programs, as would President Roosevelt 70 years later. In his own speech to the Reichstag during the 1881 debates, Bismarck would reply: ‘Call it socialism or whatever you like. It is the same to me.’”

In mocking that claim of socialism, however, what the SSA doesn’t tell you is where Bismarck got the idea of social security and, for that matter, the whole idea of a paternalistic welfare state. He got the idea from German socialist intellectuals, who saw social security as an ideal way to use the state to implement the Marxian principle “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.”

As the years went on, the German people became accustomed to having the government care for them, with their own money of course. Thus, by the time that Hitler became chancellor of Germany, the paternalistic welfare state had become a permanent feature of German life. Given Hitler’s devotion to National Socialism (abbreviated by the term “Nazi”), it was hardly surprising that he embraced such socialist programs as social security, national health care, and public (i.e., government) schooling.

In fact, Hitler embraced not only socialism but also fascism, an economic philosophy that leaves property in private hands but subjects it to government control and regulation. Another feature of Hitler’s fascism was partnerships between government and private industry, whose aims were to further the interests of the nation.

As Jonah Goldberg points out in his book *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left, from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning*, in principle there was no difference between socialists and fascists, notwithstanding historical animosity between the two groups. They shared a deep antipathy toward economic liberty, the free market, and private property. They shared a commitment to the socialist and fascist concepts of government ownership or control of the means or results of production, albeit in different variations and degrees.

That brings us to Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. For decades, and especially in the public schools and the state-supported colleges and universities across America, officials have indoctrinated American students with the notion that Roosevelt’s New Deal was nothing more than a series of government programs that saved America’s free-enterprise system. The idea is that free enterprise failed and caused the Great Depression and that all that Roosevelt did was to save the system by adopting needed free-market “reforms.”

Living a lie

It would be difficult to find a better example of a life of the lie and a denial of reality than that. For what Roosevelt actually did was adopt the principles of socialism and fascism that were spreading across the world, including the premier examples of Benito Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany.

After all, ask yourself: How can social security be a socialist program in Germany and, at the same time, a free-enterprise program in the United States? How can programs that entail government control over business and industry and government-business partnerships be fascism in Italy and Germany and, at the same time, be free enterprise in the United States?

Consider the thesis of another book, *Three New Deals: Reflections on Roosevelt's America, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933-1939*, by Wolfgang Schivelbusch, a book that the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune* called "controversial, well written, and convincing." It is a scholarly comparison of Hitler's socialism, Mussolini's fascism, and Roosevelt's New Deal.

Schivelbusch carefully draws the parallels between the economic programs of Hitler, Mussolini, and Roosevelt, and anyone who reads his book is left with but one conclusion: Roosevelt's New Deal was not free enterprise at all, as liberals have maintained for decades. Instead, it constituted a wholesale abandonment of the principles of economic liberty, free markets, and private property that had guided the United States for more than a hundred years.

A close examination of the programs that Roosevelt adopted reflects that they were no different in principle from those of Mussolini and Hitler. Social Security was based on the socialist principle of forcibly taking money from one group of people and giving it to another group. Mortgage moratorium laws entailed government interference with private contracts. The National Industrial Recovery Act converted American industry into cartels, with the power to set their own prices.

Moreover, just as Mussolini and Hitler were doing in their countries, Roosevelt resorted to propaganda and intimidation to effect compliance and conformity with his programs. That's what his "Blue Eagle" was all about — a means by which federal officials could threaten and bludgeon American businessmen to get onboard Roosevelt's new world order. It was also what Roosevelt's infamous court-packing scheme was all about — to intimidate the Supreme Court into ceasing to declare his alien programs unconstitutional.

Is it surprising, then, that Hitler, the chancellor of Germany, expressed admiration for what Roosevelt was doing and how he was doing it in the United States? Not at all. Was it surprising that Winston Churchill expressed admiration for Hitler's "New Deal"? Not at all. Was it unusual that officials in the Roosevelt administration admired Benito Mussolini for his fascism and Joseph Stalin for his socialism? Not at all.

But through it all, the lie and the denial of reality have been steadfastly maintained. From the first grade on up through college, American students are ingrained with the idea that America's economic system is — and always will be — a free-enterprise system and that the paternalistic welfare state and controlled economy are simply needed modifications and reforms of that system.

Is it any surprise, then, that liberals feel so threatened by people who are exposing this life of the lie and this denial of reality? In a sense, such people are therapists. Through their exposition of truth, they are causing liberals to face reality, which, as the eminent late psychiatrist M. Scott Peck pointed out in his book *The Road Less Traveled*, is a necessary precondition to a healthy mindset.

You see, the liberal notion is that as long as people believe a lie, then everything will be okay. Sure, socialism has failed all over the world, but Americans don't need to worry because they haven't adopted socialism. When the programs move into chaos and crisis, it's not that socialism has failed; it's that free enterprise has failed, again. Thus, all that's needed is more "reform" to further save "free enterprise."

Then, along come people speaking the truth, pointing out that this is all sheer nonsense. What is failing are the socialistic welfare programs, the ones that have their roots in Roosevelt's New Deal and, going back even further, to Bismarck's Germany.

What is needed to restore a healthy society to America? The most important thing Americans need to do is get a grip on reality with respect to the type of socialist economic system that liberals have imported to their land.

Once people are ready to acknowledge the socialism that the United States has embraced, then there can be a real debate, one that focuses on whether America should continue going down the socialist road or whether the time has come to cast America's disastrous experiment with socialism into the dustbin of history and restore its heritage of economic liberty, free markets, and private property to our land.

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