

Socialism in America

From its eruption in our universities, socialism has spilled into the streets of America. It has become all the rage among the 2020 Democratic presidential candidates. They are crawling over each other to seize the socialist banner away from Sen. Bernie Sanders, the first presidential candidate of either major party to run as a socialist. And the American public is following suit. In a 2018 Gallup Poll, 37% of all American adults held a positive view of socialism. For Democrats, the figure is a whopping 57%, while Republicans trail at 16%.

Socialism, and its more sinister sister, communism, arose in the 19th century in response to some of the excesses of the Industrial Revolution fueled by modern capitalism.

Socialism has the praiseworthy purpose of transferring the allegedly private, individual greed of capitalism to the social collective good of a community sharing of economic production. The Oxford Dictionary definition of socialism, more formally, is “a system of social (and economic) organization that vests the ownership of the means of production and distribution of capital, land, etc. in the community as a whole.” The community here is the government, which under socialism owns or controls all sectors of the economy, including the major manufacturing and mining enterprises, the entire financial sector, and even agriculture.

However lofty its moral intentions, in the words of fiscal policy specialist and economist Dan Mitchell, “the bottom line is that socialism has failed in every place it’s been tried.” The list is almost endless. For the 18 communist countries that constituted one-third of the world’s population, their socialist economies all collapsed at the end of the Cold War in 1989. There were many other countries that tried socialism, only to stagnate, until they switched to market-based economies. These included India, Egypt, Italy, Greece, Brazil, Nicaragua, Peru and Tanzania.

The case of India is instructive. From independence in 1947 to the mid-1980s, its economy under socialism grew at an annual rate of 1½%, far less than its annual population increase. From the mid-1980s, it moved to a capitalist economy, and India’s current growth rate of 7% exceeds China’s. Today — besides the spectacular disaster of socialist Venezuela — Ecuador, Bolivia, Cuba and South Africa all wallow in the quagmire of socialism.

So what in the world is the attraction for socialism in the United States? Put simply, those attracted to socialism view the immense wealth accumulated under capitalism with resentment, and want to redistribute it more equitably. Their model, trumpeted by Sanders, is the success of Scandinavian countries in both economic production and wealth redistribution. The simple truth is that Scandinavia and other successful European countries have vibrant capitalist economies. They are not socialist.

The heart of the difference lies in defense spending. Riding piggyback on the American eagle for their defense, Europeans only spend an average of 1% of gross domestic product on defense, while the United States spends 4%. If one could ever corner our Democratic candidates on how they would pay for American socialism, not one so far has been willing to admit that it would require massive cuts in defense spending. When we face serious military threats from China, Russia, North Korea, the Middle East and terrorists, such cuts in defense spending would be irresponsible.



Beyond cuts in defense spending, even socializing part of the American economy would require huge tax increases so the government could take over the functions of private companies. This is most evident in Sanders’ single-payer health care proposal. This would result in socializing the entire health care sector, which accounts for 20% of GDP. Just this grab alone would double the share of government spending in our economy — with dislocations that are beyond calculation.

Lacking any demonstration of practical success, socialists have resorted to scare tactics. In the 1970s and 1980s it was the “Limits to Growth” movement with its dire forecasts of environmental overshoot due to rampant industrial capitalism that would precipitate the collapse of the world’s ecosystem. It never happened. Today it is the Holy Writ of climate change that has inspired the Green New Deal’s call, in effect, for dismantling industrial capitalism before the coming apocalypse in 2030. According to Sarkat Chakrabarti, U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s chief of staff, “the Green New Deal isn’t mainly about climate change — it’s about making America socialist.”

Whatever the truth of climate change, let us pray that we keep socialism far from our shores. It is a scam.

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TWEET OF THE DAY

Sarah Silverman liked  
Bette Midler
@BetteMidler
Mitch McConnell doesn't like the moniker #MoscowMitch or being called a #RussianAsset. Well, Mitch, if the shoe fits, wear it! Or pass some legislation that will make our elections SAFE from foreign interference. It's a no-brainer! Unless you're afraid it'll touch your MONEY!

TODAY'S BIBLE VERSE

SUBMITTED BY VIVIAN SHIELDS, LOUISVILLE

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:6

YOUR VOICE

Letters to the Editor reflect the opinions of the writers and are not necessarily those of The Daily Times.

Thank you to Food City

Dear Editor:
There are so many people writing negative letters, but ours is a grateful one.
WoodmenLife Chapter 6246's goal is "Fight Hunger." Thanks to Joe McCauley at the Food

City on West Broadway Avenue, where he allowed us to hold a fundraiser for Mission of Hope.
We raised 660 pounds of food and several monetary donations.
We had several members volunteer their time and many

shoppers to donate items. We are so blessed to live in a town that merchants and shoppers are so generous in helping others.
Thank you!
Harriett Irwin, Woodmen Life 6246
Westmoreland Drive
Maryville



Witness to an execution

It wasn’t the execution by lethal injection that unnerved me so much as the service club atmosphere, like the kind you might encounter at a monthly lunch meeting.

“Hey, John. I haven’t seen you since ... the last one.”

There was glad-handing among prison officials and mutual questions asked about their wives and kids. Then corrections officers walked in Bobby Ray Swisher and strapped him to a gurney on July 23, 2003, at Greensville Correctional Center near Jarratt, Virginia — the commonwealth’s death house.

It had barely been five months since I began my first job as a newspaper editor, at The News Virginian in Waynesboro, after nearly 20 years as an investigative reporter. Now I was about to witness a man die. Six years before that day on death row, Swisher — then a 21-year-old high school dropout who was wasted on cocaine and alcohol — stepped into a Stuarts Draft florist shop in the Shenandoah Valley and abducted a woman not far from my newspaper building.

Current Attorney General William Barr’s recent order to reinstate the federal death penalty for the first time in nearly two decades and to execute the first of five inmates later this year got me to reminiscing for the first time in years about Swisher’s execution.

I’ve always been torn over the death penalty: It’s a fact that innocent inmates have been executed; the Death Penalty Information Center says since 1973, 160 inmates — or one in nine on death row — have been exonerated for capital crimes. But I also know that some people are irredeemable: Even if you locked them away for life, they would be a danger to other inmates. There truly is evil in this world.

In Swisher’s case there was no doubt as to his guilt, and it was a horrible crime. It was Feb. 5, 1997, when florist shop co-owner Dawn McNees Snyder was preparing for the upcoming Valentine’s Day rush. Swisher kidnapped Snyder, 22, and threatened her with an unseen gun but showed her a serrated butcher knife. He marched her to a field along the South River and then raped her and forced her to perform oral sex. Realizing she “had seen his face” (Swisher’s words), he slit her throat and pushed her into the frigid waters.

Snyder did not go easily. As the river swept her downstream, Swisher ran along the banks yelling, “Are you dead yet?” The florist fought to survive and eventually managed to crawl up the riverbank. Swisher panicked and ran when he saw her escape the river.

With a potential killer on the loose, the Stuarts Draft community was terror-stricken for 16 days, until searchers found Snyder’s body in a field about 2 miles from the florist shop where she was abducted. Meanwhile, a liquored-up Swisher had confided to a friend earlier that he was guilty. He ultimately confessed to authorities, and DNA evidence recovered from Snyder’s body connected him to her death. It took a jury less than an hour and a half to convict Swisher on Oct. 29, 1997.

In prison, Swisher said he found Jesus and was ready to die — if it came to that. Right before the plungers were pushed, sending a barbiturate, paralytic and potassium solution coursing through his veins, Swisher smiled at his spiritual adviser and told us witnesses, “I hope you all can find the same peace in Jesus Christ as I have.”

I used a primitive cellphone with spotty ser-

vice to dictate the story to a colleague back in Waynesboro on an ultra-tight deadline. Then I drove 150 miles through the night to get home. And I slept like a baby.

The next morning I felt a little guilty about how well I had slumbered, remembering a colleague’s reaction in 1997 at another execution we covered in Salem, Oregon. Harry Charles Moore, “Crazy Harry” he was nicknamed, is the last Oregon inmate to be executed and that’s only because he dropped all of his appeals.

I interviewed Crazy Harry just days before his death, which I did not witness but wrote about from a nearby makeshift press room. A colleague’s name had been drawn as a media witness for The Oregonian, along with a reporter from The Associated Press. During my interview, only a glass partition separated me from Moore, who was convicted of killing his half-sister, who happened to be his mother-in-law because he had married his niece, and his father-in-law, who also was his half-brother-in-law.

To break the tension and the awkwardness, I literally turned to gallows humor and told Crazy Harry, “I’m not even sure killing your in-laws is a crime, is it?” Moore laughed. I remember Crazy Harry was defiant that he wanted to die and would sue anyone who intervened to stop his execution. When I asked what his last meal would be, he said grapefruit and coffee, odd choices to say the least.

Hours after his execution, at nearly 5 in the morning, my colleagues and I drove to a Waffle House for breakfast. The colleague who had witnessed the execution was visibly shaking and hardly touched his biscuits and gravy. Not knowing what to say, I offered a suggestion: “Take one of those biscuits and sop up the gravy.” He looked incredulous. “What the hell does sop mean?” he asked. Another colleague told him it was a Southern thing. “Pay Todd no mind. He’s from Tennessee, remember?” I quipped, “And damn proud of it.”

I felt guilty after sleeping soundly following Swisher’s execution because of that colleague’s reaction six years earlier.

Executions in Oregon, a “progressive” state, are rare. Crazy Harry was the last, and that was 22 years ago. Executions in Virginia are not rare: The commonwealth has executed more people throughout its history than any other state, including Texas. In Virginia, 113 inmates have been executed since 1976 when the U.S. Supreme Court allowed capital punishment to resume. That’s far fewer than Texas over that time period. But before 1976, says the Death Penalty Information Center, Virginia put to death 1,277 people, including federal and military executions.

I don’t know how I feel about the federal government resuming executions or the death penalty in general. But I often wonder what it would take to remove my cloak of ambivalence.

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