

Why the Alt-Right is Against Capitalism

Some people on the left are starting to worry about getting trolled by the alt-right. This is because the alt-right has become aggressively anti-capitalist, pro-welfare state, and in favor of a government that specifically promotes white interests, not a free market that offers no privilege to anyone.

“The alt-right is looking to expand its ranks,” [declares Salon](#), “and prominent leaders of the notorious white supremacist movement apparently believe that leftists are an ideal target for their recruiting efforts.” This follows a huge investigative piece that [appeared](#) in *The Nation*, in which a reporter from the publication attended a number of alt-right events, where leftist ideas are newly fashionable.

Salon then warns leftists not to fall for it:

The alt-right’s “anti-capitalism,” then, is really just anti-Semitism wrapped up in an economic veil, devoid of any real critique of capitalism. Their economic turn is simply a means to further their movement and spread their racist ideology.

There is truth in that statement. Anti-semitism and racism have been a core part of the attacks on the market for centuries, which raises some interesting questions about the anti-market left itself.

The *Salon* claim also understates the full-on anti-liberalism of alt-right ideology, a topic that forms the thesis of [my book](#) on the topic. Indeed, in its origins, this outlook was formed in opposition to the world-transforming power of markets. It is rooted in resentment of the expansion of liberty and prosperity of the early 19th century, and the fear

that capitalism would break down old hierarchies, traditional attachments, and national borders. The revolt they favored was always a revolt against the market.

Trolling the Left

It's true that in modern times, in the United States, this gang gained public attention by first attempting to pass themselves off as libertarians, hanging out at meet ups, conferences, and taking over subreddits. It worked for a while, given the libertarian commitment to free association and free speech. But then people got wise to the game. Over the last year, many leaders within the libertarian community have doubled down on an effort to preserve the integrity of libertarian ideas and make sure they were not compromised by this gang.

Libertarianism then became a low performer for recruitment. That's when the shift became apparent. The new language of the alt-right is all about denouncing corporate capitalism for failing to do its bidding. They say that capitalism is too politically correct, is excluding them from social media, is declining to let them use financial tools to raise money, and is generally promoting their enemies in cooperation with the media.

The left often accuses capitalism of doing things for which it is not actually guilty, such as excluding the poor, exploiting workers, ravaging the earth, and so on. The alt-right, however, is mostly attacking capitalism for things that corporations are, in fact, doing and doing well. These people are not popular people, and their views have proven poisonous for venues like Twitter and Facebook, and are banned not for PC reasons, but simply because they reduce the value of the platforms.

In other ways, however, the market – which is no respecter of persons or ideologies – has been a great friend to the alt-

right. Amazon sells their books. Their podcasts are hosted by capitalist firms. Their publishing venues are based on the profit-and-loss model. The market has done the same for red and green ideologies too. The market is a tool for everyone without exception.

Tribal Barriers

It's also true that the market has always provided a main impetus for breaking down tribal barriers. It thinks in terms of individual rights because it is designed to appeal to individual minds. If your goal is the promotion of group solidarity and exclusion, it is not a good tool. Its watchwords are inclusion and empowerment of everyone. It was the gradual liberalization of markets and the technology and universalist values that came with it that ended slavery, promoted minority and women's rights, and created this thing we call the middle class.

It makes perfect sense, then, that the alt-right would reveal itself to be anti-liberal not just in politics, but also in economics. In fact, it should make the left uncomfortable that the alt-right feels at home with the economic ideas of socialists, and not for the first time. What has always united the Hegelians of the right and left has been their shared opposition to the free society. The details of the critique and proposed alternatives are different depending on the tribe, but that economic freedom itself is the target of both is nothing new.

Recall that in its early days, the Nazi party [called](#) merely for boycotts of Jewish businesses, and even instructed party members to use no physical violence. This was April 1, 1933. The hope was that this would inspire a nation to cause bankruptcy to the Jews and drive them out of the country. It didn't work. People continued to deal with Jewish doctors, grocers, and intellectuals. The next step was absolutely necessary: the Nazis abolished the market itself with the

[Nuremberg Laws of 1935](#). History has shown us that if any tribe seeks to control the market, they will have to abolish it first.

The Blending of Left and Right

The revolving door between the left and the right has been going around for two centuries. People like [John Ruskin](#) or [Thomas Carlyle](#) might have been non-Marxists and conservatives in every respect, but they targeted the market as the most feared enemy of their agenda for social and economic control. The Progressives too, split between their right and left branches, each anxious to use the state to stop the market drive that spreads the benefits of prosperity to all people.

The strange way in which the far left and right are bound up with each other has been noted by consistent liberals for a long time. Their membership is fluid, [wrote](#) Max Eastman in 1956, observing that “every judgment and choice, every trait and mode of behavior, that once had given meaning to the word ‘Right’ is now supported and approved by those whom all agree in calling ‘Left’ or ‘Leftist.’”

Equally, there have been periods in history when what used to be called left was suddenly called right, as illustrated in the magically adaptive mind of [Werner Sombart](#), who easily made the journey from Communist to Nazi.

In the much-truncated and cartoonish remake in the presidential election of 2016, many observers noted the odd way in which it was difficult to distinguish the platforms of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump: anti-trade, pro-“worker”, promising universal health coverage, and generally railing against globalism and capitalist financial power. That they hated each other was not a surprise. This fits the narrative of history in which political tribes save their most vituperative attacks for those closest to them in outlook.

(Fortunately for the American people, the winner of that

election has come to discover that deregulation and tax cuts are more popular among the public than protectionism and executive centralization.)

The alt-right's turn toward overt anti-capitalism is neither surprising nor new nor counterintuitive. It doesn't just stem from anti-Semitism, even if that is a seemingly [inevitable](#) part of it. Collectivism of all sorts and every form stands opposed to economic liberty. Just give it time: all types of collectivism end up sounding more or less like each other.

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