

How Believing in Socialism Can Make You Miserable

On my (Brittany's) college campus, the largest and most active club was the "Revolutionary Student Union," also known as the school's resident Marxists. Even then, I passionately disagreed with socialism. But one thing that struck me was how these students were not only wrong, but seemed deeply unhappy. They always walked into class scowling and were always grouching, not just about the evils of capitalism, but about intractable frustrations and perceived injustices in their personal and academic lives.

I often wondered if there was a connection between the dysfunction in their lives and their socialist ideology.

To these young revolutionaries, every frustration in their lives was someone else's fault. If they weren't getting the grades they felt they deserved, some bourgeois professor was to blame. If they didn't have job prospects that matched their high regard for their own intellects, it must be the capitalist system holding them back. Their tendency was to scapegoat "class enemies," not only for societal ills but for their own personal problems as well.

By shifting the blame to others, they relieved themselves of responsibility over their own problems. They wasted their time and energy complaining, wallowing in self-pity, and seeking redress, instead of taking ownership of their lives and fixing up their affairs. As a result, their frustrations only compounded.

This attitude also robbed them of one of the great pleasures in life: experiencing empathetic joy in the happiness of others. According to their zero-sum Marxist mindset, the prosperity of others came at the expense of their own

prospects. So they resented anyone more successful than themselves. And they became so preoccupied with dragging other people down that they had little energy left over for lifting themselves up.

If my student comrades ever did manage to impose socialism on the country, it would cause deep and widespread misery. And yet plenty of misery in their own lives was already being generated by the mere idea of socialism residing only in their minds.

The Psychological Roots of Socialism

Yet, in spite of this, and in spite of all the economic logic and evidence that shows that classical liberalism and capitalism enriches and frees the whole of society, while socialism enslaves and impoverishes it, these young socialists would still cling rigidly to their ideology. Why?

According to Ludwig von Mises, it is not simply a matter of economic illiteracy and intellectual error in general. Rather, it is a psychological matter. He even went so far as to argue that the roots of socialism lie in neurosis.

“...the root of the opposition to liberalism cannot be reached by resort to the method of reason. This opposition does not stem from the reason, but from a pathological mental attitude—from resentment and from a neurasthenic condition that one might call a Fourier complex, after the French socialist of that name”

The socialist frame of mind can be summed up in one word: resentment. As Mises wrote:

“Resentment is at work when one so hates somebody for his more favorable circumstances that one is prepared to bear heavy losses if only the hated one might also come to harm. Many of those who attack capitalism know very well that their

situation under any other economic system will be less favorable. Nevertheless, with full knowledge of this fact, they advocate a reform, e.g., socialism, because they hope that the rich, whom they envy, will also suffer under it."

Psychologist Jordan B. Peterson also characterizes socialism as both driven by resentment and fostering resentment. In a panel, he said of Marxism:

"There is the dark side of it, which means everyone who has more than you got it by stealing it from you. And that really appeals to the Cain-like element of the human spirit. Everyone who has more than me got it in a manner that was corrupt and that justifies not only my envy but my actions to level the field so to speak, and to look virtuous while doing it. There is a tremendous philosophy of resentment that I think is driven now by a very pathological anti-human ethos."

Those who have lost themselves in a downward spiral of resentment would rather fail than succeed if it meant that their class enemies would suffer along with them. The phrase "misery loves company" is particularly applicable to the socialist mindset.

As Mises explained, people often cling to resentment and scapegoating because it offers consolation, however fleeting:

"In the case of social failure, which alone concerns us here, the consolation consists in the belief that one's inability to attain the lofty goals to which one has aspired is not to be ascribed to one's own inadequacy, but to the defectiveness of the social order. The malcontent expects from the overthrow of the latter the success that the existing system has withheld from him."

It is for this reason that Mises says, "...for modern man, socialism has become an elixir against earthly adversity."

And this compulsive, unhealthy attitude is what closes the class warrior's mind and makes it impervious to new ideas. As Mises wrote, socialism often amounts to a defense mechanism against an inferiority complex:

"The neurotic clings to his 'saving lie,' and when he must make the choice of renouncing either it or logic, he prefers to sacrifice logic. For life would be unbearable for him without the consolation that he finds in the idea of socialism. It tells him that not he himself, but the world, is at fault for having caused his failure; and this conviction raises his depressed self-confidence and liberates him from a tormenting feeling of inferiority."

Only You Can Change Your Circumstances

Luckily, this kind of neurosis can be cured, but it requires effort on the part of the individual. As Mises wrote:

"One cannot send every person suffering from a Fourier complex to the doctor for psychoanalytic treatment; the number of those afflicted with it is far too great. No other remedy is possible in this case than the treatment of the illness by the patient himself."

And the starting point for conducting such self-therapy is for each individual to come to grips with the fact that resentment, envy, and scapegoating only brings oneself frustration, stagnation, and needless suffering.

We are all responsible for improving our own lives, difficult and time-consuming as that quest may be. Renowned psychology professor Jordan B. Peterson has built his career and renown largely on helping individuals leave behind resentment and self-pity and take responsibility for their own lives. He argues that, far better than political agitation and contention, that offering that kind of help is the best way to

help ideologues grow out of the neurotic tendencies that cause them to cleave to socialism and other toxic creeds. In a [Q&A session](#), he counseled saying to such people:

“...look, we would like it so much if you could thrive as an individual. Drop your cult-like affiliation. Step out of the shadows, the demonic shadows of your ideological possession, and step forward as a fully-developed person into the light.”

The antidote to both socialism and debilitating resentment is individual reflection and action. If one makes an effort to look within and better themselves, then they will find that that resentment will begin to disappear, self-efficacy will grow, and their lives will improve. And dropping socialism will be a wonderful side-effect.

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