

# Let the Free Market Fight Chinese Censorship

Given the recent maelstrom set off by American companies surrendering to Chinese government pressure, one can't help but think of the apocryphal quote often attributed to Lenin: "When it comes time to hang the capitalists, they will sell us the rope." Apparently forgetting that Lenin's [mummified corpse](#) lies moldering in the Kremlin and the Soviet Union has ignominiously collapsed, many conservatives seem to agree that the principles of freedom and capitalism that comprise the American way of life are sure to doom us at the hands of the nefarious Chinese communists.

A few days before the Chinese influence scandals erupted, I [addressed](#) this subject here at *The American Conservative*. I argued that while Chinese economic integration does indeed pose a threat to the United States, Americans can still wield their [consumer sovereignty](#) and force companies to stop kowtowing to China – without piling on more government regulations.

It's increasingly clear that many conservatives disagree with that assessment. They seem to no longer believe in the American tradition of freedom, decentralization, and the free market, instead embracing a strong and active federal government that enforces its capricious ideas as to how everyone else ought to live. Unfortunately, this anti-freedom attitude didn't just debut with the NBA scandal. As Ryan McMaken, a senior editor at the Mises Institute, [has documented](#), it has been building for quite some time. [Tucker Carlson](#) and [Sohrab Ahmari](#) are among the more prominent cheerleaders for this new conservative [etatism](#), which sees the state disciplining and running people's lives in the name of society.

While proposals like these are bad enough on the domestic level, arguing that American freedoms should be tossed out to stop the Chinese from subverting American freedoms is downright imbecilic. Contrary to conservatives' fears, the market has already begun to address the problem of U.S. companies caving to Beijing without any state intervention.

Though the NBA initially seemed to waffle in response to Chinese outrage over Daryl Morey's pro-Hong Kong Twitter statement, its commissioner, Adam Silver, ended up finding a backbone and [defending](#) Morey's right to freely express himself. Of course, the NBA's change of heart didn't just magically happen. Americans made their displeasure clear: politicians ranted, social media users piled on, and *South Park*'s creators offered a sarcastic apology after their show was [banned in China](#): "like the NBA we welcome Chinese censors into our homes and into our hearts. We too love money more than freedom and democracy."

If China's hostile and aggressive [response](#) to the NBA commissioner's defense of free expression is any indication, the league could stand to lose billions of dollars from canceled broadcasts and streaming rights. [According](#) to Silver: "the losses have already been substantial." There's even talk that the NBA [may lower](#) the next season's salary cap as a result. Yet even with this financial pressure, Silver still [refused](#) to fire Morey when the Chinese government requested that he do so. Market pressure obviously worked, making it clear that if the NBA returned to its abject servility, American consumers would make their wrath known by hitting them in the pocketbook.

The gaming studio Activision Blizzard has been dealing with its own China-related [PR disaster](#). Blizzard owns some of the largest franchises in online gaming, including the long-running *World of Warcraft* series, *Overwatch*, and *Hearthstone*. When a professional *Hearthstone* player from Hong Kong, who goes by the name Blitzchung, made a statement in support of

the Hong Kong protests during a match, Blizzard went bonkers. The company banned him for a year, rescinded his winnings, and fired the two Taiwanese game announcers who had apparently egged him on.

Many naturally assumed that Blizzard did this to avoid being shut out of the Chinese market. But instead of avoiding trouble, they unleashed a PR nightmare, as [employees walked out](#) in protest, players canceled their game subscriptions under the hashtag [#BoycottBlizzard](#), and a global movement turned a character from Overwatch into a [symbol](#) of the Hong Kong protests in an attempt to get Blizzard games banned from China. After several days of silence, Blizzard [decided](#) to reduce the suspension for Blitzchung and the announcers to six months as well as reinstate the prize money. The company also stated that the ban was not the result of any Chinese pressure, but because of its rule against divisive statements of any kind during matches.

It now seems likely that the upcoming BlizzCon at the beginning of November is going to be very [awkward](#). Rather than hyping new games and updates, the studio will have to deal with being publicly shish kabobbed by angry fans who are on the verge of becoming angry former fans.

Doubtless, more stories and controversies over Chinese censorship will make headlines in the coming months. However, American consumers very clearly don't want to accept Chinese standards: they dislike companies bowing to the communists, and they aren't afraid to make their own demands known.

Perhaps some etatistic conservatives would prefer we just dispense with all this public debate and instead dictate how everyone should behave through the government. That is, unfortunately, the route Americans increasingly seem to favor. But in the end, continuing down that path (one might even call it a Road to Serfdom) will only result in an America that's a lot more like Communist China than anyone should be

comfortable with.

Capitalism is the system by which resources are allocated to where people most value them. As reactions to *South Park*, the NBA, and Blizzard have demonstrated, Americans still do value freedom and are perfectly willing to hold accountable companies that put Chinese business before their own nation's creed.

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