

This Isn't Working: How We View Those We Oppose

Recently I celebrated my birthday with my son and five of his children. His wife and oldest daughter were visiting relatives, so I pitched in and helped James with the kids.

On my birthday we took the kids to a Steak 'n Shake just north of town. It's a kid-friendly restaurant and getting grandchildren to any kind of restaurant occasionally, even when the oldest is only nine, introduces them to the concept of eating out.

The twins, Bella and Beckett, age six, dined at Steak 'n Shake earlier in the year with their other grandparents. After ordering our meals, my son leaned across the table and said to Bella, a demure girl with blonde hair and beautiful features (Hey, I'm a grandpa and have to brag, but in this case it's true), "So, Bella, is Steak 'n Shake as much fun as the last time you were here?"

Bella glared at her younger brother and sister who were sitting across from her in the booth, little Josie waving a yellow chicken purchased earlier from a Dollar Tree, four-year-old Jude belting out a song no one knew, and Bella said very seriously, "This isn't working with these people here."

James and I burst out laughing, and Bella soon relaxed, joined our laughter with a smile, and had a great time.

Where the kid got that line I have no idea, but I imagine her as a director of plays or movies, or as head of some corporation, uttering these same words 30 years down the line: "This isn't working with these people here."

Unfortunately, dictators of all kinds also employ these words. When you have absolute control over a country, it's much

easier to remove people than to refute their ideas.

Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, and Mao all practiced this concept, killing millions because “This isn’t working with these people here.” For the last hundred years, copycats in smaller countries have also used imprisonment and execution to stifle opponents and protestors who disagreed with them. Lock up the dissidents, ship them off to labor camps, or stand them against a wall and shoot them, and you’ve ended the debate, at least temporarily. Since the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia, communism alone has killed almost 100 million people.

As the *Wall Street Journal* [noted](#), “that makes communism the greatest catastrophe in human history.”

Despite communism’s bloody and sordid history, “This isn’t working with these people here” has also become one of the mantras of radicals in the American Left.

The most extreme example of this idea emerged when Project Veritas secretly filmed a Bernie Sanders field organizer calling for gulags and [re-education camps](#) for Trump supporters and Americans opposed to socialism. The young man spouting off his opinions in this video is clearly ill-informed about socialism and about repression in such dictatorships.

Much more common are attempts to deny speakers with differing opinions access to podiums in our universities, to bully and shame conservative students into silence, to mob those with whom they disagree on Twitter, or to threaten violence against their opponents – even those of their own party – who voice an opinion contrary to the parameters of the more extreme ideologues.

The irony here is that these people have locked themselves into a gulag built by their own hands. When they cover their ears and refuse to listen to those with whom they disagree, when they bully people into silence, when they riot because a Charles Murray or an Ann Coulter appears on university

grounds, they are building a wall around themselves brick by brick, a prison in which they may remain free and safe from the differing opinions of others, but a prison nonetheless. They are living illustrations of the first sentence of Rousseau's Social Contract Theory: "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains." In this case, these radicals have fashioned the chains themselves.

"This isn't working with these people here" sounds precocious and amusing when spoken by a six-year-old. But in the mouths of older people who hate others because of their politics or religion, and who view human beings as things, digits, numbers, and bodies without souls, these words are a deadly poison.

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