

The Median Voter is a Socialist

November 28, 2016

It has been a couple of weeks since the 2016 election. I have had time to process an outcome that, even a month ago, seemed unthinkable. Oddly, considering all the ink that has been spent trying to understand how everyone could be so wrong, my conclusions about the meaning of this vote have not changed—I started writing this piece in August. If anything, my prior beliefs about the electorate have been reinforced.

Most pundits seem perplexed today because they are in manifest denial. They do not want to admit what has happened, either because that would mean admitting they identify with positions they abjure, albeit in name only, or because it would mean accepting the horrible truth that their fellow human beings have trampled on any prospect of achieving their vision of utopia within their lifetime. Aside from *The Economist* magazine and the more self-aware ramblings of George Will and others who still assert the mantle of intellectual conservatism, I have not seen any acknowledgement of what this election ultimately portends: the Reagan-Thatcher Revolution is over and the libertarian dream is dead. The pendulum has begun to swing back in the other direction.

The median voter in the United States is now a socialist, and both parties will doubtless tailor their platforms around this new standard of moderation. Ever since Trump clinched the Republican nomination, political experts have been asking when he would pivot to the center inhabited by Hillary Clinton. It never happened. Instead, Hillary had to pivot toward Trump because he had, presumably by accident, discovered America's (and Europe's and Asia's) real center. A large part of why she lost half the electorate, including many traditionally Democratic voters, was the inauthenticity of her claims to have renounced the free-market principles of her

husband's and Barack Obama's administrations. Was she sincere in her rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership? I, though her supporter, did not believe it, and neither did most of those opposed to the treaty.

It remains to be seen how many of his campaign promises Donald Trump will follow through with, and there is good reason to suspect he will temper or wholly abandon his more extreme proposals. Since the election, he has already stated that he will not seek to prosecute Hillary and that global warming may be real. Regardless of what he actually does in office, what concerns me here is that nearly half the country voted for a man selling a panacea of socialism, while the other half voted for a woman who had to veer towards socialism to secure her nomination and keep the race competitive.

Has the country truly made a giant leap towards socialism? Accepting that premise requires more than a passing knowledge of the definition of socialism. Politicians abhor a systematic taxonomy of economic systems for obvious reasons, but voters often do the same, to their detriment.

Many people think that if the dictionary defines socialism as “any of various theories or systems of social organization in which the means of producing and distributing goods is owned collectively or by a centralized government that often plans and controls the economy,”¹ then that must be the one and only definition of socialism. I have previously suggested that Marxist lexicographers wrote this definition to suit their purposes.² Readers often scoff at this conspiracy theory, but, aside from the historical record, there is one gigantic piece of evidence that supports it. When Marx and Engels refer to socialists in the *Communist Manifesto*, they only use the term disparagingly and never in the context of collective ownership of property. Indeed, they talk

¹ American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, (2011), Fifth Edition, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

² [“What is Socialism?”](#)

about many different kinds of socialism:³ “feudal socialism”, “clerical socialism”, “petty-bourgeois socialism.” They do not define socialism—Marx never defines anything—but their usage is entirely consistent with the broader definition of St. Simon and his followers when they coined the word. Unlike his future disciples, Marx viewed himself as a communist, which in his mind was something quite different from a socialist. It was only after his death that Marxists adopted the terminology that a socialist is a person working to achieve communism, an absorbing state in which the whole world operates as one organism.

So when I say that the median voter is a socialist, I do not mean that the median voter wants to obliterate private property. Rather, I mean that the median voter wants the government to interfere in the private sector of the economy—beyond what is legitimately necessary to maintain public safety—usually for his or her personal benefit. The central theme of Trump’s campaign was that he will take care of us. If persons lost out due to competition or globalization, he will fix it. Most of his supporters believe they are adherents of free-market capitalism because God-fearing Christians must be capitalists, but there is nothing intrinsically atheistic about socialism. However, the conceit that your leader can or should heal your woes by penalizing or prohibiting your competition or critics is the very essence of socialism.

As John Stuart Mill wrote in his defense of free markets: “In many cases, an individual, in pursuing a legitimate object, necessarily and therefore legitimately causes pain or loss to others, or intercepts a good which they had a reasonable hope of obtaining. . . . Whoever succeeds in an overcrowded profession, or in a competitive examination; whoever is preferred to another in any contest for an object which both desire, reaps benefit from the loss of others, from their wasted exertion and their disappointment. . . . Society admits no right, either legal or moral, in the disappointed competitors, to immunity from this kind of suffering; and feels called on to

³ *Communist Manifesto*, Chapter III

interfere, only when means of success have been employed which it is contrary to the general interest to permit—namely, fraud or treachery, and force.”⁴ There will always be winners and losers in a market economy. A proponent of free markets may allow the government to ease the suffering of the losers but not by rigging the game or hobbling the winners.

Throughout the election, many voters—and nonvoters—complained that neither Clinton nor Trump had a serious economic plan. This too is the cry of a socialist. It insinuates that the job of the President is to have a plan for the economy, which it is if you are a socialist of any sort: Marxist, fascist, mercantilist. Trump, playing to “the socialists of all parties”—from both the left and the right—touts how great his plans are without saying what they are.⁵ Hillary is not a socialist, which is why her “plan” for the economy was basically to just let the market do its thing with minor adjustments that Adam Smith could get behind, like making college more affordable and tinkering with the tax structure to make it more efficient.

The biggest threat to our economic future is that a majority of the electorate no longer believes that trusting the “invisible hand” is common sense. For the first time in its history, the Grand Old Party nominated a socialist candidate, though most of the party still does not understand this. A few, like George Will, did recognize it and renounced the party. Others, including men like Paul Ryan, who have claimed Ayn Rand as a guiding light, proved quite willing to abandon Reagan values and ride the bull for a chance to regain the White House. Of course, the Democratic Party has had a socialist streak for most of the last century. Take these two facts together, and the Sandwich Theorem applies.⁶ The median voter is a socialist. Any

⁴ Mill, John Stuart, (1859), *On Liberty* (MobileReference) p. 80. Many thanks to my colleague Randy Simmons for prodding me to finally study Mill.

⁵ Hayek, Friedrich, (2007), *The Road to Serfdom: Text and Documents—The Definitive Edition*, ed: Bruce Caldwell, University of Chicago Press, p. 46.

⁶ If the value of a continuous function when approaching a point from the left is L and the value when approaching from the right is also L , then the value where the two sides meet in the middle must also be L .

notion people might have had that we could continue Reagan's agenda and push for a more free-market society is ridiculous. Those who believe in markets are going to spend the next generation or more fighting a holding action to preserve what we have now.