

Opinion: Learn from history; socialism is a disaster

Wichita Falls Times Record News

Published 12:27 a.m. CT Oct. 24, 2018



(Photo: Torin Halsey/Times Record News, AP)

"The Greatest Generation"—men and women about to become centenarians—is shocked that today large numbers of young people and minorities have a positive view of socialism, an ideology, which is opposed to capitalism and advocates that the means of production, distribution and exchange should be owned or regulated by the government.

A recent Gallup poll showed Americans aged 18-29 are more positive about socialism than capitalism. Clearly many Americans don't have a good idea what socialism is or how it impacts societies.

Today we see repeated assaults on traditional American liberties, as groupthink and political correctness are taking a toll on critical thinking. Widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo is creating a climate receptive to sweeping change, and we see mob rule wielding great strength and silencing dissenting views.

Those with other perspectives must be allowed and encouraged to join the public conversation. This will make us all better thinkers. I merely ask that some things I have learned about socialism be considered.

A Ukrainian MSU student told me that as a child he felt America was heaven. He said Americans should study socialism before deciding we want it, that it will not play out the way we think it will. It may sound appealing—equality, more community, less business orientation, free healthcare for all—but there is no incentive to innovate and increase efficiency, there are shortages of even basic goods, hierarchies emerge, government takes over all commerce and makes all decisions.

Everyone wanted to get out of his country. Most lived in poverty; the poorest American seemed to be wealthy compared to anyone he knew. When he came to the US as a teen, he saw his first truck, the Russians having been left behind by the Industrial Revolution, and he was struck by the roads being smooth because Ukrainian roads were in terrible disrepair (Ukrainians jokingly said if one was driving straight they were probably drunk).

Government-funded healthcare was not good, and one had to offer doctors extra cash in order to get decent care. At age seven he had an adenoidectomy at a free clinic. Patients had to bring their own cloth for the bleeding, and he was tied to a chair and given nothing for pain. And we thought veterans' healthcare was unsatisfactory!

In December 1991, as the USSR disbanded, my husband and I were invited by the mayor of Moscow to a gathering of 50 US couples who were paired with 50 Russian couples in similar business fields, the purpose being to promote financial ties, and the high point was a New Year's Eve celebration in the Kremlin.

Our host couple, Alex and Natale, spoke very freely after a bit of vodka. He stated that until four years ago when perestroika and glasnost came into effect most of his Russian friends worked eight-hour shifts sitting behind desks doing nothing and getting paid by the government.

They acknowledged that communism as a successful way of life was always a farce, and Russians had to watch world leaders steadily raise living standards in other countries as Russia's living conditions grew more dire. But after the restructuring Alex became a great entrepreneur and learned for the first time what it means to really work as Americans do.

When our group was shown the extravagant lifestyles of privileged Russians which had been concealed behind high walls, and we were given access to much that commoners had never seen, including opulent Kremlin palaces, it made our translator angry.

Our meeting with the politburo was also enlightening: they admitted that they knew communism was not working but that they were resistant to change because as government officials they had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

Natale lamented that she had nothing to wear; one must shop for quality apparel in neighboring countries. She wished she could move to Vietnam. Shortages, rationing, waiting lists, and blatant abuse of political power were the norm under socialism.

Progress is stifled under socialism as individual incentives are eliminated, and the spirits of the people are broken. All dignity is stripped from the common man as freedoms and wealth are transferred from individuals and families to the State.

As Winston Churchill said, "Socialism is the philosophy of failure, the creed of ignorance, and the gospel of envy."

God, save America from socialism!

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