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Why Not Socialism?



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In May of 1949, the first issue of *Monthly Review* came off the press, with a circulation of 450 copies. It featured an essay by none other than Albert Einstein titled, “Why Socialism?” Why so famous a scientist speaking to so few people, and then out of his field of expertise?

For one, he was asked by a friend, Otto Nathan. For two, at the age of 70 he had fully formed opinions about capitalism. Regarding the deteriorating relationship of the individual to society, he had this to say: “The economic anarchy of capitalist society as it exists today is, in my opinion, the real source of the evil.” This is the sort of thing that earned him 1,000 plus pages in his FBI file.

And then, three, Einstein himself posed and answered the question, “...we should not assume that experts are the only ones who have a right to express themselves on questions affecting the organization of society.”

Einstein had to understand things simply. In developing special relativity, he asked, what do we mean when we say two events occur simultaneously, and then proposed a simple thought experiment to test a proposition that was too obvious to need testing. Obvious to other serious thinkers for centuries, that is, but it ushered in a daring new view of the physical world.

His genius ability to see things clearly did not make him immune from criticism when it came to his secular views. He was regarded as naïve. Upon close examination, a charge of naiveté rendered against a person may mean they have not exhibited the expected deference to established norms. This lack of conformity, when conformity is so easy, makes them the object of curiosity at best, or the object of law enforcement, at worst.

In the almost 70 years since his essay, it’s out in the open now that late-stage capitalism is right on track. Capital long ago seized control of the state and its political apparatus. The reigning oligarchy is flush with satisfaction over its successes: the quasi-merger of corporation and state, corporations attaining rights over people, people becoming more and more dependent upon the very corporations that exploit them, income inequality, even greater wealth inequality, all predictive consequences of predatory capitalism.

Why do some have so much, and others so little? (It has nothing to do with work). Why do some declare wars, while others die in them? (It has everything to do with workers).

Where can it go from here? Let’s hear from an expert. Credit Suisse’s 2013 Global Wealth Report: “Two generations ahead, future extrapolations of current wealth growth rates yields almost a billion millionaires, equivalent to 20% of the total adult population. If this scenario unfolds, then billionaires will be commonplace, and there is likely to be a few trillionaires too — eleven according to our best estimate.”

The military is outside the pale of political ideology and can be counted on for straightforwardness. From “The Future of the Army” report, September 2016: “Today’s world of haves and have-nots will be greatly magnified, with those fortunate enough to

have employment and access to stunning technology living in stark contrast to the hundreds of millions struggling to survive in disrupted environments.”

The report also anticipates accelerating problems due to global climate change (accepting the scientific community consensus), deeply associated with the capitalist model. Resource competition in the northernmost part of the planet opened to commerce due to Arctic ice melt. Low-lying areas made uninhabitable by rising sea levels. Extreme droughts causing collapse of agriculture and economies, resulting in refugee crises. Natural disasters from wildfires to floods to deadly heat waves only increasing.

The ruling elite must be ever watchful for cracks in the capitalist edifice. Small signs of nervousness have begun to appear now that many of our citizens are able to mouth the word, socialism, and keep it on their stomach. People have social motivations as well as ego-driven motivations.

An economic system such as capitalism, based on profit competition, brings out the worst, predatory instincts. In contrast, socialism, based on cooperation in fulfilling society's basic needs, brings out the best, ethical instincts. If it's as simple as this, why is socialism so far off in the distance, and what can be done about it?

To the first part, the distance, the ruling elite has ensconced itself since the country's inception as the propertied, law-writing class. Their problems were the problems of all social hierarchies. How to keep their privileges in place while controlling the masses. To this purpose, class division must be institutionalized and maintained through an educational system that moderates the behavior of the citizen, reducing him/her to mere observer, rather than actor, in respect to existing class arrangement. In its most insidious sense this is known as “respect for the law”.

To the second part, the pitchfork image is delightful but must be rejected in the face of the USG's armed police force with its tear gas, rubber bullets, real bullets, tanks, helicopter gunships, missiles, and thermonuclear weapons.

For generations, socialism was taboo. Pressing for it made you a cultural outsider. This does appear to be changing. The threat is diminishing. It's also well to realize that capitalism is doing much of the work by failing to a remarkable degree. Capitalism's losers are everywhere. And they're not hiding.

From the perspective of class struggle, people are on one or the other side of the barricades. This much is comprehensible. Just as comprehensible —with the second part in mind — is that there are those blind to the barricades.