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America's Socialist Origins

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for Prager University

*Americans didn’t invent free market capitalism. But you might say they perfected it.*

Larry, in the past few decades, America has been swamped in almost every industry by monopolies. How did you arrive at the conclusion that an economy dominated by monopolies is ...

"perfected free market capitalism?"

*In doing so, they created more wealth for more people than any society in the history of the world.*

Larry, what you left out was ... that they created this great wealth by stealing 2 continents from the true Americans (although they did give one tribe that great string of beads for Manhattan - so there is that).

You also left out that they created this great wealth by importing millions of human slaves.

Larry, isn't it amazing how much wealth you can accumulate when don't have to buy the land from the owners; and you kidnap humans and force them to work without wages, health care, or any type of benefits other than a roof and some food?

Who would have ever guessed that a system such as that could have produced such great wealth?

*To begin to understand this fascinating and complex story, we have to travel back in time to the very first settlers of America.*

Larry, I agree that the beginning is an excellent place to start.

So in the beginning, the land was occupied by millions of nomadic, illiterate Americans who had primitive weapons and stood no chance of defending themselves against the hordes of invading Christians from Europe, intent on stealing every acre of land that they could, and murdering anyone who stood in their way.

Okay, then what happened next Larry?

*But before we get to the history, let me define what I mean by capitalism. It’s not an easy term to pin down because it developed over thousands of years of human interaction. Adam Smith, the great English thinker, first described it in his famous 1776 treatise, The Wealth of Nations, but he didn’t invent it. For our purposes here, I define capitalism as an economic system in which individuals freely decide what they will produce and who they will serve.*

Larry, by your definition, America fails to qualify. Our laws do not allow businesses to discriminate in the manner you just described.

*Now back to history*

*When the first settlers arrived—at Jamestown in 1607 then Plymouth in 1620—they were operating under an economic system common to all European nations at that time, known as mercantilism. Under mercantilism businesses, especially in colonies, were operated for the benefit of the state. While governments permitted the companies to make profits, their primary purpose was to advance the national interest of England or Spain or France. The early American settlements were set up to be self-sufficient so that the English government didn’t have to support them. And they had to stake out territory.*

Larry, "stake out" was a euphemism wasn't it?

Instead of being honest and admitting that they stole the land from the natives who had been there for thousands of years, you called it "stake out territory"; to give it that "legal" air.

And as they expanded west murdering millions of Americans, I guess you would say they were just "staking out territory," huh?

*That was key to the colonial game: if England held the territory, Spain and France didn’t. The early colonists began their adventure with what they thought was a beautiful idea.*

Larry, those were more euphemisms, weren't they?

Now you refer to stealing land and murdering weaker people as "an adventure." And to top it off ... it was a "beautiful idea."

(but maybe not so beautiful for the victims, huh Larry?)

*They set up a common storehouse of grain from which people were supposed to take what they needed and put back what they could. Lands were also held in common and were worked in common. The settlers owned no land of their own. Though there was no name for this system, it was an ideal socialist commune.*

*And you can probably guess what happened. It began to fall apart almost immediately. As the colonists learned, when everyone is entitled to everything, no one’s responsible for anything. A colonist who started his workday early or stayed late received the same provision of food as a colonist who showed up late, went home early, or didn’t work at all.*

Larry, your scenario is dishonest, as pointed out in this expose of right wing propaganda:

<http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/right-wing-continues-push-%E2%80%9Csocialist-pilgrims%E2%80%9D-myth>

Larry, if "you people" had the facts on your side ...

you wouldn't have to lie, would you?

*After about two years, the settlement was reduced to eating shoelaces and rats. Half of them died of starvation.*

Larry, think about how easily your story just fell apart: you want us to believe that, rather than work, they were willing to die of starvation?

Larry, you're going to have to come up with something a lot more believable than that. Fox News idiots are the only ones who could hear that story and sit there nodding their heads in agreement ... like little bobble head dolls.

*Captain John Smith (of Pocahontas fame) took control of the colony and scrapped the socialist model. Each colonist received his own parcel of land. Private property had come to the New World.*

Larry, in which Socialist model do you find a denial of the private ownership of land?

America is half Socialist and half Capitalist. Do you see *any* attempts being made by *anyone* to remove a person's right to own private property?

*“He who won’t work, won’t eat!” Smith told them, citing the Biblical admonition.*

Larry, cherry-picking Bible verses isn't a very sound strategy. Anyone who has ever opened a Bible knows that for every verse you can find to support your position - I can find a dozen that contradict it. One example is "Thou shalt not kill." I can give you hundreds of verses that contradict that commandment. I hope you're not planning to rest your argument on the Bible, Larry?

*Well they worked. And they ate. And the colony was saved.*

Larry, so what was the difference?

You claimed that previously some didn't work and they starved. This time they worked and they survived. So what made them decide to work and live?

Are you really expecting us to believe that it was because one guy told them to work, but without him, they chose instead to die?

And other than Fox News viewers, whom are you expecting will believe that?

*The same story unfolded further north in the Plymouth colony 10 years later.*

Larry, so half of the Plymouth invaders also died because they didn't want to work, and then some dude told them to work or they wouldn't eat, so they all started working and eating ... and survived?

Forgive me Larry, but I can find stories in the Bible that make more sense than the crap you're shoveling.

*Although this was a Puritan colony with religious goals, its plan was the same as Jamestown’s. And it also failed. As its young governor, William Bradford, noted, by adopting the communal system “We thought we were wiser than God.” So they quickly abandoned the commune for private ownership.*

Larry, can you provide a Bible verse that supports private ownership?

I can provide evidence that the concept of private ownership originated in Athens, Greece around 500 b.c.e. from a philosopher named Solon. So where are your Bible verses?

*Soon, they had an abundance, which they celebrated with the holiday we now know as “Thanksgiving.” Over the next 150 years, this hard-learned lesson, that men should be responsible for their own economic fate, became conventional wisdom in the colonies.*

Larry, that's not exactly true, is it?

The slaves certainly weren't responsible for their own economic fate - it was determined for them. The Indians (the real Americans) weren't responsible for their own economic fate - it was determined for them. Women weren't responsible for their own economic fate - it was determined for them.

Now I get it - you're talking about the only people who really matter to Conservatives: white, heterosexual, Christian men ... with money.

*The American Revolution was largely fought over the burden that British mercantilism placed on the colonies. Two unpopular taxes—The Stamp Act and The Tea Act—are well known examples. The Americans saw the British government regulating and controlling almost all of their economic activities—and didn’t like it.*

*Now, it’s true that even after gaining independence, none of the Founders could be called capitalists.*

Well Larry, that's kind of embarrassing.

They conquered a continent, defeated the world's most powerful colonial power, and built great wealth on the backs of slaves; and by your own admission, they did all that without Capitalism.

You are doing more to kill your own argument than I ever could. Keep going Larry ... you're doing great.

*The idea of capitalism as a description of an economic system was only just beginning to be discussed in America. Yet many of the most influential Founders intuitively gravitated toward free market principles. Thomas Jefferson’s ideas of private land ownership shaped the famous Land Ordinance of 1785 that made public land available to private citizens,*

Larry, that was another euphemism wasn't it?

Land that belonged to the original Americans was simply called "public land" and distributed to the invaders. It must be fun to rewrite history to make it come out all neat and clean, after you remove all the blood and agony and truth from the story, huh?

*while Alexander Hamilton’s concepts of individual responsibility and sanctity of contracts could be seen in the Panic of 1791-92, in which he steadfastly refused to allow the US government to bail out bankers who had triggered the panic.*

Larry, it's too bad we didn't have men like Hamilton in 2008, when American politicians legislated the greatest transfer of wealth in world history, from the masses to the rich, in "The Bailout."

*Benjamin Franklin, of course, had practiced capitalism all his life with his printing business and with his maxims in Poor Richard’s Almanac.*

Larry, printing businesses are not prohibited under Socialism. Franklin wasn't practicing Capitalism - he was earning a living.

*The Constitution itself is awash in core concepts of a free market: sanctity of contracts,*

Larry, what makes you think Socialism prevents the sanctity of contracts?

*freedom of expression;*

Larry, freedom of expression has nothing to do with Capitalism. Now you're throwing everything but the kitchen sink, which means that even you must realize that your argument has failed.

*powerful limits on the government’s ability to regulate or tax;*

Larry, but the government *can* tax; and how could there not be limits? And what are "powerful" limits?

*an emphasis on paying debts; and so on.*

Larry, how is that an element of Capitalism?

Are debts ignored under Socialism?

Like I said Larry ... the kitchen sink.

*In short, it was the wisdom of experience, not academic ideology, that created America’s free-market principles.*

Larry, an economy ruled by monopolies in nearly every industry is not a free market economy. Let me get this straight Larry: you are a professor? And they actually pay you?

*The result has been the most prosperous and free nation in the history of the world.*

Larry, the second largest economy in the world is not a free-market capitalist economy but Communist China. How come you carefully avoided any mention of that fact, Larry?

As for your claim of "free nation," you'll have to explain what you mean by that before I can reply. But based on what I've just read, I have little hope that you will be able to back that up any better than your dismal attempt to push unfettered Capitalism on your audience.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dAmroKyzGY>

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

Tiny cyanobacteria

use the principle of the lens in the human eye

to perceive light direction

Cyanobacteria have populated Earth for 2.5 billion years and can be found anywhere where there's light: in ice, deserts, rivers, and lakes, as well as in the walls of buildings and in aquariums. They use light to produce energy by the process of oxygenicphotosynthesis.

In the oceans, which cover roughly 70 percent of Earth's surface, oxygen-producing cyanobacteria are among the most important photosynthetically active organisms and are thus a central component of the biosphere. Researchers discovered that cyanobacteria, which can move directly and precisely toward a light source, use their micro-optic properties to identify where the light is coming from. The light hits the surface of the round unicellular organisms, where it is focused as if by a microscopically tiny lens. This creates a focal point on the opposite side of the cell. The cells then move away from this point of high light intensity, causing them ultimately to move toward the natural light source.

All previous attempts to explain bacterial phototaxis (the process by which bacteria move toward light) have failed because these organisms, which measure only a few lengths of a light wave, were thought to be too small to perceive differences in light between the front and back side of the cell. Since the entire bacterium functions like a lens, however, the organisms can concentrate light, creating a pronounced light gradient within the cell. This physical principle is actually similar to the way light is focused in the lenses of human eyes.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

John Steinbeck (1902-1968) 66 years

(no biography - previously quoted)

"Socialism never took root in America

because the poor see themselves

not as an exploited proletariat,

but as temporarily embarrassed millionaires."