

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The following letters were submitted in response to the Fall 2019 editorial titled “*What is Socialism?*”

Good morning:

The editorial on ‘What is Socialism’ by Marson in (*Journal of Social Values and Ethics*) is a clear explanation of the demarcations between Capitalism, Socialism and Communism. It is, however, over simplistic to dismiss Adam Smith as nothing more than a proponent of Capitalism. He identified and warned against some of the perils of Capitalism, such as similar industries colluding to raise prices. I used to have the popular view of Smith before I studied economics and learned that although he considered Capitalism good economics, he was far from uncritical of it.

Charlotte Brewer, MAASW
Accredited Mental Health Social Worker

Charlotte,
Yes, I admit, that as an advocate, Adam Smith was not equal to advocacy of Karl Marx. In my editorial, my exclusive goal was to address the false information about socialism that has constantly appeared from online sources. To accomplish this goal, a detailed analysis of Adam Smith would derail my purpose. However, I do believe that your contribution to the discussion is critical. Therefore, I invite and strongly encourage you to write an editorial addressing Adam Smith’s critical analysis of capitalism. Such an editorial will be published.

Stephen M. Marson, Ph.D.
Editor, JSWVE

Dr. Marson:

Thank you for your courageous and fine article on socialism. There are, however, a few points that have been left out. For one, you do not state the basic premise of controlling the means of production which is- how much compensation do workers get in relation to their value in the production process? In capitalism they get very little, in communism a lot, and in socialism—something in-between. As

we are a capitalistic country—we have a staggering amount of inequality of income—which you also do not mention.

You are calling Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid socialism. In fact, they have nothing to do with the means of production and the worker’s compensation. They are merely measures to alleviate the ills of unrestrained capitalism. If profits were equally allocated, there would be no need for these programs.

You say that a socialistic solution “will not gain political support” in this country at this point. You do not say that socialism has such a bad name because—starting from birth, we have literally been brainwashed against it by propaganda promulgated by those who have the most to lose from it. Did you notice, however, that Americans seem to be newly and unexpectedly turning toward socialism judging by the 2020 election candidates’ popularity.?

Mildred Rein, Ph.D.
Chestnut Hill, MA

Mildred,
Thank you for your response, but I think you are incorrect regarding your analysis of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. The concept of “control over the means of production” includes both goods *and* services. Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are all services that are centrally controlled by our federal government. At one time, these services were handled by the private sector. Pensions were found in private enterprises while health care services were handled by charities and churches. This is not to suggest that the private sector did an *adequate or fair* job with these services. The poor performance of the private sector was a catalyst for government *control over the production* of these services.

Most importantly, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are services that are *not* delivered in a vacuum. Government employees facilitate these

government-controlled services. The control over the means of wages, works hours, and work environment of these employees are under total control of the federal government and not private enterprise. These services, like government-sponsored fire departments, clearly emerge from socialist ideology.

Conservative right-wingers, who whine about socialism but love their Social Security checks are being hypocritical. The government has *total control over the means of production* for Social Security. In a strict capitalist economy, a national pension program should be handled by private enterprise which would deny Congress from spending Social Security interest—which our Congress does, and which limits the funds awarded to retirees.

Make no mistake. The definition of “control over the means of production,” includes both goods *and services*. The services generated by Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, fire departments all emerge from socialist ideology.

Stephen M. Marson, Ph.D.
Editor, JSWVE

I think that you are spot on about this. These are highly loaded terms and are frequently used imprecisely. What is labelled as socialism in one setting or one time is something else in another. Key to this is the relationship between government and the economy. This is often a murky situation. The role of government is frequently debated but what is government? When Adam Smith wrote in the 1700s government for him was The King of England. That is very different from a Democracy. So then, what is the economy? In the United States, we do not have a free market economy. We have regulation and a certain amount of economic planning. The idea that a free market would be somehow superior is something that even the most conservative would shy away from. Unregulated markets are unstable and those in business often fear them. On balance,

command economies are not that desirable either. They are often inefficient and can be corrupt. So what to do? Pragmatic management of the mixed economy is a workable solution.

John McNutt, PhD, MSW, Professor
Joseph R. Biden, Jr. School of Public Policy and Administration
University of Delaware

The real question is not what is socialism, but what is a pragmatic idealistic alternative to the domination of neoliberalism as an ideology that bolsters monopoly capitalism? So, yes, we have to move beyond labels in our thinking. But as I argued in two articles in Crossroads in 1992-1993 and as I further argue in my recent theorization of [human injustice](#), we must re-focus on how to address our human needs as thickly theorized. Doing so requires not only abolishing monopoly capitalism but also oppression and dehumanization, either of which can easily co-exist with socialism as we have known it and even as we often define it. A revolutionary democratic alternative to neoliberalism—and an approach to a liberatory approach to social work which can actually gain societal sanction—must be is a [progressive pragmatic](#) one. According to such an approach, we must engage in class, organizational and institutional analysis of each policy arena in order to ascertain which mixes of the public, nonprofit and non-monopoly market sector can fund and deliver services and benefits that address human needs in a way that is consistent with human rights. We might not recognize such a mixed economy as socialism. Perhaps it is not socialism at all but rather a strategic needs-based approach to how to achieve human liberation.

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