



## Can't We All Agree that Marxism is Stupid?

*(Editor's Note: Our guest essayist this month is Thomas J. Borek, a retired attorney based in St. Louis, Missouri.)*

Many people casually refer to Marxists or communists as the extreme left and Nazis or fascists as the extreme right. But the two are not opposites. If you place them on a continuum of government power, they are both at the same end: 100 percent government power and 0 percent human rights.

Nonetheless, although fascists are almost universally reviled, Marxists are not. Many people continue to be attracted by their philosophy and their utopian dream. To take only the latest example, consider the electoral success of the current New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, the subject of our September 2025 *Mindszenty Report*.

Mamdani is a self-described democratic socialist and claims he is not a communist, but some of his statements are hard to distinguish from Marxism. He has, for instance, spoken of “seizing the means of production,” and in his inaugural address he promised “the warmth of collectivism.” He appointed a housing commissioner, Cea Weaver, who believes that “private property is a weapon of white supremacy.” Policies similar to Mamdani’s are also backed by the proudly socialistic new Seattle Mayor Katie Wilson.

Marxists spend much of their time condemning poverty, oppression and greed, and they are not wrong to do so. Today’s Marxists, however, spend no time improving their antiquated plan for a workable communist society. Their “plan” is indefensible nonsense proven to produce poverty and oppression without making a dent in greed, and by now, even the most dedicated “Marxist” scholars understand this.

The founder of the movement, Karl Marx, was a 19<sup>th</sup>-century German writer who produced a mediocre booklet, *The Communist Manifesto*, which became the

basis for the communist approach to government and economics. In it, he made a prediction and offered a solution.

Marx predicted that capitalist greed would continue unchecked until smaller businesses are replaced by larger monopolies owned by fewer people who would increasingly abuse their workers until the whole world would be slaving away for starvation wages for a handful of filthy rich capitalists.

Then he imagined a happy ending. The starving millions would overthrow the rich, end capitalism and set up their own government: a dictatorship of the proletariat. They would create paradise on earth by working hard for the sheer joy of it, sharing the fruits of their labor with anyone who needed them. The dictatorship would simply “wither away” as it became unnecessary.

That’s it. That’s the Marxist prescription for solving the political and economic problems of the modern world: the dire prediction and the fairy-tale solution. Go ahead and read every single line in Marx’s best-known works.<sup>1</sup> You won’t find any more detail and you won’t find any more logic.

### Marx’s Failed Predictions

Marx noticed that people with great economic power were often corrupted by it. They would use fair and unfair means to protect it and accumulate more of it by eliminating and acquiring their competitors and squeezing as much value as possible from employees and customers. He concluded that all the world’s wealth would end up in the hands of a very few such people while everyone else would live in poverty or worse.

He assumed that nothing would check the power of these supervillains: not labor unions, not the power of the vote, not government regulation, not inventive competitors,

not even human decency. He also didn't guess that many modern businesses would require large numbers of well-educated, highly skilled employees who could not be forced to work for starvation wages. He thought economics was a zero-sum game in which business owners could only increase their earning by impoverishing the rest of society.

Now we can identify his logical mistakes. More importantly, we've lived more than a century and a half into his future and have seen that his predictions were wrong. In modern mixed economies, capitalists have turned out to be neither as powerful nor as evil nor as foolish as Marx expected. In case you haven't noticed: The whole world is not working for starvation wages for a handful of filthy rich capitalists.

### Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely

**M**arx's solution to the greed-inducing economic power of business owners was to confiscate individual businesses and create the largest conceivable monopoly to be run by the government, that is, by the people who already monopolize police and military power. Unfortunately, when these powers combine, they become even more tempting to rulers and bureaucrats than lesser economic power was to capitalists. A measure of economic power may corrupt, but absolute totalitarian power corrupts absolutely.

Some people believe that Marxists are so selflessly committed to the general welfare that the governments they create will be dedicated to their highest ideals and immune to the temptations of power. No more than a handful of extreme leftists fit this description. Most do not, and many positively hunger for power. Who will end up with the power? Usually, those whose hunger for it is most intense.

*We have seen dozens of dictatorships of the proletariat. All have been horrible, repressive and corrupt. All have left legacies of starvation and murder. All have been rooted in atheism and hatred of Christianity.* None have simply "withered away" as unnecessary—as if all criminality and anti-social behavior would die with the last capitalist.

I don't even think Marx himself believed in that "withering away" nonsense. Why would he? He certainly knew that people need government structure whenever virtue is threatened by vice and that powerful people and institutions do not voluntarily give up their power.

Under Marxism, instead of businesses being run by individuals seeking to make a profit, they would be run by the government. But government officials cannot make business decisions nearly as well as the individuals directly involved. When they try, it's called central economic planning.

Two of the largest and most powerful nations in the world tried it for decades. Russia and China had the same experience: No matter how hard they tried, central economic planning produced nothing but economic stagnation. Eventually, they had to give it up and return to free (private) markets. The same proved true for Hungary, Romania, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Vietnam, among other countries. Venezuela tried central economic planning by popular vote. If anything, the results were worse.

In a government-run economy the only managers are a limited number of government bureaucrats, and the only workers are government employees who cannot be fired. Bureaucrats suffer from a lack of information, limited time and mixed motives. Some may be single-mindedly dedicated to the economic success of the nation, but some will always be more interested in currying favor with their superiors, lightening their workload or increasing their own wealth.

### Perverse Incentives

**I** worked for a government agency where my co-workers and I used to joke that some of our managers would prefer to cut off all public service and simply push forms around in a circle. Then one day our local director instructed us to stop answering the phone. All phone calls went to an answering system, and callers had to wait days or weeks for any response at all. We received fewer calls and served the public less often, while our director was rewarded for processing the reduced workload more quickly.

This sort of thing is a perpetual problem with government-run activities. One cannot imagine a private employer rewarding employees for turning away business.

In a free market, the decision-makers are more numerous, better informed and more highly motivated to make the best possible use of economic resources. Individual employees choose the most lucrative jobs: the jobs where their contributions to their employers are most valuable. Sellers and buyers choose to make the

most mutually advantageous trades. Entrepreneurs start businesses and bet their own resources that they can better meet the needs of their customers. When their decisions are wrong, they are replaced by more competitive rivals. Accordingly, they try very hard to make the best decisions they can.

### New, Improved Marxism?

There are Marxists who believe we should hand all economic decision-making over to the government but will admit that the Marxism practiced by the former Soviet Union, China and their satellite states for many years was flawed. They play down the flaws, but when pressed concede that those governments were repressive, corrupt and totalitarian, that their economies were stagnant and that their people suffered horribly. They will then claim, however, that the Marxist states they envision will be different and will avoid those political and economic evils—in other words, that they have the expertise to make communist principles work well.

In my youth, I might have chosen to join the scholars and revolutionaries developing and refining a body of knowledge that would allow us to create a communist society while avoiding the evils of the Russo-Chinese experiment. Ultimately, however, I could not join them because they never existed.

I've been looking for them (members of the mythical "Make Communism Work" think tank) for more than 50 years: first, by asking my leftist friends and mentors about them, and later by watching for them on university campuses, in leftist literature and in political speeches. University departments of Economics and Political Science often employ professors who identify as Marxist, but their scholarship tends to consist of highlighting serious economic and political problems and characterizing them as symptoms of the evil capitalist system.<sup>2</sup> Although political figures like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez push Marxist socialism at every opportunity, they never point to any principles that will protect their Marxism from the evils of . . . well . . . Marxism.

When offered a chance to defend Marxism in public debate with other academics, nearly all Marxist professors refuse the honor. Those few who accept immediately retreat both from the dictatorship of the proletariat and from the government-run economy.

In April 2019 in Toronto, Canada, the topic for a debate was "Happiness: Capitalism vs. Marxism." The speakers were the psychologist Jordan Peterson and the acclaimed Marxist philosophy professor Slavoj Žižek. Peterson opened by explaining the fundamental errors in Marx's booklet. When it was Žižek's turn, he lamented the horrors of the Russian and Chinese communist regimes and agreed with Peterson about *The Communist Manifesto*.

Žižek seemed surprised that anyone would expect him to defend the destruction of capitalism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and government ownership of the means of production: you know – communism.<sup>3</sup> I later learned that despite his insistence on the superiority of his leftist and explicitly Marxist viewpoint, he has often admitted that "we cannot obviously step out of capitalism."<sup>4</sup>

In November 2019 at New York University the resolution up for debate was: "Socialism is preferable to capitalism as an economic system that promotes freedom, equality and prosperity." Again, the pro-socialist guy, Richard D. Wolff, Professor of Economics Emeritus of the University of Massachusetts, admitted that socialism, i.e., government ownership and control of the means of production, has always failed and that he couldn't think of any way to make it work.

Instead, he extolled the virtues of a Spanish winery owned and operated by the workers. He suggested that workers everywhere purchase the businesses that employ them and run them in common<sup>5</sup>—a "solution" unlikely to be widely imitated, perfectly consistent with free-market capitalism, and fundamentally at odds with Marxist "solutions".

*In the U.S., those who say they view socialism more favorably than capitalism include 14% of Republicans, 38% of independents and 66% of Democrats.*<sup>6</sup>

### Reasons Some Believe in Communism

1. Not everyone is (or should be) a political scientist.
2. Some academics, like professors Žižek and Wolff, although rejecting *The Communist Manifesto's* principles continue to call themselves Marxists or socialists, leading some of their admirers into error.
3. Many people benefit from big government while others hope to obtain government employment, benefits or grants.

4. People pretend that places such as Scandinavia are reaping the benefits of extreme socialism, while the truth is that their wealth flows from free-market capitalism. When all factors are considered, they are no more socialist than the U.S.
5. People believe in a distorted left-right binary: that virtuous people who wish to oppose human suffering are those who move perpetually leftward toward paradise, and that selfish, entitled people move ever-rightward for their own benefit. Accordingly, they tend to accept (or reserve judgment about) any ideas promulgated by big-government advocates of all stripes – including the classical Marxists – for the benefit of Team Virtue.

*Let's acknowledge that government interventions are necessary for some human problems, but let's allow such interventions the way responsible doctors prescribe pharmaceuticals for our bodies. We should authorize them only for serious problems, use them neither more than necessary nor longer than necessary, and constantly assess and re-assess their efficacy and side effects.*

Some of us will be predisposed to find ways in which new government efforts can reduce problems while creating minimal collateral damage. Three cheers for them. Others will undoubtedly focus on monitoring existing programs and maintaining a healthy skepticism about new proposals. Cheers as well.

*The Communist Manifesto* wasn't a great work of scholarship 178 years ago. Now it should be just a historical curiosity—a failed theory that's been proven a failure sixteen different ways. Whether you call it socialism, democratic socialism, Christian socialism, Marxism, Neo-Marxism, Liberation Theology, Critical Theory or Post Modernism, it remains utterly useless.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Das Kapital* (1867 for vol. I).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, courses offered by Columbia University's Economics Department (<https://bulletin.columbia.edu/columbia-college/departments-instruction/economics/#coursestext>) and Political Science Department (<https://bulletin.columbia.edu/columbia-college/departments-instruction/political-science/#coursestext>) and the wide range of polemics offered by "Marxist University," an online resource by and for revolutionary Marxists. <https://marxist.com/marxist-university.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsWndfzuOc4>.

<sup>4</sup> "Thinking Blue | Writing Red" by Stephen Tumino, Open Book Publishers, <https://library.oapen.org/handle/obp.0324.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJQSuUZdcV4&t=2s>.

<sup>6</sup> "Gallup: Image of Capitalism Slips to 54% in the U.S." by Jeffrey M. Jones, September 8, 2025, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/694835/image-capitalism-slips.aspx>.

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