

# Ideologies and the World Struggle

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OUR WORLD, few would deny, is in the throes of a major political crisis, a result of a clash of basic and opposing political-economic ideologies. To denote these ideologies and systems in ordinary speech we casually throw around standard political and economic terms such as capitalism, socialism, communism, fascism, "left," and "right" with all the self-assurance and confidence of one to whom the meanings of the words he uses are elementary and obvious.

In any event, these terms bring an immediate picture to the minds of most of us, followed by a definite

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mental reaction based on that image. For example, we think of socialism and communism as "leftist" systems or philosophies, while capitalism and fascism are commonly characterized as "rightist." Some influential writers and opinion makers go so far as to imply that fascism (including Naziism) is simply an extreme form of capitalism, or at least an outgrowth of it. Avowed socialists and communists, of course, find this view very congenial to their beliefs and do everything they can to encourage it, if indeed they did not originate it.

As a result, the very word "capitalism" has acquired a sort of vague disrepute in America and the other countries of the West—countries which, it is generally acknowl-

edged, owe much of their progress and prosperity since before the Industrial Revolution to the ascendancy of capitalism, with its emphasis on the autonomy and worth of the individual human being. In any case, capitalism is today a word almost unused in polite society except in a derisive sense, to the point that even most defenders of Western values hesitate to use it in describing their ideals of free enterprise and freedom of thought.

Capitalism as a system is thus commonly thought of as decadent or at least *passe*, and the idea is prevalent that the alternatives to it lie in one of two presumably different directions: either fascism on the so-called "right," or socialism or communism on the "left." It is clear that of these alternatives socialism-communism has gained the upper hand today, with the horrors of Hitler's Naziism still relatively fresh in people's minds (although those who favor communism conveniently ignore the at least equal horrors committed in *its* name). And anyway, fascism was defeated in World War II, wasn't it?

### **Are Fascism and Communism at Opposite Poles?**

How valid are these popular ideas? Do communism and fascism really represent opposite poles, with socialism being either an inter-

mediate stage on the road to communism or a less extreme product of leftist thinking which can be stopped short of communism and thus avoid its excesses? Certainly this is the impression unmistakably given by most segments of the American mass media, and such ideas are prevalent abroad as well. And where does capitalism fit in? Or, more concretely, where do *we* in America and other Western countries fit into the world political spectrum, and, even more important, in which direction are we heading?

In answering these questions, let us take the currently unusual step of defining our terms, using the most concise and to-the-point dictionary definitions available. This basic approach is warranted by the fact that these terms have been so consistently misused by well-meaning people unaware of their true implications. Also, a little reflection on them should make it clear to any thinking person on which side of the spectrum each of these political-economic systems lies, and thus help put them into a true perspective. It should then be clear that the issue being discussed here is far more than a matter of semantics or a debate over words, but a basic question involving the very lives of people and nations—the answer to which the future and even survival of Western civilization, and for that matter all civilization, may depend.

With this in mind let us first define capitalism along with a less-used but equally significant contrasting term, statism.

**capitalism:** An economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision rather than by state control, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market.<sup>1</sup>

**statism:** Concentration of economic controls and planning in the hands of a highly centralized government.<sup>1</sup>

The principle or policy of concentrating extensive economic, political, and related controls in the state at the cost of individual liberty.<sup>2</sup>

Note that the above two terms are direct opposites. Capitalism, with its reliance on private decision unguided by government decrees, and statism, with its reliance on government authority in all spheres, are in the long run totally incompatible with each other. While statism as a term is not so widely used as the other terms being discussed here, it is nevertheless prob-

ably the best word available to describe the political-economic pole opposite capitalism, and ultimately the only alternative to it. Capitalism, with its emphasis on individual liberty, rests on a philosophic base of individualism—while statism, with its denial of individual rights and its vesting of effective control in a collective entity, the state, rests on a philosophic base of collectivism. Thus, insofar as the political terms “right” and “left” have any concrete meaning, capitalism represents the political right; statism the political left.

Let us now turn our attention to the three “ism’s” most discussed today, all of which have gained control of major nations in recent times, and at least two of which are continuing to extend their area of overt control.

**socialism:** Theory or system of social organization by which the means of production and distribution are owned collectively and controlled through the government.<sup>3</sup>

**communism:** A system by which the means of production and distribution are owned and managed by the government, and the goods produced are shared by all citizens.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> The Random House Dictionary (unabridged), 1973.

<sup>3</sup> Thorndike-Barnhart Comprehensive Desk Dictionary, 1967.

**fascism:** Any system of government in which property is privately owned, but all industry and business is regulated by a strong national government.<sup>3</sup>

Note the close similarity in the meanings of the above three terms. All of these systems rely on government force to accomplish their ends, and deny individual rights whenever they conflict with those ends as determined by the collective—that is, by the state. Thus, *all three are simply forms of statism*, and politically represent the far left. One should not be misled by the nominal private “ownership” allowed by fascism, since ownership without control is a sham, a contradiction in terms. (That many people *have* been so misled, however, is shown by the common but unthinking designation of fascism as “rightist.”) Fascism and communism, far from being opposites, are both direct outgrowths of socialist thought and socialist doctrine. They not only share the same collectivist roots but amount to the same thing in actual practice. It is no coincidence that Hitler’s program for Germany was officially known as National *Socialism*, the Nazi party platform being clearly socialist in both form and content.

Yes, it is true that fascists, socialists, and communists have often been bitter enemies, even to

the point of bloodshed and warfare between them. But the special hatred they reserve for each other, sometimes superficially interrupted by temporary alliances, more resembles the rivalry of greedy brothers fighting over a large inheritance than that of parties disagreeing over basic principles. They share the same basic principle: the collectivist notion that the preferences of the mass, exercising control through the state, supersede the rights of the individual. In practice, this leads to only one thing: totalitarian dictatorship, exercised by the individual or small group most adept at manipulating crowd passions and not hesitating to use force against any who refuse to cooperate.

### **A Deliberate Deception**

Statists of all denominations have spread the falsehood that the only alternative to fascism lies in the “opposite” direction represented by socialism-communism, in an attempt to steer public opinion in their direction through fear and hatred of the other. In this they have to a considerable degree succeeded. And since fascism, at least, is no longer fashionable in today’s world, the main beneficiaries of this notion have been the socialists and communists who have managed to bring huge segments of the Western public around to this view, including

many political scientists and economists who should know better. Thus a deliberately fostered misapprehension of words has, through reaction, helped tilt the scales toward a particular style of collectivism which, no less than the style reacted against, stands opposed to the most fundamental human values of Western civilization.

Between socialism and communism, it is clearly the more militant communism which is making greater gains today, more through force than persuasion—but the point here is that in the end it makes little difference which of the collectivist creeds may come out on top. If any of them do, the loser will be human freedom and human dignity, the right of an individual to live his own life in peace without fear of suppression of his abilities and desires and the regulation of his actions by an all-powerful state. In the words of former British Labourite Ivor Thomas: "From the point of view of fundamental human liberties there is little to choose between communism, socialism, and national socialism. They are all examples of the collectivist or totalitarian state. . . . In its essentials not only is completed socialism the same as communism but it hardly differs from fascism."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by F. A. Hayek in the foreword to the American edition of his classic, *The Road to Serfdom*.

Almost forgotten in the melee of leftist ideologies is the fact that the real alternative, the true opposite of them all, the political-economic system in which the individual is sovereign and the role of government is specifically limited to the protection of its citizens from fraud, force and violence, which gives free scope to the common sense of the people and provides a climate of liberty and incentive for constructive social change, is capitalism.

Under any true capitalistic system the watchword is liberty, and man—individual man—is given his rightful place at the center of his universe, rather than being an indistinguishable speck in a uniform and controlled crowd. In a system based on individual liberty the main task of government is to insure that it remain so, guarding against state intervention into economic affairs in the knowledge that the worst type of economic power is state power, and that the most dangerous and uncontrollable form of monopoly is state monopoly!

While the key nation in the Western world, the United States, still describes itself as a nation of "free enterprise," in reality the American system today is a mixture of elements of freedom and statist controls, the latter having been introduced with increasing frequency in recent decades. It is a volatile mixture of elements fundamentally

incompatible with each other, which sooner or later must result in the victory of one side or the other. The currently popular political term "middle of the road" in this sense describes a state of continual internal warfare, ideological turmoil, and intellectual confusion. The same kind of mixture, in varying degrees, is present in all Western countries, which largely explains the West's lack of moral courage to vigorously oppose the spread of communism.

America today is at the center of the struggle between capitalism and statism, and in her present mixed economy the statist ingredients are becoming more and more conspicuous. The important question is not whether this statist

trend happens to be more particularly towards socialism, communism or fascism (though elements of each are present), or towards another collectivist "ism" yet to be named—since they all lead to the same end. The vital question is whether we shall continue in the direction we have been traveling which leads to tyranny and slavery, or turn around and move in the opposite direction which leads to freedom and dignity.

One thing is sure: we cannot stand still, as defenders of the status quo would have us believe. Let us, pausing only long enough to regain our bearings, choose the way of freedom while we still have the choice, and resolutely proceed in that direction with a clear view of the road ahead. 

## A Fundamental Antagonism

IS IT A FACT of no significance that robbing the government is everywhere regarded as a crime of less magnitude than robbing an individual, or even a corporation? . . . What lies behind all this, I believe, is a deep sense of the fundamental antagonism between the government and the people it governs. It is apprehended, not as a committee of citizens chosen to carry on the communal business of the whole population, but as a separate and autonomous corporation, mainly devoted to exploiting the population for the benefit of its own members . . . When a private citizen is robbed, a worthy man is deprived of the fruits of his industry and thrift; when the government is robbed, the worst that happens is that certain rogues and loafers have less money to play with than they had before. The notion that they have earned that money is never entertained; to most sensible men it would seem ludicrous.

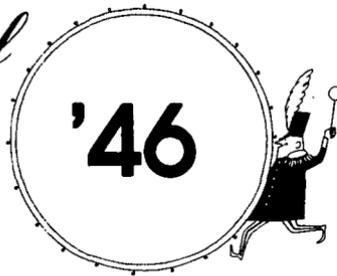
H. L. MENCKEN, *A Mencken Chrestomathy*

IDEAS ON



LIBERTY

# The Spirit of



EDWARD COLESON

NO, this isn't a misprint, a Bicentennial article that got the wrong label. There have been other spirits besides the "Spirit of '76"; the familiar German word "Zeitgeist" bears witness to this fact. Let us consider two greatly differing eras which were tied to '46—1846 and 1946.

In 1846 the free enterprise principles enunciated by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, were finally, and with a mighty flourish, being put into practice in Victorian England. In 1946 the "Welfare State" became official in America, the "Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave." Both events fit the spirit of their age too, as we shall soon discover.

It is hard to imagine a greater contrast than the thinking and

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political activities of 1846 as against those of 1946. Both developments were characteristic of their time, and both were the result of a long historical process. In 1846, with the "Repeal of the Corn Laws" and the subsequent change to free trade in the next few years, the freedom philosophy worked itself out to the consummation foreshadowed in *The Wealth of Nations*. With the passage of the Employment Act of 1946, Congress committed the federal government to the "continuing policy and responsibility" of maintaining "maximum employment, production and purchasing power," fulfilling an ancient socialist dream. In 1846 the "invisible hand" was in charge; in 1946 Big Brother had taken over.

One of the most misunderstood aspects of history is what Lord Keynes called "the gradual