



Written by [Brian Farmer](#) on January 15, 2009

The Welfare State Is Really Socialism in Disguise

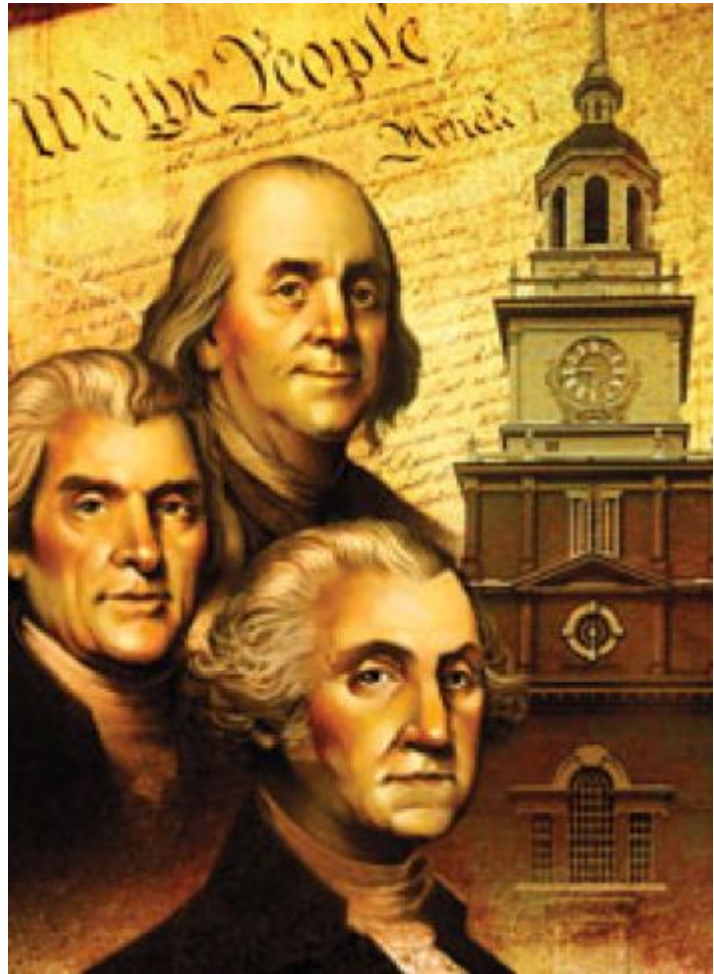
Yes, just as when we were children, everyone wants to ride in the wagon, but nobody wants to pull the wagon! It's a principle which is so simple that even a child can understand it.

I would like to set the stage for this discussion by talking a bit about the political spectrum. The left-right political spectrum is a common way of classifying political positions, political ideologies, and political parties. The general consensus seems to be that, as one moves from the center to the left, the political spectrum is occupied by Democrats, Liberals, Progressives, Socialists, and Communists. And as one moves from the center to the right, one encounters Republicans, Conservatives, Libertarians, Fascists, and Nazis.

However, when one ponders the situation a bit, it becomes apparent that much of this placement has nothing to do with the true relationship among political beliefs. As with other spectrums, the political spectrum must be measured from one extreme to the other. One way to do this is by constructing a horizontal line with no government, or anarchy, on the extreme right and total government, or totalitarianism, on the extreme left. Totalitarian systems include Fascism, Nazism, Communism, and Socialism.

The extreme on the right, anarchy, where no government prevails, historically has resulted in totalitarians rushing in to fill the vacuum. Because the leap from no government on the extreme right to total government on the extreme left has been shown to be so easy to make, the political spectrum might best be portrayed as a horseshoe, so that the extremes are close together and the system of limited self-government is furthest from both. In either case, line or horseshoe, the traditional American position of a limited federal government, a free market, and private property bears no relationship to the systems of the left. Nazism, Fascism, Communism, and Socialism all share a common belief in government control of one type or another, with more and more government-financed programs leading to government regulation of every facet of life.

From this understanding, we can see that the basic issue is between two principles, the first being





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Individualism and the second being Collectivism. Individualism holds that human beings have inalienable rights to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness, that only on the basis of these rights can people have a society of freedom and justice, and that governments are instituted to secure those rights. Sound familiar? One could call it Americanism, because the United States of America is an example of a social system based on the principle of Individualism, or at least it was originally set up that way (except for the institution of slavery in the South, of course, which was later done away with). Collectivism, on the other hand, holds that human beings do not have such rights and any rights that they do have are granted by the State. Each person exists not for his own sake, but for the sake of the group.

That raises the obvious question, in view of this discussion: where does the Welfare State fit into that scheme? To answer that, we first have to define what the Welfare State is. Strictly speaking, a Welfare State is a government that completely provides for the welfare, or the well-being, of its citizens. Such a government is involved in citizens' lives at every level. It provides for physical, material, and social needs, rather than the people providing for their own needs. The purpose of the Welfare State is to create economic equality or to assure equitable standards of living for all. It redistributes wealth by heavily taxing the middle and upper classes, in order to provide goods and services for those seen as underprivileged. The redistribution of wealth is a socialist concept: from each according to his ability; to each according to his need. But try to imagine an involuntary transfer of income or wealth, from one person to another, which is not a violation of the right to property, the right to keep the fruits of one's labor! Hence, the Welfare State is the antithesis of personal liberty, which is why the U.S. Constitution grants no such power of wealth redistribution to the federal government.

But some may argue that the Welfare State is not incompatible with Americanism, because the U.S. Constitution authorizes the federal government to address the issue of the general welfare. Indeed, the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution states that the Constitution is ordained and established to, among other things, promote the general welfare. But one must first understand what the framers of the Constitution meant by "the general welfare." At the time the Constitution was written, the general welfare referred to the welfare of all the citizens and not to certain entitled groups. Secondly, one must also understand how the Constitution promotes the general welfare. It does so by severely limiting the powers of the federal government. After all, the United States of America did not become the most successful political, economic, and social experiment in the history of the human race, because of what the federal government did. It became the freest, richest, and most powerful nation in the world, because of what the federal government was *prevented* from doing. As Patrick Henry put it, "The Constitution is not an instrument for the government to restrain the people; it is an instrument for the people to restrain the government — lest it come to dominate our lives and interests."

And then there is Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution, which empowers the Congress to "provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States." Some argue that the semicolon after the words "United States" implies that this phrase stands alone, on an equal footing with the so-called "Enumerated Powers" which follow it, and that this means that Congress can pass any laws it deems necessary and proper, in order to provide for the general welfare. Again, we must keep in mind that the expression "general welfare" refers to the welfare of everyone and not just to certain designated people. Secondly, we must keep in mind what James Madison said in *The Federalist Papers* (No. 41) about Article I, Section 8:

It has been urged and echoed, that the power "to ... provide for the common defense and general



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welfare of the United States” amounts to an unlimited commission to exercise every power which may be alleged to be necessary for the common defense or general welfare.

Had no other enumeration or definition of the powers of the Congress been found in the Constitution, than the general expressions just cited, the authors of the objection might have had some color for it.

But what color can the objection have, when a specification of the objects alluded to by these general terms immediately follows, and is not even separated by a longer pause than a semicolon?... Nothing is more natural nor common than first to use a general phrase, and then to explain and qualify it by a recital of particulars. But the idea of an enumeration of particulars which neither explain nor qualify the general meaning, and can have no other effect than to confound and mislead, is an absurdity.

Others may take a different tack and claim that the Welfare State is actually a mixture of Individualism and Collectivism. But individual rights cannot be half-recognized. Either individual rights are recognized in a society, or they are not recognized. What frequently happens is that a society based on Individualism does not have the courage, integrity, and intelligence to observe its own principle consistently in every practical application. Through cowardice, ignorance, or opportunism, such a society passes laws and accepts regulations which contradict its basic principle and violate the inalienable rights of its citizens. Such a society may appear to be working, but it is actually disintegrating. Disintegration takes time. Unless the violations are corrected, such a society eventually collapses into full-blown Collectivism. A famous quote, attributed to Alexander Fraser Tytler, puts it another way:

A democracy is always temporary in nature; it simply cannot exist as a permanent form of government. A democracy will continue to exist up until the time that voters discover that they can vote themselves generous gifts from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates who promise the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that every democracy will finally collapse, due to loose fiscal policy, which is always followed by a dictatorship. The average age of the world's greatest civilizations from the beginning of history has been about 200 years.

Finally, some will argue that inalienable rights also include the rights to food, clothing, housing, health care, an education, a job, a secure retirement, and so on. But a single question would make the issue clear: At whose expense? Those alleged rights do not occur naturally. In fact, they are goods and services produced by human effort. So, who is to provide them?

Let's talk about what "rights" really are. Philosopher and novelist Ayn Rand provided one of the most compelling arguments on the matter. She stated that "rights" is not just a political term. It is also a moral term. It tells us that a certain course of behavior is right and proper, that it must be respected by others and not be interfered with, and that anyone who violates a person's rights is wrong, immoral, and evil.

Our inalienable rights are the rights to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness. Why only those specific rights? Because all legitimate rights have one thing in common: they are rights to *action*, not to goods and services from other people. Legitimate rights impose no obligations on other people, except for the obligation to leave you alone. This system guarantees you the opportunity to work for what you want — not to receive it for nothing from somebody else. You have a right to work, not to rob others of the fruits of their work, not to turn others into virtual slaves laboring to fulfill your wants and



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needs.

The right to life does not mean that your neighbors have to feed and clothe you. It means that you have the right to earn your food and clothing yourself, and that no one is allowed to forcibly stop your efforts to obtain them, or to take them from you, when you finally get them. In other words: you have the right to act, to keep the fruits of your labor, and to do with them what you wish. But you have no right to the goods, services, and talents of others, except on terms to which they voluntarily agree.

The right to the pursuit of happiness is precisely that: the right to the *pursuit* — to a certain type of action and its result — not to any guarantee that other people will make you happy or even try to do so. If your desire for something imposes a duty on other people to satisfy you, then *their* right to liberty is violated, and the right to pursue *their* happiness is hindered. Your right to happiness at their expense means that they become, in effect, your slaves.

Nowadays, we watch the intellectuals and the politicians abandoning the moral principles upon which this nation was founded. We are witnessing the annihilation of the concept of rights. The original American idea is being ignored, as if it had never existed. The rule now is for politicians to violate our rights, while arguing for a long list of alleged rights never dreamed of in our nation's founding documents — rights which require no earning, no effort, no action at all, on the part of the recipient.

You are entitled to something, the intellectuals and the politicians say, simply because it exists and you want it. You are entitled to have it provided for you by the federal government, which in turn entitles the federal government to set up a Welfare State. But from where does the federal government get what you want? What must the federal government do to private citizens — to their individual rights — to their real rights — in order to carry out the promise of showering free goods and services on the people?

The newly invented rights wipe out real rights — and turn the people who actually create the goods and services into servants of the State. It's the same as if the federal government were to proclaim a universal right to a car, or a computer, or a cell phone: not that you are free to earn those things by your own effort, but that you have some moral claim to be given those things free of charge, with no action on your part, simply as handouts from a benevolent Welfare State.

Socialism is clearly evident in this process. The Welfare State is not hard-core Socialism per se, because it does not necessarily require the total elimination of private ownership of the means of production and distribution. But enormous bureaucracies have been created to tax, subsidize, and regulate businesses, and the federal government owns 34 percent of our nation's total land area. Furthermore, two-thirds of the federal budget is devoted to programs that are engaged in wealth redistribution.

Hence, it would not be inaccurate to claim that the Welfare State is Socialism in disguise. In any case, we can be absolutely certain of this: the Welfare State is not Americanism in disguise!



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