

The Capitalist Road to Serfdom

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The big news of the week is that the Democrats have gained control of the House while the Republicans strengthened their control of the Senate. A real plus for most Americans because it means that instead of having a Congress working against them they will now have one incapable of doing much of anything. But at the same time it's also a real negative because it will mean our Asshole-in-Chief now has free rein to fill the critical decision gap with his worldly expertise.

The poor guy can't remember what he says from day to day so it's no surprise he had forgotten that his road to the White House came about because of his bumbling discovery of a truth: that the annoyingly repetitive claim of a robust, booming, economy was an insulting pack of lies from the standpoint of a large proportion of the lower classes. But now in 2018, with him as the chief of America, he was only too happy to take credit for what he said was garbage in 2016. Much of the Republican losses came in the Mid-West and the South, the base of his support; *they* still know that it's all a lie. If Trump were not so vain and ignorant he may have held his ground by staying with his condemnation of the Fed for undercutting prospects for a genuine recovery because of their rate increases.

But it doesn't really matter because nothing can save this system, or even its civilized veneer. It's said that the Roman Empire in Western Europe didn't finally succumb because of military losses but rather to a debt inflicted suffocation dealt to the plebeians by its own landowners and financiers. Back then the desperate plebes could only survive by selling themselves as serfs to their debt-holding masters in exchange for the minimum requirements for the sustaining of life.

According to the Federal Reserve the majority of Americans cannot even round up a measly \$400 should an emergency require immediate cash on hand. Whatever necessities and comforts that they have in their living arrangement have largely come about by selling their future earnings to state sanctioned loansharks so that they may live decently as long as they pay back the loans with interest.

Corporations are legally identified as if they were an individual person. When they go into bankruptcy because they can no longer pay their bills a court will arrange deals with creditors that will discharge much of the outstanding debt. Of course, the living humans that own and control the corporation are never at risk of personally losing anything regardless of how much they have milked the corporation into bankruptcy.

That same relief could have been employed to save millions of Americans from ruin following the 2008 collapse and massive unemployment. Had insolvent banks been liquidated rather than bailed out all their assets in the form of loans would have been marked as lost leaving the newly unemployed free of paying for old debts as they searched for new income. But the purpose of a capitalist state is to do what is best for capitalism, thus they were bailed out just so they could continue sucking their victims dry, and if they couldn't pay, seize their property.

Slaves were bought on the market and worked by force during which their owner provided enough to maintain their ability to slave away. Serfdom came about more by the force of necessity rather than capture and sale. The debt that the future serf had accrued was held by a dominant class that could force repayment even if not available in the form of money or freely exchanged commodities. They were made to repay it in kind, which in the case of the serf was their labor power. Unlike the slave their person was not owned by their master. The master only possessed their labor power which is tied to their persons and used to work the land. If his master sold the estate that he worked on, he went with it though, strictly speaking, he wasn't being sold.

The version of slavery and serfdom that exists under capitalism is called wage slavery. Like the slave and the serf, the worker does receive something in return for the maintenance of his future capacity to labor. A large number of workers under capitalism live under conditions no better than that of slaves and serfs (unless one considers cell phones a major improvement). In developed countries workers, especially if they are organized, can live somewhat better. But the standard for better is somewhat higher in wealthier nations. Going into debt is the only means to reach and maintain that standard. Thus they are slaves to their employer and their lender. They must be obedient and carry out whatever is demanded of them. They cannot speak freely and over time they even lose the ability to think freely. Thus they have become the serfs of capitalism tied to this or that enterprise.

But there is one very positive historical fact that can change things. Slaves, serfs and workers have always rebelled against their oppressive existence, and that plus changing conditions have led to the demise of the two older systems. What follows the current one could and should be one that terminates class domination once and for all.

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China's President Xi recently said that "houses are built to be inhabited, not for speculation." In the US the national vacancy rate for houses and apartments is 13%, in China it's 22%. In the US we know that investment groups own large amounts of housing which can be withheld until they have milked owners and

renters of the highest bearable percentage of their income. Gone are the days when 25% was the maximum.

But what's the problem in China? Isn't it a 'communist' nation where such a vital necessity as housing is collectively owned and distributed? Of course not. Those 50 million vacant homes are in the hands of capitalist speculators who have withheld them from the market in order to maintain high sales and rent prices which in turn support high property values.

We saw the home where Little Wang, the boy with frozen hair, walked to school from in wintry weather. It was closer to a lean-to than a shack, with an open fire for roasting potatoes. There are 61 million children like Little Wang living with rural caregivers after their parents moved to cities for work and couldn't find affordable housing that would permit living as a family unit.

So much for those fools who claimed that Marxian communism existed anywhere in the world. What they actually should have identified was the Stalinist counter revolution working its way toward completion.

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