

OUR "SO-CALLED" RIGHTS

How Socialist Duty Overrides Human Rights

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—BERNARD SHAW

————— ” —————



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How Socialist Duty Overrides Human Rights

One byproduct of socialism's foundation on compulsory duty is that our rights are seen as "rubbish" and opposed because they permit us to "resist."

So-called rights.¹

Ideological nonsense.²

Obsolete verbal rubbish.³

These are three of the ways Karl Marx described individual rights—a taste of what philosophers have described as Marx's

diatribe against human rights.⁴

Karl Marx is, of course, the most important socialist philosopher of all time. His thinking has defined socialism's goals and beliefs for the past 150 years. It still does today.⁵

Marx outright rejects the idea of human rights.

The goal of this paper is simple. It's to show you what knowledgeable socialists already know: that one of the inevitable byproducts of socialism's foundation on compulsory duty is to make duty the "rock" and rights the "scissors." When they come into conflict, duty always wins.

The liberal philosophy that underpins our capitalist society begins with individual rights. It rejects as incredibly dangerous the compulsory duty to give our time and talents to others.

Socialism flips this script. Socialism is a duty-first philosophy. It's founded on the belief that the obligation to give our abilities to society is morally correct. Moreover, this power over our lives is required to create and operate a socialist society.⁶

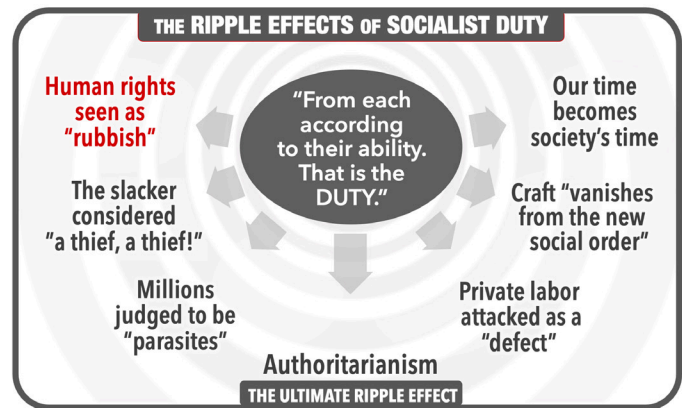
For over 170 years, the socialist standard of duty has been defined by the famous axiom "from each according to their ability."⁷ This remains the democratic socialist standard of duty today.⁸

Celebrated socialist philosopher R. H. Tawney summarizes the socialist perspective on duties versus rights:

Society should be organized primarily for the performance of *duties*, not for the maintenance of *rights*, and ... the rights which it protects should be those which are necessary to the discharge of social obligations.⁹

What does this democratic socialist¹⁰ (a thinker praised by Michael Harrington, the founder of the Democratic Socialists of America¹¹) teach? First, a socialist society would be focused on making us perform duties, not on protecting our rights. Second, our rights would be limited to those needed to perform our duties.

That socialism ranks duty above rights is but the first of the many ripple effects of socialism's foundation on the duty of "from each according to their ability."



"WE, AS SOCIALISTS, HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH LIBERTY"

Socialists admit that the type of duty socialism demands is "strikingly absent" from the liberal philosophy that underpins our current society.¹² It's a duty fundamentally different from our obligation to pay taxes.¹³

Given our inexperience with socialist duty, its incompatibility with individual rights may not be immediately apparent. At its most fundamental, a right is a freedom—the power to choose for yourself what you will do and when you will do it. By contrast, a duty is something imposed by the power of another. A duty voids freedom. It compels you to act and tells you how you must act.

The most important right we have in our liberal society is the right to define our own lives by using our brief time here on earth in essentially any way we wish. What makes this possible is that liberal philosophy starts from the premise that our abilities (our time and talents) are our private property—things we individually own and control and that others can't take from us.

Socialism's duty of "from each according to their ability" is expressly intended to override this most critical of rights. It transforms our time into what socialism treats as society's property, as *society's time*.¹⁴

That socialism prioritizes duty over rights isn't news to knowledgeable socialists. But it could easily come as news to you. So, let's confirm that R. H. Tawney's statement "society should be organized primarily for the performance of *duties*, not for the maintenance of *rights*"¹⁵ represents the socialist norm.

In *The Left and Rights*, Tom Campbell echoes Tawney, explaining that socialist society can provide citizens with "authoritative guidance" regarding the performance of societal goals.¹⁶ Campbell says this would

make duty, not rights, the essential concept of socialist community life.¹⁷

And from J. Ramsay MacDonald, Laurence Gronlund, E. H. Carr, Henri van Kol, and Ernest Bax, respectively, come a few more of the many examples of socialists backing up Tawney's declaration that socialism requires duty and has little use for rights:

The State does not concern itself primarily with man as a possessor of rights, but with man as the doer of duties. A right is the opportunity of fulfilling a duty, and it should be recognized only in so far as it is necessary to the performance of duty.¹⁸

This conception of the State as an organism thus consigns the 'rights of man' to obscurity and puts Duty in the foreground.¹⁹

The new faith [socialism!] reversing the 19th-century trend, will lay more stress on obligations than on rights, on services to be rendered to the community rather than on the benefits to be drawn from it.²⁰

The general duty must always be placed above personal liberty... He who fulfills his duties will enjoy the rights of liberty.²¹

Doubling Down on Duty

Many people are familiar with socialism's most famous axiom, "From each according to their ability, to each according to their need." Far fewer know that there's an alternate version of this saying.

This second version ensures that all in socialist society would be under the compulsory duty of "from each according to their ability" whether or not socialism is delivering on the promise of "to each according to their need."

To learn more, see the RFP paper "Doubling Down on Duty."

[The socialist citizen] will recognize the call of duty to do and to forbear only in things which directly affect the society; all actions not having a direct social bearing being morally indifferent for him. In this new conception of duty, the individual consciously subordinates himself to the community.²²

Bernard Shaw, one of the founders of the famed socialist organization the Fabian Society, provides another illustration of socialism's views of duty in contrast to rights:

We, as Socialists, have nothing to do with liberty. Our message, like Mussolini's, is one of discipline, of service, of ruthless refusal to acknowledge any natural right.²³

Again, we're told that socialism's message is one "of discipline, of service"—that is, of duty. Again, we're told socialism has no use for rights.

The Mussolini whose views are so in synch with those of socialism? It's Benito Mussolini, the world's first fascist dictator.

Shaw points out a reality we'll study further below: socialism and fascism share an anti-liberal bond. Socialists would no doubt love to disavow the connection Shaw highlights. But his explanation of the socialist view of rights and duties is indistinguishable from the thinking other socialists express above. His only flub is admitting that this means socialism and fascism march in lockstep when it comes to loving duty and spurning rights.

Another socialist who affirms Shaw's "ruthless refusal to acknowledge any natural right"?

Karl Marx.

"IDEOLOGICAL NONSENSE ABOUT RIGHT"

Karl Marx isn't just the most important socialist philosopher of all time. Today's democratic socialists also say Marx is one of their own—a genuine democratic socialist. None other than Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) founder Michael Harrington repeatedly labels Marx a democratic socialist.²⁴

This democratic socialist Karl Marx is the same Marx who referred to rights as "so-called rights," as "supposed rights," as "obsolete verbal rubbish," and so on.²⁵ He's the same Marx who, along with Friedrich Engels, stressed his "opposition" to the entire concept of rights.²⁶

Karl Marx's disdain for rights is no quirky pet peeve. It's a pervasive and pernicious aspect of Marx's thinking—the thinking that has defined socialism for well over a century and still does today.

New York University professor Stephen Lukes authored the seminal works *Marx and Morality* and "Can a Marxist Believe in Human Rights?" The conclusion Lukes reaches in both is that socialists who are true to the Marxist faith cannot believe in rights.²⁷ Lukes reports:

Marx and Engels always wrote disparagingly about the language of rights and justice.²⁸

They *always* wrote disparagingly. Similarly, in their article "Was Karl Marx Truly against Human Rights?," professors Justine Lacroix and Jean-Yves Pranchère tell us:

Everyone is familiar with the young Marx's diatribe against human rights.²⁹

And as Lacroix and Pranchère also explain, it wasn't just the *young* Marx who belittled rights. They conclude that Marx was a "prisoner of an ideological" view of rights his entire life.³⁰ Let's note that this jail was one of his own construction. Marx built an anti-rights philosophical prison. Thousands of socialists have locked themselves in it since.

Marx disdained what he considered "ideological nonsense about right."³¹ To his thinking, the entire concept of rights was just so much bourgeois bunk, an artifact of the liberal philosophy that underpins capitalism.³² A full review of Marx's attack on rights would consume many pages. For now, let's consider one example of his beliefs: his opinion that

none of the supposed rights of man, therefore, go beyond ... an individual separated from the community, withdrawn into himself, wholly preoccupied with his private interests and acting in accordance with his private caprice.³³

This is deeply flawed thinking. The protections rights afford don't require us to be separated from the community or withdrawn into ourselves. Likewise, having individual rights in no way suggests we're entirely preoccupied with private interests or acting strictly on private whims (a "caprice" being a whim). Our rights simply mean that others can't force us to work on their goals without our consent.

But it's this very aspect of rights—the protection they provide from compulsion—that socialism is against. Rights must be curtailed so they don't interfere with the

Same as It Ever Was

Democratic socialism is not a new and improved socialism. Socialists have long believed that socialism is democracy, despite the fact that socialism's anti-liberal form of compulsory duty turned earlier socialist experiments into authoritarian nightmares.

Socialism remains founded on the socialist standard that has been around for well over a century: the duty of "from each according to their ability." This duty makes today's socialism, fundamentally, the same as it ever was.

To learn more, see the RFP paper "The 'Keto-Friendly' Political Philosophy."

compulsory duty on which socialism is founded. As we'll shortly see R. H. Tawney explain, socialism is against rights because they allow us to *resist*.

Rights that grant us the ability to resist the state are a critical aspect of liberal philosophy. But to Marx and socialism, these rights are proof of an individual separated from the community and concerned only with personal whims.

Marx, again, is someone whom the very founder of the Democratic Socialists of America says we should consider a "champion of human freedom and a democratic socialist."³⁴ How can that be when Marx argues rights are "rubbish"?³⁵

Perhaps the expectation is that we would remain ignorant of Marx's views. Whatever the explanation, one thing is certain: socialism must have very different definitions of what counts as democratic and as freedom.

SOCIALISM'S PROBLEM WITH RIGHTS? THEY ALLOW US TO "RESIST"

We've seen R. H. Tawney argue that society should be organized primarily to make us perform duties, not to protect our rights. He explains the reasoning behind this thinking:

Duties, unlike rights, are relative to some end or purpose, for the sake of which they are imposed. The latter [rights] are a principle of division; they enable men to resist. The former [duties] are a principle of union; they lead men to co-operate.³⁶

Why does socialism place duty above rights? Because duty is aligned with the socialist objective of making us work on social goals rather than individual ones.

Duty gives those running society the means to compel us to do things whether we want to or not. The ability to compel is the whole point of duty.

And what, to socialist thinking, is the problem with rights? It's the very fact rights do what they're intended to do: they give us the ability to keep others from interfering with our lives. Rights give us the means to defy the orders socialists look forward to issuing.

When Tawney says "duties, unlike rights, are relative to some end or purpose," he isn't speaking about goals of our own choosing. No, he's talking about ends and purposes selected by those running society. If these ends were of our own choosing, duty wouldn't be required to make us work on them. Socialism's foundation on duty is how socialists stop us from using our lives for our own purposes and make us work on their goals instead.

Tawney called for our liberal society based on individual rights to be replaced with a socialist society founded on duty. But this isn't to say he was in favor of authoritarianism.

Tawney's objectives were pure, but he failed to appreciate the risks associated with his ideas. He imagined that, with the correct people running the show, one could have a society based on compulsory duty that wouldn't end up a totalitarian nightmare.

This mistaken thinking is hardly unique to Tawney. It's a dubious belief that's always been behind socialist thought and remains so today: the assumption that humans can be angels and, moreover, that they would keep on being angels even when given devilish powers.

A classic example of this mindset appears in *Voyage in Icarie*, a novel by famed French socialist Étienne Cabet depicting a perfected socialist society. In Cabet's story, a resident of Icarie relates this key bit of the nation's history to a visitor from another country:

Happily, the dictator elected by the people, the good and courageous *Icar*, was the best of men.³⁷

That certainly was fortunate for the good people of socialist Icarie. No wonder Icarie ended up such a wonderful place.

Too bad things have never worked out that way here in real life. Instead of the best of people, we've ended up with the likes of Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot. And with millions of dead to show for it.

Socialism's foundation on duty makes it a system that requires a never-ending supply of the best of people. But for every angel among us, how many devils are there—individuals who see a system based on compulsory duty as a means to fulfill their lust for power and their desire to control the lives of others?

And the grave risks posed by socialist duty aren't limited to making it easy for those who are already evil to take control. Socialist experiments have shown time and again that even those who start out as angels can be turned into devils by the power socialist duty bestows on those running socialist society.

"WITHOUT DUTIES NO RIGHTS"

Those selling socialism are all too often guilty of the sin of omission. They know facts they should tell us, but they don't because it will hurt the sale. This problem is particularly acute when it comes to being upfront about the nature and implications of socialist duty. DSA founder Michael Harrington provides us with a prime example of this reality.

In his book *Socialism: Past and Future*, Harrington praises R. H. Tawney. Harrington speaks of his desire for a society based on Tawney's concept of "fellowship" and writes that this concept would be "critical to the new society" of socialism.³⁸

That's nice. But what else do we know Tawney considered critical to the new society? Duty, and limits on individual rights.

Tawney believed that creating a society of fellowship required replacing our liberal society based on rights with one founded on duty and the limitation of rights.³⁹ No society based on duty instead of rights? No fellowship.

Harrington sells us Tawney's concept of fellowship. But what does he say about the anti-liberal changes to society required to create this fellowship?

Not a peep.

Yes, it can be tough to sell a philosophy that calls for an onerous form of compulsory duty and that disparages rights. Signs reading, "So-called human rights are ideological nonsense!" wouldn't persuade many to become socialists.

The most common tactic socialists employ for dealing with this sales challenge is the one Michael Harrington employs when discussing Tawney's vision of a society of "fellowship": say nothing about socialism's requirement of duty, even when ethics make it clear you should.

But when the issue simply can't be ducked, a common socialist tactic is to link duty and rights in a combo plan, obscuring the intent to impose duty by promising rights as well. Democratic socialist Eugene Debs provides the pitch that countless socialists have made, all using virtually identical wording:

Without rights there shall be no duties; without duties no rights.⁴⁰

This "visionary axiom,"⁴¹ as socialists have called it, is really a bit of sales trickery designed to deflect attention from socialism's plan to force duty on us. The purpose of the first half of this expression is to keep us from focusing on the implications of the second half.

The first half of the saying is "without rights there shall be no duties." It implies there's little need to worry about socialist duty because we'll only have duties if we have rights too.

But "without rights there shall be no duties" doesn't actually give us anything. In our liberal society, we already have rights. Better yet, we have rights without dangerous duties that override them. "Without rights there shall be no duties"? Thanks for nothing.

What do we discover if we concentrate on the second half of the expression, the "without duties no rights" portion? It confirms socialism's plan to take the ax to the liberal philosophy that underpins our current society. "Without duties no rights" means we must accept the duties socialism imposes—duties that override the most important of our rights, our right to use our time and talents as we see fit—or have no rights at all.

"WE, FASCISTI, DO NOT SPEAK ONLY OF RIGHTS"

There's one other philosophy that could use socialism's "without rights there shall be no duties; without duties no rights" slogan without changing a word: fascism.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then fascism sure flatters socialism with its wholesale copying of the socialist playbook. Here are some of the ways in which this other anti-liberal philosophy mimics socialism:

- Like socialism, fascism is founded on the belief that the individual should be subservient to "the community" (as Hitler was fond of expressing it).⁴²

- Like socialism, fascism rejects liberalism and its lack of compulsory duty. As the examples below demonstrate, fascism calls for a return to a society based on duty, just as socialism does.
- As with socialism, belief in duty leads fascism to treat the time in our lives as *society's time*, as the community's property to control.⁴³
- Belief in duty leads socialism to belittle rights, to see them as "supposed rights" and as "so-called rights." And, as illustrated below, belief in duty leads fascism to do the same.
- Socialism's foundation on duty has contaminated the whole philosophy. The same is true of fascism. For example, belief in duty has turned both socialism and fascism into philosophies obsessed with eliminating alleged "parasites"—those who are seen as failing to perform their socialist or fascist duty.⁴⁴

What accounts for these many similarities? They result from the fact that fascism's philosophical roots are found in socialism. Numerous socialists helped establish this other authoritarian belief system. And those fascists who weren't originally socialists were inspired by socialist attacks on the liberal philosophy that underpins capitalism—particularly by the socialist rejection of both liberalism's lack of compulsory duty and its foundation on the idea of inalienable rights.

Thus, it's not surprising to hear a fascist say, paralleling socialism:

We, Fascisti, do not speak only of rights, we speak also of duty.⁴⁵

These are the words of Benito Mussolini, the world's first fascist dictator—the same Mussolini whom Bernard Shaw praises above. Where is it that Mussolini learned to "speak also of duty"?

Why, as a socialist.

Before becoming "the father of Fascism,"⁴⁶ Mussolini was a leader of the Italian Socialist Party and editor-in-chief of *Avanti!*, the Socialist Party's national daily newspaper.⁴⁷ And prior to running *Avanti!*, Mussolini was the managing editor of three smaller socialist newspapers.⁴⁸ He even founded his own socialist philosophical journal, *Utopia: Fortnightly Review of Revolutionary Socialism*.⁴⁹

As a socialist leader, Mussolini gave innumerable speeches and wrote countless articles selling socialism. These demonstrate both the depth of his support for socialism and the breadth of his socialist knowledge. In them, he quotes or otherwise references a bevy of important socialist philosophers—not only Marx and Engels dozens of times, but also Gracchus Babeuf, August Bebel, Edward Bellamy, Edward

Bernstein, Louis Auguste Blanqui, Charles Fourier, Jean Jaurès, Karl Kautsky, Paul Lafargue, Ferdinand Lassalle, Robert Owen, Charles Peguy, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Henri Saint-Simon, Werner Sombart, and others.⁵⁰

Mussolini was a socialist heavyweight and likely would have remained one if not for the split that World War I caused in the Italian Socialist Party, a rift that led to Mussolini's expulsion.⁵¹ But Mussolini, and the other socialists who joined him as fascists, had learned well the socialist lesson of loving duty and disdaining rights. They brought this authoritarian mindset with them to their new fascist home.

Between the direct influence of former socialists like Mussolini and the indirect influence of socialism's repudiation of liberalism, the result is that the fascist views of duty relative to rights are strikingly similar to those of socialism.

Socialism starts from the belief that all should be born owing their time and talents to society. As Louis Blanc put it 140 years ago, and in the words socialists still use today:

From each according to their ability. That is the DUTY.⁵²

What does fascism say about duty? These examples come, respectively, from Benito Mussolini, from fascist thinker Mario Palmieri (who praised duty during an attack on individualism and rights), from Adolph Hitler, and from the "National Socialist [Nazi] Program":

The Fascist considers labour a duty and duty a law.⁵³

Individualism ... is the negation of the principle of Duty which is the foundation of the moral world and the affirmation in its stead of the principle of Rights—those rights which are the perennial spring of all human ills and evils.⁵⁴

It is the duty of the individual to return to the community, zealously and honestly, what the community has given him.⁵⁵

"Adversary of Every Parasite"

Benito Mussolini described himself as "the implacable adversary of every parasite." Socialism has been obsessed with "social parasites" from the philosophy's first days. Hundreds of socialist thinkers have used this pejorative term.

Parasites are the millions of us whom socialists and fascists see as failing to perform our duty to society. Both socialism and fascism say suppressing parasites is the path to the "perfected" future.

To learn more, see the RFP paper "The Socialist Obsession."

It must be the first duty of each citizen of the State to work with his mind or with his body. The activities of the individual may not clash with the interests of the whole, but must proceed within the frame of the community and be for the general good.⁵⁶

The fascist duty to give our abilities to the community mimics socialist duty, as does the fascist focus on work.⁵⁷ And the idea that our individual actions should not be allowed to conflict with "the interests of the whole" also emulates socialist thinking.

MARX AND MUSSOLINI BOTH DENIGRATE OUR "SUPPOSED RIGHTS"

When fascists speak about rights in relation to duties, they again make statements that are indistinguishable from those of socialists.

Consider this thinking from Ernest Huber, the Nazi jurist who literally wrote the book on National Socialist (Nazi) law, *Constitutional Law of the Greater German Reich*:

All rights must be regarded as duty-bound rights. Their exercise is always dependent upon the fulfillment by the individual of those duties to which all rights are subordinate.⁵⁸

Huber says the only rights we should be permitted are those needed to perform duties. This is the same principle expounded by socialists R. H. Tawney and J. Ramsay MacDonald earlier in this paper.

Another quote from Ernest Huber also embodies one socialist belief after another, starting with an overall attack on liberalism:

Not until the nationalistic political philosophy had become dominant could the liberalistic idea of basic rights be really overcome. ... There are no personal liberties of the individual which fall outside of the realm of the state and which must be respected by the state. The member of the people, organically connected with the whole community, has replaced the isolated individual. ... There can no longer be any question of a private sphere, free of state influence, which is sacred and untouchable before the political unity. The constitution of the nationalistic Reich is therefore not based upon a system of inborn and inalienable rights of the individual.⁵⁹

This Nazi denial of inalienable rights equates to what we have seen Bernard Shaw identify as socialism's "ruthless refusal" to acknowledge such rights, a refusal confirmed by the views of none other than Karl Marx. Recall also Marx's attack on rights for being, in his view, only a reflection of

an individual separated from the community, withdrawn into himself, wholly preoccupied with his private interests and acting in accordance with his private caprice.⁶⁰

As seen in Huber's thinking, fascism operates from the same flawed view of rights that Marx does: the belief that our liberal rights mean we're focused on private whims and separated from the community that both socialists and fascists believe we are born to serve.

Huber promises fascism would deliver the world Marx desired, a world in which there would no longer be a "private sphere"—that is, no longer any place where the individual is safe from encroachment by those acting in the name of society. For fascism, as for socialism, there is no right to resist the community.

Finally, in *The Doctrine of Fascism*, Benito Mussolini writes that the fascist state's

functions cannot be limited to those of enforcing order and keeping the peace, as the liberal doctrine had it. It is no mere mechanical device for defining the sphere within which the individual may duly exercise his *supposed rights*.⁶¹

Mirroring socialism, Mussolini attacks liberal philosophy. And mirroring Marx, Mussolini disparages our rights as "supposed" ones.

The bottom line is that both socialists and fascists demand duty and denigrate rights. Both of these anti-liberal philosophies look forward to flipping the script on our current liberal society that's based on rights and rejects the form of compulsory duty that fascism and socialism require.

Yes, what we're discussing is philosophy, but it's philosophy that has a critical bearing on our lives in the real world. As historical experiences with both socialism and fascism have shown, when a society is based on duty and maligns rights, tragedy awaits.

Hitler, Mussolini, Nazis, and other fascists are rightly reviled and hold an especially infamous space in our consciousness for their crimes against humanity. The results of history's socialist experiments have yielded state-sponsored mass murder and even genocide all too similar to that perpetrated by fascism.⁶²

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM SAYS DUTY BEATS RIGHTS

As R. H. Tawney explains, the socialist view is that

society should be organized primarily for the performance of duties, not for the maintenance of rights, and ... the rights which it protects should be those which are necessary to the discharge of social obligations.⁶³

The very starting point of socialism is with the imposition of duty. And the express purpose of this duty is to override our liberal right to use our lives and the time in them as we wish. Apart from the goal of controlling what we do with our lives, there would be no reason for socialism's duty of "from each according to their ability."

These underlying premises of socialism show it to be an anti-liberal philosophy. They erode the protections that rights provide us from authoritarianism. And even democratic socialists hold these anti-liberal views. Democratic socialists don't wish for dictatorial outcomes, but they support a system that makes every experiment with socialism an authoritarian accident waiting to happen.

Today's socialists say Karl Marx and R. H. Tawney are exemplary democratic socialists. This means one can be a democratic socialist despite promoting the idea that human rights are trash and nonsense. It means one can be a democratic socialist despite being against rights because rights allow us to resist.

These anti-liberal views held by democratic socialists are the same anti-liberal views we associate with plain old socialism. They help us see that "democratic socialism" is a misleading marketing slogan, not a new version of socialist philosophy.⁶⁴ When you pull off the democratic socialist label, it's the same old philosophy inside the package.

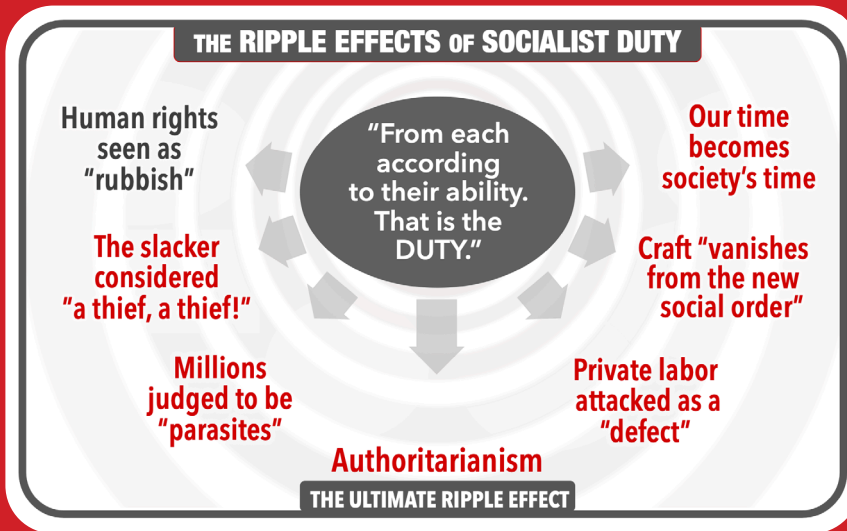
That socialism extols duties over rights may be news to you. That democratic socialism is based on the same duty of "from each according to their ability" that has been the socialist standard for 170 years may come as a surprise. And the fact that socialism and fascism are siblings when it comes to loving duty and disparaging our liberal rights may also be a reality with which you were unfamiliar.

But none of these facts comes as news to any knowledgeable socialist. Knowledgeable socialists are not only aware of all this, but they're also on board with it. If they weren't, they would no longer be socialists.

Socialism is founded on belief in the morality of compulsory duty—the compulsory duty to give our time and talents to society. This anti-liberal principle is the very

starting point of socialism. It's a principle that guarantees duty will *always* beat rights in a socialist society. Duty can only be duty by overriding our rights.

It's common to think of socialism as a left-liberal philosophy, but it's not. Socialism's foundation on the compulsory duty of "from each according to their ability" means socialism is, and will forever be, a left *anti*-liberal philosophy.



To learn more about the ripple effects of socialist duty, visit redflagspress.org/ripple

NOTES

1. Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1978), 40.

2. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in *Marx/Engels: Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1950), 2:23.

3. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 23.

4. Justine Lacroix, Jean-Yves Pranchère, and Sarah-Louise Raillard, "Was Karl Marx Truly against Human Rights? Individual Emancipation and Human Rights Theory," *Revue française de science politique (English Edition)* 62, no. 3 (2012): 47.

5. As one example of the reality that Marx and his thinking continues to define socialism, consider that the Democratic Socialists of America see themselves as a Marxist organization and at their 2017 convention celebrated the fact that they had become the largest Marxist organization in the US. David Weigel, "The socialist movement is getting younger and turning into a left-wing force," *Chicago Tribune*, August 6, 2017, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/nation-world/ct-socialist-movement-bernie-sanders-20170806-story.html>.

6. The fact that socialism has been designed such that it requires socialist citizens be under compulsory duty to do as those running socialist society direct is no surprise. Socialism starts from the belief that such a duty is morally correct (which is why socialism has required the duty of "from each according to their ability" for over 170 years). Because socialism believes such a duty is morally right, it's only natural that socialism would be designed with the expectation of putting this duty to work in the functioning of socialist society. (What would be surprising is to have a philosophy that believed duty was morally correct that didn't use this power in its day-to-day operations.)

There are numerous aspects of the plans of socialism that are based on the assumption of duty. For example, socialist theory is explicit that constructing socialism requires the elimination of work judged to be "socially useless" and the transfer of the legions of individuals that socialists believe are currently performing "socially useless" tasks to work approved by those running socialist society. It's by suppressing "useless" work and moving these workers to approved work that socialism is to achieve its many sales promises.

In our liberal society, the time in our life is treated as our personal property to use in essentially any way we wish. As such, there isn't the slightest chance of it being legal to outlaw countless jobs so as to constrain our work choices to those others approve of. It's socialism's foundation on the duty of "from each according to their ability" that makes the suppression of allegedly useless work possible. Socialist duty turns our time into what is effectively society's property and gives socialist society the power to limit our work choices. If we were left free to do whatever work we wished as is the case in liberal society, rather than constrained to those choices approved by society, socialist theory itself says socialism would be impossible. To see examples of socialists calling for the suppression of "useless" work and its relation to constructing socialist society, see the RFP paper "The Socialist Obsession."

7. French Socialist Louis Blanc is typically credited with developing the expression "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" in the 1840s (though another French socialist, Étienne Cabet, also started using it at roughly the same time). Here's one example of Blanc's using this expression in 1848: "Chacun produise selon son aptitude et ses forces, que chacun consomme selon ses besoins." Louis Blanc, *Nouveau*

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discours de M. Louis Blanc sur l'organisation du travail devant l'assemblée générale des délégués des travailleurs (Paris: Commission du Gouvernement Pour Travailleurs, 1848), 10.

8. As one of the many available examples demonstrating socialism continues to require the duty of “from each according to their ability, Democratic Socialists of America founder Michael Harrington writes: “The goal of socialism, clearly, is to overcome greed and act on the basis of ‘to each according to his/her need, from each according to his/her ability.’” Harrington, “What Socialists Would Do in America—If They Could,” 445.

9. R. H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1921), 96. Emphasis original.

10. Tawney has long been touted as a democratic socialist. For example, Ross Terrill’s biography *R. H. Tawney and His Times* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973) not only speaks of Tawney as a democratic socialist but quotes others who do so, like Hugh Gaitskell: “I always think of him [Tawney] as the Democratic Socialist par excellence” (276).

Others quoted in this paper disparaging rights are also counted democratic socialists, like Ramsay MacDonald. Kenneth O. Morgan writes: “He [MacDonald] had been regarded as one of the most dynamic and magnetic of British political leaders, a model for democratic socialists throughout the world.” Kenneth O. Morgan, “Ramsay MacDonald and the Rise of Labour,” *New Perspectives* 1, no. 3. (March 1996).

11. Michael Harrington, *Socialism, Past and Future* (New York: Mentor, 1992), 304–5.

12. Joseph H. Carens, “Rights and Duties in an Egalitarian Society,” *Political Theory* 14, no. 1 (February 1986): 31; Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation*, 3rd ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1944), 437.

13. The liberal philosophy that underpins our current society rejects compulsory duty of the type socialism demands. Why? Because “from each according to their ability” gives others the power to control our time and talents without our consent. Our duty to pay taxes in liberal society only comes into play after we’ve chosen what to do with our lives. Taxes apply to the economic results of our choices; they don’t put those running society in a position to make those choices for us. In contrast, socialism’s duty of “from each according to their ability” is enforced before we decide what to do with our lives. Socialist duty morphs our abilities into society’s property to control—it turns our time into society’s time. For example, socialist duty puts those running socialist society in a position to define what kind of work is a good use of that time and to forbid work that isn’t “socially useful.”

14. The fact that socialism treats the time in our lives as society’s time is addressed at length in a number of RFP papers. See, for example, “Why Socialism Says Craftwork Is ‘Idiocy,’” “Why Socialism Says Slacking Is Theft,” and “A ‘Defect’ of Liberalism.”

15. Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, 96. Emphasis original.

16. Tom Campbell, *The Left and Rights: A Conceptual Analysis of the Idea of Socialist Rights* (London: Routledge, 1983), 83, Kindle.

17. Campbell, *Left and Rights*, 83.

18. J. Ramsay MacDonald, *Socialism and Government* (London: Independent Labour Party, 1909), 1:12.

19. Laurence Gronlund, *The Cooperative Commonwealth: An Exposition of Modern Socialism* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1884), 83–84.

20. Edward Hallett Carr, *Conditions of Peace* (New York: MacMillan, 1942), 125.

21. “Devoir général soit placé au-dessus de la liberté personnelle. ... Celui qui remplira ses devoirs jouira des droits de la liberté.” Rienzi [Henri von Kol], *Socialisme et liberté* (Paris: V. Girard and E. Bière, 1898), 36.

22. Ernest Belfort Bax, *The Ethics of Socialism, Being Further Essays in Modern Socialist Criticism* (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co, 1893), 29.

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23. Bernard Shaw, October 27, 1927, letter to Adler, quoted in Margaret Cole, in *The Story of Fabian Socialism* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), 197. Shaw wrote these words praising Mussolini five years after Mussolini had established his authoritarian fascist regime over Italy but before Mussolini's Italy joined Nazi Germany to lead the world into World War II.

24. Michael Harrington, *The Twilight of Capitalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), v.

25. Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 40, 41. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 23.

26. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, 3rd rev. ed. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 225. Marx, "On the Jewish Question."

27. Steven Lukes, "Can a Marxist Believe in Human Rights?," *PRAXIS International* 4 (1981): 344.

28. Lukes, "Can a Marxist Believe in Human Rights?," 338.

29. Lacroix, Pranchère, and Raillard, "Was Karl Marx Truly against Human Rights?," 47.

30. Lacroix, Pranchère, and Raillard, "Was Karl Marx Truly against Human Rights?," 63.

31. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 23.

32. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 23.

33. Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 41.

34. Harrington, *Twilight of Capitalism*, v.

35. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 23.

36. Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, 96.

37. "Heureusement que le dictateur élu par le peuple, le bon et courageux Icar, se trouve le meilleur des hommes!" Étienne Cabet, *Voyage en Icarie*, 5th ed. (Paris: Au Bureau du Populaire, 1848), 39.

38. Harrington, *Socialism, Past and Future*, 304–5.

39. Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, 96.

40. Eugene V. Debs, "The Socialist Party's Appeal," *The Independent* (New York), October 15, 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/debs/works/1908/appeal.htm>.

41. George Allan England, quoted in Debs, "Socialist Party's Appeal."

42. Socialism is founded on the belief that the individual should be subservient to the community and that this subservience is the way to "true freedom" and "true individualism." Ernest Bax reports what he considers a positive attribute of socialism: "The New Ethic of Socialism, moreover, exhibits for the first time in the world's history the conscious sacrifice of the individual to the social whole" (Bax, *Ethics of Socialism*, 21). Similarly, see J. Ramsay MacDonald: "The individual is primarily a cell in the organism of his Society" (MacDonald, *Socialism and Society*, 32).

Fascism also sees the individual as subservient to "the community." Socialism may have been the first philosophy to call for the "conscious sacrifice of the individual" as Ernest Bax proclaims, but fascism was spurred on by this socialist stance. Adolph Hitler wrote: "True idealism is nothing but the subordination of the interests and life of the individual to the community" (Adolph Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim [Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1943], 299.)

Ernest Huber tells us the Nazi view: "The legal position of the individual is always related to the community and conditioned by duty. ... It is developed not for the sake of the individual but for the community" (Ernest Rudolf Huber, "Constitutional Law of the Greater German Reich (1939)," quoted in Raymond E. Murphy et al., *National Socialism: Basic Principles, Their Applications by Nazi Party's Foreign Organization, and the Use of Germans Abroad for Nazi Aims* [Washington, DC: US Department of State, 1943], 50). In one Nazi party document, we see the same metaphor at work in fascism as in socialism—"society"/"the nation" as an

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organism and individuals as disposable cells: “The Nation ... is an organism comprising an indefinite series of generations of which single individuals are but transient elements” (*Program of the National Fascist Party 1921*, Biblioteca Fascista, March 1, 2012, <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/program-of-national-fascist-party-1921.html>).

Because both political philosophies make the individual subservient to society, socialism and fascism are both anti-individualist. The “father of Fascism,” Benito Mussolini, writes: “Anti-individualistic, the Fascist conception is for the State; and it is for the individual only in so far as he coincides with the State, which is the conscience and universal will of man in his historical existence. It is opposed to classical liberalism, which arose as a reaction to absolutism and exhausted its historical function when the State was transformed into the conscience and will of the people. Liberalism denied the State in the interest of the particular individual; Fascism reasserts the State as the true reality of the individual” (Benito Mussolini, “The Doctrine of Fascism (1932),” Biblioteca Fascista, March 1, 2012, <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/doctrine-of-fascism-1932.html>). Che Guevara, meanwhile, provides the socialist view of individualism: “Individualism ought to be the efficient use of the whole individual for the absolute benefit of the collectivity” (Ernesto “Che” Guevara, “On Revolutionary Medicine,” in *Venceremos! The Speeches and Writings of Che Guevara*, ed. John Gerassi [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968], 115).

43. Socialist duty leads socialists to treat the time in our lives as society’s time and to say that our work is not our individual property but rather should be considered the property of society. Fascism’s foundation on duty leads it to the same view—that our time is effectively the *community’s time* and our work not for ourselves but for the community.

In one example of the socialist view, Fidel Castro said, “Labor is not an individual tool with which to earn one’s living but is rather the tool of the whole society, not the resources of an individual” (Fidel Castro, “Castro Anniversary Speech in Santa Clara [July 26, 1968],” Castro Speech Database, accessed December 7, 2020, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1968/19680726.html>). Adolph Hitler’s words mirror those Castro spoke many years after him: “[The individual] no longer works directly for himself, but with his activity articulates himself with the community, not only for his own advantage, but for the advantage of all. The most wonderful elucidation of this attitude is provided by [the Aryan’s] word ‘work,’ by which he does not mean an activity for maintaining life in itself, but exclusively a creative effort that does not conflict with the interests of the community” (Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 297–98).

44. For details on socialism’s multi-generation obsession with “parasites,” including examples from over a hundred socialist thinkers over nine generations, see the RFP paper “The Socialist Obsession.”

45. Benito Mussolini, “Speech delivered at Prato della Marfisia in Ferrara, 4th April 1921,” in *Mussolini as Revealed in His Political Speeches*, trans. and ed. Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1923), 77.

46. Mario Palmieri, *The Philosophy of Fascism* (Dante Alighieri Society, 1936). Benito Mussolini is referred to as “the father of Fascism” multiple times in this work, not only by Mr. Palmieri but also by Dr. Guido Corni, who writes the preface and reports: “Mr. Palmieri’s work is not only honored by the seal of the Dante organization, but also by the approval of the father of Fascism, the Duce himself, his Excellency Benito Mussolini.”

47. Spencer M. Di Scala and Emilio Gentile, eds., *Mussolini 1883–1915: Triumph and Transformation of a Revolutionary Socialist* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), preface, Kindle.

48. Pierluigi Allotti, “The Style of a Revolutionary Journalist,” in Di Scala and Gentile, *Mussolini*; Stefano Biguzzi, “A Revolutionary in Trentino,” in Di Scala and Gentile, *Mussolini*.

49. See Benito Mussolini, *Utopia: Rivista Quindicinale del Socialismo Rivoluzionario* (Milano: Feltrinelli Reprint, 1970).

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50. See Benito Mussolini, *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Edoardo Susmel, 36 vols. (Firenze: La Fenice, 1951), esp. vols. 2–7.

51. The advent of World War 1 led to a split within the Italian Socialist Party, which had historically been pacifist. (Mussolini himself had served six months in jail for leading an anti-war protest against the Italian invasion of Libya; see Spencer M. Di Scala, “The Battle Within: Benito Mussolini, the Reformists and the Great War,” in Di Scala and Gentile, *Mussolini*.) Mussolini represented a significant faction of Socialist Party members who felt that the circumstances of World War 1 demanded abandoning their traditionally anti-war policy. Other party leaders and members favored Italy remaining neutral. The debate split the party, and Mussolini was stripped of his party membership. Italy did end up fighting alongside France, Britain, and the US in the war.

Here’s an excerpt from Mussolini’s last speech to the Italian Socialist Party: “But you have not seen the last of me! Twelve years of my party life are, or ought to be, a sufficient guarantee of my faith in Socialism. Socialism is something which takes root in the heart. What divides me from you now is not a small dispute, but a great question over which the whole of Socialism is divided. ... Do not think that in taking away my membership card you will be taking away my faith in the cause, or that you will prevent my still working for Socialism and revolution. It is the right and duty of the Italian people to liberate their political and spiritual life from the parasitic station of the past.” Benito Mussolini, “Do Not Think That by Taking Away My Membership Card You Will Take Away My Faith in the Cause,” in *Mussolini as Revealed in His Political Speeches: November 1914–August 1923*, ed. and trans. Bernardo Quaranta (New York: E. F. Dutton, 1923), 5.

With the socialist pathway to power closed to him, Mussolini sought and found in fascism another route to helping the Italian people “liberate their political and spiritual life” from alleged parasites.

52. French Socialist Louis Blanc is typically credited with developing the expression “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need” in the 1840s (though another French socialist, Étienne Cabet, also started using it at roughly the same time). Here’s one example of Blanc’s using this expression in 1848: “Chacun produise selon son aptitude et ses forces, que chacun consomme selon ses besoins.” Louis Blanc, *Nouveau discours de M. Louis Blanc sur l’organisation du travail devant l’assemblée générale des délégués des travailleurs* (Paris: Commission du Gouvernement Pour Travailleurs, 1848), 10.

The quote “From each according to his ability. That is the DUTY” (“De chacun, selon ses facultés. Là est le DEVOIR”) is from one of Blanc’s later works, *La Histoire de la Révolution de 1848* (Paris: C. Marpon, 1880), 1:148.

53. Benito Mussolini, “Decalogue of Benito Mussolini (1940),” Biblioteca Fascista, March 6, 2012, <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/decalogue-of-benito-mussolini-1940.html>.

54. Palmieri, *Philosophy of Fascism*, 8.

55. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 337.

56. Gottfried Feder, “The National Socialist Party and Its General Conceptions,” trans. E. T. S. Dugdale, in Raymond E. Murphy et al., *National Socialism*, 223. Feder was a high-ranking Nazi and a member of the Nazi party before even Hitler joined. While Hitler was in prison (where he wrote his infamous *Mein Kampf*), Feder was head of the Nazi party.

57. As the great socialist August Bebel explains, the first “Fundamental Law of Socialist Society” is the “Duty to Work of All Able-Bodied Persons.” August Bebel, *Woman and Socialism*, trans. Meta L. Stern (New York: Socialist Literature Co., 1910), 370.

58. Ernest Rudolf Huber, “Constitutional Law of the Greater German Reich (1939),” quoted in Murphy et al., *National Socialism*, 50.

59. Ernest Rudolf Huber, “Constitutional Law of the Greater German Reich,” 50.

60. Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 41.

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61. Benito Mussolini, *Fascism: Doctrine and Institutions* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1968), 13. Emphasis added.

62. Among the many socialist mass murders and genocides are the “killing fields” in Democratic Kampuchea (Cambodia) that cost over a million and likely as many as three million their lives; “The Holodomor,” the Ukrainian genocide in which the USSR took over four million lives; and the People’s Republic of China’s “Great Leap Forward,” estimated to have killed 20 million at the low end, though new research by Frank Dikötter puts the figure well above 40 million.

For background on the killing fields, see the Yale University Genocide Studies Program, Cambodian Genocide Program, <https://gsp.yale.edu/case-studies/cambodian-genocide-program>; Craig Etcheson, “‘The Number’—Quantifying Crimes Against Humanity in Cambodia,” Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 1999; Philip Short, *Pol Pot, Anatomy of a Nightmare* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2004). On the Holodomor, see Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine* (New York: Knopf-Doubleday, 2017); Miron Dolot, *Execution by Hunger: The Hidden Holocaust* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1985). On the Great Leap Forward, see Frank Dikötter, *Mao’s Great Famine: The History of China’s Greatest Disaster, 1958–1962* (New York: Walker and Co., 2010); Xizhe Peng, “Demographic Consequences of the Great Leap Forward in China’s Provinces,” *Population and Development Review* 13, no. 4 (December 1987): 639–70; Wei Li and Dennis Tao Yang, “The Great Leap Forward: Anatomy of a Central Planning Disaster,” *Journal of Political Economy* 113, no. 4 (August 2005): 840–77.

63. Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, 96.

64. There are many facts that demonstrate “democratic” socialism is a branding strategy, not a new version of socialism. That today’s democratic socialists hold the same anti-liberal views socialists have held for 150 years is only one. To learn about the many others, see the RFP paper “The ‘Keto-Friendly’ Political Philosophy.”