

Donald Trump, Socialist

“Tonight, we renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country,” US president Donald Trump announced in his State of the Union address in February. His base, as he had hoped, cheered him on in setting himself up as foil to Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

In the three months since, though, Trump has doubled down on his own socialist policy proposals. On trade and immigration, he’s 21st-century America’s most strident — or most empowered, anyway — advocate of an indispensable tenet of state socialism: Central planning of the economy by the government.

Trump wants the government to control what you buy and who you buy it from. Thus, his “trade wars” with Canada, Mexico, the European Union, and China, powered by tariffs intended to advantage “Made in America” goods (and their politically connected makers) over others.

Now he’s announced a plan for “merit-based” government control of immigration under which bureaucrats in Washington decide how many, and which, immigrants the American economy “needs,” instead of leaving such decisions to markets and individuals.

In the past I’ve bemoaned the fact that “socialism” has come to mean such different things to so many different people. From its 19th century definition of “worker ownership of the means of production,” it’s been continually re-defined to characterize everything from Marxist-Leninist totalitarianism to a more all-embracing “democratic socialist” welfare state powered by heavy taxation on “the rich.”

That’s a pretty broad net. But except among anarchist socialists, state control of the economy is the axis on which all versions of socialism turn, and Trump is clearly all-in on the idea.

He even lends a socialist cast to the excuses he makes for his economic policies. He continually positions himself as protecting workers from the “dog-eat-dog” competition of capitalism (while avoiding using that word negatively). By adding an emphasis on political borders to those excuses, he changes the discussion from “labor versus capital” to “American labor versus foreign capital.”

That approach is nothing new. See Stalin’s “socialism in one country,” for example, or the marriage between central economic planning and nationalism characterizing the fascism of Mussolini and Hitler.

America’s Republican president campaigns against socialism while attempting to

implement it. Meanwhile, America's progressives campaign for socialism while attempting to thwart actual worker ownership of the means of production (e.g. the "gig economy"). Talk about cognitive dissonance!

Notice what's missing from the discussion on both major "sides": Freedom.

Freedom to move within and across political borders.

Freedom to trade within and across political borders.

Freedom to plan our own lives and live them instead of turning that power, and that responsibility, over to the state.

Neither major political party even convincingly pretends to care about those fundamental human rights anymore.

The entire public discussion revolves around what the politicians should "allow" or "forbid" the rest of us to do next, based on an unquestioning assumption of their moral authority to make such decisions for us.

Unless we break that cycle, we're on our way into the next Dark Age.