

Socialism Sucks, and Everyone Ought to Know It

Today my friends Bob Lawson and Ben Powell have released their new *Socialism Sucks: Two Economists Drink Their Way Through the Unfree World*. Intellectually, EconLog readers will know the score, but *Socialism Sucks* embeds good economics and economic history within an irreverent travelogue. Modern socialist rhetoric is so ahistorical and otherworldly that it's great to hear reports about what North Korea, Venezuela, and Cuba are actually like. Along the way, Lawson and Powell thoughtfully explore the whole "That's not real socialism" slogan. Quick version: Contrary to First World socialists, it's the hell-states that are real socialism, and the success stories of Scandinavia that are fake socialism.

I actually had the privilege of workshopping the draft of this book. Some of the attendees urged Bob and Ben to rewrite the book to appeal to young progressives, but I insisted that this was a task for a completely different book. *Socialism Sucks* speaks to people with common sense and a sense of humor who simply don't know much about socialism. That includes 95% of American conservatives, who normally have negative feelings about the socialist label but who couldn't tell you about the Holodomor, the Gulag, the Great Leap Forward, or the Laogai, much less the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact or the Killing Fields. Talk radio is going to try to angry up its listeners anyway, so it might as well angry them up against smug nostalgia for a totalitarian idea that murdered over a hundred million people and reduced dozens of nations to slavery while claiming to be the greatest of heroes and humanitarians.

Do Lawson and Powell really think that young self-styled American socialists are plotting mass murder? Do I? My answer, at least, is, "I severely doubt it, but I shouldn't have to wonder." When activists gush about the glories of socialism as if the Soviet Union never existed, all people of common decency should be horrified. The right response to the slogan, "We want Sweden, not Venezuela" really is, "The Venezuelans didn't want Venezuela either, but that's what they got."