

COMMENTARY

Socialism calling



Socialism is the new fad topic of chicken-little political conversation.

And now that we have a black guy about to stretch his long scrawny frame out on the big mattress in the White House master bedroom, all kinds of people are pointing it out.

Of course, the short scrawny white guy who still inhabits the White House master bedroom has practiced more socialism of a kind (welfare for the rich) than anybody since FDR, but people don't mention it by name.

I haven't heard so much talk about socialism since a professor at the University of Kansas tried to introduce it to my poli-sci class in 1971. "Socialism," he intoned, "is collective or governmental administration of the means of production and distribution of goods." Or something like that.

We showed that old fool the country wasn't ready for it; we just sat there and drooled, glassy-eyed and oblivious, trying to remember the previous night.

Usually we couldn't. But we always remembered where the student cafeteria was, a socialist place if I ever saw one. There, the Kansas government ladled out huge quantities of carbohydrates three times a day to any would-be hippy who happened past with a meal card. A meal card, by the way, is a

socialist invention.

OK, there was one other time socialism reared its ugly head in my young life: when my mother read me "Chicken Little."

Everybody thought the chicken said, "The Sky is Falling, The Sky is Falling." And I admit, it sounded like that. But even at age 6, and even though I was not a Boy Scout — not ever, by God — I was alert to the threat to our American Way Of Life (AWOL).

I recognized immediately that what the chicken really said was this: "Socialism Calling, Socialism Calling," rather than "The Sky Is Falling."

That was serious business. Even then, with Eisenhower in the White House and Elvis in Memphis and McDonald's selling hamburgers for 15 cents, I knew that our society was in deep trouble.

I knew, even while I was practicing duck-and-cover in Miss Brickle's first-grade class and wondering how my family could get to the ranch so I could get my single-shot .22 to shoot Russkies if the sky flashed bright and a mushroom cloud appeared — I knew that the real threat was not the Russkies.

No sir. I knew the real threat to the American Way of Life (now AWOL) would be a socialist in the White House 50 years later, and the country done gone to the socialist dogs.

So this is not new, this socialism thing, even though some of our pundits are bringing up the notion with all the same hideous portent as the town fathers of Salem brought up witchcraft, back in 1692. These contemporary har-

bingers of socialist evil would just love to get their hands on some socialists and some matches, I don't doubt.

Why, one old sage warned of the following nightmare just the other day in the daily newspaper: "The loss of our collective self-esteem in a welfare state, disappearance of both the work and risk-taking ethics that made our nation prosperous and the very real possibility that the government will take over banking, big business and heaven-knows-what."

Maybe FDR's socialist soup lines killed our collective self-esteem and risk-taking ethics — or was that starvation?

And now look at us, no self esteem at all. Take Social Security, which is as pure a model of welfare socialism as you can get. I'll bet neither the old newspaper sage nor his parents ever turned down one red cent of that gravy train. Most people who turn 65 don't mind becoming socialists.

How about public schools and libraries? Sorry, they're socialist. Police and firefighters? No sir, government-run. The United States Navy, the United States Marine Corps and those other service organizations? Naw. Socialist outfits if I ever saw them, government-owned and operated.

The old sage went on to say that some of his best friends are black, and the light in their eye is a happy light these days, so he is happy, too. Apparently it didn't occur to him that happy light in someone's eye is usually the result of stoner values. Socialist stoner values. We learned that at a socialist institution of higher education before the 1970s had even so much as cleared its throat.

So you know, I'm not the only one

who has noticed. Socialism is everywhere.

Welfare itself — food stamps, rent help, bank bailouts, tax breaks for huge corporations — is socialism, we all know that.

Whenever the government tries to help somebody, even if one thin dime is involved, that's socialism. Medicare and Medicaid are socialism. Roads and bridges are socialism. National parks are socialism, along with state parks and city parks. Public swimming pools are socialism.

Even baseball has gone to the socialist dogs. Local governments are now willing to spend vast quantities of taxpayer money to build those profiteering boys of summer their own spring-time fields of dreams.

Socialism, all. The government this, the government that, the government "heaven-knows-what," as that old socialism-calling sage put it.

Public radio? Socialist, although not as much as it used to be, since its support is down from 81 percent government money a couple of decades ago to about 14 percent, according to an NPR Web site. They're begging for the rest this week on WGCU 90.1-FM and WMKO-FM 91.7 Marco, as you may have noticed. Want to fight socialism? Give them some of your money, quick, before the government does.

And let me raise just two final questions in the midst of all this hand-wringing and nattering on about socialism and "the government."

Isn't "the government" you and me?

Here's the short answer: Yes.

I reckon our sense of self-esteem and willingness to take risks is going to be OK, don't you? ■



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