
P. Dean Russell

EXPLOITATION and FREEDOM

AFTER two years of unemployment, 58-year-old Vincent Sgroi found a job answering the night-phone in a police station in New York City. While Mr. Sgroi would rather have back his old job as a highly-paid linotype operator in a printing company that went broke, he does find a form of comfort in his lower-paying government job: "At least no one is making money off me."

I suspect that Vincent Sgroi has here offered the primary reason for our continuing trend away from competitive jobs that depend on profits, and toward non-competitive jobs that depend on taxes. He's convinced that profits are made at the

expense of the workers, i.e., by exploitation.

His belief is shared by perhaps more than 90 per cent of the world's people, including millions of intelligent Americans. For example, the idea that profits are made by exploiting labor is the basic theme behind most of today's television plays about business. As the TV story unfolds, the following idea will usually appear in one way or another: Profit-driven businessmen grow fat by exploiting the labor of others. We watch those plays because, basically, millions of us hard-working and anti-communist Americans agree with the message.

Those plays include situation comedies, soap operas, and serious drama. In them, businessmen lie, cheat, and steal in a continuous ef-

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fort to increase their profits. The evil acts of the Mafia are usually portrayed as typical "big business" activities. I have seen TV plays in which international businessmen (usually represented as Americans) pay large sums of money to the leaders of foreign governments in an effort to increase profits from government contracts. If they can't buy those leaders, they sometimes have them blackmailed, or even assassinated.

The businessman always wears the black hat on TV as he gets rich by following the dictionary definition of exploitation: "An unjust or improper use of another person for one's own profit or advantage."

A Dim View of Businessmen

This belief that businessmen are evil—especially the leaders of big business—is also found among our highest officials in Washington. Many of us still remember that famous incident in 1961 when the president of the United States informed the president of one of our largest corporations that "all businessmen are sons-of-bitches." That belief sometimes appears to be the prevailing viewpoint in both houses of Congress as they pass laws against the "excessive profits" that big businessmen make by exploiting the poor and helpless. I have even heard businessmen-fathers advise their college-bound sons and

daughters to study for careers in government, *not* in business, if they want to make a worthwhile contribution to our nation and people.

This attitude is not inspired by a communist conspiracy. For the most part, the writers and politicians who think that profit-motivated businessmen are bad people are themselves good people. They write and speak as they do because they're convinced that profits can't be made except by exploitation.

They are just as sincere in that belief as was that real-estate agent in Florida who gained ownership of the home of a poor couple by paying a \$3 overdue tax bill they didn't know about. He defended his action by claiming that, in business, the only way anyone can make a profit is to make sure someone else takes a loss, i.e., by exploitation.

If that were actually the case, of course linotypist Vincent Sgroi would be the exploiter; he got paid in full for many months while the businessmen-owners of the printing press made no profits at all and went broke. But most of us, like Mr. Sgroi, are as likely to base our decisions on emotion as we are on logic.

I'm convinced that those anti-business writers of TV and movie scripts are sincere people who truly want to stop exploitation. And they are equally sincere when they say that the best way to stop this exploitation is to abolish our profit-

motivated economy in one way or another. The usual solution they advocate is government ownership, i.e., let business be owned in common (through our government) and be used for the benefit of all the people instead of for the profit of a privileged few.

A writer-producer of popular television shows, Douglas Benton, summed up the belief (and hope) of most of his fellow-writers in these words: "The big corporations like General Motors and International Business Machines . . . will die out. . . . We are inevitably moving toward socialism."

The McCarthy Era

Before they increase their efforts to take us there, however, I do hope those writers will take one last look at the early 1950s and a senator name McCarthy—and what happened to a fairly large number of television writers and actors when our government decided to take a more active interest in that industry and those who worked in it. Please remember that Senator Joseph McCarthy truly believed that communism is bad and that we American people are entitled to be protected against communist propaganda in the entertainment media.

Those writers and actors of a quarter-century ago quickly discovered that writers and actors can lose their jobs for political reasons in the

United States just as they do in Russia. This happens in *any* nation when the government is powerful enough to question the viewpoints expressed in TV and movie scripts.

An important difference between the situation of those writers in Hollywood in the early 1950s and their counterparts in Moscow was this: In our profit-motivated economy of the United States, other companies and individuals who wanted to make a profit from the work of skilled workers could (and did) hire those blackballed writers to work for them. Also, some of those "politically discredited" writers found that, in our relatively free economy that's motivated primarily by the desire to make profits, they could continue writing under assumed names. In that fashion, several of them continued to earn good salaries. One of those writers even won an "Oscar" for superior work under his assumed name! But under the no-private-ownership and no-profit system of socialism, there is no employer other than the government. And if a writer in Russia tries to conceal his identity, he'll surely end up in prison.

You would think that anyone would be quick to understand that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov (and other "refusenik" writers in Russia) were only able to get their books and articles printed by the privately-owned and free-

market publishers in the capitalist nations. The owners of the presses in our profit-motivated economies were happy indeed to get those manuscripts because they made huge profits by publishing them. But neither Solzhenitsyn nor Sakharov has yet seen the connection between private ownership, profits, and a free press. As far as I can determine, both still believe that the presses should be used for the benefit of all the people instead of for the profit of a few.

Like their fellow-writers in the American movie industry, those Russian writers honestly believe that government ownership and/or control of industry is in the best interests of everyone—provided, of course, that it is properly and fairly administered. Both of those Russian writers are unimpressed by the viewpoint that the control of ideas (i.e., people) can become a permanent situation only when there is no profit to be made by hiring someone or by publishing his works.

Ownership in Common

Writers in the United States today cannot claim the excuse of ignorance concerning this relationship. All they need to do is look at any economy where the presses (i.e., the means of producing or reproducing words) are owned in common and must be used for the benefit of all the people instead of for the

profit of a few. In every case—underline *no exception*—there is complete and absolute censorship in the “common ownership” nations. The leaders of government (acting in the name of the people) determine what will be printed. Anyone caught printing anything else is, by legal definition, a criminal.

True, in the profit-motivated economies of private ownership, there *can* be government censorship, and sometimes there is, e.g., McCarthy in the United States and Franco in Spain. But the censorship is never as complete as in the “common ownership” nations and it eventually disappears because the private owners of the presses find it highly profitable to print and sell suppressed works and ideas that you and I want to read and are willing to pay for. If it were otherwise, i.e., more profitable to work for a press that’s totally controlled by government, I have no reason to doubt that’s what we would have.

We Americans especially enjoy talking about freedom in the abstract as some sort of lofty ideal that we’re all quite willing to die for at any time and for any reason. I’m personally convinced, however, that the primary defense against censorship in the United States (and everywhere else) is the attitude of the owner of a printing press toward the machine itself and the profit it can bring him. As long as the

machine is his and he can sell its services to anyone who wants to have a book printed, he's likely to defend his press with his life.

For precisely that same reason (in both Russia and the United States) farmers will die in defense of their land against anyone who tries to take it from them, including their own government. Millions of farmers actually *did* die in Russia for that reason; and millions *will* die in the United States, if necessary. But let the land or the press be owned in common and used for the benefit of everyone equally—i.e., no profits for anyone—and no one is eager to risk his life in its defense. I'll defend my home and my typewriter against all comers. I'm not nearly as willing to die defending the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Tellico Dam which we all own in common.

They Dare to Speak

It was our privately-owned presses—which are directly dependent on circulation to make profits and survive—that told us about the activities of the top officials in the Nixon Administration. Suppose *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and other profit-motivated newspapers in the United States were "owned in common" as are *Pravda* and *Izvestia* in Russia. Suppose that their survival was not based on circulation and profits but on decisions by the government

managers. Do you imagine we would have had the Watergate story?

When the presses are owned in common and are used for the benefit of all the people instead of for the profit of a few, the top government officials can literally commit personal murder against their colleagues and families, and never be exposed by the newspapers they control. Stalin (and other top government officials in Russia) actually did participate in outright murder. Profit-motivated newspapers and magazines reported it. To the surprise of no one, the no-profit and common-ownership papers in Russia didn't.

When private ownership and the profit motive disappear, human freedom vanishes. You can count on it.

Those TV writers (and others) who condemn the profit motive are not looking for subsidies or unfair advantages. They want only the money they themselves generate; not a penny more. They honestly believe that they are being ripped off by the publishers and distributors. That's precisely what causes them to support common ownership or government control. They think they'll thereby get what's rightfully theirs. I've never heard any persuasive defense of common ownership except this: The deserving people (the workers) will thereby get more of the fruits of

their labor, and the less deserving (the exploiters) will thereby get less or none at all.

I, too, want what is rightfully mine. All of it. If I believe I'm being cheated or exploited, I'll protest vigorously. Further, I'll take whatever measures I think will stop it.

I'm puzzled, however, by the naive belief of those writers that they'll get a better material deal from McCarthy (or Carter or Reagan or whomever is our next president or senator) than they'll get from the private owner who is motivated primarily by his desire to make a profit by publishing the works created by others. Since the livelihood of the private owner is totally dependent on publishing books and plays, you can depend on him to publish anything he thinks will sell at a profit, i.e., that people want to read. The politician, however, is interested in getting elected; making a profit doesn't concern him. These differing motivations, however, do determine what each will want printed. It's clear to me that I'm most likely to get this article printed by the owner of a private press who wants "to make money" from my work. Does anyone imagine I could get it printed by a government press that just wants to serve the best interests of the people?

Those popular and influential TV writers and actors seem blissfully unaware that the actions they dis-

approve of in the capitalist economy of private ownership do not (and cannot) disappear in the socialist economy of government ownership. Some arrangement of owners, managers, and workers necessarily continues to exist in any and all economic systems. In truth, the primary evil those writers abhor, i.e., economic power of man over man, is actually accentuated in the socialist system they endorse.

The Freedom to Move

The sheer economic powers of managers over workers in a socialist economy with only one employer (government) is obviously far greater than the power of managers over workers in General Motors or *The Wall Street Journal*. Under private ownership, employees are forever quitting their jobs in one company and going to work for another employer elsewhere. Under the socialist system of government ownership, however, there's no other employer to work for. And you must have official permission before you can change from one job to another.

In no sense is our problem of diminishing freedom due to a conspiracy on the part of anyone, including our TV writers and all other intellectuals. Our problem is actually based on a sincere and ever-present desire of almost all of us for justice—as we see it. And there's the

difficulty, i.e., "as we see it," for justice is a purely subjective concept.

I have no mathematical solution to the problem of a "just division" of cooperative effort. This issue has occupied the best minds of the human race since we first gathered into groups to work together. I know only that "turning it over to government" is not the answer. For how can an official (elected or appointed) set a fair price on this article without also rendering an official verdict on the merit of my ideas?

I'm convinced that justice (whatever it is) is more likely to exist in a private-ownership and profit-motivated arrangement than in a common-ownership and government-controlled arrangement.

My conviction is based on a relationship to which I can find no exception, either currently or historically. It is this: When private ownership and the profit-motivated market economy disappear, human freedom disappears at the same time. ☉

Shawn A. Bozarth

Socialism in Theory and Practice

As seen through the eyes of a U.S. exchange student in Britain

ENGLAND is a hotbed of radicalism these days, mostly socialist and frequently violent. I was introduced to this brand of revolutionary socialism through one of my professors, an admitted Marxist who was sympathetic to the Socialist Workers' Party.

His argument was simple: "The capitalist system is flawed. Capitalists overproduce, rob the workers for the sake of profit and reduce them to paupers. Faced with increasing mis-

ery, the worker must sell himself to earn money for food. He has no liberty. He spends his life at a job and has no say as to his work conditions. When will this degradation end? When the working class rises up and controls the workplace."

I also observed the rising up of the working class that fall and winter of 1978-1979. A wildcat strike of 33 toolmakers at a British Leyland factory in Birmingham was sustained, without punishment, when the