Are You a Liberal – Your Politics - Part Two

When Bernie Sanders ran for the U.S. Presidency, he identified himself as a Democratic Socialist. What the heck is a Democratic Socialist? Is that like Socialist-Lite? And what exactly is socialism? Like the word democracy, socialism is another slippery term. We find the word attached to a wide spectrum of political organizations. Even Adolph Hitler, when he came to power, organized under the National Socialist German Worker's Party (In the original German, the word ***Na****tional****Sozi****alistische*** is where we get "Nazi"). And also like the word *democracy*, the term *socialism* depends on who is defining it. In the late 19th century, capitalists took the opportunity to pervert Darwin's theory of evolution by using a popular thought of the time, "Social Darwinism," to rationalize the rapacious tactics that adhere to capitalism to explain why the poor were poor. Not because of economic conditions, but because of the laws of nature.

Mindful of that, let's start with this: "Socialism is a political philosophy and movement encompassing a wide range of economic and social systems, which are characterized by social ownership of the means of production, as opposed to private ownership." When we speak of "private ownership," we are talking about capitalism. The United States prides itself on being a capitalist system, but there are aspects of our economic and social systems that rub up against capitalism.

Government regulation of capitalism is one of those friction points in which socialism attempts to keep the ruthlessness of capitalism from causing the volatility that creates wild swings in the economy. There are some unique economic systems that have evolved that are a blend of capitalism and socialism. Take the National Football League. Its thirty-two teams are essentially a *monopoly*, a closed system, owned in most instances by a bunch of billionaires. If they did not regulate themselves, some teams would cause such an imbalance because of the size of their market share, wealth, and power in comparison to smaller market teams, the small teams would perpetually lose most games every year, and consequently, most of their fans—and revenue. So, to make things "fairer," they arranged for successful teams to essentially subsidize the weaker teams. Call it a sort of affirmative action or wealth re-distribution, giving the losing teams first pick on players each year, for example, hoping to balance the field, make it more competitive, and making it "fairer." This is the sort of regulation that is, in theory at least, unthinkable in a free market, and it definitely has the whiff of socialism to it. The NFL. Imagine that!

Social Security is a type of socialist product. There are a number of conservative-minded political factions who have been attempting to privatize Social Security, which is funded by the earnings of everyone who works and contributes to the system, but is run by the U.S. government. An alternative would be to have private entities such as banks and investment firms manage the funds that individuals now have deducted from their wages with the promise of a pension when they reach retirement age. The question many people might ask: Who do you think can better fulfill that promise? Private banks and investment firms, or the U.S. government? Some conservative Republicans think that private banks and investment firms would do a better job. Defenders of the U.S. government will point out the private bank collapse of 2008 that required the U.S. to help bail out the banks. It would appear that the United States government is the only entity that is reliably "too big to fail." Unless, of course, our country defaults on its debts. But that's another story.

There are other institutions that have socialist characteristics, particularly organized groups of public employees, such as teachers, law enforcement, some healthcare professionals, State, county and municipal employees. In the case of public employees, the taxpayers are the stockholders in the "company." In recent years there have been efforts to privatize some of these institutions, hospitals, for instance. The problem with privately owned institutions, they are expected to be profitable for investors. One has to consider: "Do I want to place my health in the hands of people who want to make as much money off of the institution charged with caring for me?

Whether you support government supervision of these institutions or believe privatization would be an improvement can help you to better understand what your political ideology may be. A purely socialist system has what opponents would call weaknesses, just as does a purely capitalist system. A regulated capitalist system, even with its faults, has to be an improvement on either of the others.