

## **College Unbound!: The MRC's Liberty Learning Program**

*"Saving Liberty Requires Knowledge of Its Enemy"*



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#### **Series 1: Marxism-Collectivism**

#### **Episode 07: The Forerunner of Marx: Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Socialism**

#### **Teaching Text**

As we all shared at the start of our class, the terms Marxism and Communism inspire intense and justified negative reactions among liberty-backers. But we need to capture that energy and use it – to help others understand those terms. It's up to us to teach others about why they're immoral, unworkable, and destructive to human dignity and well-being.

In that pursuit, we learned about Karl Marx's life and his 1848 Communist Manifesto. But Marx's communist philosophy is just one part of a larger overall problem – the horror of collectivism — and major historical figures seduced millions to the side of aggressive collectivism long before Marx.

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So, it's time to study the wider subject of "socialism," and one of its most explicit proponents, one of the most dangerous and deluded collectivists of them all, the French political theoretician and writer, Jean Jacques Rousseau.

First, What is Socialism?

Initially, many 20th Century writers, historians, and economists limited their view of socialism. Economic historian Thomas DiLorenzo explains that those writers often defined it as "government ownership of the means of production," one of the stages of Marxism.

But that ignored a great deal of the history of socialism.

And, as DiLorenzo also notes, the definition "...was expanded far beyond that. In his famous book, 'The Road to Serfdom'... Friedrich Hayek explained that, before too long, even by the time you got to the 1940s, socialism had been redefined as, 'income redistribution through the welfare state and the progressive income tax. And the objective, he said, was always the same... It was always the attempt to equalize society, but the means just changed... A lot of socialists gave up on the idea of taking over industry and running it, especially in the United States, where the 'working class', so called... was never interested in taking over the factories like Marx and Engels insisted."

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As a result, Marxist-collectivists in many Western nations pushed for “regulations,” bureaucracy, welfare programs, progressive taxation, redistribution of wealth, and the more publicity-friendly label “democratic socialism.”

And, as Austrian School of Economics co-founder Ludwig von Mises offered in his book, “Socialism”, the socialist-collectivists worked generationally to destroy the institutions of capitalism and the philosophical, common law traditions of classical liberalism (Natural Rights).

It’s been a centuries-long attack on the traditions or philosophical underpinnings of classical liberalism, an attack on peaceful respect for natural rights, economic freedom, and equality under the Common Law. And this has been conducted by means of envy and the poisonous notion of “equality of outcome” rather than equality of man as a sovereign human being blessed with God-given individualism.

But, who helped start it all?

That, of course, would be 18th Century French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau was born in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1712, and relocated to Paris France where he had a common-law wife, wrote plays, operas, music, and fiction, and attempted to break into French Enlightenment philosophical society dominated by thinkers such as Voltaire and, often, the legacy of Descartes.

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And it was Rousseau who, entering a contest he thought would bring him attention, claimed in his 1755 essay, "The Second Discourse on Inequality" that man in the "state of nature" was "equal" and happy:

"Having neither houses or huts, nor possessing property of any sort, everyone depended on chance for his lodging, and often slept only one night in any one place. Males and females united fortuitously, according to encounters, opportunities, and desires. They required no speech to interpret the things they had to say to each other, and they separated with the same ease."

If one detects a Pre-Romantic, anti-Christian devotion to primitivism in his words, one is on the right track. Likewise, if one detects an absolute lack of ethics or responsibility in Rousseau's philosophy, one also is correct. Rousseau fathered five children with his common-law wife, and he sent EVERY ONE to the state Foundlings home. Then, he had the gall to publicly say that he had been the victim, and had been unable to "Feel the pleasure of a father's embrace" with his offspring. Like Marx, according to Rousseau, the culprit for economic ruin and poverty was never one's own sloth or lack of ethics -- it was those who had more -- or any -- property.

With the introduction of private property, says Rousseau in "The Second Discourse", the innate differences in ability led to inequality and a disruption of that wonderful, innocent "state of nature."

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“He who sang or danced the best, he who was the most handsome, the strongest, the most adroit, or the most eloquent, became the most esteemed. And that development marked the first step towards inequality, and, at the same time, towards vice. From these first preference were born, on the one hand, vanity and contempt, and, on the other, shame and envy. The fermentation caused by these new leavens finally yielded compounds ruinous to both to happiness and to innocence.”

But Rousseau’s baking metaphors and fuzzy romanticism about some prehistoric state are really just emotive spin, preparatory to his direct assault – on private property. And it is here that we can see the salient collectivist DNA he passed on to Marx and contemporary collectivists:

“The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, could think of saying, ‘This is mine,’ and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of ‘civil society’. How many crimes, wars, murders, miseries, and horrors would not have been spared to the human race by one who, plucking up the stakes, or filling up the trench, should have called out to his fellow men, ‘Beware of listening to this imposter! You are undone if you forget that the Earth belongs to no one, and that its fruits belong to all!’”

Certainly, those could be the daft musings of a leftist at a contemporary political rally. Rousseau’s ideology fits right in, and, just like contemporary leftists, Rousseau did not understand the fundamental nature of rights.

So it’s up to us to shake off his ghost.

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The system of Natural Rights — be it ordained by God, or seen as a development of human interaction — is a tool, a non-physical machine. Like the inclined plane and lever are physical machines that prehistoric people used to better their lives, non-physical machines such as language and division of labor also facilitated better living, surplus, and trade. The idea that people respect the fruits of each other’s labor, or that they respect “first claim” status on land was an organic outgrowth of trial and error, adopted because it HELPED people better their lives. It wasn’t foisted on people, nor was it slid into their lives in some surreptitious manner.

The very “inequalities” socialist Rousseau decries are natural, and important, because they allow people to see where their skills differ, and the private property paradigm, along with the principles of free trade and free association, allow for people to divide their labor and do what they do best, trading with others as they create surplus.

Far from being the source of inequality, private property and free trade are the means by which people possessing different abilities and interests can devote themselves to that which they do best, refine their skills, reduce waste, and compete with others to provide their offerings to consumers, who do the same in turn. It is the machinery by which all people, of all skill levels, are lifted, allowing them to get more for less, and to do so peacefully as they benefit from the incentive of being able to keep the fruits of their individual labor and ingenuity.

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But Rousseau despised that template, and his second major work, “The Social Contract” called for a complete change in society and the political structure, seeing an omnipotent government in “The Assembly,” a place where the politicians would be blessed with the power to express the “General Will,” a form of gestalt power that he said was infallible, all-powerful, and could never be questioned, and which, he explained, stood in utter contrast to the evil, “Will of All,” which was the process of each individual deciding for himself or herself what he or she wanted.

In other words, Rousseau predated the modern “Democratic Socialist” state by a century, at least, and presaged the views of socialists such as Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, BLM, and Antifa.

They all call for the elimination of individual will, attacks on private property through state taxation, regulation, and controls, for the redistribution of wealth through the same mechanism, and for all decisions regarding property, law, and life, to be decided by the state.

Sound familiar?

In France, the socialist Jacobins followed Rousseau’s suggestions, and heads rolled, buildings went up in flames, women were raped, property stolen, businesses looted and confiscated, and disease and starvation followed until a new tyrant in the form of Napoleon appeared.

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What have socialist-collectivist schemes wrought, worldwide, since? And what additional disasters will they lose?

We'll look at that, soon, and we'll look at huge, powerful movements that are, right now, pushing for the dominion of collectivism, even as we dedicated few fights for freedom.

Quiz 07: <https://forms.gle/ZXzuJsLN9f2tMc4V9>