

I'm ill at ease over this negative correlation: I want to believe in democratic socialism, which exists nowhere on earth. [Of course, as biblical, I have basic and ultimate belief in "the kingdom of God," but it insists on no particular economic or political option among those available in current theory or praxis.]....Nor do we have, anywhere I know of, a capitalist liberation theology; and I'm ill at ease over the ease with which liberation theologies assume (1) capitalism inherently oppressive and (2) marxism inherently, or at least potentially, liberative....Peter Berger, on 1Aug77 WSJ ed.p., stimulates thought:

The Link Between Capitalism and Democracy

By PETER BERGER

If one central delusion afflicts a large portion of the American intelligentsia (and, through its influence, a similarly large portion of the media-educational complex), it is the failure to perceive the connection between capitalism and liberty.

By the intelligentsia's perspective, capitalism has long been a morally distressing necessity at best, a cosmic cancer at worst. Consequently, the pursuit of liberty, in this country or abroad, has been perceived as an enterprise in which capitalism is either irrelevant or antagonistic. But the current concern about human rights may change these deeply rooted attitudes.

The causes of the concern with human rights are mixed: a reassertion of fundamental American values. Another expression of that seemingly unending capacity of the "new class" to be masochistic and aggressive at the same time. Political expediency. Genuine revulsion against the cruelties brought to daily attention in an age of instant communications. The American penchant for wanting to clothe every native in the wardrobe of our own morality.

Yet if the reasons are mixed, it is difficult for anyone who believes in freedom and decent government not to be cheered by some of the recent pronouncements on human rights.

Could all this lead to international disaster? Of course. Every other innovation in foreign policy could, too. Meantime, it is cheering to find (as I did on a recent trip to Asia) that there are places where for the first time in years, victims of political repression look to the United States for solace and hope.

Inevitably, the new concern for human

rights has encouraged a survey-research mentality: Who tortures whom, where and how often? How many political prisoners are there in country A as compared with country B? This has led many people to the rediscovery of the obvious: There is a connection between respect for human rights and political democracy.

The connection is not absolute, of course. There are benevolent despots. There are also violations of human rights in countries with democratic forms of government. All the same, the correlation between respect for human rights and healthy democratic institutions is high indeed. It is salutary for American political consciousness that this correlation is once again a matter of public awareness.

Moreover, it gives rise to yet another hope: Perhaps, just perhaps, the correlation between capitalism and democracy might also be discovered.

In the demonology of our intellectuals there are two distinct sets of ogres, perceived as habitually holding hands—the torturing henchmen of dictatorial regimes and the greedy, exploitative capitalists, brought together by the thirst for power and the profit motive.

Yet the data indicate a rather different empirical relationship between torture-prone politics and profit-motive economics. To be sure, a number of ugly dictatorships have capitalist economies and there are capitalists undeterred by hand-holding relationships with dictators. But there is not a single democratic regime in the world today that does not have a capitalist economy.

To put it differently, there is not a single non-capitalist democracy in the world

today. Put differently again, there is not a single Socialist country with a democratic form of government. And it is difficult to find a Socialist country with a passable record on human rights, including the so-called economic rights of which the left is so enamored.

If intellectuals can benefit from renewed appreciation of this correlation, so can businessmen. The latter have always believed vaguely in the correlation, but the belief had little bearing on their international conduct or domestic apologetics.

Capitalism today finds itself in an increasingly hostile cultural environment in the West. This has implications for business' international activities, but also for the manner in which business presents its case at home.

A number of astute commentators have recently pointed out that capitalism will not become more attractive to its detractors by the propagation of economic theory, however attractively packaged, nor by educational campaigns showing that capitalism produces more and superior underwear. However, they might possibly be persuaded, or at any rate disturbed, by a better understanding of the correlation between capitalism and moral decency.

Conversely, businessmen might also be disturbed if they understood that every linkage of profits and torture—whether in countries with right-wing dictatorships or in Socialist countries with which America seeks to "normalize" relations—undermines the very moral argument with which, in the end, capitalism will have to defend itself domestically.

Businessmen like to think of themselves as realists. Fair enough. Broadly speaking, compared with college professors, they are. It is not realistic, however, to think that economic processes operate in a socio-cultural vacuum, immune to the pressure of ideas, values and moral convictions.

These pressures are ever more antagonistic to capitalism in the contemporary world, but they are reversible. And the present moment may provide an unexpected opportunity for those who grasp the connection between capitalism and democracy to go on the moral offensive.

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