
Dealing with the increasing disparity in incomes worldwide, an economist remarked recently that capitalism was a wonderous lottery, a great game of chance, in which there would always be some winners and some losers. There are some parallels between capitalism and a lottery: as defined, a lottery is a game of chance. But for a lottery to be fair all players would have an equal chance to win or benefit.

Who Wins?

There is little that is remotely chancy about the selection of 'winners' and 'losers' in the American economy. Parents work hard to assure their offspring have a better than even chance, not just of winning but, of winning bigtime. In capitalism every player starts from a different position, with a different set of initial advantages or disadvantages and grossly different likelihoods of succeeding. In a true lottery, such as one hopes is the sort that provides the payoff in so many state funding exercises, the winners are selected independently of the sorts of criteria deemed germane to economic success - social position, intelligence, skills level and prior accomplishments. Of what lottery could my economist possibly have been thinking?

The Myth

A myth of American capitalism, the American dream, is that anyone can get to the top. With what? Certainly not random chance, the touch of the blind, good fairy’s wand in the dark? What then? Hard work? Luck? Earnest good intentions? Powerful friends and backing? In the prevalent mythology, what earns success? The word 'earn' is crucially important here: that success is somehow deserved, by virtue, literally, of some properties or behaviors, not bestowed by heritage, entitlement, lineage or other unearned preconditions. Either way, nothing is remotely left to random chance.

What in fact correlates with 'success', or lack thereof, and the increasing income disparity in this country? Devoid of the sycophantic mythologizing, what in fact are the distinguishing characteristics and behaviors of those who attain economic success in America? What characteristics and behaviors distinguish the losers? Do they 'earn' their poverty and miserably diminished conditions? What are the mechanisms by which they 'earn' their status?

Organized Piracy
To what extent is organized piracy, theft by taking, deception and illusion, bands of brigands conspiring to take from the general population for their own interests responsible for the income spread? Capitalist economic mythology perpetuates a comfortable rationale for the most unjust behaviors and conditions, allaying the doubts and guilt of the unjust and suppressing the retributive desires of the oppressed. Fair and equal chance plays a miniscule role: that economic success is a lottery is surely a myth. Another is that market economics fairly and equitably distribute the wealth and wellbeing.

The Contrivance of the Marketplace

Markets and the market place are NOT governed by laws of nature but are a carefully contrived con to cover and justify the transfer of wealth from those with too little to those with already far too much. The invisible hand of the marketplace does not achieve the general good, fairness or balance, but rather the exploitation of the poor, ignorant and gullible by the avaricious, greedy and insensitive. The purpose of markets is to focus and concentrate wealth, not distribute wellbeing: the wealthy get more and better; the impoverished, less and must do without. What would an economic system be like that - rather than transferring well-being from the poor to coddle the rich - provided equitably for all?

The myth of the marketplace is that the general good is served by a system of dollar votes: not one person, one vote; but one dollar, one vote. The election is immediately thrown; everyone's voting power differs. The market pursues those with more votes to cast, whomever can pay the most, and neglects the needs of those with fewer. The poor have no power to direct production to meet their needs. The marketplace is a whore to the well-to-do, diverting energy, materiel and production from common necessities to trinkets of status and a competition among the rich who consume conspicuously while the poor of the world suffer and die of preventable famine, disease and drought.

The Professional Predator

Moreover market economics engender a predatory breed of professional speculator, the marketer, whose livelihood depends on inducing the unwary to buy what they don't need, at too great a price, then pockets the difference. Progress is measured not in needs met but by sales achieved in excess of true need, a system that begs wanton waste of resources and pollution of the environment with unnecessary by-products.

Why must there be an underclass?

Another myth is that to advance, society must have income disparities to motivate progress and innovation. How would society advance if there were not a vast undercaste of impoverished and barely-getting-by to subsidize, fund and yearn to join the few well-to-do? What would a society be like that measured progress not in the wasteful excesses of its few but in providing economically for all; that judged itself in terms of preserving the environment; that, rather than rewarding, condemned waste of its resources and environmental destruction? Could a society survive that measured its progress in increasing its compatibility with the other
life-forms on the planet, that esteemed, admired and rewarded advances in integrating human activities with planetary sustainability?

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