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**Atlas Almost Shrugged**

by [CYNTHIA E AYERS](http://www.familysecuritymatters.org/authors/detail/cynthia-ayers)

February 27, 2017

***"If you saw Atlas, the giant who holds the world on his shoulders, if you saw that he stood, blood running down his chest, his knees buckling, his arms trembling but still trying to hold the world aloft with the last of his strength, and the greater his effort the heavier the world bore down on his shoulders - what would you tell him to do?"***

***"I . . . don't know.  What . . . could he do?  What would you tell him?"***

***"To shrug."***

**Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (1957)**

What might America look like under a Marxist/Leninist regime?  Could this country - known for its freedom-loving individualists - ever succumb to socialism?  In *Atlas Shrugged*, Ayn Rand answered these questions.  Over a twelve-year period, she produced a gripping narrative from what was essentially a cultural analysis and a hypothetical roadmap.  It was most certainly a warning; but was she also trying to prepare us for a future that only she could see?

Sixty years after the book's publication, Atlas *almost* shrugged - and with good reason.   The world foreseen by Rand has been ever-so-slowly and almost imperceptively descending, weighing heavily on us all.  Comparisons between reality and the fictional scenarios within *Atlas Shrugged* have been proffered since its release; yet we've never been as close to the kind of pervasive, oppressive socialist society described in her novel as we were this past year.  Thankfully - on November 8th, 2016 - we received a reprieve.

Anxious about the direction the presidential election seemed to be taking by mid-year, I picked up my long-neglected copy of *Atlas Shrugged* and began to sift through it.  Becoming engrossed in the plot, I realized that real world cultural deviations, almost indistinguishable from those envisioned by Rand, have been emerging over the decades since I last perused it.  Subsequently, while listening to media commentary on President Trump's inaugural speech as well as the left's (and their proxies') histrionic reactions to the President's performance during his first few weeks in office, I was stunned by phrases and thought patterns that seem to have been ripped straight from the book's pages.

That which once seemed improbable is being revealed daily.  The words uttered by Rand's antagonists - articulating concepts, conditions, and situations which I had not earlier considered to be a literal possibility in the United States - are now used as weapons, vociferously shouted and shrieked from several fronts.  Astonishingly, if the election of 2016 had ended as generally expected, a climactic point similar to that of the fictional account Rand shared with us would have been well within reach.

The antagonists of Rand's story were, in fact, "progressives." Her characters espoused the same rhetoric, the same ideology, and the same policies as modern liberals.  The emotionally-driven way of life embraced by the book's progressives was virtually the same as that proclaimed by their larger-than-life equivalents.

In *Atlas Shrugged*, the world's governments, educational systems, media, court systems, and entire cultures had been subsumed by progressive doctrine from close to the beginning of the book's storyline; and it was evident that once progressives obtained the principal reins of power in America, the country's descent into darkness was inevitable.  Laws established for the mandatory institution of "equal opportunity" were enacted by a domineering governing body peopled solely by individuals with influence.  Everything was done for the "good of the public," produced according to "ability" and provided in accordance with "need" (the very essence of socialism).  Feelings were deemed to be of higher value than reason.  The squeaky wheels - those who proclaimed need and victimization with the loudest of voices and the highest semblance of suffering - were given priority when resources were doled out (not just the staples of life, but also virtually anything deemed *by* the "victim" to be of importance *to* the "victim"), especially if the potential recipients knew someone of governmental "influence".

Con artists who found they could control and exploit the wealthy for their own benefit were the ones who made the rules - and the rules were, of course, always enacted in the exploiters' favor (that is, for themselves as individuals or for the benefit of "special friends").  These "leaders" - portraying themselves as kindly purveyors of the public good - maintained their official positions by appearing to cater to the poor while enriching themselves by means of subterfuge and manipulation.  And just as modern progressives often do, the book's antagonists deflected their own dubious antics and failures onto the capitalists they despised, while hypocritically accusing them of heartless and unethical behavior.

Who provided the resources?  The wealthy, the industrialists, the capitalists, the self-made business persons (the 1%) - they were forced to hand over anything demanded of them by government to include the means and methods of production, as well as their own physical and intellectual property.  Regardless of their actual willingness to help the needy, they were shunned as the most selfish and immoral of society.

It was, in the cultural framework of the book, considered "moral" for productive achievers to give until everything they had produced and achieved was eventually lost to them or simply destroyed.  Conventions ranging from mandatory distribution of assets to foreign aid were established for the purpose of helping the rich sacrifice their advantages, their efforts, and ultimately their lives -- ostensibly to the world's impoverished, disadvantaged, and underprivileged.

The nightmare world painted by Rand was mediocrity heading toward complete obliteration due to the leveling of society for the supposed benefit of the neediest.  Equal opportunity became no opportunity. Laws against monopolies destroyed competition. The lack of competition precipitated systemic collapse when those who were granted the unearned "right" to manage resources failed.  Money, having long been wasted, redistributed, stolen, and/or shipped to countries deemed to be more desperately in need, was sadly wanting when "leadership" finally concluded that collapse was inevitable.  Officials resorted to state-sponsored violence, hiring proxies to protest, commit sabotage, and murder in order to maintain conformity and control.

When the most innovative and productive citizens disappeared one-by-one - vanished into their own "safe zone" - society's downfall accelerated.  The ones who found solace in their self-imposed exile planned to return only when there was nothing left to stop them from rebuilding civilization on the basis of sound principles, honesty, and reason.

I sincerely doubt that many in the United States understood the environment Rand envisaged, either at the time of the book's publication (1957) or in the years that immediately followed.  Her detailed descriptions of an America that was then yet to be were enigmatic, if not fanciful, to some and simply blasphemous (considering her overt atheism) to others.  Criticisms of the political essence of her work, however, demonstrated her detractors' lack of anything close to Rand's prognosticative power, let alone any comprehension of the breadth of experience, the complexity of thought, and the depth of philosophical insight that went into her work.

Barring head-in-sand syndrome, there should be no such lack of understanding by today's reader.  Rand knew from experience what progressives were capable of, and predicted ruination should socialism ever be allowed to grow and prosper within the United States.  The evidence is overwhelming that her prognosis was valid.

For those who now grasp the implications, time is very short.  Unless radical changes are made by the new administration, the tide of progressive subjugation will have been only briefly impeded.  Indeed, the violence, invective spewing, and other bizarre obstructive behaviors perpetrated by the liberal left seem to be aimed at maintaining the pace of their agenda and keeping any course redirection at bay.  It is as if progressives are, and have long been following a script designed to destroy American national sovereignty - a script that Rand knew the ending to, only too well.  Maybe they are; some unconsciously, others perhaps very much in tune with their intentions.

We've long known, for example, that most universities are bastions of liberal progressive thought.  While the study of *Atlas Shrugged* should be mandatory, it is doubtful that the politically active youth of today's campuses have even heard of it.  Rand's dark view of socialism would hardly be seen as appropriate to [faculty](http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/oct/6/liberal-professors-outnumber-conservatives-12-1/) who are busy indoctrinating young minds while keeping them [largely unaware of exactly what it is they are being encouraged to support](http://reason.com/poll/2014/07/16/millennials-dont-know-what-socialism-mea).

Nevertheless, *education* (as opposed to indoctrination) of our youth in a non-partisan, pressure-free atmosphere may be the key to saving the country from a rather dismal socialist future.  Lasting, substantive change must start in the school systems.  As long as students are encouraged and rewarded by teachers to rebel, protest, and act out in violence on behalf of ideas, views, and questionable facts with which they've been force-fed and often don't even understand, our country will be under threat.  Only within an academic system dedicated to true inquiry and freedom of speech, with no undue influence, and no fear associated with political disagreements, will students be able to think critically (not to be confused with simply being critical).  In a setting where they are truly free to learn, many may begin to appreciate that success and independence can be remedies for - not causes of - the victimhood of others.

If education in America is not reformed in its entirety, socialism wins.  In fact, the campaign promise of a (financially) free college education for all - a promise which seemed to draw many voters during the 2016 election - guarantees liberal access to a much larger, never-ending population of young people.

The youth are the left's reserves - their fallback. All progressives have to do is wait, keep the youth interested in socialist ideologies, and disrupt the processes of government to the greatest extent possible.  Even if the new administration is able to reinvent the media, rid the courts of bias, and transform the bureaucracies (e.g. reinvigorating the Hatch Act), the left will be able to rely on long-term infiltration of new hires from liberal academic institutions.  Indoctrinated students will continue to feed the ranks of the media, the courts, and the bureaucracies, *unless transformation includes education*.

Control over education will not be relinquished easily.  The continuity of the supply-chain is an extraordinarily high priority for progressives.  It is mandatory for the achievement of socialist goals in the United States.

Since the presidential election of 2016, progressives have made it painfully clear that they are not happy.  Rand noted an eerily similar state of chaotic distress associated with impending systemic collapse among the progressives in her book.  They expressed that fear by physically torturing the story's hero, John Galt (an option completely counter to their proclaimed humanitarian sensibilities).  Like Galt, President Trump is an unabashed capitalist with a love of the freedoms guaranteed by the constitution of the country he was born in - and he knows exactly how close we all came to losing those freedoms.  If the violent protests and vicious media blasts seen over the last four weeks have been any indication, the left of today fear and hate President Trump with the same fervor shown by the antagonists of *Atlas Shrugged* to Rand's main protagonist.

Can any President survive such vilification?  What if comprehensive transformation proves impossible?  Will progressive socialists ultimately take over - and If so, what does that mean for the country?  What does it mean for the people?

In Rand's account, civil society degenerated under socialist rule.  Those who, for a time, tried desperately to persevere in order to save the nation from itself - the 1% - eventually shrugged.  They retreated to a hidden refuge.  Their companies, businesses, and industries failed, either concurrent to their departure or soon afterward.  Workers, having ascertained that the society they were told to depend on was doomed, walked off their jobs and vanished into the night, heading toward the abandoned fields, towns, and factories of the "flyover states."

In the real world, industries have been "vanishing" - their owners preferring the cost of a move overseas to heavy regulatory burdens and high taxes levied in-country.  Individuals in large numbers have left the job market altogether.  Following the election, however, businesses signaled their readiness for change.  Some "escape plans" were placed on hold; and at least a few companies are preparing for their return.  The wealthy, the innovators, the industrialists, and the workforce seem to be willing to invest, once again, in a future for America - at least for now.

Rand skillfully exposed the irony of a socio-economic system controlled by elites who, cloaked behind a façade of base hypocrisy, proclaimed empathy, love, and absolute equality for all.  Inevitably, such a system becomes a vortex of destruction from which very few are able to escape.  Yet socialism's contemporary advocates are either willfully blind true believers, or they are counting on being members of the ruling class - remaining unfazed and unaccountable, while others suffer the consequences of the adoption of a dysfunctional utopian dream.

Like *Atlas Shrugged*, the pre-election angst and the post-election violence of 2016 are warnings that we must reform the pillars of society while it's still possible.  It would be easy to place the full burden of reform on President Trump; but that would be unfair.  It's our responsibility to help him shoulder that load - and the time is very short.  If drastic changes are not made within the next two to four years, progressives may succeed in their quest for total, perpetual control.

Thankfully (perhaps miraculously), Atlas hasn't given up.  His arms may be trembling, his knees may be buckling, but he hasn't actually shrugged - yet.  We've received a reprieve, and we must make the most of it.  The alternative - failure, as seen in the world Ayn Rand so aptly depicted - is not an option.

[*Family Security Matters*](http://www.familysecuritymatters.org/)*Contributing Editor Cynthia E. Ayers is currently Deputy to the Executive Director of the EMP Task Force on National and Homeland Security. Prior to accepting the Task Force position, she served as Vice President of [EMPact Amercia](http://empactamerica.org/%22%20%5Co%20%22http%3A//empactamerica.org/), having retired from the National Security Agency after over 38 years of federal service.*

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