

Mark James Miller: Are Environmentalists Communists? And What About Ayn Rand?

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Santa Barbara is the birthplace of the environmental movement. When [Union Oil's Platform A](#) blew out in January 1969, ultimately spewing between 80,000 and 100,000 gallons of crude oil into the [Santa Barbara Channel](#), a new consciousness about humanity's relationship with our planet began. The first [Earth Day](#), held a year later, was a direct outgrowth of that disaster.

So I found it more than a little ironic to see a car in Santa Barbara recently that sported two bumper stickers, one proclaiming, "Green Is The New Red," complete with a hammer-and-sickle and the face of [Karl Marx](#). For a moment I was perplexed as to what this meant. Then I saw the one next to it: "Who Is John Galt?" it asked, and the meaning became clear.

In case anyone doesn't know, green is the color of the environmental movement, red is the traditional color of communism, and [John Galt](#) is a character in [Ayn Rand's](#) novel, *Atlas Shrugged*. The driver was letting the world know that he is a follower of Rand and that to Rand's devotees environmentalism is communism, communism is environmentalism, and that's all you need to know.

At first glance Ayn Rand seems an odd choice as a standard bearer for the American right in the 21st century. She was an atheist, an adulteress, a drug addict and a staunch defender of abortion rights.

But with her unrelenting belief in laissez-faire capitalism, her disdain for people who accept government assistance of any kind, her opposition to taxes on the wealthy and on the corporations they own, and her belief in the superiority of the rich over everyone else, her ideas have struck a chord with the angry, militant conservatives of the American body politic.

Rand was born Alissa Rosenbaum in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1905, and came to the United States in 1926. In her screenplays, novels and essays, she outlined her

philosophy of *The Virtue of Selfishness*, the latter quality being, in her mind, the highest moral virtue a person can aspire to.

Altruism, compassion, charity — all were evil, because they were only a façade that enabled the weak to take down the strong. The egomaniacal narcissism of a *Ted Bundy* was not something to recoil from but something to admire. Rand sang the praises of a serial killer named *William Edward Hickman*, describing him as “brilliant, unusual, exceptional” due to his willingness to do literally anything to get what he wanted.

This admiration for the ruthless individualist is reflected in Rand’s two major novels, *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). In these two massive volumes of fiction, the protagonists are brilliant, driven men who single-mindedly pursue their visions of excellence — one as an architect, the other as a steel magnate — while having to fight off the efforts of weaker, smaller-minded individuals and governments to prevent them from realizing their dreams.

Small wonder, then, that Rand’s followers see environmentalism not as an effort to save and preserve the only planet we have for future generations, but as a sinister, communist inspired plot to prevent the corporate elite from making money. Rand herself said as much in 1970, when she concluded that the then-nascent environmental movement was actually a scheme to destroy industrial society and capitalism, too.

Rand saw plots and conspiracies everywhere, as do her present-day followers. A link on a Randian website asks, “Earth Day: Conservationist or Communist?” and the article that follows suggests that April 22 was selected as Earth Day because it is the birthday of *Vladimir Lenin*, founder of the Soviet Russian state.

An article by another Rand follower is titled “Against Environmentalism,” and declares, “The fundamental goal of environmentalists is not clean air and clean water; rather it is the demolition of technological/industrial civilization ... they undermine our quality of life ...” “Whose environment?” scoffs another. “Environmental is a political code word.”

Another Randian advises her readers to simply “Shrug off the fear and guilt of earth day ... A more malevolent, man-hating philosophy is unimaginable.”

But Rand was no friend of the common man or woman. “Don’t deify the common man,” was a directive she put out in her *Screen Guide for Americans*, in 1950, a

guidebook she wrote to help Hollywood studios keep communist ideas out of the movies.

A common person, she said, “has no outstanding qualities.” She regularly referred to ordinary people as “lice,” to whom it was evil to show any kindness, all the more so because they were far too eager to accept government aid like welfare or [Social Security](#). Anyone who did so was a “moocher” and a “parasite,” not to mention a communist. (The recent proposal by Wisconsin [Gov. Scott Walker](#) to stigmatize the poor and unemployed by making them take drug tests would surely have met with her approval).

Despite the many contradictions in Rand’s life and her ideas, she continues to have a prominent place in today’s political scene. Former [Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan](#), [U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas](#) and [Rep. Paul Ryan](#), R-Wis., and a former vice-presidential candidate, are only a few of her contemporary devotees.

Type the name “Ayn Rand” on [Google](#) and you will get more than 2 million responses.

Rand’s life ended with what can only be described as moments of supreme irony. Always a heavy smoker, she scoffed at the 1964 [surgeon general’s](#) report linking smoking with cancer as “communist propaganda” and continued her two pack-a-day habit. But in 1974 she was diagnosed with lung cancer.

Faced with the need for surgery and the reality of huge medical bills, she became one of the moochers and parasites she and followers so intensely despise. Using the name Ann O’Connor, she applied for and received Social Security and [Medicare](#), remaining until the end of her life on the same government programs her devotees today would like to abolish.

She died in 1982, alone except for a paid nurse, ending her life as a “red.” Who knows, had she lived a little longer, she might have gone green, too.

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