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# The Kulaks Must Be Liquidated as a Class

By KEVIN D. WILLIAMSON | January 25, 2019 6:30 AM



Senator Elizabeth Warren speaks at an event in Claremont, N.H., January 18, 2019. (Brian Snyder / Reuters)

Elizabeth Warren is not proposing a tax; she's proposing asset forfeiture.

**H**istory is very short, if you look at it the right way.

The American Revolution seems like it was a very long time ago, but looked at with the right kind of eyes, it was the day before yesterday: The revolution of Washington and Jefferson inspired the French Revolution, which unhappily perverted the classical-liberal principles of the American Founders and created instead an ersatz religion purporting to be a cult of pure reason — *le Culte de la Raison* — which culminated in fanaticism, terror, and dictatorship.

The French Revolution inspired the Russian Revolution, which created its own cult of pure reason — “scientific socialism” — and modeled its “enemies of the people” purges on French revolutionary practice, culminating in fanaticism, terror, and dictatorship. The Russian Revolution in turn inspired the Iranian one, which had intellectual roots in the Bolshevik experience in the Caucasus and culminated in fanaticism, terror, and dictatorship. The Iranians exported many of their revolutionary principles to Hugo Chávez, his United Socialist party, and their so-called Bolivarian Revolution (whose *colectivos* gangs were modeled on Iran’s *basji* militias) which culminated in fanaticism, terror, and dictatorship, currently on particularly dramatic display.

In most cases, the revolution begins with a peasant prelude and reaches its crescendo with some variation on the theme of Napoleon; socialist revolutions in particular have a peculiar habit of beginning with a man in a work shirt and ending up with a man dressed like Cap’n Crunch. **Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro does look a sight in his beauty-pageant sash and Mr. T-worthy gold chains.** The people who endure his socialist government are eating zoo animals and pets in what was the richest country in South America.

Elizabeth Warren is going to look terrific in those mirrored aviator sunglasses and peaked captain’s hat. She’s spent half her life playing dress-up, morally — pretending to be an Indian — so she may as well dress the part of her aspirations. “Who are you wearing to the state dinner? Oscar de la Renta? Prada? Pinochet?”

Revolutions do not set out to be awful. Not usually. They just end up that way. When the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia, many of them wanted to prohibit capital punishment, which they saw as a high-handed czarist institution. V. I. Lenin overruled them. “How can you make a revolution without executions?” he asked. The key to revolution in his mind — and in those of his revolutionary antecedents and descendants — was terror. “We shall return to terror and to

economic terror,” he promised, in a revolution of “unrestricted power based on force, not law.”

Senator Warren apparently has found her guiding spirit and has announced along with her presidential campaign a campaign of economic terror based on force, not law. Specifically, she has proposed to begin seizing a portion of the *assets* of some wealthy Americans, a course of action that the federal government has no constitutional power to undertake. The seizure of assets is a fundamentally different thing from the taxation of income, which itself took a constitutional amendment to implement. What Warren is proposing is essentially a federal version of the hated asset-forfeiture programs that have been so much abused by law-enforcement agencies — minus the allegation of criminal misconduct and made universal and annual.

The senator is in a bit of a panic: She hadn't expected to face a challenge from her left in her quest for the Democratic nomination, but as her entire party lurches in a *chávista* direction, she has been forced to go one step farther lest she fall into the “moderate” class, whose members almost certainly will be slaughtered in the 2020 Democratic primary. And so she proposes this ridiculous and illegal course of action.

She may not be the radical she pretends to be, but Senator Warren has pretended to be a lot of things. A Cherokee, for one, which is good for a laugh, but perhaps not the worst of it. Her longing for fame — and money and power — is impossible to miss. She spent a period trying to launch a career as a writer of dopey self-help books (*The Ultimate Lifetime Money Plan!*) and then tried on the costume of a Lou Dobbs-style populist China hawk, and even in her scourge-of-Wall-Street incarnation, she couldn't help cribbing from Margaret Thatcher in pandering to Dobbs, then at CNN: “One of the problems with spending money in this way is that at some point we really do run out of money.” She boasted that her little bureaucratic fiefdom — the Congressional Oversight Panel — was called “COP.” Her “professor of color” act got her a couple of cushy

academic postings and a net worth of a few million dollars. I covered her Senate race against Scott Brown and watched her doing a pretty poor impersonation of an Irish-American ward-heeler in Boston, clapping along awkwardly to “Charlie on the M.T.A.” like some animatronic Muldoon. If she has to pretend to be Hugo Chávez, it won’t be her first act of cultural appropriation. And the recipe book should be a hoot.

Funny thing about Senator Warren’s asset-forfeiture scheme. Like many similar proposals, it probably would not raise much revenue and might in fact leave the country as a whole economically worse off. And the people advising Senator Warren on that are perfectly content with that outcome, because, as Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman argue in the case of Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s proposal to radically increase income taxes, this is to be understood not as an economic question but as a moral one: It is simply morally obligatory to hurt wealthy people. “The point of high top marginal income tax rates is to constrain the immoderate, and especially unmerited, accumulation of riches,” they write.

And who gets to decide what’s merited and what’s unmerited? What are the chances that, say, Senator Warren’s modest millions or her multimillion-dollar home are deemed “unmerited”? What decides, of course, is “unrestricted power based on force, not law,” because the law cannot substantially answer that kind of question but can only instead encode the desires of people with power, which is what Senator Warren is seeking more of.

Again, we have been here before.

When the socialist schemes of Joseph Stalin et al. foundered, they blamed the “kulaks,” i.e. those who had enjoyed the “unmerited accumulation of riches.” There was never any real definition of a “kulak.” Basically, if you had one cow and your neighbor had two, he was a kulak. Stalin announced the “liquidation of

the kulaks as a class” as a necessary precondition for the progress of his program, which was, like Kamala Harris, “for the people.” Dekulakization (раскулачивание) was responsible for the deaths of about 5 million subjects of the workers’ paradise. This was necessary, the socialists argued, because the kulaks dominated the political party system (“for the rich, wealth begets power,” Zucman writes), because expropriating their wealth was necessary to fund benefits for the people (“The affluent,” Saez and Zucman write, “can contribute more to the public coffers. And given the revenue needs of the country, it is necessary”), because the kulaks were hoarders (under the headline “Elizabeth Warren is trying to save capitalism from itself,” David Atkins of *Washington Monthly* decries the “artificial lack of resources caused by the looting and hoarding of the obscenely wealthy”), etc.

But do our modern progressives really propose to liquidate these “hoarders” as a class?

Saez and Zucman write hopefully of the prospect that high tax rates would make the class of people with larger incomes “largely disappear.” Representative Ocasio-Cortez declares it “immoral” that we have a “system that allows *billionaires* to exist.” Marshall Steinbaum, the research director of the progressive Roosevelt Institute, wrote: “It’s increasingly clear that having wealthy people around is a luxury our society can no longer afford.”

And, so, here we are again: The kulaks must be liquidated as a class. But who is a kulak?

We might glean some insight into that from the progressives’ thinking in the recent free-speech debates, which goes something like this: “We’re all in favor of free speech, but Nazis should be chased from the public square, by violence if necessary, and we should harass their employers in order to ruin them financially. Also, everybody who disagrees with me is a Nazi, including children wearing hats that I don’t like.”

You may not feel like a kulak. You may take comfort in hearing that only the “tippy-top” wealthiest people are to be expropriated in the name of social justice. Those children at Covington Catholic probably didn’t think they were Nazis a week ago, either.

History is short, if you look at it with the right kind of eyes. Some of you might want to consider looking from Zurich or Singapore.

