



WOODS: All right, let's talk about your debate. I've already set it up for the folks, you and Richard Wolff at the Soho Forum. Of course, I'll put a link in the show notes page for how you can listen to the debate, because I think you really should. Let me start off with a comment, if I may.

EPSTEIN: Please.

WOODS: And that is, I have been perfectly willing to acknowledge when people I disagree with perform very well at the Soho Forum. For example, I side with Bob Murphy, but I thought George Selgin did a terrific job in his debate.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

WOODS: Likewise, I side with Randy Barnett, but I thought — sorry, I can't remember the other fellow's last name. I think it started with a D.

EPSTEIN: A Cornell professor, yeah.

WOODS: Yeah, I mean, he did a good job. I can't remember his name. But I remember thinking, I don't agree with this guy, but he's doing an excellent job. So I just want to make clear from the outset, it's not that I just arbitrarily say that people I disagree with are bad debaters. Not so.

EPSTEIN: No.

WOODS: But what I want to say in this case is I was shocked at what a weak job I thought Richard Wolff did. I thought most of his presentation was just moral outrage and sheer assertion. No attempt to prove anything, sheer assertion. And then not even really an attempt to indicate that he even understands your position, Gene. And in particular, when he went into this long tirade about how unstable capitalism is and that every four to seven years, you get a downturn, I would think a debater steeped in both sides, —which I never expect the other side to be. We know what they say, but they almost never know what we say — I would have thought somebody like that would say, *Now, listen, I know Gene's going to get up here and tell you that the Federal Reserve is the cause of this instability and it's not capitalism's fault, but the reason that argument fails is —*

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

WOODS: There was not even — if you hadn't forced the issue, he wouldn't have even mentioned the Federal Reserve in his whole presentation. So I was very, very underwhelmed, and I thought I would be blown away, like I frankly was by, as I said, these two other debaters I disagree with. Not so. So what was your overall impression?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, well, let me take your remarks back to play. You know, it's interesting that you discerningly point out that those two debates, you could see that there was a very formidable person on the other side whom you had to respect. And actually, I quite agree with you about those two, interesting that you point that out, so I guess geniuses like us think alike, Tom.

Beyond that, of course, it was interesting — I'm going to lead up to my main observation about your somewhat depressing point, which is absolutely valid. But of course, Richard is somebody

I did read, and he had literally — and of course, I did say this in my rebuttal, that Richard literally thought that the downturn, the Great Recession of '08-'09, was attributable to a collapse in consumer spending, and that indeed, he'd said that for years, for decades, consumers had to keep borrowing and borrowing up to the hilt, and finally, they were tapped out, and that's why the Great Recession happened.

And I pointed out that — and by the way, what's interesting about the conventional national income accounts is that often, as Bob Murphy, the great Bob Murphy, has shown us, they can be cited quite fairly to make very good points on the free market side. I pointed out that consumer spending was continuing to increase through the fourth quarter of 2007, increasing just before the downturn happened. So how could you possibly talk about something increasing causing that kind of collapse? So I did say that, and indeed, I had read Richard. I knew pretty much back to front what he was going to say.

With respect to your larger point, it bothers me that that's the case. I'm almost sorry I didn't say, at least toward the tail end of the debate, this is the guy whom *The New York Times* has called perhaps the most prominent Marxist economist in the country. Cornel West, whom many people have heard of, has called Richard Wolff our greatest socialist economist, a PhD from Yale and undergraduate of Harvard, just like Tom Woods, an undergraduate — No — yeah, no, you're an undergraduate of Harvard, Tom.

WOODS: Yeah.

EPSTEIN: Of course, Columbia, PhD. Indeed. And then, of course, as he wants you to know, he studied at Stanford under the very illustrious Marxist economist, Paul Baran. So I wanted to tell people: look, whatever you might think, negatively or positively of what you heard from Richard Wolff's presentation this evening, his attempt to combat my various points in debater's style, I think it's not going to get any better than this. This is the best you're going to get.

Now, I guess if I had said that, I had to confess that even Bhaskar Sunkara, not nearly as learned a guy, much younger, who debated me a year ago October, even he put up a better fight. So I guess I would have had to admit that, that when I debated Bhaskar, after I debated him, I was told: pick on somebody your own size, Epstein. The guy is less than half your age. What does he know? Of course, he had a big book contract with Basic Book to bring out a book that is now called *The Socialist Manifesto*. He put out *Jacobin* magazine, so one would think he's a brilliant livewire who could easily best me in a debate. But no, no, I'm not picking on somebody my own size, so that's why I went after Richard Wolff. And much to my dismay and disappointment, just as you said, Tom, he came off as a preening narcissist for much of the evening. So you're right.

WOODS: And you know, you and I don't like to call people names. That's not true. I like to call people names [laughing]. You don't. But at least when I call people names, I feel bad about it. I can say that about my moral compass, all right/

EPSTEIN: No, no, I like to call people names. Go ahead, Tom.

WOODS: Okay, all right, fair enough. Because when you said that about him just now, I thought that's not very Gene Epstein-like. But then I thought back to the tone that both of you adopted. It's one thing to be heated in a debate, but he was just belligerent and unfriendly.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

WOODS: He had no warmth whatsoever. He had all the warmth of a guy pushing a gurney in an insane asylum. I mean, just no warmth whatsoever. And you were very graciously trying to concede where he made a point or where you could find common ground. And then at the end, he says, "Just to show how strong socialism is, just note how many times Gene Epstein said he agreed with me." I mean, here you are being gracious and he uses that against you. I

thought, what a lowlife dirtbag this guy is. But also, you were you were charming, and there was none of that in this guy. I mean, he just came off as a — and maybe it's because his blood is just boiling with moral outrage. Well, so is ours, but at least we can be human beings.

EPSTEIN: Yes. Well, there too, there's an interesting backstory on that. Number one, while you and Dave Smith and others did not come down on me for the way I seemed, at least certainly did, lose my temper at times when I debated Bhaskar Sunkara on a similar issue, socialism and freedom in that case, I did get annoyed with the young man. Dave Smith likes to joke that every once in a while when his wife says, "Learn some economics, Bhaskar," that's echoing me.

So I think that I could have come off better that time, although notice somebody in my fan base said, "You had a right. That was just being fiery and passionate." A lot of the older people, often, including my son Jim actually, said, *You did not gain any ground by losing your temper with Bhaskar*, even though they acknowledged that I didn't lose my temper to the point of incoherence. If you actually read what I wrote or you just listened to the content, I kept on point with Bhaskar, and I did indeed win the debate in that case by 10 percentage points according to Oxford-style voting.

With Richard, I won by 20 percentage points according to Oxford-style voting, and I think it probably helped that, as in fact a couple of people said, *You were more charming*, and I said, *Well, I hope I didn't just win on charm. I hope I won on substance, as well*. But obviously, I think I played it right, although then a few other people whom I can never please said, *You were too nice to the guy*. You know, I can never get it right. Too harsh with Bhaskar, too nice with Richard.

But also with respect to agreeing with him whenever I could — and indeed, maybe seven or eight times I said I agree with him over the course of the debate — and I was criticized for that. Like tactically, why are you doing that, and notice that he's claiming credit for that. I thought and actually still feel what I said in my first few words when I made the summation, I said, "Richard and I do indeed agree about a lot. That's because we are both radicals. We are both radicals, and we see a lot that has to be changed. But Richard wants us to march in exactly the wrong direction." And so I wanted to make a lot of that, and I think it was the right tack to take. Of course, all of it was valid. When Richard talked about the medical monopoly, the healthcare monopoly, I said, of course, it exists. And actually, Nick Gillespie, who was the moderator, jumped in and said, "And of course, you want more free market." Nick, by the way, as moderator had been instructed by me in advance — he had moderated before when I debated Social Security trust fund — I told Nick, if anything, make it look as though you're biased in favor of Richard. Because sometimes that could be a little confusing, how is this going to sound — *Well, lean against me*.

So a couple people complained to me that, you know, *That moderator, he let Richard talk on and on whenever he was wanting to make a point. In your case, several times, he's making it difficult for you to finish what you're saying*. This was in the more extemporaneous back-and-forth. And I said, *Well, I hope the socialists in the audience* — there were easily like about 150 of them in a hall of over 400. I said, *I hope the socialists in the audience did have that impression, that the moderator is, if anything, making it more difficult for the capitalist side to get his points across*. I thought that was fine with me.

But actually, the other part of it, which is funny — this is another part of the backstory. I get a little concerned walking into a debate that I'm going to do at the Soho Forum. I do a lot of joking and blabbing with the volunteers and with everybody going into the debate. And I get a little worried. In fact, now I'm getting a little hoarse right now. I get a little worried that I'm going to get to hoarse to do the debate. So I tell everybody I'm deaf and dumb. I can't talk. I want to just save my voice for the debate. So I actually sat before the debate began, about 45 minutes before, I sat on the stage and just pensively looked at my notes, and so on. But Richard saw me, came right up to the stage and sat right next to me. And for 45 minutes, we

actually had a very amicable conversation. You know, we're both septuagenarian Jewish guys. And coincidentally, I had studied Marxist imperialism at the New School under the Marxist economist Harry Magdoff, and Richard had had Harry Magdoff as a foster father. So we knew a lot of the same people, and we were getting very friendly.

Look, in a way almost, I had my side. Maybe people want to watch the debate between me and Richard, and then see how I got angry at Bhaskar. So he is actually at his core a nice guy, even though I guess because I started out by quoting copiously from his book, I started to sort of knock his cage. And by the way, you talked about listening to it. Last I checked about two hours ago, the video on YouTube was up to 105,000 viewings, and so it's snowballing up. And so I'm very gratified about that, given the fact that Richard has 90,000 Twitter followers, a lot of his people are watching it, and a lot of them are responding. So at least I'm reaching them. That's very gratifying.

WOODS: All right, let's talk about some specifics.

EPSTEIN: Sure.

WOODS: I spotted a couple of what seemed to me to be contradictions. And the thing is, you obviously spotted them too.

EPSTEIN: Yes.

WOODS: But you cited Wolff's book from seven years ago. Seven years is not exactly a lifetime, you know? I mean, it's not yesterday, but it's not a lifetime.

EPSTEIN: [laughing] Tom — yes, go ahead.

WOODS: Well, anyway, so you were taking him seriously, and you were saying that you're talking about worker-owned enterprises and democratizing the workplace and this and that, and that that's your vision of socialism. And then you went on to describe all the problems with that. And of course, one problem — well, we'll come back to that. But then he said: oh, it's ridiculous to try to claim that there's one socialism or that any of us would try to predict what it's going to look like. But he spent the entire evening predicting what it was going to look like, namely, there would be more worker-controlled firms. So I mean, I don't understand that point at all.

Second thing is, he claims that he does not support a top-down, state-directed socialism, and he repudiates all those sorts of things. But over the course of the evening, he nevertheless could not help himself. I mean the real Richard Wolff came out. I mean, he more or less did at times seem to defend those regimes, such that you, very humorously — he didn't pick up on the humor because he doesn't detect subtlety. Let's put it that way. But you very humorously said, *I apologize. I mean, it looks like I've accidentally painted Richard into a corner because now he's resorting to defending these regimes, and that's not what he believes. He's not supposed to be defending those regimes. He believes in a bottom-up solution.* So it was so great, because you were very gracious but at the same time condescendingly reminding him what he's supposed to believe.

EPSTEIN: [laughing] Yes. Well, first of all, Tom, you make me laugh when you say that, well, admittedly it was written seven years ago, and Richard, by the way, is 77, so it was published when he was 70 years old, seven years ago —

WOODS: It was a youthful indiscretion, when he was but a lad of 70.

EPSTEIN: And Tom, let me hold your feet to the fire. I want to tell you, if you want to repudiate any of your previous books, then you should do so, because somebody is going to debate you on the causes of the Great Recession and quote from your book *Meltdown*. I hope you're not going to say, "Hey, that book was ten years ago."

WOODS: I would have the decency of telling them before the debate: don't cite that book, because it's just going to be a waste of time.

EPSTEIN: Thank you, Tom. Exactly. You would say – and by the way, what comes to mind, just to digress a bit, the brilliant libertarian, so to speak, libertarian Harvard philosopher, Robert Nozick, did have a habit of repudiating his books, although you had to read his subsequent books very carefully to find, for example, that in one of his books, he specifically repudiated his book on libertarianism, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. So there is precedent for that, and it's perfectly okay to repudiate a whole book that you wrote so long as you make that clear. Tom Woods can gain credit, gain points for what a flexible thinker he is. You know, I no longer believe in what I wrote in that book. So we agree about that, Tom.

So you were even being a bit facetious that I said, jokingly, after I quoted copiously from Wolff's book and took him seriously and made sure that I got him right, and I was actually waiting for him to sort of hit back at me by saying, oh, he read that out of context, or make some kind of crazy rationalizations and equivocations about what he actually said in the book. Instead of that, he gets up and says, *A book is like a kid. I didn't recognize anything I wrote. There are many socialisms. I'm not predicting the future*, all of that. And that was my first moment that evening, realizing for sure that this was going to be sort of a case in which I'm going to sort of chase him around the ring with statements he's going to make.

I already had an inkling of that, because of course, he was the affirmative, so he went first. I gave him 17.5 minutes, by the way, because I had to give myself 17.5 minutes, somewhat longer than I usually give debaters. I usually give them at most 15, sometimes 12 minutes, although 15 minutes has been the norm. And that was because in crafting my remarks – and by the way, my advice to all debaters is that the main reason – this is my bragging moment. The main reason why I've had five debates at the Soho Forum, taking the negative in all five cases and won all five debates according to Oxford-style rules, the main reason is that I do my homework. I become very familiar with what this person has written and said about the topic so that I'm going to have few surprises. And that enables me to craft my remarks, even though I'm going to go second. I don't have to sit there furiously taking notes to hear the initial statement for the affirmative when I'm taking the negative. I don't have to do that, because I'm very familiar with what the person thinks.

But sitting there listening to Richard in his 17.5 minutes, I was somewhat astonished that there was so much throat clearing, going into some crazy history about socialism and all that. And Nick, the moderator, was actually concerned that Richard was confusing the audience about what the rules of the resolution was all about.

WOODS: Yeah, I noticed Nick kept repeating the resolution, as if to – I mean, you were clearly staying on point. And yeah, you're right, we got from Wolff a whole lot of stuff about the New Deal coalition and the history of socialism. It was completely irrelevant to the debate.

EPSTEIN: Yes, no, actually, I was on Dave Smith's show, and Dave was appalled at so many of the side points that Richard was making. And I said, well, look, let's talk about those side points, Dave, because they had nothing to do with the debate. But of course, obviously, interesting questions arise. We are talking about a guy, Richard Wolff, who's lived through these times – again, 77 years old. He's lived through the same times that I've lived through, and he apparently believes that that the New Deal was abrogated, was reversed over time in the '50s, '60s, between the departure of Roosevelt and the current time. He actually believes, I guess, that there was no LBJ Great Society. There was no enormous expansion of the welfare state. The legendary idea that Reagan rolled back anything much in the welfare state is, for Richard, something that happened for 70 years. I mean, he's that much out of touch with just practical reality. This is one of the stories he told that evening.

And I guess it's important to mention it for those who want to listen to the debate, because I didn't pick up on that point at all, because it was completely irrelevant to the discussion and I wanted to save my time and remarks for what was actually to the point, and so I didn't mention it. But again, my mouth was agape that Richard has such a persecution complex that

he actually thinks the dominance of government and the dominance of the welfare state was actually reversed over the last 70 years, rather than greatly enhanced.

But getting to your point finally, Tom, about the fact that Richard clearly then, once he decided to back away from his book, once he said that socialism can mean many things, I realized I have to be ready on all fronts to deal with whatever he's going to bring up. And his worst moment, as you may recall, Tom, his worst moment was — when was it? Oh, yeah. This is an odd part of the evening. A question was asked about the nonaggression principle and freedom under capitalism and socialism.

And Richard, sitting not far from me, was shrugging and he said, "I don't want to answer that question." He actually muttered it, and Nick didn't hear him because Nick was up at the podium. So I jumped in. I said,

"I'm going to answer that question for Richard." And Nick said, "Well, what are you doing, Gene, stepping in? Because the question" — I said, "Nick, Richard said he wants me to answer that question." So I jumped in.

I said, "You know what Richard would say in answer to your question about the nonaggression principle and freedom under capitalism and socialism? What he's going to say is that you have the freedom to starve under free market capitalism, that if you don't get a job, you're going to starve. And therefore, there's no freedom under capitalism, because unless you work for a capitalist, you're going to starve. And that's what Richard is going to say." And then I tossed upon them, "Somehow, somehow, all the starvation tends to take place in socialist economies and socialist societies." And then I shut up.

And then Richard pounced, and he said, "I've heard all that stuff about all those deaths under socialism, and how about all the deaths due to capitalist wars?" I don't know if you remember that point, because I was criticized for that by Dave. He said, "How about all the people who were killed in World War I, World War II, because of those capitalist wars?" And so I missed an opportunity. Dave Smith was criticizing me for that. I should have argued with him about whether those wars were actually capitalist or not.

WOODS: Right, of course. What a dumb way for him to think.

EPSTEIN: [laughing] Yes.

WOODS: I mean, if they're capitalist wars, how come Gene Epstein's dead-set against them? Isn't he the least bit curious about that? Like, the guy is the most uncurious person in the world. He has no curiosity beyond his little bubble.

EPSTEIN: Right? Well, yeah, no, no, no, no. I picked my spot, and I said — so you might criticize me too, Tom, for missing that opportunity. I thought we'd go down a rabbit hole about whether those wars were capitalist or not.

WOODS: Right.

EPSTEIN: And you know, it's funny, as I jokingly said, I've made a virtue out of the fact that I was born to communism, that I spent my teenage years as a democratic socialist into my 20s. That intellectual depravity that I dwelt in for so long, that I've made into a virtue. And my fellow libertarians are in awe of me that I have such a dramatic background. You know, Bob Murphy said, My God, those stories that you come up with, with the FBI following his mother around — But Dave said, "Hey, look, Gene, that obviously means that you've got a lot of ground in debating socialists. That gives you an advantage, because you've been there and done that." And in this particular case, I remember I used to argue with my mother's boyfriends who were, of course, all staunch communists. And I knew their whole mantra about capitalist wars, and I was anticipating, my God, I'm going to be arguing with my mother's boyfriends.

WOODS: Yeah, right. But also, you would be arguing over definitions. Like, I mean, when there's a monopolistic institution waging aggression on something else, it's not even

capitalism. Then you just arguing definitions. I can understand why you didn't want to jump in there.

EPSTEIN: Okay, okay, good, Tom.

WOODS: All right, but let's go on to the — I mean —

EPSTEIN: But wait, Tom, let me just finish. Let me just say —

WOODS: Okay.

EPSTEIN: Just let me repeat that, Tom, if you'll recall what I did say was that, "Richard, I'm against those wars too" — yet another time when I'm agreeing with Richard, all those people — there were 2 million people killed in the Iraqi wars. "But Richard, the difference is that this was mass slaughter that governments committed against their own citizens." Hopefully, Tom, you'll say that's a good point that I made against Richard.

WOODS: Yes. Look, I think you did a great job against the guy.

EPSTEIN: Okay.

WOODS: I thought your opening statement absolutely killed him. Your opening statement. Because you stayed on point. Unlike him telling stories, you stayed on point. He sounded like he had a bunch of slogans and a bunch of assertions.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, yeah.

WOODS: And especially just something simple, like how does he not know the trend in consumer spending on the eve of the recession, when that's going to be — because he's stuck in theory. But that's the thing. Isn't that funny? The Austrians supposedly are just basking in their theory and they're not looking at empirical evidence, but he was so basking in Marxist theory that he didn't even bother to look at the trend in consumer spending.

EPSTEIN: Absolutely. Yes, indeed.

WOODS: All right, now, in talking to you, it should be clear enough that we're not right now refuting socialism. We're just reviewing your debate. That's a separate thing. So I'm not expecting you do that. I want people to go listen to you.

EPSTEIN: And I want you to hold my feet to the fire. Absolutely, I want you to hold my feet to the fire about what I might have done better, because I can always learn.

WOODS: Well, the one thing that I would have done more in that opening statement is I would have pounded a little harder on the Fed and said, "Notice that Richard failed to mention the Federal Reserve. That's true of the entire American establishment, and how interesting that it's also true of the Marxists. What is it about this institution that nobody wants to talk about, except us? And then secondly, to stand here and lecture us about the alleged instability of capitalism, as if I've got no response to that, without even trying to anticipate my answer, without even mentioning the Federal Reserve? I don't understand. That's just malpractice that's being perpetrated on the audience." But fair enough.

EPSTEIN: No, I agree with you. No, I agree with you, Tom. I could always use the excuse and say that when you're up there and you've got a lot of balls in the air and —

WOODS: Oh, no, look, but Gene, I'm not criticizing you, because you did — but I want you to understand, you did plenty of things in that opening statement that I wouldn't have done that were great that I wouldn't have thought. So on balance —

EPSTEIN: On balance, I did great. I appreciate that. Yeah, no, indeed, I want to build on your point, by the way, and say that what I thought in terms of a couple of things that I just think, God, I should have said that, you know, the truth of the matter is that Richard wants to keep — whatever socialism he wants — of course, that's obviously a moving target — he wants to keep the Federal Reserve. He wants to keep the monetary system. So we're going to have

booms and busts that are at least as bad under his. I could have said that, as well, and almost should have. So I missed that opportunity, for sure. You're going to say, Tom — anything else you wanted to bring up? Go ahead.

WOODS: Well, yes, because if he's going to talk about workers democratizing the workplace and comparing the workplace to a relationship between a king and subjects — just astonishing to me — but you made the simple, obvious logistical point, that if we're all going to make all the decisions — first of all, Jeff Deist posted the other day, he said, and I can't use the word he used, but he said, *Most workers would have no idea what to do, and they would make a cluster you-know-what out of it if they tried.* Okay, let's just face it.

But you pointed — and by the way, then Richard came at you and said — because you were talking about the sheer impracticality of this. For one thing, people would be in meetings — you were saying that if you had 60 people, just 60 people, and you were arguing one point and each person had 10 minutes or something, it would take 10 hours to make one decision. Rothbard talks about this in *The Betrayal of the American Right*, because he's talking about participatory democracy and how the left was trying to use it. He said, "The meeting became all of life." So you were pointing that out. And he just dismissed it, didn't bother to address it.

And then he said, "You know, Gene's arguments sound like the same sorts of arguments we've heard against political democracy. The masses aren't smart enough or whatever." And, "Oh, come on, Gene." First of all, A) the masses clearly and obviously aren't smart enough, by his own admission. Why'd they vote for Donald Trump? By his own admission. Hello. But secondly, yeah, you know what? I'm not smart enough. I have a PhD from Columbia, and as you said, an undergrad from Harvard. I'm not smart enough to make decisions for a firm, when I'm just some guy who sweeps the floor. How would I know? On what basis would I make those decisions?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, or to put — of course, I probably would have used the rhetorical ploy and said, "Maybe they're too smart. Maybe they're smart enough to recognize that they can't mind everybody else's business and that there has to be a division of labor in this regard." Sure, absolutely. And, you know, what's interesting is that Richard and Bhaskar actually teamed up the following week to debate — I found Bhaskar was at least conceding that we don't want everybody's life to consist of meetings, and so we're just going to have representatives. So of course, obviously I just said, "Of course, what's going to happen is that we're not going to have the tyranny of the majority anyway. We're not going to have" —

WOODS: Yeah, right, no. k It'll wind up becoming an oligarchy of some kind.

EPSTEIN: Sure, sure, of course, because there won't be enough hours in a day. We're going to give these people a lot of power, and they're going to be ruling over us. But then again, let me insist, of course, that I did say several times and I did go over my old mantra — mantra by now, because I went over it with Bhaskar — which is that we already have lots of people in business for themselves. We already have a worker co-ops. We already have a lot of instances in which people want to work in places where — as in Whole Foods, for example, which John Mackey still continues to run in that same way — more worker participation for people who take more interest in their work. And we could evolve potentially to more worker-run firms. It's perfectly compatible under capitalism, and it's perfectly possible if people want it, if it does indeed speak to deep needs and desires. So that limited form of worker ownership participation, that's almost an old story. I don't want to work for any bosses; I want to be in business for myself, and I want to work with a group of people, and so on. All of that is very possible under capitalism. And if that's all Richard really wants, he doesn't want these kings in the workplace and to have bosses and all the rest of it, then we can have it. We can all have it if that's what we truly want.

But some of us would prefer, as I did during my working life, to allow the people at *Barron's* and the people at News Corp, which owned it most of the time, to take on the headaches of

running the place, and making all the decisions beyond me about running the place, and letting me do my thing and earn a decent salary in the process. And so that's another choice that we make. And obviously, these people aren't our kings, so long as we decide and so long as the economy provides us with alternative means of employment, which in the vast majority of cases, it does. And so, of course, that's the other key card that I wanted to play and wanted to make clear, because I thought I was mainly trying to address the socialists in the audience to try to speak to their feelings.

I was also criticized that I didn't praise capitalism enough and that I said, you know, "Even our flawed system of capitalism that's heavily rigged in favor of the powerful is preferable by far to what Richard wants to bring about." You know, it's preferable by far. We have a flawed system, but still, it's something we support, and indeed, we need more capitalism and not less. We do need radical change, but radical change in the capitalist direction. So I was trying to convey to the young people in the audience, I'm as outraged as Richard is about so much that goes on in our society, so many things that actually do shaft people of limited means.

WOODS: Well, there's a lot more we can talk about. Your points about exercising for freedom of speech when, you know, the resources are going to be democratically directed, which of course means that if you happen to belong to a despised minority, good luck getting your point of view out because you won't be able to get access to the resources.

EPSTEIN: Yes.

WOODS: He never addressed that, other than to in passing suggest that worrying about the government is just so old-fashioned. *We're not talking about the government. We're talking about* – Okay, well, then all right, if you don't like the word *government*, we'll call it a banana, all right? Whatever. It's something. Something is in charge of deciding what the majority allegedly wants, and whatever that something is, whether it's the government or a banana or whatever, whatever that thing is, is very likely to be biased in the direction of what the majority wants. I understand the problems with the Constitution and all that, but in principle, that's why there's a First Amendment to the Constitution, so that that won't be up for a vote.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

WOODS: Right? That will not be up for a vote. And that's what makes private property great, is that once you own that property, nobody votes on it. It's yours. It doesn't matter if 99% of the public hates you. It's still your property, and you can use it to convey your ideas.

EPSTEIN: Well, you're stirring me, Tom, my memory of that key moment in which I began to cross over from being that oxymoron. An oxymoron is a married bachelor, a contradiction in terms. I was a libertarian socialist, just as Noam Chomsky called himself a libertarian socialist. And then reading Rothbard, it was really when Rothbard put a fine point on the issue by saying that anybody in charge of scarce resources with respect to the exercise of freedom of speech or the building of new mosques or any expression of dissident opinion, anybody in charge is going to have to ration the resource. Those tough decisions are going to have to be made, even on the part of somebody who's like on the nice side, who isn't a power-hungry, completely narrow-minded lunatic. Or if the majority is voting on it, which of course is a fantasy since nobody's going to keep up with those decisions, that even the majority has got to be told, *Hey, we can't vote in all of these things, because there just ain't enough resources for these things*. We live in a world of scarcity.

And so that fine point on it, oddly, was the thing where the light bulb went off in my head, completely, because I think maybe in my dull brain prior to that, we libertarian socialists used to think, you know, we'll just make sure that anybody who wants to publish a book, anybody who wants to build a chapel to the pagan gods, anybody who wants to express themselves will be able to. But obviously, only in the Land of Cockayne, I think is the way Mises put it. Clearly, we will have to ration resources, and I stressed that point in my presentation.

And then when I talked about the stifling of innovation with all these committees in charge of funding and in charge of labor, that they would not only have the excuse that we've got limited resources so we can't fund Steve Jobs' crazy idea for a smartphone that threatens so many industries, well, with their property, they can't do that. And then besides — that's another great excuse they would legitimately have — most new ideas never work out anyway, which is actually, of course, true. Most new ideas don't work out. And so they would have cardinal excuses that we could all take seriously for choking off freedom of speech and for choking off innovation.

WOODS: Well, we're going to call it quits right here, and I'm going to urge people to check out TheSohoForum.org for future debates.

EPSTEIN: And let me just say that in keeping with my age, I happily have Walter Block, the Walter Block, 78 years old, three years older than I, finally defending his eviction theory having to do with abortion, a matinee on Sunday, December 8th, at three o'clock, our very first matinee, December 8th. He's going to be debating a young woman named Carrie Baldwin, who claims to be a Rothbardian in many ways, but who's going to take him on. So that's December 8th at the Soho Forum. Please come.

WOODS: Okay, so we'll link to the Soho Forum and to this particular debate that you and I've been talking about today show at TomWoods.com/1538. All right, happy birthday again, Gene. Thanks for your time.