Is There a Case for Socialism in the U.S. Today?

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We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings.

~Ursula K. Le Guin (1929-2018)
IS THERE A CASE FOR SOCIALISM IN THE U.S. TODAY?

Dan Parker, John Green, Thomas Hayes
La Salle Young Democratic Socialists of America
QUESTIONS

1) Raise your hand if you know anyone in your life who identifies as a socialist.

2) Raise your hand if you identify as a socialist.

3) What words or phrases come to mind when you hear the word “socialism”? 
SOCIALISM IS...

- Anti-capitalist
- Democratic
- Anti-imperialist
- Anti-war
- Anti-racist
- Feminist
- Pro-immigrant rights
- Pro-LGBTQ+ rights
- Pro-indigenous sovereignty
- Environmentalist
- Pro-accessibility for folks with disabilities

For universal access to:
- healthcare
- education
- housing
- food and water
THE KIDS ARE ALL RED: SOCIALIST INTEREST AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

(A) Which of the following, if any, do you identify as?*

- Socialist
  - 18-34: 16%, 19%
  - 35-49: 17%
  - 50-64: 10%
  - 65+: 9%

- Capitalist
  - 18-34: 26%
  - 35-49: 21%
  - 50-64: 9%
  - 65+: 6%

(B) Which of the following, if any, do you support?*

- Socialism
  - 18-34: 33%
  - 35-49: 38%
  - 50-64: 50%
  - 65+: 60%

- Capitalism
  - 18-34: 50%
  - 35-49: 15%
  - 50-64: 7%
  - 65+: 7%

INCREASING SOCIALIST INTEREST (CONT.)

- Bernie Sanders approval rating in 2017: 75%

- DSA membership jumped from 6,000 to 32,000 in since 2016 election.

- Why do you think capitalism is losing support among young people?

- How might you explain the membership spike in the DSA or the popularity of Bernie Sanders?
Workers produced much more, but typical workers’ pay lagged far behind

Disconnect between productivity and typical worker’s compensation, 1948–2013

**Note:** Data are for compensation (wages and benefits) of production/nonsupervisory workers in the private sector and net productivity of the total economy. “Net productivity” is the growth of output of goods and services less depreciation per hour worked.

**Source:** EPI analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics and Bureau of Economic Analysis data

Updated from Figure A in *Raising America’s Pay: Why It’s Our Central Economic Policy Challenge*
CEO-to-worker compensation ratio, 1965–2013

Note: CEO annual compensation is computed using the "options realized" compensation series, which includes salary, bonus, restricted stock grants, options exercised, and long-term incentive payouts for CEOs at the top 350 U.S. firms ranked by sales.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from Compustat's ExecuComp database, Current Employment Statistics program, and the Bureau of Economic Analysis NIPA tables

Economic Policy Institute
HISTORY OF SOCIALISM IN THE U.S.

- 1901: Socialist Party of America Founded
- 1905: IWW founded to fight for workers rights
- 1900-1920: Eugene V. Debs of Indiana runs for president under a Socialist Ticket
- 1950s: Socialist repressed by McCarthyism
- 1966-82: Black Panthers fight for black empowerment and socialism
- 1982: Democratic Socialists of America Founded by Michael Harrington
WHAT IS CAPITALISM?

Meriam-Webster Dictionary Definition:

an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market.
CAPITALISM IN ESSENCE: THE PROBLEM

- an elite few profit off the backs of working people

- Working people do not control production or the fruits of their labor (i.e. profits)

- Similar to slavery and feudalism: those who produce wealth don’t control distribution

- Unlike slavery and feudalism: workers enter “voluntary” contracts with employers
WHY IS CAPITALISM A PROBLEM?

1) Alienation
   - we are alienated from our work, each other, and ourselves

2) Incompatibility with Democracy
   - economic inequality → political inequality

3) Proliferation of Injustices
   - capitalism is mutually reinforcing with racism, sexism, queerphobia, ableism, and imperialism

4) Capitalism demands infinite growth from finite resources
THE MYTHS OF CAPITALISM

- “Capitalism is the medium of human flourishing.”

- Myth 1) “Capitalism gives us the freedom to choose our work and what we consume.”

- Myth 2) “Capitalism affords everyone an equal opportunity for success.”

- Myth 3) “Capitalism decentralizes power to prevent coercion.”
WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

- Merriam-Webster Dictionary Definition:

  any of various economic and political theories advocating collective or governmental ownership and administration of the means of production and distribution of goods
DEFINING THE SOCIALIST SOLUTION

- Economic system in which workers on the “means of production”
- System in which we democratically make both political and economic decisions
- System that eliminates exploitation because workers control the profits!

Call it democracy, or call it democratic socialism, but there must be a better distribution of wealth within this country for all God’s children.

— Martin Luther King —
WHY IS SOCIALISM THE SOLUTION?

- Provides basic needs of all people
- Fosters healthier, more cooperative relationships between people in society.
- Weakens many structures that reinforce white supremacy, cisheteronormative patriarchy, and imperialism.
INTERSECTIONAL SOCIALISM

- Bread: goal to meet the material needs of all people
- Roses: goal that the dignity of every person is upheld
- One example: Transgender healthcare
OUR FUTURE: SOCIALISM OR BARBARISM

1) Automatization of labor

2) Impending climate catastrophe
DSA’S GOALS: NON-REFORMIST REFORM

- Medicare for All
- Living wage
- Tenant protections
- Protection of undocumented immigrants
- Election of progressive candidates to office
HOW CAN DSA ACHIEVE THESE GOALS?

- Community organizing
- Form alliances & coalitions with unions and other left activists
- Electoral measures
FAQS

- Don’t socialists want to get rid of property?

- Aren’t people inherently greedy and self interested, isn’t it just human nature?

- Has socialism ever actually worked?

- Don’t people need an incentive to work?
IS THERE A CASE FOR SOCIALISM IN THE U.S. TODAY?

- How have your feelings about socialism have changed over the course of this presentation?
- Who believes that there is a case for socialism today? Why, or why not?
- Any other general questions?