

Socialism in america today



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Socialism in America

In America today, there is a negative stigma that has arisen as a result of mainly the cold war that has had several detrimental effects on the country. This is something that affects American citizens and policy makers who create new legislation. Many of these people will vehemently oppose the idea of socialism but will take advantage of socialist principles already implemented in American society. It is important for America to become informed on the varying different forms of socialism and how some forms of it, such as the democratic socialism that Bernie Sanders promotes, can provide beneficial socialist principles while also allowing for a free-market capitalist economy. Educating the American citizenry on this issue would allow for them to properly elect officials in the future who may consider themselves socialists.

For a lot of people, socialism is only considered in terms of being its own political party like the socialist party or the communist party. However, any political party can contain aspects of socialism without having "socialism" in the name of their political party. Although socialism has never been only one thing, Schneirov says that "it has always had ethical, utopian, and ideological dimensions" (Schneirov). In America, socialism evolved alongside capitalism, thus creating a society which merges the two together. Socialist leaders such as Karl Marx have wanted to transcend a capitalist society altogether and completely end class divisions. Most others, however, do not wish for such a revolution to take place but rather have a good mix of the two (Schneirov). A good example of this being Bernie Sanders; a presidential candidate who outspokenly supports democracy and a free market while also

argues for socialist principles. Mainly ones that involve forcing those in the country who are the richest to pay their fair share of taxes and give their fair share to help the standard of living for all of Americans to rise.

One important distinction that needs to be made is that there are many different forms of socialism that profess very different views on how society should be run. Although socialism has several unchangeable tenets, such as “ public ownership of the means of production and distribution,” all other aspects of this view are up for debate. Michael Harrington, in his book “ Socialism: Past and Future,” says that for socialism to prevail at all in the twenty-first century, its large diversity and complexity must be understood and recognized (Harrington). Donald Busky does a good job of defining and making a distinction between these various types of socialism in his book, “ Democratic Socialism: A Global Survey.” He goes into depth on utopian socialism, Marxism, social anarchism, communism, and democratic socialism; all different forms of socialism that vary widely. Forms of socialism like Communism are devoid of democracy and are usually associated with totalitarianism or a dictatorial rule. However, other forms of socialism like democratic socialism combine “ the ideas of liberal-democratic government with that of social ownership and control of the economy” (Busky).

Socialism has received a negative stigma throughout the years, mainly during the cold war (Bump). This stigma has remained over the years and has had several detrimental effects on America. Being called a socialist has even become an insult in America, when in reality it could be a beneficial thing to be a socialist. Mark Leibovich, an author for *The New York Times* , points out that conservatives have been using the terms “ socialist” as an

insult in his article titled "'Socialism!' Boo, Hiss, Repeat". He even argues that the push for socialism is something that is returning after laying dormant for a while now. He points out how John McCain, a candidate who fought with Obama for the election of president, even accused Barack Obama of desiring to "spread the wealth," a major tenet of socialism (Leibovich). Although Obama has indeed implemented several different socialist based pieces of legislation, this legislation has been beneficial to the country. For example, he implemented a new health care system that has provided coverage for many Americans that lacked the coverage before. Regardless of benefits of socialism such as Obama's health care reforms, many people still look at socialism as if it is always a negative thing that should be avoided at all costs. This is because many do not know of the many different forms of socialism that exist. Many people believe that socialism is just one thing with no diversity. Different forms of socialism can range from utopian socialism, where wealth is distributed equally to everyone and there is no chance of working up the chain of economic classes, to democratic socialism, where billionaire's wealth is used to help keep the lower class out of poverty and make public education free for those who could otherwise not afford it. In a democratic socialist economy, people can still work hard to bring themselves up the economic class ladder. Some forms of socialism, such as communism, include a command system where the government controls almost every aspect of the economy, while others allow for a free market.

Although many people are unaware, there are several aspects of socialism that are already present in modern day America (Walter). One of the most

obvious examples of this being the government health care system. This is a system that is already implemented in American society. It is a program that is subsidized by taxpayers. This means that those who receive this health care are not required to pay the full price for it as society collectively helps foot the bill for it, even if they do not use the service. This allows those who are financially unable to pay for health care that they may need to receive proper health care. This is part of a common aspect of socialism which involves spreading the wealth in the country around (Rose). Barack Obama, the current president of the United States, has already implemented socialist based healthcare legislation called Obamacare. The official name of this act being the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Cheryl Chumley, an author for *The Blaze*, wrote an article titled "Obamacare Ruling Solidifies Socialism in America." The title of this article does a good job of summing up exactly how Obamacare has influenced health care. In this article Chumley quotes Obama who said that "we finally declared in America health care is not a privilege, but a right for all" (Chumley). These are sentiments that are shared by Bernie Sanders, a self-proclaimed socialist.

There is even a push in the nation to implement universal healthcare, a system that has been implemented in many other western industrialized countries. This means that everyone in the country would automatically receive health care, regardless of their financial status.

Another common aspect of socialism in America is corporate welfare. This is something that is not as common knowledge as government healthcare as it does not directly affect the citizenry to the same effect as healthcare does. This involves corporations that receive financial support from the government

to prosper through things such as subsidies. Rose discusses how this can be seen through the oil industry and how the American government immensely helps the oil industry prosper. He even goes as far as to say that it is no longer necessary for the American government to be doing this anymore as the oil industry is clearly prospering immensely and many industrialized countries depend on it for many of their utilities (Rose). This is an example of a socialized industry that almost everyone relies upon and uses every day, yet many still scoff at the idea of socialism when it is brought up in conversation.

There is a plethora of utilities that are subsidized by taxpayer's money that are then made usable by the public. This allows everyone in a community to contribute a certain portion of their finances to provide basic utilities to everyone, even those who would not possess the money to partake in the use of the utilities without this system. This is an idea that has been around for almost the entire duration of America and is a basic socialist principle, just like the governmental health care. These things help to raise the standard of living for the entire community. Rose lists only a few of these utilities that most people take advantage of. He lists military expenditures, highways, a rail system, postal service, and air traffic control (Rose).

Even though all of these utilities are made possible through socialist legislation, there is a negative stigma that exists in America with what seems to be a majority of the citizenry. Many people have a very ill-informed opinion on the matter and do not understand exactly what socialism can look like and how it can benefit a society. This stigma originated mainly during the cold war. During this era, America vehemently fought to contain communism in <https://assignbuster.com/socialism-in-america-today/>

the areas that it was already located and tried to keep it from spreading to other reasons. This becomes a problem because many people conflate socialism and communism as if they are the same thing. Donald Trump, a current Republican presidential candidate, has made it clear that he conflates the two through his comments towards Bernie Sanders, a self-proclaimed democratic socialist. Trump has called Sanders a "socialist" and a "communist" when it is evident that he does not advocate Communism and has never claimed to. In modern times, this stigma is mostly associated with the Republican Party, with the Democratic Party generally being more accepting of the idea. This is obviously not completely exclusive to either side though.

This stigma that has arisen against socialism through the cold war can have several detrimental effects on the country. One area that could suffer from this stigma that was discussed earlier is the health care system. Many people do not want to "socialize" this vital system and make it available to everyone in the country. This could possibly lead to people not getting the proper health care that they need because they cannot afford the care and they cannot afford the proper health insurance to cover it. Many European countries have already implemented a universal health care system and it has led to many more individuals getting the health care that they need, even if they are not lucky enough to possess the funds to pay for it. In America, the health care system is still just an industry that many people use to make money and it has led to some lower class people being unable to get proper health care. John Barro points out in his article titled "Bernie Sanders, Democratic Socialist Capitalist" that Bernie Sanders wishes to make Medicare

something that is free for all, and a right freely granted to everybody. This would make the federal government the sole insurer. Barro points out that this is clearly something that a democratic socialist would endorse (Barro).

Bernie Sanders, a self-proclaimed democratic socialist running for president, has received very varying responses to his title of "socialist." It has been beneficial for him in the way that he has received a large amount of attention that he may not have received otherwise. However, many people have been swayed from supporting him because of it even though they may support a lot of the policies that he proposes. The large grey area that is present when it comes to socialism allows for Bernie Sanders to be a socialist but also still advocate for the free-market capitalist economy that is seen in America currently. According to Busky, "democratic socialism combines the ideas of liberal-democratic government with that of social ownership and control of the economy."

A very common response to Bernie Sanders' democratic socialism is that people will deny that it is even socialism. For example, in the article titled "The Money Illusion: Bernie Sanders' Silly 'Socialism,'" the author condemns Sanders for using the term socialism. He claims that Sanders is either ignorant or eccentric and should refer to himself as a social democrat instead. He argues that Sanders does not know what it truly means to be a socialist and points out that he views socialism as a system that works in opposition to capitalism ("The Money Illusion: Bernie Sanders' Silly 'Socialism"). People like the author of this article do not understand the vast diversity between different socialist ideologies that are all still part of socialism. They only see socialism as a form of Communism or a society in

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which wealth is spread out entirely and there is no ability to climb in economic class. George Will makes the claim that Bernie Sanders is not a socialist. Will makes the arguments that the term socialism has become so diluted that everyone is basically a socialist and supports what is today known as socialism in America (Will). This however, does not invalidate Sanders claim to be a democratic socialist. He still has plans to redistribute the wealth and help spread some of the money from the wealthiest to those who are truly in need of it. Josh Barro, an author for The New York Times, hits the nail on the head in his article titled "Bernie Sanders, Democratic Socialist Capitalist." He points out how Sanders' use of the word "socialist" to describe himself has caused a lot of confusion. This is obviously partly due to the fact that most Americans are unaware of what exactly this can mean. Barro points out that Sanders strives for a mixed economy "where capitalist institutions are mediated through taxes and regulation." He still endorses a capitalistic economy, like his democratic opponent Hillary Clinton does; he just wants more taxes and regulation (Barro). However, Barro does still point out his grievances with Bernie Sanders referring to himself as a socialist. He argues that the aspects of Bernie Sanders campaign that Sanders deems to be "socialist" are things that most other candidates embrace without needing to use the term "socialism." He even ends the article by saying that he hopes "Mr. Sanders is not too offended if I simply describe him as "very liberal"" (Barro).

Bailey Ethier has an article titled "Bernie Sanders' ideas are as ridiculous as Donald Trump's;" a title that speaks for itself. Ethier argues that these two candidates have a lot in common, even though Donald Trump and Bernie

Sanders are in different parties and have strongly condemned each other for their proposed policies. She argues that Sanders socialist ideas are just as crazy as Trump's idea of building a large wall on the southern border of the United States and making Mexico pay for it. The policy that Ethier focuses on specifically is Sanders plan to make tuition at public universities free. He plans on taxing Wall Street for this. Ethier argues that this would not foot the entire bill and that Sanders is crazy for believing that this is achievable (Ethier). Even though this socialist measure has been achieved in other countries, the United States deficit and population exceeding 350 million people are definitely barriers that need to be overcome.

Reactions have, however, not been entirely negative to Bernie Sander's form of socialism. Joseph Schwartz discusses how Sanders has drawn crowds of thousands of people to his rallies, to an extent greater than any other candidate has. Schwartz points out how many of his supporters are of the younger generation. This is because this demographic of people were not alive or old enough to comprehend the stigma that was formed against socialism during the Cold War (Schwartz). They are looking at the policies that Sanders propose through a view that is less biased than those who were around during the Cold War and mistakenly conflate socialism and the communism that the United States tried to contain and stop from spreading.

The most important thing to focus on is educating the American citizens on the vast differences that are present in socialism and highlight the socialist principles that are already present in America. This is something that is very important and a problem that is not taken seriously or even acknowledged by most people. Bernie Sanders is a good example of a candidate that can

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be a socialist and still advocate for a free market capitalistic economy like the one present in America today. This issue is also one that is very important for upcoming elections. Many people hear that Bernie Sanders is a socialist and are immediately turned away by this without actually considering the changes that he plans to make. Hopefully educating the citizenry with the possibilities of socialism when used correctly would allow for the proper people to be voted into office. Even beyond this, it is important to look past these terms like “ socialism” and “ capitalism” and really look at the specific views and tenets of different candidate’s campaigns. Basing one’s vote solely on whether or not a candidate refers to himself as a socialist or not unnecessarily divides the electoral constituency and creates a distinction that need not exist.

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