

# On socialism and democracy

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Is it possible for a Democracy and Socialism to co-exist? That is, can a government be democratic and also re-distribute income to the less fortunate?

AA

Houston, Tx.

19 July

Thanks for your letter.

Allow me to turn the question around: How can there be real democracy without equality? Throughout history, the struggle for democracy has always been associated with the assault on social privilege and the achievement of a greater degree of equality than had previously existed.

Huge disparities in the distribution of wealth are inherently undemocratic. Such disparities imply profound differences not only in social position but also political power. Those who possess immense wealth will do everything in their power to curtail the ability of the broad mass of people to effect changes that would adversely affect their privileged position.

How democratic can a society be when 90 percent of its wealth is effectively concentrated in the hands of less than 10 percent of its population? Were social conditions in America determined on a truly democratic basis, such extreme differences in the distribution of wealth would not be possible. Yes, American citizens enjoy certain important democratic rights. But workers have, when all is said and done, no control over the basic economic forces and decisions that largely determine the course of their lives. It is the owners of the means of production who determine who shall work and who shall not. And even those who have jobs are essentially powerless when it comes to determining the aims and direction of the company for which they work.

So while it is certainly true that there can be no real socialism without democracy, it is no less true that there can be no real democracy without socialism.

Yours sincerely,

David North

(for the WSWs Editorial Board)

See Also:

Leon Trotsky and the Fate of Socialism in the 20th Century

[By David North - Full text of lecture 102 KB]



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