

Growing support for socialism in the United States

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A Gallup poll released yesterday found that, for the first time since it began tracking the figure, fewer than half of young people aged 18-29 have a positive view of capitalism, while more than half have a positive view of socialism. The poll also found that, again for the first time, significantly more Democratic-leaning voters have a positive view of socialism than of capitalism.

The percentage of young people viewing capitalism positively is continuing its precipitous fall, from 68 percent in 2010, to 57 percent in 2016, to 45 percent in 2018 (a stunning 23-percentage point drop in just eight years). The percentage of young people viewing socialism favorably has remained relatively flat during this period and stood at 51 percent in 2018—producing a 6-percentage point gap in favor of socialism.

A similar trend is seen among Democrats and “Democratic-leaning independents” of all age groups, with a positive view of capitalism falling from 53 percent in 2010 to 47 percent in 2018, while those with a positive view of socialism increased from 53 percent to 57 percent—a 10-percentage point gap in favor of socialism.

According to Gallup, overall most Americans still have a positive view of capitalism, but this year’s 56 percent positive rating is, by four points, the lowest recorded. Gallup included a list of economic terms, asking respondents to say whether they had a positive or negative image of each. Of these terms, only “socialism” increased its positive image, while “entrepreneurs,” “free enterprise,” “capitalism,” “small business,” “federal government,” and “big business” all fell.

The period covered by Gallup’s figures (2010-2018) is significant. It largely corresponds to the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and the tenure of the Democratic administration of Barack Obama, which came to power promising “hope” and “change,” while presiding over the largest transfer of wealth from the working class to the rich in US history. Obama left office proclaiming that the economy had “never been better,” but workers and young people clearly feel otherwise.

The growth in support for socialism, and the decline in support for capitalism, confirms the evaluation made in a resolution adopted at the Socialist Equality Party Congress last month. “There is a growing sense among substantial sections of the working class and youth,” the resolution states, “that

capitalism is inherently unjust and that fundamental changes in the economic system are needed. While this broad-based sentiment has not yet developed into a mass political movement directed toward the ending of the capitalist system, interest in and support for socialism is growing rapidly.”

The growing interest in socialism terrifies the ruling class. It coincides with initial expressions of the resurgence of class struggle, from the teachers strikes that spread throughout the country earlier this year and threaten to emerge again as the schools reopen over the next several weeks, to the mass opposition among UPS workers to the concessions contracts supported by the Teamsters union, to growing anger among auto workers, Amazon workers and other sections of the working class.

In response, the ruling class—in the United States and internationally—is moving to impose ever more directly authoritarian forms of rule, whether through the promotion of far-right nationalist movements (including forces cultivated by the Trump administration) or in the moves by the traditional parties of the ruling class to abrogate basic democratic rights. In the United States, it is the Democratic Party that has taken the lead in demanding, in the guise of combating “fake news” and “Russian meddling,” greater censorship of the Internet, which is ever more explicitly directed at left-wing, socialist and anti-war publications.

The ruling class has another means of combating and diverting mass opposition to capitalism: the promotion of various pseudo-socialist political movements and individuals that use the term “socialism” to confuse and disorient. In the United States, this role was played in the 2016 election by Bernie Sanders, who spoke of a “political revolution” against the “billionaire class,” only to channel the significant (and, for Sanders, unexpected and unwelcome) support he received behind Hillary Clinton, the candidate of Wall Street and the military and intelligence apparatus.

The same role is now being played by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). From its origins, the DSA has been nothing more than a faction of the Democratic Party. Michael Harrington, who founded the DSA in 1982, defined its politics as the “left wing of the possible,” by which was meant the “left wing” of what was acceptable to capitalist, bourgeois

politics. The DSA did not then and does not now represent a break with the Democrats, but rather has functioned as an auxiliary organization of the Democratic Party.

Over the past year, DSA membership has grown rapidly, from 7,000 in 2016, to 47,000. The organization will likely have two members in the next congress, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who defeated incumbent Congressman Joseph Crowley in a Democratic Party New York congressional primary in June, and Rashida Tlaib, who won last week's Democratic Party primary in Detroit's 13th Congressional District (home of longtime Democratic Party/DSA member John Conyers, who resigned last year).

The growth of the DSA reflects two contradictory processes. On the one hand, the leftward movement of a layer of young people looking for a socialist opposition, and, on the other hand, the active promotion of the organization by a faction of the Democratic Party and the corporate media. The DSA-affiliated *Jacobin* magazine has been exempted from Google's censorship algorithms targeting the left, while the *New York Times* has opened its pages to its editor, Bhaskar Sunkara.

The DSA is part of a broader group of organizations, including the International Socialist Organization and Socialist Alternative, that speak for privileged sections of the upper-middle class, not the working class. Their proposals for limited social reforms are connected to support for the Democratic Party and the defense of the organizational domination of the corporatist trade unions over the working class.

The Gallup poll is only the latest indication that there is a massive reservoir of support in the working class and youth for socialism. As workers enter into conflict with the policies of the corporate and financial elite, this reservoir will grow. There is, however, only a limited understanding of what socialism really means and how it can be obtained. As such, it is susceptible to being misguided and suppressed, as the capitalist ruling elites advance their plans for war and dictatorship.

Genuine socialism must be advanced clearly and with great determination. The Socialist Equality Party insists that genuine socialism is based on the principle of social equality, that the vast sums of wealth monopolized by the rich through the exploitation and immiseration of the working class must be seized and directed toward the satisfaction of social needs.

Genuine socialism is international, based on the principle that workers in every country have the same social interests and the same class enemies. A socialist movement must take up the defense of immigrant workers on the basis of the fight for open borders—that workers everywhere should be able to live and work where they choose.

Genuine socialism is inseparable from the fight against imperialist war, the product of the inherent contradictions of the capitalist nation-state system, which threaten to engulf the globe in a nuclear catastrophe.

Genuine socialism is based on the interests of the working class, the vast majority of the world's population. It is opposed

to all forms of nationalism, as well as the politics of racial and gender identity, which seeks to divide workers against each other and subordinate them to the capitalist system.

And genuine socialism is revolutionary. It proposes not mild reforms, which the ruling class will not tolerate, but revolution—the overthrow of capitalist property relations through the establishment of democratic control over the giant banks and corporations. It fights for the political mobilization of the working class, in opposition to the Democratic and Republican Parties, to take power and establish a workers' government to reorganize economic life, in the United States and internationally, on the basis of social need, not private profit.

Since its founding 80 years ago by Leon Trotsky, the co-leader with Lenin of the Russian Revolution, the Fourth International has fought for revolutionary socialist internationalism against Stalinism, Social Democracy and all perversions of Marxism. Trotskyism is the socialism of today, embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International, comprised of Socialist Equality Parties throughout the world.

The Socialist Equality Party is spearheading the fight to arm the developing objective movement of workers and youth with an uncompromising revolutionary program and perspective. In the 2018 elections, it is running Niles Niemuth in Michigan's 12th Congressional District to bring a socialist program to workers throughout the region and beyond.

The fight for genuine socialism means joining and building the SEP, its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International, and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.

To join the SEP, click [here](#). To join the IYSSE, click [here](#).



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