

Growing support for socialism among students across the US

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US)
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As colleges and universities in the United States resume classes, one thing is apparent: Support for socialism among youth and students is growing rapidly. Record social inequality, three decades of continuous US imperialist war, soaring levels of student debt, and attacks on democratic rights have not passed unnoticed by the new generation of college students.

“It’s like they are squeezing us young people, forcing us to join the military because we can’t afford a home or find a decent job,” one student told members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Northern Virginia Community College during a club fair day last week.

A Gallup poll taken last month found record numbers of people under the age of 30 viewing socialism more favorably than capitalism. Many incoming freshmen will have emerged from a traumatic high school experience, beset by poverty, lack of supplies and a social crisis involving endless school shootings.

The IYSSE found widespread interest in socialism among students and young people at college club fairs across the country. Students spoke on a wide range of issues they were confronting, including wealth inequality, history, opposition to war and militarism, and hostility to the two-party system.

“Every injustice in the world can be boiled down to capitalism. Everything is controlled by money and profit,” said Margarita, a microbiology major at San Diego State University.

Many students said that the election of President Donald Trump had shocked and spurred them into political action. “For decades socialism has been considered a dirty word, but now more and more people support it,” said another student at SDSU. “I think Donald Trump’s presidency has politicized a lot of people. I never became interested in politics until he

got elected. I’m glad there’s an alternative here.”

This sentiment was echoed across the country. In Manhattan, a New York University student, Justin, said, “Trump is a fool. And it’s foolish that we are focused on bombing Syria. If we go to war it is just more money spent, and it will only create a continuous trend of war.”

Despite the mass hostility to the Trump administration, students did not regard the Democratic Party or the US military-intelligence agencies as an alternative to the Republican president. Mohamed, a student at Northern Virginia Community College, called for the US to “end all wars,” saying that while the United States had the world’s largest military, it “didn’t do much good for anyone.”

Another student, Rawan, whose family is from Libya, told an IYSSE member, “Before the US invaded [Libya in 2011], things were good. You had something called a ‘family passport,’ which got you a certain amount of food every month. Education was free for us, gas was cheap, then the United States came in.”

“It was bad,” Rawan said, “the US bombed buildings people lived in and destroyed many cities. Each time they bombed a building, they’d claim it was a military base. They weren’t. They took Libya’s wealth. It’s all about money. [Americans’] taxes go into the military, not into fixing roads or things like that.”

The hostility to the intelligence agencies was most pronounced at the University of Illinois at Chicago. IYSSE members, who have initiated a campaign against the school administration’s new partnership with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), sought to raise awareness of the political implications of the CIA’s presence at the school and have called for the agency’s expulsion.

Many students were shocked to learn that the world’s

largest spy agency will have a regular presence on campus. One student told the IYSSE that his family was from Nicaragua, where “we have had many dictators because of the CIA.” He was concerned that the partnership was agreed to behind student’s backs and said he wants more information. Students feared that the partnership would lead to the CIA spying and collecting intelligence on students.

The need to study and learn from history regularly came up with young people who showed interest in socialism. At the University of Michigan, students also had a chance to meet Niles Niemuth, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for Michigan’s 12th Congressional District.

Niles talked with Joel about the significance of the Russian Revolution, the fight for genuine socialism led by Leon Trotsky and the founding of the Fourth International, and their connection to the genuine socialism that Niles is fighting for in his campaign. Afterwards Joel told the IYSSE that, “History is so important, and I’m really glad you guys take it so seriously... I am interested in socialism and want to learn more.”

Kate, another student at the University of Michigan, expressed her opposition to war: “I am interested in socialism because capitalism is unsustainable. We produce as much as possible for profit. Imperialist war is messed up; it’s a tool for the few that destroys the lives of the many. I am not interested in establishment politics; the Democratic Party does not represent me.”

One issue that frequently came up was the difference between the politics of the IYSSE and pseudo-left organizations like the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

Ryan, a student at Western Michigan University, asked the IYSSE why he should join the IYSSE instead of the DSA. IYSSE members explained that the DSA operates as a section of the Democratic Party. Unlike the DSA, the IYSSE is internationalist, seeking to unite workers and youth across the globe in a mass movement for socialism. This means, above all, a sharp political break with the Democratic and Republican parties as well as the nationalist trade unions which work to contain mass opposition to their pro-business policies. Instead, the IYSSE calls for the building of an independent political party for the working class for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a workers’

state

Shi’Ajia, a Liberal Studies student at New York University, said, “Politics is important for people to express our ideas, but capitalism creates a control... Most people in power are for the rich and don’t care about small communities.”

Angel and Val stopped by the IYSSE table at Hunter College in New York City. Angel said, “I think if we had socialism instead of capitalism we could get people off the streets and have free education. If there were no [social] classes, we could work together to make sure the rich don’t keep getting richer. Wealth should be divided equally.”

Andy is a Political Science Major at Western Michigan University. “I actually was attracted to journalism because I think that the working class is bombarded by misinformation,” he said. “The working class is so busy working two jobs, like 70 hours a week, and then they get home and they don’t have the time to necessarily find out what’s really going on, or to read history.

“The biggest piece of misinformation that I have ever heard, that was taught to me in schools my whole life, is that capitalism produces a balanced society. This is a complete lie. Look at what it actually does. I have a family member who got sick in old age, and the medicine and treatment were so expensive that at some point they had to start choosing between basic needs like food and paying for medication. *That* is capitalism.”

When asked about the Democratic Party, he answered, “I am totally disillusioned. They don’t seem like they are doing what they should be. I just don’t trust them.”

Nicolas, a graduate student at University of Florida, said that the capitalist system is not sustainable for both social and environmental reasons. “This isn’t just a moral question but also a rational one. With the emergence of crisis after crisis, a system based on private profit just can’t work.”



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