

## Socialism

Intro – We hear a lot about socialism these days. It's no secret that campaigning for the 2020 Presidential election has already begun. At least one the candidates for President is a self-proclaimed socialist (Bernie Sanders).

- It seems that socialism is catching on with younger generations as well. In a recent Gallup poll, younger Americans are **souring on capitalism**. Less than half, **45 percent, view capitalism positively**.
- “This represents a 12-point decline in young adults’ positive views of capitalism in just the past two years and a marked shift since 2010, when 68 percent viewed it positively,” notes Gallup, which defines young Americans as those aged 18 to 29.”
- Meanwhile, **51 percent of young people are positive about socialism**. Just a few years ago, you wouldn't have thought that socialism would trump capitalism among the young, but it has.
- How can this surge in socialism be explained? What will be the end result?

### 1. What is socialism?

- Socialism is a political and economic theory of social organization which advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole. (Production & consumption)
- The term "socialism" was created by Henri de Saint-Simon, one of the founders of what would later be labelled "utopian socialism". He was a French philosopher of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

- The original "utopian" socialists condemned liberal individualism for failing to address social concerns during the industrial revolution, including poverty, social oppression and gross inequalities in wealth.
- They saw liberal individualism as degenerating society into supporting selfish egoism that harmed community life through promoting a society based on **competition rather than cooperation**.
- In the early days, the terms “communism” and “socialism” were used interchangeably, but after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia, socialism began to be seen as a phase between capitalism and communism.

### 2. What are the roots of socialism?

- Early socialist thought took influences from a diverse range of philosophies such as civic republicanism, Enlightenment rationalism, romanticism, forms of materialism, Christianity (both Catholic and Protestant), natural law and natural rights theory, utilitarianism and liberal political economy.
- Another philosophical basis for a lot of early socialism was the emergence of **positivism** during the European Enlightenment. Positivism held that both the natural and social worlds could be understood through **scientific knowledge** and be analyzed using scientific methods.
- That being the case, socialism is a system born out of atheism. Because it is built on rationalism and scientific methods, most socialists would see no need for God to be a part of the equation. In fact, some would discourage theism.

- **Karl Marx** was also a proponent of socialism. He and other pioneers of socialism believed it would provide a system where work could be done quicker, thus requiring less time. That way, workers would have more time for creativity.
- From the beginning, most socialists were responding to what they believed to be the dangers of capitalism. **Capitalism** is “an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state.”
- Socialists have always held that capitalism is dangerous and wasteful, because supply & demand is used to enrich private owners. Rather than allowing owners to enrich themselves with capital, socialists believe measures have to be taken to disperse capital more evenly in society.
- Socialists have historically argued for cooperative ownership where capital can be shared and hopefully placed back into the industry to produce more productive means of work & revenue. **Socialists discourage private ownership.**
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were two German philosophers who developed what would later be called “Marxism.” In 1848, they co-authored *The Communist Manifesto*.
- Both Marx and Engels argued that the *proletariat* (working class) should control the means of production through a workers' state erected by the workers in their interests.
- The early socialists were “utopian,” believing they could usher in “heaven on earth” through social constructs. Later socialists weren't so optimistic.

3. What is the role of the state in socialism?
  - Socialists don't always agree on this question.
  - In the 19th century the philosophy of state socialism was first explicitly expounded by the German political philosopher Ferdinand Lassalle.
  - Lassalle considered the state to be an entity independent of class allegiances and an instrument of justice that would therefore be **essential for achieving socialism**. Much of the modern socialism we hear about today would take its lead from Lassalle's ideas.
  - Following the victory of Leninism in Russia, the idea of "state socialism" spread rapidly throughout the socialist movement and eventually state socialism came to be identified with the Soviet economic model.
  - These days, we hear some talking about “democratic socialism” and they use countries such as Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Norway as examples.
  - Let's use Sweden as an example – in the 70s and 80s, the government had taken control of nearly everything. When the government saw that a socialist state was not sustainable, they privatized many agencies. So then, Sweden & the others are not really socialist.
  - Politicians like to use those countries as examples because they provide free healthcare, free higher education, and free childcare. What those same politicians don't say is that the residents of those countries are taxed at a much higher rate than Americans. They're provided many programs, but they are highly taxed to make them happen.

4. Why is socialism so attractive to this generation?
- Socialism has caught fire because it promises so much – free healthcare, free education, free maternity leave, free childcare, etc.
  - Most advocates of socialism in America believe that the government should take control of private agencies – such as healthcare – and in turn provide those amenities to everyone.
  - It's easy to see why someone would get excited about having healthcare who's never had it. It's easy to see why an aspiring college student would get pumped about free tuition, or why a recent graduate would get excited about all their student debts being cancelled!
  - A major critique of socialism is that it promises much but delivers little. In the US, some lawmakers have proposed "A Green New Deal" in an attempt to move away from the use of fossil fuels in favor of more clean forms of energy.
  - In theory it sounds great, but when you read the price tag some estimates come in around \$4 trillion!!! That's more than 3 times the annual US economy.
  - When socialists are asked how they propose to pay for those plans, they always respond with higher taxes. Socialists have been accused of "Robin Hood Economics" – taking from the rich and giving to the poor.
  - So then, while socialism sounds great, it actually produces more regulation and taxation that eliminates jobs and encourages corporations to send their companies to other countries.

5. What does the Bible have to say about socialism?
- I believe socialism was originally intended to be something good – a means through which poverty and suffering could be addressed. That is very consistent with Scripture that encourages us to be generous with the less fortunate (Matt. 25:40).
  - The nation of Israel was given clear instructions by God on how they should treat the poor. For instance, the Israelites were not allowed to take advantage of their kinsman – to "put them out to usury."
  - Also, farmers were instructed not to harvest the corners of their fields so they could be gleaned by those who were less fortunate. Thinking of others in poverty comes right back to the Golden Rule – "do unto others" (Matt. 7:12).
  - As we come to the New Testament, we find something in Acts 4 that looks like socialism – *"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."*

- That said, the Scripture never visualizes anything like a socialist state. Why? Because socialism is steeped in atheism and doesn't make accommodation for the fallen condition of man (Rom. 3:23). It simply isn't possible for men to create a "utopia" – only God can do that!
- Socialism can create an environment where people become lazy and wait on the government to provide them with everything. The Bible says, "*If a man won't work he won't eat*" (2 Thess. 3:10).
- It seems that the only thing the Bible requires of the government is to create opportunities for men and women to be responsible and to provide for themselves.
- Rather than redistributing wealth, we should encourage people to earn their own wealth and use it to provide for themselves and to glorify God.
- At the end of the day, Christians need to realize no socio-economic or political system is perfect. Even capitalism is open to rampant greed and oppressing the poor.
- As followers of Christ, we pray for our leaders, we advocate for responsible policies, but we look to Jesus as our eternal hope! We understand that we are pilgrims passing through.
- That said, we need to beware of socialism, because it often turns to communism and dictatorship. Let us remember Nazi Germany, the USSR, and even places like China, North Korea, and Venezuela today.
- Many men and women have fought and died for us to be free. We shouldn't exchange that freedom for promises of hope and change.