



“Democratic Socialism” A Reality Check

By Dr. Paul Kengor





The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is an avowed socialist organization, which boasts high-profile members, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, and Ayanna Pressley, the four U.S. Representatives known as "The Squad."

**"Oh, it's okay, I'm not a socialist,
I'm a *democratic* socialist."**

How often have you heard that? Are you sick of it yet?

You especially hear such nonsense on college campuses. And nonsense it is. Yet sadly, it's attracting a lot of recruits.

Leading the charge is the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which boasts such members as exciting new democratic-socialism cover-girl Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. It also boasts chapters on more than 200 college campuses. The DSA is the hot new thing, and AOC its poster-girl. It claims a membership surge to more than 55,000. It's the home not only of AOC but the likes of Reps. Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, and Ayanna Pressley, three added cohorts of the left's new intrepid quartet, "The Squad."

If you visit the websites of such groups, you'll see images of the four women's profiles together, gazing leftward to the sunny optimism of collectivist utopia. They adorn the lead page, even mastheads, of progressive websites. The Squad appear together in TV interviews stoically presenting themselves as (in AOC's words) "fighters for justice." They are the face of the New Left. And yes, the Left is even selling t-shirts of The Squad.

To today's newfangled socialists—the "democratic socialists"—The Squad is cooler than crusty old Bernie Sanders, venerable grandfather of modern socialism. The Squad is, after all, female and ethnic. It's more diverse. But above all, its handy banner is "democratic socialism."

And remember: "Oh, it's okay, I'm not a socialist, I'm a *democratic* socialist."



Today, *The Squad* is cooler than crusty old Bernie Sanders, venerable grandfather of modern socialism. All four members are endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America.

"And yet, how does the home organization of democratic socialism, the Democratic Socialists of America, bill itself? Well, it describes itself as 'socialist.' The DSA at its website and in its literature calls itself 'the largest socialist organization in the United States.'"

And yet, how does the home organization of democratic socialism, the Democratic Socialists of America, bill itself? Well, it describes itself as "socialist." On its website and in its literature, the DSA describes itself as "the largest socialist organization in the United States."

Alas, there's some honesty in advertising. Note the key word: "socialist." The Democratic Socialists of America refers to itself as "socialist" because it is socialist and because democratic socialism is, well, socialism.

So, if your roommate with the AOC pin-up flashes you a beaming smile and blithely cautions, "Oh, it's okay, I'm not a socialist, I'm a democratic socialist," stop and provide a crucial clarification: note that even AOC's organization, the Democratic Socialists of America, describes itself as socialist.

And that's because democratic socialism is socialism. How so? What are the similarities? What are the differences? Glad you asked. Here's a tutorial—a reality check—for that lefty roommate. Read and remember these five realities, and pass them on. Share them far and wide on your campus.

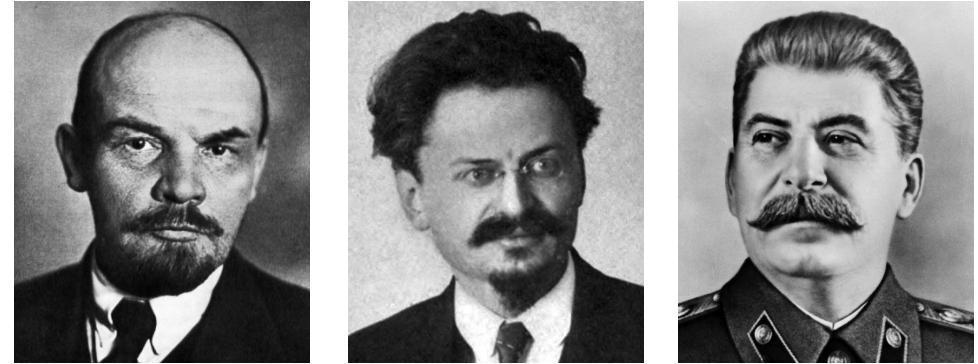
REALITY CHECK #1: Early Pioneering Communists Were First Either Social Democrats or Socialists

Today's democratic socialists want to insist they're different from history's nasty socialists and certainly from communists. Those old ideologues, they assert, weren't *democratic* socialists. They weren't even social democrats.

But in reality, that's not so at all.

Let's start with the very worst of them, the Bolsheviks, the Soviets, the founders of history's deadliest, pioneering communist-totalitarian enterprise: the Soviet Union. For starters, Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, and Joseph Stalin, and their fellow communist totalitarians established a "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." Not only were they socialists, but social democrats. It was at the second Congress of their Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, beginning in Brussels and ending in London, traversing a period of three weeks from July to August 1903, that Lenin changed the name of his and Trotsky's and Stalin's

The Founders of the Soviet Union, History's Deadliest, Pioneering Communist-Totalitarian Enterprise, All Started as Social Democrats



Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Joseph Stalin (shown left to right), and their fellow communist totalitarians were all first social democrats, then socialists, and finally communists.

party from the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party to what would eventually become the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It was there that Lenin and his cadre became the Bolsheviks (splitting into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks).

The Bolsheviks were first social democrats. They were social democrats and socialists en route to becoming communists.

Here in the United States, leading pioneering communists, such as William Z. Foster, Ben Gitlow, and Bertram Wolfe, to name just three, took the same route. They were leaders in the American Socialist Party in the first decade of the 20th century before they helped launch the American Communist Party in the second decade of the 20th century. Wolfe, a founding delegate of the American Communist Party to the Soviet Comintern in Moscow, noted, after all: "Lenin began his career as a Social Democrat."

William Z. Foster was, in effect, the first major public face as well as chairman of what became known as (and remains to this day) Communist Party USA. Holding that spot from 1929 to 1934, Foster would be succeeded as chair by the equally famous (or infamous) Earl Browder. The CPUSA loyalty oath in those days stated: "I pledge myself to rally the masses to defend

America's Pioneering Communists All Started as Socialists



William Z. Foster, Ben Gitlow, and Bertram Wolfe (shown left to right) were leaders in the American Socialist Party in the first decade of the 20th century before they helped launch the American Communist Party in the second decade of the 20th century.

the Soviet Union. I pledge myself to remain at all times a vigilant and firm defender of the Leninist line of the party, the only line that insures the triumph of Soviet Power in the United States." Foster and friends advocated a "Soviet American Republic" as part of a "world Soviet Union."

And before he spearheaded CPUSA, Foster had been with the Socialist Party of America.

Ben Gitlow helped to launch the Communist Party in America in 1919, for which he became one of the very top leaders throughout the next decade. He ran on the Communist Party ticket for everything from mayor of New York City to governor of New York as well as vice president of the United States. He had been so central to directing the party that by 1929 he had risen to the pinnacle as general secretary of the Communist Party of the United States—until his disagreements with Joseph Stalin got him expelled that same year. It would be difficult to find a more committed comrade. But first, Gitlow (in 1907) joined the Socialist Party.

The likes of Gitlow, Foster, and Wolfe took the natural step in the Marxist evolutionary process, moving from socialism to communism (more on that in a moment).

Modern self-identified "socialists" in America or Western Europe recoil at any suggested similarity or sympathy to Soviet socialism—or to Nazi socialism. ("Nazi" is actually an abbreviation for National Socialist German Workers' Party.) They indeed bear no comparison to the brutal violence orchestrated by such tyrants. Nonetheless, socialists generally, in America and the wider West, do share in common with the Soviets and the Nazis the general goal of government ownership of the means of production in some form. Socialists all share that objective. The famous Clause IV of the 1918 British Labour Party manifesto/platform (repudiated in 1995 by Labour Party leader Tony Blair) called for "the most equitable distribution" based on "the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange."

Importantly, that is a central tenet of socialist thought. When curious seekers Google the word and land at Merriam-Webster.com, they will discover precisely that standard definition. "Socialism," states Merriam-Webster, is "government ownership of the means of production."

**To repeat: Socialism means
government (or public) ownership
of the means of production.
Remember that.**

All of which begs some theoretical questions and clarifications. So, what is socialism, and how is it different from communism and democratic socialism?

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In this painting by Vladimir Serov, it is the evening of April 16, 1917, and Vladimir Lenin has just returned to Russia, arriving in Petrograd by train. Joseph Stalin is shown to his right as Lenin urges the soldiers, sailors, and working class people below to overthrow the Czarist government, crying "Long live the Socialist revolution!" In March 1918, the Bolsheviks, officially known as the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, would change their name to the Russian Communist Party.

REALITY CHECK #2: Socialism Leads to Communism

Socialism is communism's ugly stepsister.

In Marxist-Leninist theory, socialism is a transitional step on the way to full communism. Socialism has that very specific purpose; it is a waystation along the path to a full communist *utopia*. History, according to Marxist-dialectic thought, would pass through a series of planes or stages, from slavery and feudalism to capitalism to socialism to communism. Each successive plane or stage would be a higher step in the evolutionary process toward a "workers' paradise" or glorious "classless society."

In his definitive work on this subject, *The State and Revolution*, written in September 1917, Vladimir Lenin, in his chapter titled, "The Transition from Capitalism to Communism," began with a quote from Karl Marx: "Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other."

The socialist revolution falls in between, opening the door to the eventual consummation of the communist revolution. "And this brings us to the question of the scientific distinction between socialism and communism," Lenin continued. "What is usually called socialism was termed by Marx the 'first,' or lower, phase of communist society. Insofar as the means of production becomes common property, the word 'communism' is also applicable here, providing we do not forget that this is not complete communism."

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Here Lenin provided something very useful, especially for modern "democratic socialists" to ponder. As Lenin noted, Marx judged "socialism"

a first step on the road to communism. Socialism was a prior stage to communism, a necessary but only temporary stage on the way to complete communism. Whatever and whenever that might be—and based on whoever gets to make the determination for the “masses” as a whole.

Richard Pipes, the longtime professor emeritus of Russian history at Harvard, in his indispensable *Communism: A History* (The Modern Library, 2001), rightly objected that, in a sense, “no clear distinction” can be drawn between “socialism” and “communism.” Pipes noted, though, that Marx distinguished between two phases of progress toward full communism. First there would be a “transitional phase” under which the old inequalities would survive even while their foundations were being destroyed. This would be followed by a second, higher phase in which the principle “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” would replace the principle of “equal pay, equal work.”

This is indeed correct. Marx himself stated in his 1875 work, *Critique of the Gotha Program*:

“Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other.”

As Pipes explained, Lenin defined Marx’s first phase as “socialism” and the second phase as “communism.” Moreover, noted Pipes, shortly after Lenin seized power in Russia, he thus changed the name of his party from “Social Democratic” to “Communist.”

And what is communism’s goal? Like socialism, the goal is common ownership of the means of production. Said Lenin: “We call ourselves Communists. What is a Communist? Communism is a Latin word. *Communis* is the Latin for ‘common.’ Communist society is a society in which all things—

the land, the factories—are owned in common and the people work in common. That is communism.”

How is this different from “socialism?” Answer: only by stage. And does adding “democratic” to it make it any different? Not at all. Democracy was part of the process—another stage—in getting there.

Likewise telling is Lenin’s clarification (published in his *Collected Works*, Vol. 45) that “common ownership” does not actually mean ownership by the people. It means ownership by the state:

The aim of socialism is to turn all the means of production into the property of the whole people, and that does not at all mean that the ships become the property of the ship workers or the banks the property of the bank clerks. If people take such paltry things seriously, then we must do away with nationalization, because the whole thing is preposterous. The task, the aim of socialism, as we see it, is to convert the land and the industrial enterprises into the property of the Soviet Republic.

— VLADIMIR LENIN,
COLLECTED WORKS, VOL. 45

This is a very important admission from Lenin and from all communists going forward to this day, right up through the Castros in Cuba and the Kims in North Korea. Indeed, anyone who thinks that “the workers” or “the masses” actually own the factories and farms after they are taken from the owners is seriously mistaken.

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REALITY CHECK #3: "Democracy?" What Democracy?

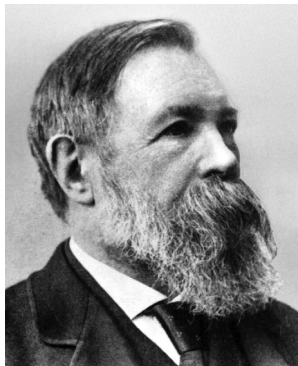
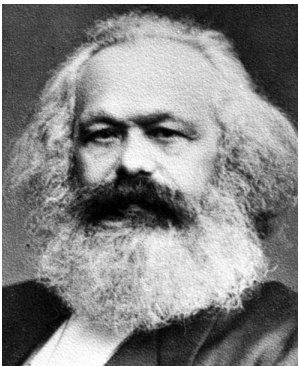
Today's fancy "democratic socialist" might concede that this history and theory may all be correct. But surely bad guys like Lenin, Marx, and Mao didn't talk about "democracy."

Well, actually, they did. They spoke of it quite frequently and favorably.

"For socialism is impossible without democracy," averred Lenin in his *Collected Works* (Vol. 23), "because: (1) the proletariat cannot perform the socialist revolution unless it prepares for it by the struggle for democracy; (2) victorious socialism cannot consolidate its victory and bring humanity to the withering away of the state without implementing full democracy."

As we see here, Lenin—the communist, the Marxist, the despot, the destroyer of civil liberties from freedom of speech and press to religion and

Marx and Engels Believed Democracy Should Be Used Against Itself as a Means to Achieve Their Ultimate End: Communism



Karl Marx (left) and Friedrich Engels (right) wrote in their *Communist Manifesto*, "The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class to win the battle for democracy." To Marx and Engels, democracy was merely a means to eliminate private property and ultimately impose a communist state, not an end in itself.

assembly, the half namesake of Marxism—Leninism, the dictator responsible for the deaths of millions—actually supported "democracy." Surprised? But not once does one understand what he and fellow communists and socialists meant by "democracy." To communists and socialists, "democracy" was a mere means to their ultimate ends.

Marx and Engels summed up in their *Communist Manifesto*:

"The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class to win the battle for democracy." But democracy was only part of the process. As Marx explained in his *Notes for a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*: "In a true democracy the political state disappears."

Engels said much the same, and then some. He explained the "value" of democracy as a tool to be used against private property. Engels wrote in *The Principles of Communism*: "Democracy would be wholly valueless to the proletariat if it were not immediately used as a means for putting through measures directed against private property and ensuring the livelihood of the proletariat." Engels even considered the American experience: "In America, where a democratic constitution has already been established, the communists must make common cause with the [Communist] party which will turn this constitution against the bourgeoisie and use it in the interests of the proletariat." The very freedom provided by the U.S. Constitution would be tapped and turned against itself.

Engels, like Marx, and especially like Lenin, saw democracy as a cudgel to ensure communism. It was a vehicle to drive toward a communist state. It would be momentarily hailed and preached but ultimately exploited and abolished.

Lenin, in fact, tossed around the word much the same way that leftists and secular "progressives" fling it around today in the United States. He used it as a vague metaphor for "equality," which, in his case, was a form of class-based economic-wealth equality, of equality of physical property and money,

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and Marx, institutions such as democracy (as well as property, the state, money, and even religion and the family) would "wither away."

It is crucial to understand that, for communists, "democracy" is thus not an end in itself. It is not sacrosanct. Very similarly, when leftists in the United States today invoke the necessity of free speech (while also demanding "speech codes" against speech they disagree with) and extol words like "diversity" and "tolerance" (while intolerantly not tolerating diverse opinions they reject), they are acting in the spirit of how Lenin saw "democracy" as a tool to wield or even weaponize. Lenin's own understanding of democracy was that it was temporary at best. It was a mere stepping-stone to something else—something that, in Lenin's state, would be not only *not* democratic (as Americans have long understood the term) but would degenerate into a full-blown totalitarian dictatorship.

whereas American leftists, liberals, progressives, socialists, and communists today apply the term with abandon to all sorts of new "rights" and forms of "equality" they seek: income equality, sexual equality, bisexual equality, gender equality, transgender equality, climate equality, "marriage equality," and whatever other social-cultural projects they pursue in order to transform the culture.

Those particular modern forces aside, Lenin wrote plainly in *The State and Revolution*: "Democracy means equality... But democracy is by no means a boundary not to be overstepped; it is only one of the stages on the road from feudalism to capitalism, and from capitalism to communism."

During this process, said Lenin



Following in the footsteps of their Communist forefathers, leftist student activists of today use the freedoms afforded by the U.S. Constitution and the democratic process to attempt to destroy those same freedoms.

Even Mao Zedong, communist China's tyrant, and the man who was responsible for more deaths than any leader in all of history, sang the praises of "democracy." Mao favored what he called a "system of democratic centralism" as part of his "new spirit of democracy."

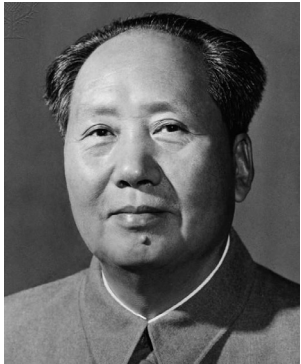
In his "On New Democracy," written in January 1940, Mao wrote:

Only a government based on democratic centralism can fully express the will of all the revolutionary people... It will own the big banks and the big industrial and commercial enterprises... railways and airlines... and shall be operated and administered by the state.

Mao said, "In the new-democratic republic under the leadership of the proletariat, the state enterprises will be of a socialist character," and "the republic will take certain necessary steps to confiscate the land of the landlords and distribute it to those peasants...." Such is the economy of New Democracy.

Curious, eh? A "new democracy" in which government owned and managed banks, railways, airlines, and industrial and commercial enterprises. Is that how you define "democracy?"

Murderous 20th Century Dictators Mao and Mussolini Were Both Marxists Who Used Democratic Language to Disguise Socialism



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And then there was another infamous socialist: Italy's thuggish *Il Duce*, Benito Mussolini, who was a fascist and socialist and Marxist who reverently referred to Karl Marx as "the father and teacher" and "the magnificent philosopher of working-class violence."

"Fascism is for liberty," insisted Mussolini of his fascist socialism. "It is for the only kind of liberty that is serious—the

liberty of the State and of the individual in the State. Because, for the Fascist, all is comprised in the State and nothing spiritual or human exists—much less has any value—outside the State."

Yes, you read that correctly. If your jaw just hit the floor, then welcome to the club of the confused.

To these Marxist-socialist-communist tyrants, "freedom" and "liberty" was about (as Marx and Engels put it in the *Communist Manifesto*) the "abolition of private property." They wrote emphatically: "The theory of the communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property."

If that wasn't clear enough, they doubled down: "You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. . . . Precisely so; that is just what we intend." And humanity would only be free when liberated from the

"bondage" of the "evil" of private property. Humans would only be free when the state seized and controlled their possessions.

But above all, to those socialists then and still today, democracy was about "equality" or, better understood, about a means for pursuing their definition of "equality." When they spoke (and still speak) of "democracy," these socialists and democratic socialists did and do not mean democracy in the way you perceive it or learned it. Their models were never Jefferson and Madison.

REALITY CHECK #4: "Democracy" and "Democratic Socialism" Today

In less guarded moments, some modern socialists will concede that their definition of "democracy" is literally the definition of socialism. "Democracy," explained Bernie Sanders in a 1987 interview, "means public ownership of the means of production."

In other words, Bernie's definition of "democracy" is synonymous with the definition of socialism. To repeat, as Merriam-Webster puts it, "Socialism is government ownership of the means of production."

Does Bernie Sanders today still define "democracy" in the socialist way he did back in 1987? Yes. In March 2019, he told NPR that "democratic socialism" means "I want a vibrant democracy"—to "create a government that works for all and not just the few." Speaking in June 2019 at The George Washington University, he explained: "Economic rights are human rights, and that is what I mean by democratic socialism." He said: "It is up to us to reject that path and choose a higher

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Lifetime socialist Bernie Sanders lived on a "Stalinist Kibbutz" in 1963, traveled to the USSR with his new bride for their honeymoon in 1988 (pictured above), and marveled at Castro's socialism on a visit to Cuba in 1989.

path towards truth, justice, and love. And that is the path I call democratic socialism." Bernie offered: "Call it democracy, or call it democratic socialism, but there must be a better distribution of wealth in this country."

Bernie equates democracy and democratic socialism with wealth redistribution.

As a lifetime socialist, Bernie Sanders is certainly an authority. In 1963, he moved to Israel and lived on what historian Ron Radosh described as a "Stalinist Kibbutz." As Daniel Greenfield observes, Bernie's kibbutz was comprised of pro-Soviet members who considered themselves "Marxist-Zionists." In 1980, when typical Americans voted for either Jimmy Carter or Ronald Reagan for president, Sanders was a formal Presidential elector to and campaigned for the militant, revolutionary (Trotskyist) Socialist Workers' Party.

Sanders is an experienced fellow traveler to Marxist dystopias. In the

spring of 1988, he traveled to the USSR with his new bride, in what he openly later conceded was "a very strange honeymoon." In a 1989 visit to Cuba, Sanders soaked in Fidel Castro's socialist sun and marveled: "The revolution there is far deeper and more profound than I understood it to be. It really is a revolution in terms of values."

Are modern voters not repelled by this? Well, if they are, they have a curious way of showing it. In 2016, Bernie Sanders set aside his "Independent" party affiliation in making a bid to ride the Democrat donkey all the way to the White House. He received 13 million votes in the Democratic Party primary. To give you a sense of how significant that number was, Donald Trump got 14 million votes in the Republican primary that year, which was a record. In both 2016 and 2020, Bernie secured the second largest number of delegates, behind only Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Joe Biden in 2020. We can't say that young folks voted for Bernie because he was some cool Capitol Hill hipster. The stodgy old white guy was not exactly Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—a fellow socialist, elected to Congress in November 2018 as a 28-year-old. They voted for Bernie because they voted for his socialism. Just as they told pollsters they would. Consider the data:

In 2014, a survey by *Reason* magazine and the Rupe Foundation found that 53% of those aged 18 to 29 view socialism favorably. Not long after that survey, Gallup turned up a disturbing figure, learning that 69% of Millennials said they would be willing to vote for a socialist as president of the United States

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“Building this ‘new socialist society,’ explained Nagin, would directly involve ‘Communist Parties’ and ‘coalitions of Communists and other progressive forces and parties’ constructing ‘a classless, modern, democratic, and green communist society,’ where ‘socially-produced wealth is socially distributed.’”

of America—a country founded on the antithesis of socialist principles. They did just that in 2016 and 2020, contributing mightily to Bernie Sanders’ millions of votes in the Democratic Party Presidential primaries. A May 2019 Gallup poll found that four in ten Americans generally prefer socialism, with 43% saying socialism would be a “good thing” for America. Among registered Democrats, 57% view socialism positively.

Bernie aside, what about other socialists today? How do authorities on socialism define socialism?

Sometimes the best approach to try to define a term is to go directly

to the source—that is, to the advocates themselves.

To that end, the World Socialist Party of the United States declares its overriding “object” as this: “The establishment of a system of society based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of society as a whole.” More than that, it sees this object as part of a global movement. “The WSP forms part of the world socialist movement,” states the group’s mission statement. “Our only goal is to educate people to the urgent need we all have of eliminating wage-labor and capital now in favor of communist-based free access and self-determination of needs. We call this ‘common ownership,’ but other terms we regard as synonymous are communism and socialism.” This explanation comes from WSP’s own statements and literature.

The group’s logo depicts the globe wrapped in a banner that declares, “UNITE FOR SOCIALISM!” under the famous Marxist phrase “WORKERS OF THE WORLD” and above the Marxist phrase “YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT YOUR CHAINS.”

Here we see that these socialists are communists, as they themselves concede. The World Socialist Party regards the two as synonymous. It is not alone in that respect and never has been. It sees socialism as the crucial step to communism.

Modern communist literature seconds this. In 2016, *People’s World*, the successor publication to the *Daily Worker*, and long the mouthpiece of Communist Party USA, ran a special timely series asking and attempting to answer the question, “What is Socialism?” In the April 2016 issue, longtime socialist Rick Nagin offered this assessment: “The essence of socialism is the replacement of the capitalist class and private corporate power by the working class and allied forces (family farmers, small businesspeople, self-employed professionals, etc.). . . It can then begin to reorganize the economy. Such a reorganization would include social ownership of key industries such as finance, energy, armaments.”

Building this “new socialist society,” explained Nagin, would directly involve “Communist Parties” and “coalitions of Communists and other progressive forces and parties” constructing “a classless, modern, democratic, and green communist society,” where “socially-produced wealth is socially distributed. This requires progressive taxation of capitalist wealth and socialization of privately-owned means of production.” In such a system, “The working people take over the apparatus of government.”

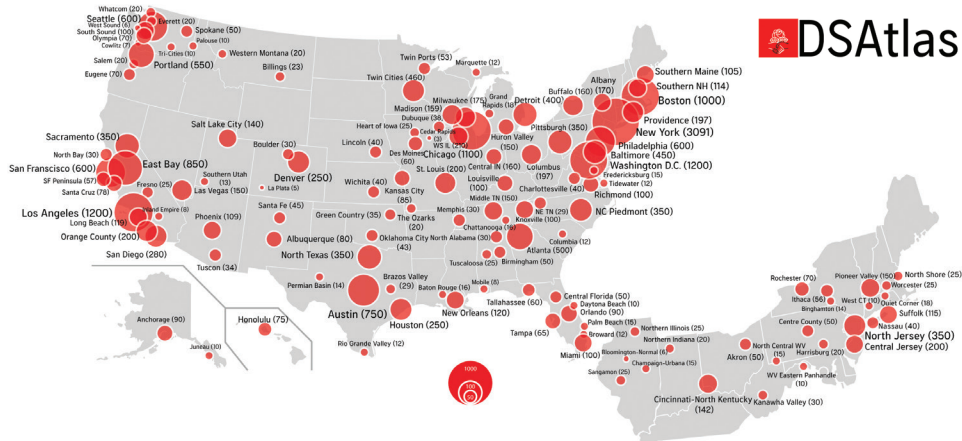
That is to say, the government has control.

REALITY CHECK #5: The Voices and Faces of “Democratic Socialism” Today

This is a good point to circle back to the emergent and leading socialist organization in America, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), and its most popular face, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a rising star of the Left.

The DSA was founded in 1982 by socialist activist and academic Michael Harrington. Started as a merger of two left-wing organizations, the DSA began with about 6,000 members. Then it stalled. The Reagan years and collapse of

Map of the Democratic Socialists of America's Nationwide Chapter Membership Numbers as of 2018



The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) began in 1982 with about 6,000 members and dipped to about 5,000 by 2015. With the advent of the Left's so-called Trump Resistance, as of 2018, DSA had chapters on more than 200 college campuses and boasted more than 55,000 members nationwide. Note that the above map is no longer available at the DSA website.

communism were bad years for socialists. By the year 2000, those numbers still had not risen much; to the contrary, they apparently dropped—until the Obama era and with the election of 2016 and the reinvigorated political Left's so-called Trump Resistance.

The DSA is now claiming a membership surge. Sources report that DSA's numbers exploded to more than 55,000 by 2018 (and rising still), chalked up to an anti-Trump backlash and the stardom of the likes of Ocasio-Cortez. "The day after she won the Democratic nomination, the group had 1,152 people join its ranks—35 times more than an average day," reported the *Hill*. (Clarification: AOC was elected by running as a Democrat against a Democrat incumbent during the Democratic Party primary. The DSA, since 2018, has been primarying moderate Democrats around the country with DSA/"democratic socialist" candidates in safe districts without serious Republican challengers.)

DSA has a sophisticated online map (see <http://dsatlas.org/#/map>) charting its exact numbers in each chapter nationwide. As of 2020, it boasts chapters on more than 217 college campuses.

As for the socialist label, DSA does not dodge it.

"The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is the largest socialist organization in the United States," declares the lead statement at DSA's website. Much like its political candidates, what follows for DSA on its website is not a definition of democratic socialism but a list of campaign issues. Under the banner "Current Campaigns" is a three-legged stool of "Medicare for All," "Strong Unions," and, tellingly, "Electoral Power." Wrapping up that platform is the older face of democratic socialism: lifetime socialist Bernie Sanders.

Bernie Sanders is the name invoked in DSA's call for Electoral Power: "Bernie Sanders launched a political revolution and we're continuing to build it, supporting democratic socialist candidates running for local and state office. We're also grappling with how to build independent political power to hold candidates we elect, and others, accountable to their constituents rather than the donor class. Click here to go to our electoral website."

Many are doing precisely that. And by claiming to be not, say, Marxist socialists, or totalitarian socialists, but *democratic* socialists, they are trying to repackage socialism with a pretty pink bow. The "About" section at DSA's website has a tab titled, "What is Democratic Socialism?" What follows is this:

Democratic socialists believe that both the economy and society should be run democratically—to meet public needs, not to make profits for a few. To achieve a more just society, many structures of our government and economy must be radically transformed through greater economic and social democracy....

"...By claiming to be not, say, Marxist socialists, or totalitarian socialists, but *democratic* socialists, they are trying to repackage socialism with a pretty pink bow. The 'About' section at [the Democratic Socialists of America]'s website has a tab titled, 'What is Democratic Socialism?'"

“In demanding nothing less than ‘many structures of our government and economy’ be ‘radically transformed,’ we see that the new socialists are little different from the old socialists. They are not moderates, not mere tinkerers, but radical transformers.”

Democratic socialists do not want to create an all-powerful government bureaucracy. But we do not want big corporate bureaucracies to control our society either. Rather, we believe that social and economic decisions should be made by those whom they most affect. . . . We believe that the workers and consumers who are affected by economic institutions should own and control them.

This is merely another way of expressing the socialist objective of common ownership of the means of production, albeit stated

more palatably by the DSA. In actual practice, this has meant that the state owns and controls economic institutions—factories, farms, coal mines, steel mills, railways, car companies, oil companies, phone companies, industries ranging from transportation to communications to healthcare, etc.—given that no single worker or consumer, nor group of them, is actually permitted to own and control economic institutions. The Soviet leaders said the same. When Soviet communists proclaimed that “the workers” were in charge, it merely meant that the state was in charge. The “workers,” like the phrase “the masses,” was merely a nebulous, wide-ranging label for a mass collective that the centralized authority was in charge of orchestrating.

In demanding nothing less than “many structures of our government and economy” be “radically transformed,” we see that the new socialists are little different from the old socialists. They are not moderates, not mere tinkerers, but radical transformers. They are revolutionaries, whether the face is Bernie Sanders (who announced his 2020 Presidential bid vowing to “transform the country” and complete “the political revolution”), Alexandria

Marxism and Today's Mobs

What, if anything, might Karl Marx have in common with today's mobs? That is, the rioters storming streets and towns with chains and spray-cans vandalizing statues or burning down police precincts? These are, of course, no longer merely about statues of Confederate generals. They now include Union generals who defeated the Confederacy (i.e., Ulysses S. Grant), no less than Abraham Lincoln, even black abolitionist Frederick Douglass, not to mention Washington and Jefferson and Columbus and even Francis Scott Key and on and on.

What do these figures have to do with the unjust killing of George Floyd or police reform? Obviously, nothing. These actions represent a tearing at the very fabric of the nation, culture, and its social and political order. And it's there that a comparison to Karl Marx is apt, regardless of whether those ripping down statues could even spell the words “Communist Manifesto.”

The goal of Marx and the Marxist project from the outset was one of fundamental transformation. Marx's ideas were so radical, and so (as Marx openly conceded) “contrary to the nature of things,” that they inevitably raze the foundation.

Marx in the *Manifesto* said that communism represents “the most radical rupture in traditional relations.” It seeks to “abolish the present state of things.” In a remarkable statement, Marx and Engels said that communists “openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.” They closed their *Manifesto*: “Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things.”

In a letter to his friend Arnold Ruge, Marx called for the “ruthless criticism of all that exists.” Marx was particularly fond of a line from Mephistopheles (the devil/demon figure) in Goethe's *Faust*, “Everything that exists deserves to perish.”

Beyond ruthless criticism for Marx, there was ruthless abolition. As Marx biographer Robert Payne noted, the word almost seems to jump off every page of the *Manifesto*. “And after he has ‘abolished’ property, family, and nations, and all existing societies, Marx shows little interest in creating a new society on the ruins of the old,” observed Payne. “He would wander through the kingdom of ruins. . . . The *Communist Manifesto* was the gauntlet he threw at the world.”

(Continued on page 26)

Ocasio-Cortez, or, to name two others very prevalent in the news, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, both likewise proud members of the Democratic Socialists of America.

And all along, these new socialists honk the horn of "democracy." So do today's communists. Go to their flagship publication, *People's World*, or the website of Communist Party USA, www.cpusa.org, and you will see that word omnipresent. "We are part of movements to broaden democracy," insists John Bachtell, general secretary of Communist Party USA, in *People's World*.

Yeah, right. Or at least as *they* understand "democracy."

The Reality of What You Can Do

In summary, some form of socialist wind, a spirit of democratic socialism, is blowing out there. It's sweeping up many Millennials. It is thriving on college campuses. We shouldn't be surprised. This has been the drift in

Marxism and Today's Mobs *(Continued from page 25)*

Karl Marx wanted to burn down the house.

This Marxist reality is not lost upon certain revolutionaries in the streets today, whether Antifa ringleaders or the founders of Black Lives Matter. Patrisse Cullors, who co-founded BLM with Alicia Garza, states: "We actually do have an ideological frame. Myself and Alicia in particular are trained organizers. We are trained Marxists." In an April 2018 interview, Cullors added: "I went through a year-long organizing program at the National School for Strategic Organizing.... We spent the year reading, anything from Marx, to Lenin, to Mao." She expands on this in her memoirs, which include a foreword by America's most famous female Marxist, Angela Davis, a mentor and inspiration. "I read, I study, adding Mao, Marx, and Lenin," reiterates Cullors.

To be sure, the vast majority of marchers in the streets aren't Marxists. Not a single revolutionary standing with a hammer or torch aside a statue of Christopher Columbus need quote Karl Marx in the process. Marx, however, would heartily approve of the tearing down of the existing social and political order.

modern "progressive" political circles in addition to the culture at large, particularly young people.

Sadly, this highly successful current push to marry "democracy" and "socialism" might be modern in its marketing, but not in its historical roots. The slogan "democratic socialism" sounds attractive to the undiscerning, the easily manipulated, and to those ignorant of the deeper history of the ideology they now say they support.

And yet, this is not fruit from a good tree. This tree has very bad roots. Before eating from this tree, modern Americans should be much more vigilant about taking a closer look at the underlying foundation. Who planted this tree? Who cultivated it? What were their intentions for the harvest? What did they really mean by words like "democracy" and "socialism?"

The modern mind in today's West and today's America is that of the dictatorship of relativism, where everything can be redefined according to one's whims and fancies, from (to borrow from Justice Anthony Kennedy)



Well-organized and well-funded Antifa Marxist agitators wreak havoc in Portland, Oregon, after the Oregon State Police decide to leave the city due to the County District Attorney's decision not to legally charge rioters connected to the so-called "protests."

one's own conception of life, existence, and the universe, to even one's own meaning of meaning itself. Thus, Americans today play footloose and free with words like "democratic socialism," thinking the slick slogan is new or fun or cool. In truth, such language has a past—a pretty ugly one with some nasty dictators. It would benefit modern Americans to get to know that past a little better. While these advocates latch on to words like "democratic" and "socialist," they display alarming ignorance of the history of this very language.

And thus, "democratic socialism" has suddenly become all the rage. It is framed as a new smiley-faced "socialism." Those who support it hasten to add that they are "democratic socialists," as if that sounds or feels better. It's not.

How can you respond and fight against this?

For starters, knowledge is power, truth is power. Know the truth, which truly sets you free—literally so in the battle against socialism. Know more than they do. Sadly, they don't know their own history or their own ideologies and ideologues. Most of them genuinely don't know or understand what they profess. Ask ten socialists to define socialism and you'll get ten different answers. Ask ten "democratic socialists" and you'll get ten different answers.

You, however, know better. You know the reality.

Also, have courage. Stand up for what's right on your campus. Get involved with Young America's Foundation. Join or start a YAF chapter. Bring a YAF speaker to campus. Oftentimes, the only conservative lecture you will hear during four years in college will come from a YAF speaker. Help educate those not being properly educated with all the facts and who are being taught a narrow, biased point of view. Support true diversity on campus—*intellectual* diversity. Diversity of ideas is the kind of diversity that should matter most in an academic environment. Support genuine freedom of thought. Don't let socialism (or "democratic socialism") have the classroom floor all to itself.

Armed with these reality checks, set forth. Be a cheerful and informed warrior. Help to educate. And be not afraid to stand for truth.

Recommended Reading

- Applebaum, Anne, *Gulag*
 Bardach, Janusz, and Kathleen Gleeson, *Man is Wolf to Man: Surviving the Gulag*
 Chambers, Whittaker, *Witness*
 Chol-Hwan, Kang, *Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag*
 Cheng, Nien, *Life and Death in Shanghai: Communism in Mao Tse-tung's China*
 Courtois, Stephane, et al, *The Black Book of Communism*
 Dodd, Bella, *School of Darkness*
 Engels, Friedrich, *The Principles of Communism* (1847)
 Gregg, Sam, "The Most Dangerous Socialist in History," *The Stream*
 Horowitz, David, *Radical Son*
 Kengor, Paul, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Communism*
 Kengor, Paul, *The Devil and Karl Marx*
 Kengor, Paul, "Cultural Marxism and Its Conspirators," *The American Spectator*
 Kengor, Paul, "Cultural Marxism and Its Conspirators: Part 2," *The American Spectator*
 Lenin, Vladimir, *The State and Revolution*
 Lenin, Vladimir, "Letter to American Workers," August 1918
 Lenin, Vladimir, Speech to the Comintern Congress, March 1919
 Lenin, Vladimir, Speech to Russian Young Communist League, October 1920
 Marx, Karl, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" (1843)
 Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin/Signet classics volume, edited by Martin Malia)
 Pipes, Richard, *Communism: A History* (Modern Library edition)
 Pipes, Richard, *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive*
 Pius XI, Pope, *Qui Pluribus*, encyclical on faith and religion (November 1846)
 Pius XI, Pope, *Quadragesimo Anno*, May 1931
 Pius XII, Pope, *Divini Redemptoris*, encyclical on atheistic communism (March 1937)
 Radosh, Ron, *Commies*
 Solzhenitsyn, Alexander, *The Gulag Archipelago*
 Solzhenitsyn, Alexander, *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*
 Ung, Loung, *First They Killed My Father*
 Valladares, Armando, *Against All Hope*
 Yakovlev, Alexander, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia*

About Dr. Paul Kengor

Paul Kengor, Ph.D., is professor of political science at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania, and a *New York Times* bestselling author of over a dozen books. He is senior director and chief academic fellow at the Institute for Faith & Freedom and former visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. His articles have appeared in publications from the *Washington Post* and *USA Today* to the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times*. He is a longtime columnist and senior editor for the *American Spectator*. Kengor is an internationally recognized authority on (among other topics) Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, communism, socialism, and conservatism.



Dr. Kengor is frequently interviewed by the BBC, Fox News, MSNBC, C-SPAN, NPR, EWTN, the Christian Broadcasting Network; by radio hosts such as Glenn Beck, Mark Levin, and Bill Bennett; and by TV personalities including Megyn Kelly and Bill O'Reilly. He often writes for *National Catholic Register* and *Crisis* magazine.

Dr. Kengor's books have been published by HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, Harvard University Press, Oxford University Press, Ignatius Press, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, HarperPerennial, and many others. In 2017, he released what has been described as his "magnum opus," *A Pope and a President: John Paul II, Ronald Reagan, and the Extraordinary Untold Story of the 20th Century*. Among his bestsellers are the 2012 book, *The Communist*, and his 2004 classic, *God and Ronald Reagan*. Several of his books are the basis for major films, including the film, *The Divine Plan* (Robert Orlando, producer), which screened in theaters nationwide in 2019. In August 2020, he released his latest, *The Devil and Karl Marx* (TAN Books/St. Benedict Press).

Kengor is a frequent public speaker, at venues such as the Ronald Reagan Library, YAF's Reagan Ranch Center, National Press Club, Heritage Foundation, Princeton University's James Madison Program, American Enterprise Institute, the Center for Strategic & International Studies, the Gerald Ford Library, the National Presbyterian Church, the Fulton Sheen Cultural Center, and at colleges ranging from the University of Virginia to the College of William & Mary to the Naval Academy to Notre Dame University.

Kengor received his doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs and master's degree from American University's School of International Service. He holds an honorary doctorate from Franciscan University. He and his wife, Susan, have eight children, two of which are adopted.

About Young America's Foundation

Young America's Foundation is the principal outreach organization of the Conservative Movement, committed to ensuring that increasing numbers of young Americans understand and are inspired by the ideas of individual freedom, a strong national defense, free enterprise, and traditional values.

We inspire millions of young people with conservative ideas through breakthrough conferences and seminars, campus lectures and activism initiatives, internships, and educational programs across the country—including the Reagan Ranch project, the National Journalism Center, the Center for Entrepreneurship & Free Enterprise, and Young Americans for Freedom.

Young America's Foundation preserves the Reagan Ranch, Ronald Reagan's home of 25 years and his only private residence during his administration, as a premier Presidential property and site to inspire America's future leaders and teach the lessons of Ronald Reagan's Presidency.

The National Journalism Center trains students in the skills of accurate journalism and reporting through prestigious media internships and classroom training featuring leading journalists and experts.

Young Americans for Freedom chapters provide young conservatives with unmatched resources, training, and activism initiatives to advance freedom at schools nationwide.

Young America's Foundation's Center for Entrepreneurship & Free Enterprise educates and inspires young people to champion free enterprise principles.

To learn more about YAF's programs, please visit YAF.org or contact Young America's Foundation at 1-800-USA-1776.



FRONT COVER IMAGES: (Top) In this painting by Viktor Ladeyshikov, Vladimir Lenin is depicted looking on as Bolsheviks assault the Winter Palace during the October Revolution of 1917. (Bottom) Antifa Marxist agitators march in the streets of Portland, Oregon, causing mayhem throughout the city.



“Communism is
neither an economic or
a political system—it is
a form of insanity.”

— RONALD REAGAN



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