

SOCIALISM: DEFINITION, HISTORY, PROSPECTS, CRITICISMS

There has been a revived interest in socialism in the U.S. in recent years, beginning with Bernie Sanders' astonishing popularity during two presidential primary seasons, and by the election of people identifying as socialists to public office. This revival has been the subject of severe attacks and many attempts have been made to discredit its followers and their programs. Social policies old and new have been linked to socialism in campaigns to discredit them so that today even the mildest of reforms have faced obstacles unknown in most other countries. In the extreme, some see socialism as the road to slavery, while adherents see it as the way to a world without war, poverty, and racism.

Among the issues that we will try to explore are these:

1. What socialism is, and is not, will occupy our attention throughout the course. This will include an examination of specific programs as well as broader goals.
2. The history of socialism in the U.S.: socialism and communism, socialism and minorities, socialists' positions on wars, reform vs. revolution, etc.
3. Different institutions that may (or may not) fall within the definition include utopian communities, producers' co-ops, the Mondragon system, the kibbutz, Guild Socialism, Syndicalism, and others.
4. We will ask why socialism has not "caught on" in the U.S. in contrast to many other countries.
5. Under the above, we will look at "American exceptionalism" in its many dimensions.
6. We will of course look at criticisms of socialism as well as what critics call "socialism," including in other countries, from Scandinavia to Cuba.
7. Finally, we will consider the present and future of socialism in the U.S. and world-wide.

I will begin each session with your questions and comments and if appropriate make a short presentation providing background on some aspect of our subject. I expect that participants will not be neutral but will be respectful of others' views. As soon as I have an email list, I will send out several short articles or refer you to pieces available online in preparation for our first session. For now, check out this interesting historical piece on Google: Albert Einstein, "Why Socialism?" Moving forward I will provide further material and suggest more readings, all available online. Participants' suggestions will be welcomed at all times. I will try to draw on one or more outside resource persons to discuss certain issues that I expect will come up.

LEADER: Martin Oppenheimer is a professor emeritus of sociology, Rutgers University, where his field was political sociology. He has written on social movements, including the Nazi movement, and has been a participant-observer in the civil rights, labor, and anti-war movements.

TUESDAYS: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., 6 weeks beginning September 28 through November 2

MAXIMUM: 12