

propaganda of nationalism, fear, racism, and so on, but socialists see through these lies and recognize that wars involve working people maiming and murdering other working people for the benefit of their wealthy exploiters. Furthermore, socialists oppose war and the preparation for war because these distractions divert resources from constructive and positive projects for social good, such as funding for education and health care.

## I Want to Learn More

The above are just a sampling of socialist ideas and values. If you want to learn more, please visit our website: <http://chicagodsa.org>.

If you live in the Chicago area and you believe that socialist values resonate with your own, then we welcome you to join and to get involved in the **Chicago Democratic Socialists of America**. Simply fill out the membership application below and select your appropriate dues rate:

\$75.00 Sustainer/Family Membership  
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We look forward to working with you and building a better world for all.



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## So What Is Socialism?

By Michael Baker

Due to events in the last Presidential election cycle, the economic crisis, the federal government's response to the economic crisis, as well as other reasons, many people in the United States have become interested in the ideas of socialism. However, many misconceptions exist about what exactly socialism is. This pamphlet will attempt to elucidate some of the ideas of socialism.

### What Socialism Is Not

***Socialism is not "communism."*** The words *socialism* and *communism* have both implied different political and social philosophies throughout their histories and have meant different things in different cultures and at different points in history. But rest assured, the political philosophy advocated by socialists in the United States today has nothing to do with the popular conception of "communism," which is that of an authoritarian, bureaucratic state. Due to the political and social history of the United States, socialism and communism are often confused in the public mind and, whether out of ignorance or malicious intent, are often portrayed as the same in the media. However, socialists historically have been some of the most vocal opponents of so-called "communism" and other authoritarian ideologies.

***Socialism does not advocate the abolition of all private property.*** For example, if you own your place of residence, socialism *does not* state that the federal government should take ownership of your home. The fact is that, for the most part, socialism favors decentralization of authority (less federal government control). Socialism *does* advocate that some major industries be controlled socially and democratically by the people, so working people will have more access to needed resources, and so these industries will be run in the best interest of the people. For example, in responding to the recent collapse of the financial sector, socialists advocated nationalizing the banks because this approach would have been the most efficient and inexpensive way not only of saving the banks but also of bringing them under democratic control and imposing

rational regulation. But, instead of following the advice of socialists, the federal government chose to save the bankers and shareholders, *not* the banks.

**Socialism does not try to "make everyone of the same."** Quite the opposite. Socialism advocates *more* freedom and individual expression for people, not less. Whether it's freedom of expression or sexual freedom, socialism advocates *increasing* freedom. Also, if various socialist policies were enacted, such as a shorter work day, an increased minimum wage, and national health care, people would have more time, energy, and resources to pursue and develop their *individual* interests and abilities. It is our current system that tries to impose conformity and "sameness," not socialism.

**Socialism does not advocate "one party rule."** In fact, in the United States today, it does not make much sense to talk about socialism in terms of political parties. There are some small political parties that call themselves "socialist," but these are, at best, very marginal players in electoral politics. At the same time, there are Green Party candidates, independent candidates, and others who identify as socialists. So it makes more sense to think of "socialist" as a place on the political spectrum, like "conservative" or "liberal," rather than as a political party. And quite contrary to "one party rule," socialism advocates reforming our ballot access laws to allow for *more* political diversity and *more* political debate and choices for voters, not fewer.

## What Socialism Is

Socialism is not a unified, static viewpoint, and the ideas of socialism have varied throughout history and cultures. However, we can state some general points of agreement amongst socialists in the United States today:

**Liberty.** Socialists are committed to ensuring that the liberties guaranteed in our Bill of Rights are respected – full freedom of speech, assembly, press, and religion. Needless to say, socialists are

*staunchly* opposed to the trampling of our rights that has occurred in recent years under the guise of the "War on Terror" and in such infamous legislation as the "Patriot Act." Socialists are also committed to full freedom of political expression, which includes a *truly* multi-party system, unlike that of our current two-party system, which seeks to limit the range of political debate and inclusion to keep the two dominant parties in power.

**Equality.** Socialists see the world's people as one human family. As a result, socialists are committed to the elimination of all forms of bigotry, discrimination, and oppression, including those based on gender, race, national origin, age, sexual preferences, and disabling conditions. Socialists recognize that people around the world have more in common with each another than they do with the corporate and political powers that dominate their lives. Socialists also recognize that corporate and political powers use bigotry in all its forms to pit people against one another so that these powers can more easily control and exploit people. Furthermore, socialists are committed to creating more economic equality amongst people. Socialists do *not* advocate that everyone should have the same income, but socialists *are* interested in eliminating the *vast* disparity in wealth that exists, not only in this country but around the world. The socialist vision of a world-wide human family is not only a more positive, compassionate, and appealing one than the dominant "us versus them" vision, but it is also more accurate and empowering.

**Full Employment.** Socialists are committed to full employment. Full employment means everyone who is able and wants to work will be employed in meaningful work. The socialist vision of full employment stands in stark contrast to our current system, which keeps part of the population employed – working obscenely long hours, much to the detriment of their family life, their ability to pursue other interests, and their health – while keeping the remainder of the population underemployed or unemployed. Our current system keeps working people divided against one other and works to the detriment of all working people. With full employment and an increase in wages, all people who are able to work and want to work would be employed in meaningful work and would work far fewer hours,

improving everyone's lives both economically and socially.

**Workplace Democracy.** Socialists are committed to workplace democracy. Under our current system, there is *no* democracy in the workplace. The workplace is *authoritarian*. In the socialist vision of workplace democracy, workers would have the right to form unions freely and to strike and engage in other forms of workplace dissent without fear of retribution. The workers would also control their workplace democratically, for example, by making important decisions by vote and by electing their managers. As a result, in spite of an increase in worker organization and control under socialism, strikes and other job actions would be uncommon because working conditions would be vastly improved and workplaces would be democratically controlled.

**Environment.** Socialists are committed to improving and preserving our environment. Socialists recognize that we must shift from our current model of development and consumption to an environmentally sustainable model of development and consumption. Socialists also recognize that the kind of sustainability necessary given our current circumstances can only be accomplished with careful planning at the regional, national, and international levels and *cannot* be entrusted to the whims of the "free market." The socialist vision of sustainability includes conservation, alternative energy production, the careful management of natural resources, land-use planning, pollution reduction, wildlife preservation, environmental cleanup, and working for a world free of the inherit dangers of nuclear energy.

**War.** Socialists are committed to opposing war and the preparation for war. As noted earlier, a key component of the socialist vision is seeing the world as one human family. Some socialists are pacifists; others believe in acting only in self defense. But no socialists condone the disastrous concept of "preemptive war" that the United States government has adopted in recent years. Socialists recognize that most wars are fought for no other reason than for the further enfranchisement and enriching of the politically connected and wealthy. These "powers that be" often try to motivate the public to participate in and support war by employing the