

Democratic socialism

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Democratic socialism is a broad political movement propagating the ideals of socialism within the context of a democratic system. In many cases, its adherents promote the ideal of socialism as an evolutionary process resulting from legislation enacted by a parliamentary democracy. Other democratic socialists favor a revolutionary approach that seeks to establish socialism by creating a non-parliamentary democratic system, usually based on democracy rooted at the local level as well as at the national level, including broadbased popular associations such as workers' councils, community groups, and other similar organizations.

Thinkers, writers and activists such as Robert Owen, Karl Marx, Eduard Bernstein, George Orwell, Bertrand Russell, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb can all be said to have contributed to "democratic socialist philosophy". However, popular movements such as the growth of trade unionism, the Chartists and the Labour Party (UK) (a "democratic socialist party" according to the first line of its constitution) are equally critical to understanding democratic socialism.

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Definitions

Many of those who describe themselves as "socialists" often argue that socialism necessarily implies democracy, thus making "democratic socialism" a redundant term. The fact that one specific movement is called Democratic Socialism does not mean that other branches of socialism must be any less democratic. However, the term is often used by those who wish to contrast this form of socialism with Communism or other ideologies that Democratic Socialists consider dictatorial ideologies in practice that, in theory, also claim to be socialist.

The terms "Democratic Socialism" and "Social Democracy" have often been used interchangeably, and, indeed, many have considered them synonymous until recently. Today, however, they usually denote two different things: Social Democracy is more centrist and supports a broadly capitalist system, with only some social reforms (such as the welfare state), intended to make it more equitable and humane. Meanwhile, Democratic Socialism is more left-wing and it supports a fully socialist system, seeking to establish that socialist system, either by gradually reforming

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capitalism from within, or via some form of revolutionary transformation. Thus, Democratic Socialism can be either an evolutionary socialist movement or a revolutionary movement. This tension between the revolutionary and evolutionary tendencies of democratic socialism can be seen in the Socialist Party USA, which has members who advocate both types of positions (although the party statement of principles does use the word "revolution" to describe its position). Revolutionary democratic socialists accuse those who favor evolution of supporting a kind of "socialism from above" that is achieved via legislation and which does not truly abolish the capitalist system. Evolutionary democratic socialists accuse supporters of revolution of being impractical and of supporting pie-in-the-sky approaches.

Evolutionary democratic socialists and social democrats both typically advocate at least a welfare state, although some social democrats, being influenced by the Third Way, would be willing to consider other means of delivering a social safety net for the poorest in society. Revolutionary democratic socialists support a welfare state, not as a means toward achieving socialism, but as a way of providing relief until revolutionary change takes place, and also as a means of mobilizing the populace towards revolutionary ideals. Democratic socialists maintain a commitment to the re-distribution of wealth and power and social ownership of most major industry, and some believe in a planned economy; these are all concepts which social democrats have largely abandoned. In addition, many democratic socialists retain a Marxist analysis (though often a reformist one), while social democrats reject Marxism entirely.

Democratic socialist parties appeared before the World War I, when no single country could be described as democratic in the full modern use of the term, because of electoral discrimination on the basis of gender, race or wealth. What frequently distinguished these democratic socialists from others was a willingness to work through a parliamentary democracy (even if people were still disenfranchised) to both improve the lives of working classes and win the vote, rather than resort to revolution (the overthrow of the state). Revolutionary Democratic Socialism attracted greater support a few decades later, when many democratic socialists became disillusioned with evolutionary socialism, because social democracy, the largest evolutionary socialist movement, had failed to abolish capitalism and had in many cases abandoned the goal of building a socialist society. Revolutionary democratic socialists also believe that the political structures within existing capitalist societies serve as an impediment to full democracy, which they believe can only be achieved by establishing a new political structure built from the bottom up and based on popular organizations that emerge during democratic and socialist struggles.

History

Many early varieties of socialism, particularly those stemming from the sans-culotte branch of French Revolutionary politics, took for granted democratic characteristics such as universal suffrage and equality before the law. Notable among such currents are the egalitarian Jacobinism of Babeuf, the humanistic revolutionary spirit of Louis Blanc, Robert Owen's so-called utopian socialism, and the communism of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Such early socialisms might in retrospect be included as democratic socialist. The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Socialist Industrial Unionism of Daniel DeLeon in the United States represented another strain of early Democratic Socialism, which favored a form of government based on industrial unions, but which also sought to establish this government after winning at the ballot box, thus assuming a revolutionary approach while incorporating the parliamentarism of evolutionary democratic socialism.

However, democratic socialism as such only becomes a movement in its own right as a current rejecting both Communism (with its distinctive visions of the vanguard party and the dictatorship of the proletariat) and, preferably, the reformism characteristic of yellow socialists and social democrats.

The Austromarxists were major representatives of the left, democratic socialism between the two world wars. Also the guild socialism of G. D. H. Cole in early 1920s was a conscious attempt to envision a socialist alternative

to Soviet-style authoritarianism.

During the 1920s, Council communism anticipated democratic socialist positions in several respects, notably through renouncing the vanguard role of the revolutionary party and holding that the system of the Soviet Union was not authentically socialist (describing it as a degenerated workers' state). However, council communism has generally tended towards the anarchist positions and cannot be considered as a democratic-socialist theory.

During India's freedom movement, many figures on the Left of the Indian National Congress organized themselves as the Congress Socialist Party. Their politics, and those of the early and intermediate periods of JP Narayan's career, combined a commitment to the socialist transformation of society with a principled opposition to the one-party authoritarianism they perceived in the Stalinist revolutionary model.

The *folkesocialisme* or people's socialism that emerged as a vital current of the Left in Scandinavia beginning in the 1950s could also be characterized as a democratic socialism in the same vein.

In much of Europe and North America during the 1960s, there was a strong current of democratic socialism in the politics of the New Left. For example, the classic Port Huron Statement of the SDS combines a stringent critique of the Communist model with calls for a democratic socialist reconstruction of society. In western Europe, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the situationists, and various groups taking to the streets in May 1968 articulated similar positions. The New Left legacy of democratic socialism may be clearly seen in the post-Marxist positions of a wide range of intellectuals (sometimes identified with post-modernism or post-structuralism), from Chantal Mouffe in Europe to Cornel West in the United States.

Simultaneously in Eastern Europe (particularly Czechoslovakia), there was a tendency towards socialism with a human face meant to endow a Marxist-Leninist political establishment with more authentically democratic credentials.

Since the end of the Cold War, many traditionally Marxist-Leninist groups and parties have evolved positions more closely resembling democratic socialism. The parties of the European United Left today often include both a "conservative" Marxist-Leninist wing and a "liberal" democratic socialist tendency.

The boundaries of what might be categorized as "democratic socialism" are thus necessarily fluid. On the right, democratic socialism shades seamlessly into social democracy; on the left, it passes into various hybrids and permutations of Leninism. Furthermore, it also shades off into a variety of radical progressive groups not specifically identifying with the history or symbolism of "socialism" as such. Since the 1990s much of the political activity of the democratic Left has fed into the international movement against capitalist globalization. Many anti-globalist groups describe themselves as anti-capitalist without self-identifying as socialist, despite sharing a great many positions and analyses with democratic socialism.

Characteristics

Democratic socialists have normally defended the role of the public sector, particularly as regards the provision of key services such as health care, education, utilities, mass transit, and sometimes also banking, mining, and fuel extraction. For evolutionary democratic socialists, their economic vision has often included a mixed economy with a greater emphasis on worker and consumer co-operatives, credit unions, family farms and small businesses, as compared to authoritarian Marxist-Leninists. In India, democratic socialists have to varying degrees seen the traditional village-based peasant economy as a model to be supported and enhanced.

Revolutionary democratic socialists usually distinguish between the role of the public sector within parliamentary democracies and the role of social ownership in a post-revolutionary society. They see pre-revolutionary public ownership, not as a means of achieving socialism, but as a means of ameliorating the worst effects of capitalism

until a revolution is accomplished and the means of production are transferred directly to the workers and community organizations. With respect to the means of production, many revolutionary democratic socialists prefer to use the term "social ownership" rather than "nationalization", because the latter is often associated with social-democratic style state ownership by the bureaucracy of a parliamentary state. Social ownership in this sense conveys a sense of a broadly based democratic control of the means of production at the level of the workplace, from which power in a democratic workers republic would flow.

Regarding tactics, democratic socialists include a spectrum of positions, from those advocating nonviolent resistance against capitalism, or the possibility of violent resistance under certain circumstances, to those committed exclusively to anti-capitalist reforms through parliamentary means (see evolutionary socialism and Fabianism). Democratic socialists advocating direct action may tend to similar positions with anarcho-syndicalism (with which democratic socialism shares the characteristics of being both anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian), although democratic socialists characteristically do not regard the state itself as an evil to be abolished.

List of Democratic Socialist parties

The following political parties are either democratic socialist in themselves, social democratic parties with significant numbers of democratic socialist members, or other left-wing parties with democratic socialist members:

- Party of European Socialists, European Union. 32 members and 7 associate members, including:
 - Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), Germany
 - Parti Socialiste, France
 - Parti Socialiste, (PS) Belgium (Wallonia)
 - Socialistische Partij - Anders (sp.a), Belgium (Flanders)
 - Labour party, Ireland
- European United Left - Nordic Green Left, European Union (*partially communist*)
 - Left Party, Sweden
 - European Left, European Union
 - Left Party, Germany
 - Socialist Party (SP), The Netherlands
- Samajwadi Party, India
- Democratic Labor Party (DLP), South Korea
- Australian Labor Party (ALP) - Australia
- Fijian Labour Party (FLP) - Fiji
- Israel Labor Party - Israel
- Democratic Socialist Party, Japan
- Union des forces progressistes, Quebec (Canada)
- Socialist Party USA, USA
- Democratic Action Party, Malaysia
- Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Sri Lanka
- United People's Freedom Alliance, Sri Lanka
- Partido Liberal, Colombia
- Unity List, Denmark
- Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño, Puerto Rico
- Partido Socialista, Argentina
- Movimiento V República, Venezuela

The largest Democratic Socialist organization in the U.S. is the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). DSA is not currently a party but works in coalition with a broad base of progressive and left-wing organizations. DSA is a

member of the Socialist International (SI) and its youth organization, the Young Democratic Socialists (YDS), is the only socialist youth organization currently recognized by the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY), the largest youth organization in the world.

See also

- Progressivism
- Inclusive Democracy
- Industrial Workers of the World

Books

- Donald F. Busky, *Democratic Socialism: A Global Survey*

External links

- The Socialist International (<http://www.socialistinternational.org/>)
- List of Leftist Socialists and Reform Communists (<http://www.broadleft.org/leftsoc.htm>)
- Joseph Schwartz and Jason Schulman *Towards Freedom: The Theory and Practice of Democratic Socialism* (http://www.ydsusa.org/toward_ds.html)

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