

Feeling the Bern: Democratic Socialism in America

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Economics Colloquium

Austrian Student Scholars Conference

## **Introduction**

The 2016 Presidential Election was unprecedented. Virtually no one expected its final outcome and as political outsider Donald Trump upset an establishment name in Hillary Clinton to become the 45th President of the United States of America. This outcome clearly symbolizes a shift in the way Americans feel about how the country should be run. Before the heated general election and final outcome, there was a different movement seen in the democratic primary election as Bernie Sanders, a self-proclaimed democratic socialist saw dynamic support for his cause.

What made so many people want to “Feel the Bern”? The United States government has a track record of intruding on the lives of private citizens but American culture has typically been against and has vilified socialist movements, making the Bernie Sanders revolution a perplexing phenomenon. It seems to be common sense that the government would not be able to adequately provide for the specific need of each individual in American society, so why bother with such overarching program and sweeping change to give the government more control over the way citizens obtain their wants and needs?

Supporters of Sanders were swayed by rhetoric and a lack of understanding in terms of what Democratic Socialism actually means for a country. These citizens view the government to be an end-all, be-all of society, a religion, or a god that has the ability to right wrongs, build equality, and save the United States from itself.

## **Bernie Sanders and the Framework of Democratic Socialism**

Soviet-Style Socialism, or Communism as it is commonly referred, has never been truly successful. Soviet-Style socialism typically involves dictatorial rule established through violent revolution, terrorizing or killing large sums of people, leaving survivors trapped in a society void of personal freedoms, and severely diminished material well-being. In order for socialism to survive in some manner, it needed to evolve and reform. Today, democratic socialism is the result of the reformation of the original Soviet-Style template.

A Theory of Socialism and Capitalism written by Hans-Hermann Hoppe, is a comprehensive work that provides the distinctions between the varieties of socialism. In Hoppe's chapter titled "Socialism Social-democratic Style", he provides main characteristics of democratic socialism. These characteristics include how democratic socialism is implemented, its emphasis equalization, and the role of private ownership in a democratic socialist system. Hoppe's work along with information regarding Senator Sanders' goals and policies helps to frame Senator Sanders' ideas and motivations and how they align with a movement toward democratic socialism.

A key aspect of democratic socialism is how it comes to be established in a society. In contrast to Soviet-Style Socialism, revolution and coup has no place in the reformed democratic system. Instead, democratic socialism it implemented through gradual approach. In accordance with common socialist beliefs, capitalism has the tendency to produce an increasingly uniform proletarian class, which then would lead to a

swelling voter turnout for a socialist party. With the enlargement of the franchise and a system of universal suffrage, socialism's victory could be attained through democratic, parliamentary action.<sup>1</sup>

Senator Sanders was aware that this path would be his only way to implement his platform. He is an outspoken opponent of corporations contributing to campaign financing through donations and proposed an amendment to the Constitution called “The Democracy is for the People Amendment” that would give power to states to regulate and restrict how much can be donated to political campaigns along with how those contributions can be spent.<sup>2</sup> It is Sanders’ belief that contributions from wealthy individuals and corporations skews the democratic process and inhibits all citizens from having an equal say in electing politicians. Campaign finance alone however would not be the solution towards creating a more representative democracy because only a fraction of the population actually votes in political elections. In response to this dilemma, Sanders has proposed legislation to make Election Day a national holiday, this would hypothetically diminish the conflict between a work schedule and casting a ballot, leading to increased voter turnout.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Hoppe, Hans-Hermann. *A Theory of Socialism and Capitalism*. (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2010). 56.

2. "Campaign Finance." Sen. Bernie Sanders. Accessed December 2016. <http://www.sanders.senate.gov/legislation/issue/campaign-finance>.

3. Ibid.

After a democratic socialist system is in control it has to determine how to effectively produce goods and services for society. Rather than focusing on the full nationalization and control over a nation's industry and economy like Communism, democratic socialism places more emphasis on attaining egalitarianism or equalization in society. Democratic Socialists seek to do so through income taxation and equalization. In addition to equalization of opportunity, these become the true cornerstones of democratic socialism.<sup>4</sup> These ideas are well represented in the policies Senator Sanders advocates.

Senator Sanders claims that wealth inequality is a large problem in the United States. He notes that there has been a recovery since the Great Recession but that the recovery has benefited the extremely wealthy far more than it has the rest of the country. This aspect of the recovery fuels the argument for wealth inequality as a severe problem in the United States. To solve this perceived issue, Sanders supports policy to create a greater number of well-paying jobs to bolster the lower and middle classes while creating reforms to restrict the extremely wealthy from dodging taxes. With a greater number of well-paying jobs for the middle and lower classes, there is the hope that their overall wealth will rise while acts to prevent avoiding taxes will decrease the total wealth of the upper class and extremely rich American citizens. This would ideally close the wealth gap between classes to make income earners across society more economically equal.

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4. Hoppe, 59.

Senator Sanders seeks to bring about more wealth for the lower and middle classes in two different ways, by creating programs to produce jobs and by increasing the minimum wage. These motives are illustrated in the legislation he has proposed such as the Rebuild America Act which would allocated \$1 trillion to rebuild infrastructure, a program that would create 13 million jobs, along with the Employ Young Americans Now Act which would allocate \$5.5 billion into youth jobs and employ 1 million teenagers and young adults.<sup>5</sup> Sanders also introduced legislation to increase the minimum wage to \$15 per hour in 2020 because he believes that, “Nobody who works a 40-hour week should have to live in poverty.”<sup>6</sup> Sanders also wants to reform trade policy such as the North American Free Trade Agreement along with the Central America Free Trade Agreement in addition to changing the country’s trade status with China.<sup>7</sup> Sanders believes these policies have adversely effected the American worker and that changing them would result in better paying jobs that would allow America to be an industrial power that cares for its workers, not just the wealthy.

To limit the upper class from continually increasing its wealth and subsequently increasing the wealth gap in America, Sanders’ goal is to make sure the upper class “pays its fair share”. Sanders attempts to do so by proposing such policy as the Corporate Tax Dodging Prevention Act, legislation that would prevent profits from being hidden in tax

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5. "Economy." Sen. Bernie Sanders. Accessed December 2016.  
<http://www.sanders.senate.gov/legislation/issue/economy>.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

havens.<sup>8</sup> Sanders also wants capital gains and dividends to be taxed at the same rate as other income.<sup>9</sup> Attempting to equalize wealth and income alone however does not fully reach the full aspirations of a social democratic system, the equalization of opportunity is also an important factor.

Senator Sanders yearns to develop the equalization of opportunity. He does so in his support of government control in dental and health care, education, along with communication in society. Sanders was a supporter of the Affordable Care Act and worked to increase the number of Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers across the country to provide health services to anybody.<sup>10</sup> He also introduced the Comprehensive Dental Reform Act, which creates new places to seek dental care and invests in dental health education to increase the number of dentists and dental healthcare professionals.<sup>11</sup>

In regards to supporting educational opportunities, Sanders was an influence on the Head Start program and the Every Child Succeeds Act.<sup>12</sup> He also introduced the College For All Act to provide \$47 billion in Federal funding to incentivize colleges to

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8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. "Primary Health Care." Sen. Bernie Sanders. Accessed December 2016.  
<http://www.sanders.senate.gov/legislation/issue/primary-health-care>.

11. "Dental Care." Sen. Bernie Sanders. Accessed December 2016.  
<http://www.sanders.senate.gov/legislation/issue/dental-care>.

12. "Education." Sen. Bernie Sanders. Accessed December 2016.  
<http://www.sanders.senate.gov/legislation/issue/education>.

eliminate tuition costs for undergraduate students.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the College For All Act would also restructure student loan rates and make financial aid easier to obtain.

To better control communication in the country, Senator Sanders opposes the control a few companies have over media and wants more competition in cable television. As a supporter of Net Neutrality, he wants to restrict internet providers' ability to offer varying services for different prices.<sup>14</sup> He would seek to use federal funds to provide broadband internet service to more Americans.

Considering the different policies Senator Sanders supports along with the bills he has proposed, Senator Sanders fits well in the democratic socialist framework presented by Hans-Hermann Hoppe. Hoppe wrote that, "social-democratic socialism does not outlaw private ownership in the means of production and it even accepts the idea of all means of production being privately owned—with the exception only of education, traffic and communication, central banking, and the police and courts."<sup>15</sup> Sanders does not want to control every single piece of production in the United States like Soviet Style Socialism would. Sanders does advocate for increased taxes on the wealthy which does in fact confiscate some means of production, but not all factors. His focus is controlling

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13. Ibid.

14. "Media Ownership & Telecommunications." Sen. Bernie Sanders. Accessed December 2016. <http://www.sanders.senate.gov/legislation/issue/media-ownership-and-telecommunications>.

15. Hoppe. 61



and directing only certain factors of production like education and communications in addition to his motives to reach economic equality in society.

With a basic understanding of economic principles, it is easy to comprehend that a democratic socialist system will not bring forth the best results for society. There are more than 300 million people in the United States. The amount of government control necessary to provide an equal amount and quality of education, healthcare, communication services, along with employment is staggering and unrealistic. It should also be noted that even if all people in the United States had equal opportunities and an equal amount of wealth or income, different classes would still arise, as individuals would use their opportunities and wealth in different ways. This point makes the motive for egalitarian action futile.

An institution such as the government would never be able to adequately provide these services for more than 300 million people because no individual in the population requires the exact same services as another individual. Each person has specific needs. A government directed by policy, supported by confiscated funds in the form of taxation, without competition and means of calculating profit and loss is destined to be inefficient as it will provide too much support for some and not enough support to others.

The taxation may look like a good thing to fund policy to try to promote better lives for citizens but the development of the free market does a better job of increasing standards of living. Taking monetary resources away from the best private producers in a free market means they will not be able to produce the things that truly enrich the lives of

individuals in a society. Government intervention in the form of taxation therefore wastes time and resources, as a result, society as a whole will suffer. It would not suffer as greatly in comparison to a society run by full Soviet Style Socialism but it will still be worse off than that of a society with a more Free-Market System.

From this point arises the question: if society would ultimately be worse off with a movement toward democratic socialism, why did Senator Sanders garner such popularity? The answer to this question is multi-faceted. First, Senator Sanders is passionate and efficiently employs rhetoric. Second, the American population sees problems, wants some sort of change, is ignorant to Socialism in any form, and is therefore willing to support a system like democratic socialism. These two qualities along with the fact that the United States of America already implements a multitude democratic socialist policies resulted in the popularity Senator Sanders received.

### **The Power of Speech and Perception**

On November 19, 2015 Senator Sanders delivered a speech at Georgetown University entitled “What is a Socialist?”, it shows how Senator Sanders paints his ideology in a compassionate and humane light while vilifying what he believes is opposition to those beliefs. The speech exemplifies the political rhetoric and passion needed to have built such support for Senator Sanders’ cause.

A main component of the speech was to paint the wealthy in society as villainous and greedy. Senator Sanders said, “The rich get richer. Almost everyone else gets poorer. Super PACs funded by billionaires buy elections. Ordinary people don’t vote.

We have an economic and political crisis in this country and the same old, same old establishment politics and economics will not effectively address it.”<sup>16</sup>

After creating a group to blame for the struggles of society, he calls for action, “The billionaire class cannot have it all. Our government belongs to all of us, and not just the one percent.”<sup>17</sup> Once there is a group to blame and a call to action, he lists out a variety of problems to associate with the vilified group.

Senator Sanders included statements like, “children in America go hungry and veterans sleep out on the streets”, “millions of our people are working two or three jobs just to survive”, and that America has, “the highest rate of childhood poverty of nearly any major country on earth.”<sup>18</sup> These along with a multitude of other problems seen in the United States emotionally primes the audience to be ready for a solution, even if that solution is economically unsound. Senator Sanders created a perfect moment to paint a picture of democratic socialism that relieves the country of its struggles.

Senator Sanders is well aware of the stigma associated with the word “socialism”. He describes democratic socialism in a personal, humane manner. He lets the audience know what democratic socialism means to him. He said, “Let me describe to you what democratic socialism means to me...Democratic socialism means that we create an

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16. SANDERS, BERNIE. 2016. "WHAT IS A SOCIALIST?." Vital Speeches Of The Day 82, no. 1: 25-30. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost. 26.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

economy that works for all, not just the very wealthy. Democratic socialism means that we must reform a political system in America today which is not only grossly unfair but, in many respects, corrupt.” In this statement, he is referring back to his vilified group, to the influence of the very wealthy on politics and the fact that Wall Street can receive government bailouts but providing welfare support to a typical citizen, for him, is a political battle.

Senator Sanders further legitimizes his statements by quoting prominent historical figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. who said, “This country has socialism for the rich, and rugged individualism for the poor.”<sup>19</sup>

Senator Sanders continued to incorporate present problems he perceives into what democratic socialism means to him. He said, “...it’s time we had democratic socialism for working families, not just Wall Street, billionaires and large corporations. It means that we should not be providing welfare for corporations, huge tax breaks for the very rich, or trade policies which boost corporate profits as workers lose their jobs. It means that we create a government that works for all of us, not just powerful special interests. It means that economic rights must be an essential part of what America stands for. It means that health care should be a right of all people, not a privilege.”<sup>20</sup> Using the repetition of the phrase ‘It means’, Senator Sanders is able to emphasize the multitude of

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19. Ibid. 27.

20. Ibid.

ways he thinks democratic socialism can change society for the better. He continues repetition with the phrase ‘democratic socialism means’.

He said things like, “Democratic socialism means that, in the year 2015, a college degree is equivalent to what a high school degree was 50 years ago – and that public education must allow every person in this country, who has the ability, the qualifications and the desire, the right to go to public colleges or university tuition free.”<sup>21</sup>...“Democratic socialism means our government does everything it can to create a full employment economy.”<sup>22</sup>...“Democratic socialism means that if someone works forty hours a week, that person should not be living in poverty.”<sup>23</sup>...“Democratic socialism means that we have government policy which does not allow for greed and profiteering of the fossil fuels industry...”<sup>24</sup>...“Democratic socialism means, that in a democratic, civilized society the wealthiest people and the largest corporations must pay their fair share of taxes.”<sup>25</sup>... “Democratic socialism, to me, does not just mean that we create a nation of economic and social justice. It also means that we must create a vibrant democracy based on the principle of one person one vote.”<sup>26</sup> Through these statements,

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21. Ibid.

22. Ibid. 28.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

Senator Sanders is able to touch on a multitude of the policy and programs he supports and stands on as a politician.

Senator Sanders effectively concludes the repetition in his speech and summarizes the support of democratic socialism. He proclaimed, “So the next time you hear me attacked as a socialist, remember this: I don’t believe the government should own the means of production, but I do believe that the middle class and the working families who produce the wealth of America deserve a fair deal..I’m not running for president because it’s my turn, but because it’s the turn of all of us to live in a nation of hope and opportunity not for some, not for the few, but for all.”<sup>27</sup> With this summarizing statement, Senator Sanders claims that socialism is not in reality a threatening system, but is actually one that will take care of the entire society.

In reading the speech it is easy to forget that Senator Sanders wants to implement an inefficient system. He uses normative statements to create the feeling that the current system is unjust and oppressive. Through the entirety of the speech, he mentions nearly all of the policy previously discussed and connected to Hans Hoppe’s framework of democratic socialism. His rhetoric along with his commitment to creating policy made Senator Sanders a genuine politician, a man who wants to help the people and will take action to do so. In a political scene where politicians can seem phony and power hungry, Senator Sander sticks out as a clear change from the norm.

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27. Ibid.

With his words he is able to craft a problem and connect with his audience, he is able to back that up with the legislation he has introduced and supported. Senator Sanders very much “talked the talk” and “walked the walk”. He embodies an anti-establishment solution to the societal problems in which America is concerned.

### **What Americans Know and Feel**

Opinion polls and statistics of the general public show that Americans would at least be open to considering the views and beliefs expressed by Senator Sanders. From September 30 – October 5, 2016, the market research firm YouGov conducted the Annual Report on U.S. Attitudes towards socialism, it captured a multitude of opinions of the general public in America along with the more specific beliefs of the varying generations living in America. The report presented three main conclusions. First, basic knowledge of communism is lacking in the general public. Second, is that younger Americans have sharply different views of communism and socialism than older Americans. Third, is that the general public is turning against capitalism. These conclusions support the assertion that because people are historically and therefore economically ignorant, they were more easily spurred to support institutional change in the form of democratic socialism, resulting in the contention of Bernie Sanders in the 2016 Presidential election.

The first conclusion is important to consider. The Annual Report on U.S. Attitudes towards socialism says that generally, Millennials are unfamiliar with prominent figures of communism. 42% of Millennials were unfamiliar with Mao

Zedong, 40% were unfamiliar with Che Gueverra, 33% were unfamiliar with Vladimir Lenin, and 32% were unfamiliar with Karl Marx.<sup>28</sup> At first, it may seem inconsequential for Millennials to be ignorant to these figures. After all, Bernie Sanders advocates for democratic socialism, not communism. Democratic socialism however, is not a completely divided system from communism; it only differs in degree. Socialism is much closer to communism than it is to capitalism.

The general public is ignorant to the amount of human life lost to communism. When questioned how many people communism has killed over the past 100 years, only 25% believed communism killed 100 million people or more. If the response was a number less than 100 million, it was wrong.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, 75% of the general public is ignorant to the amount of death cause by communism. Those not familiar with the impact of communism would be more likely open to supporting a system that varies in degree from Communism, like democratic socialism.

Comparing the opinions of differing generations in American society paints and interesting portrait of how democratic socialism is perceived and may continue to develop. Overall, only 30% of the general public considers Socialism to be “Very Unfavorable”.<sup>30</sup> For Millennials and Generation Z, the percent who believe Socialism is

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28. *Generation Perceptions - Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation Annual Report on U.S. Attitudes towards Socialism*. Report. YouGov, September 2016. Page 3.

29. *Annual Report on U.S. Attitudes towards Socialism*. Report. YouGov, September 2016. 6.

30. Annual Report. 2.



“Very Unfavorable” falls to 15% and 18% respectively.<sup>31</sup> For the “Mature” generation, only 18% reported that they would be open to voting for a candidate who described themselves as Socialist.<sup>32</sup> Baby Boomers reported at 33% who would likely vote for a candidate that describes themselves as socialist.<sup>33</sup> The younger generations report in higher percentages that would likely vote for a candidate who describes them self as a socialist. For Generation Z, 45% said they would likely vote for a self-described Socialist, 46% of Millennials would vote for such a candidate, and only slightly behind those two generations was Generation X at 44%.<sup>34</sup>

When asked to choose between the two statements, “America’s economic system works against me” and “America’s economic system works for me” the general public is split almost in half with a slight edge to the first opinion, 52% of those polled believe the current economic system works against them.<sup>35</sup> Assuming people want their economic system to work for them, 52% of the general public therefore believes that the economic system needs either more or less government intervention so the economy will work for them. This is further evidence the General Public would want some kind of economic change; some would be open to democratic socialism.

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31. Generation Perceptions. 10.

32. Inbd., 12.

33. Inbd.

34. Inbd.

35. Annual Report. 1.

Furthermore, only 41% of the Mature Generation felt that the current economic system worked against them.<sup>36</sup> For Millennials and Generation X, 53% and 52% respectively felt that the current economic system worked against them.<sup>37</sup> At a bit higher of a percentage of Baby Boomers, at 56%, believed the current economic system works against them.<sup>38</sup> This Baby Boomer generation drove the want for change resulting the election of an anti-establishment candidate with Donald Trump rather than the establishment figure in Hillary Clinton.

Senator Sanders continually focused on closing the wealth gap between the upper class and the rest of society. This sentiment matches well with the attitude of the public. When questioned about income inequality, 78% of those polled believe the divide between the rich and poor is a serious issue with 49% believing it is “very serious” issue and 29% believing it is a “somewhat serious” issue.<sup>39</sup> Only 7% of those polled believed income inequality was “not at all serious”.<sup>40</sup> It would seem then that Senator Sanders was astute in his political rhetoric to vilify the very wealthy in American society.

These figures are evidence that change was desired by the general public. This desire for change from the current order ultimately resulted in the election of anti-

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36. Generation Perceptions. 14.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid

39. Annual Report. 1.

40. Ibid.

establishment candidate, Donald Trump. The 56% of the Baby Boomers that believed the current economic system works against them is the generation that was essential to the success of the Trump candidacy. They wanted change, but not in the form of democratic socialism by Bernie Sanders and were certainly not willing to follow the political norm in voting for Hillary Clinton.

While democratic socialism did not prevail as the dominant solution in the 2016 election, it may be considered as a more popular and viable solution in the future. Members of Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation X will continue to develop their beliefs and more of Generation Z will come of voting age while the Matures die out and Baby Boomers become the oldest living American generation. As this takes place, members of the general public that hold the most contempt for socialism will no longer be a political factor and the generations that are more considerate of socialism will have more influence.

The Baby Boomers had a more favorable view of Capitalism than the younger generations did. For the Baby Boomers and Mature generations, 54% and 71% respectively, hold a favorable view of capitalism.<sup>41</sup> A smaller percentage of the three younger generations hold a favorable view, with 42% of Millennials, 45% of Generation X, and 47% of Generation Z.<sup>42</sup> Overall, 50% of the general public holds a favorable view

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41. Generation Perceptions. 15.

42. Ibid.

of capitalism, 29% do not hold a favorable view of capitalism, and roughly 22% are unsure.<sup>43</sup>

Those who are unsure may be confused in regards to what capitalism actually is. The United States has always been considered as the beacon of Capitalism in the world but has never held a truly free-market capitalist system. Government economic intervention and welfare policy has been a signature of American society for a long time.

The United States already implements a multitude of policies and programs that supported and aligned with democratic Socialism. Hans Hoppe affirms this point in writing, "...social-democratic socialism can now be said to be one of the most widespread ideologies of our age, increasingly shaping the political programs and actual policies not only of explicitly socialist parties, and to a lesser degree those of the western communists, but also of groups and parties who would not even in their most far-fetched dreams call themselves socialists, like the east coast "liberal" Democrats in the United States."<sup>44</sup>

Senator Sanders made the same point in his "What is a Socialist?" speech by describing the action of the government in the Great Depression and later in the 1960s. He said, "...Roosevelt implemented a series of programs that put millions of people back to work, took them out of poverty and restored their faith in government. He redefined the relationship of the federal government to the people of our country. He combated

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43. Annual Report. 2.

44. Hoppe. 60.

cynicism, fear and despair. reinvigorated democracy. He transformed the country. And that is what we have to do today. And, by the way, almost everything he proposed was called “socialist.” Social Security, which transformed life for the elderly in this country was “socialist.” The concept of the “minimum wage” was seen as a radical intrusion into the marketplace and was described as “socialist.” Unemployment insurance, abolishing child labor, the 40-hour work week, collective bargaining, strong banking regulations, deposit insurance, and job programs that put millions of people to work were all described, in one way or another, as “socialist.” Yet, these programs have become the fabric of our nation and the foundation of the middle class. Thirty years later, in the 1960s, President Johnson passed Medicare and Medicaid to provide health care to millions of senior citizens and families with children, persons with disabilities and some of the most vulnerable people in this county. Once again these vitally important programs were derided by the right wing as socialist programs that were a threat to our American way of life.”<sup>45</sup>

The general public today cannot distinguish policies and programs such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, or the minimum wage as being socialist in nature. To the general public, they cannot perceive American life without these programs. They associate these programs as the norm and can be confused about what Capitalism actually is.

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45. Sanders. 25-26.

This can explain the varying opinions of the general public in regards to socialism and capitalism. Those who benefit from and appreciate the policies and programs already in place and logically connect their roots to socialism would be inclined to support and move towards democratic socialism. There are others who consider the socialist type programs as the norm and appreciate them, but believe they live in a predominantly capitalist society, they do not believe they are anywhere near being socialists, American capitalism to them is part of their identity and would not support a socialist because it conflicts with their identity. Others predominantly support democratic socialist policy but are weary of the label “socialist” as it still holds a stigma. That stigma deters truly committed support, this describes the “east coast ‘liberal’ Democrats” mentioned by Hoppe.

There are other people still, who recognize socialist policies in America and oppose them, yearning for a more free market system, they will not support any move towards democratic socialism and want to repeal programs and policies already in place. These people would have appreciated early American life. In the early days of the United States, The government did not have nearly as much influence in controlling the economy or providing for those who needed help in society. Looking back to these times reveals that society can provide aid to those in need without instituting sweeping change and control like that of the democratic socialism or the current programs established in the United States.

## **Authentically Caring for Society**

It may seem inconceivable for America to operate and care for the poor without the changes Bernie Sanders and democratic socialism he calls for in addition to government institutions that have already been established. The Tragedy of American Compassion, written by Marvin Olasky provides an alternative to government action to solve economic struggles. In the beginnings of the United States of America, the poor and disadvantaged members of society were cared for not by government initiatives and programs but by individuals and voluntarily organized institutions that freely worked to uplift others in need.

Olasky asserts that a truly free market does not expel poverty and struggle but neither does government intervention and economic restructure. The most efficient solution to economic struggle and poverty is through compassionate individuals and groups. Contemporary action motivated by advancing the free market or introducing new government policy to equalize society both neglect the morality of pre-twentieth century morality used in the early United States.

The main group of people who struggled in the early days of the United States were widows, orphans, and those who had fallen into poverty as a result of some sort of disaster. The early American model of caring for these people emphasized hospitality; the giving of time and the opening of homes to those in need were the solution to poverty. The solution did not involve giving money and not every person received help. The early American model of helping the poor required “decent living”, hospitality was not

provided to those who lived unsavory lives. The Scots' Charitable Society, organized in 1684, stated that "no prophane or diselut person or openly scandalous shall have any part or portione herin."<sup>46</sup> The able-bodied in need were encouraged to work and would not be helped by charitable societies or individuals.

In the present day the standards used in order to determine who was worthy of help in Colonial America would be scoffed at. According to Olasky, "Cultures build systems of charity in the image of the God they worship, whether distant deist, bumbling bom vivant, or "whatever goes" gopher."<sup>47</sup> Colonial America built its charity on a theistic God of both justice and mercy, making the system, "hard-headed but warm-hearted."

The present American system does not hold a moral compass directed by a belief in the theistic God of justice and mercy, it does not hold fast to a single god but encourages the worship of any god or no god at all. As a result, some type of assistance is provided to anyone, regardless of behavior or actual need. This allows unrighteous and immoral people in society to reap benefits provided by those who pay taxes to the government without any say so by every tax-payer. This current system is a stark contrast to Colonial America, where giving assistance to those who were deserving and truly needed it, was a way to worship God.

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46. Olasky. 7.

47. Ibid. 8.



Unfortunately, the current American culture will most likely remain the norm. Polls show that the public is more accepting of socialist thought than Christian scripture. The Annual Report on U.S. Attitudes towards Socialism reported that 71% of the public agreed with the statement, “A nation will not survive morally or economically when so few have so much, while so many have so little.”, said by Bernie Sanders. Only 53% of the public agreed with, “If any would not work, neither should he eat.” From 2 Thessalonians 3:10 of the New Testament. Comparing the two statistics shows the public is beyond a time of holding one single religion as the basis for disciplined private charity driven by compassion rather than an impersonal political program.

More than likely, the America will hold true to what has become the norm for the near future, democratic socialism may at some point be America’s solution. There is however hope for change, perhaps the progression of government programs will result in greater unforeseen consequences an inefficiency. Perhaps private solutions to Americas socio-economic issue can be re-instituted if the public realizes the government is not the only answer. Olasky believe so, he claimed that. “we have thought ourselves into a social disaster – and we can think our way out of it. The key to the future, as always, is understanding the past.”<sup>48</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The American people wanted at political change. It resulted in the election of Donald Trump but also in a surge of support for the self-proclaimed democratic socialist,

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<sup>48</sup> 48. Olasky. 5.

Bernie Sanders. Both figures were considered “anti-establishment” but the support of Bernie Sanders was a peculiar phenomenon because the United States has typically held an attitude of disdain towards socialism.

Bernie Sanders was authentic in his ideals and legislation, and used rhetoric in his campaign to encourage the younger generations of the United States to support him in the primary elections as they were more accepting of socialism. They were supportive because they were less educated with the results of communism and socialism over the course of history. Democratic socialism may have more success in the future as these younger generations have more of a political influence.

There is a more practical and efficient solution to America’s socio-economic problems. This is evidenced in the private, compassionate charity of the early American culture. It is unlikely things will change back to that model of charity however because culture is no longer based on a single religion.