
Democratic Socialism

Videos:

“Democratic Socialism, explained”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmCAP6t_jvg

(6:04 minutes)

“5 Socialism Myths: Part 2”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0pWj4tKSdY>

(5:13 minutes)

Guide:

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said that it’s “not okay to put donors before your community.” What did she mean by this?
3. Ben Powell said: “If you’re dependent on the state for your livelihood, you lose your ability to use your voice to oppose them because you can be punished.” What did he mean by this?
4. Samuel Goldman said that the basic principle of democratic socialism is that “political equality is impossible without some degree of economic equality.” What did he mean by this? Is this principle correct? Why/Why not?
5. Ben Powell said that America does have some “socialized” industries, like the post office, roads, and the DMV. What have your experiences been with these industries? Have they been positive or negative?
6. Samuel Goldman said that in America, the aim of socialists is not to replace capitalism, but to restrain it. Do you think this is a good compromise between more extreme forms of socialism and traditional capitalism? Why/Why not?
7. The Stossel video explains that while Sweden was once socialist, it didn’t work, so the country moved away from it. Denmark’s prime minister stated that his country “is a market economy.” Before watching this video, had you heard people claim that Sweden and Denmark were socialist?
8. Christine Riddiough said that the Democratic Socialists of America believe that “in a modern, moral, wealthy society, no American should be too poor to live.” Is this belief

unique to democratic socialism? Is democratic socialism a good way to achieve this goal?

Why/Why not?

9. Ben Powell argued that while socialism and fascism are different, they both take autonomy away from average citizens. What did he mean by this?
10. Samuel Goldman said that most people who call themselves socialists have no memory of the Soviet Union or China's orthodox Marx phase. Do you consider yourself aware of the Soviet Union or China's socialist histories? Have they impacted your views of socialism?
11. Ben Powell said that when he met with socialists, the problems they pointed out were the product of bad government. Can more government be the solution to existing government problems? Why/Why not?
12. Samuel Goldman calls it a "distinctively American rhetorical trick" to denounce any form of social welfare provision as socialism. Do you think the word "socialism" is used inaccurately? Is it used too often? Why/Why not?
13. Ben Powell said that in the last 20 years, more humans have escaped extreme poverty than in any other time in human history. Before watching this video, would you have guessed that extreme poverty was getting better or worse?
14. Both videos argue that the word "socialism" is used inaccurately, by politicians on the right and the left. Do you think there are ulterior motives behind labeling something "socialism"? What might they be?
15. In the Stossel video, Ben Powell said "it's hard to exercise political freedom if you don't have economic freedoms." In the ThinkProgress video, Samuel Goldman said "political equality is impossible without some degree of economic equality." In what ways are these statements in opposition? In what ways are they in agreement?
16. Both videos show concerns for average citizens and the impoverished. Do you think these two opposing viewpoints have common ground?
17. After watching these videos, do you think democratic socialism is significantly different from traditional socialism? Why/Why not?
18. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
19. Did you have an opinion of democratic socialism before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from either video that affects your views of the debate over democratic socialism?
20. What could you learn about democratic socialism that might affect your view of this debate?
21. What else would you like to learn about democratic socialism?