



## **Socialism, even democratic socialism, is quite different from progressivism**

Don Smith  
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Bernie Sanders calls himself a democratic socialist. So does Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who recently won the Democratic primary in New York's 14th congressional district, defeating incumbent Democratic Caucus Chair Joe Crowley in a major upset victory. The odd thing is: are they really democratic socialists? Do they even know what democratic socialism is? There is evidence that they aren't and don't. Noam Chomsky and Cornel West say that Sanders is a social democrat, not a democratic socialist. They call him a New Dealer.

(Chomsky points out that Dwight Eisenhower -- who said that anyone who questioned the New Deal doesn't belong in the political system -- would be called a raging leftist in the current extreme political climate.)

Professor Frances Fox Piven, the honorary chairperson of the official Democratic Socialists of America coalition, says Sanders "does not quite meet the definition of the term," calling him a New Deal Democrat." Marian Tupy, of the libertarian Cato Institute, writes in *The Atlantic*: "Bernie Sanders is not a socialist, but a social democrat." Tupy writes:

Considering the negative connotations of "socialism" in America, it is a bit of a puzzle why Sanders insists on using that word. It would be much less contentious and more correct if he gave his worldview its proper name: not "democratic socialism," which implies socialism brought about through a vote, but social democracy. I wholeheartedly agree.

A *New Yorker* article on Ocasio-Cortez suggests that she calls herself a democratic socialist not because of any deep ideological commitment. Her self-appellation has "less to do with theory or ideology than with the simple fact that she kept seeing members at rallies for every cause she cares about, from the Hurricane Maria rescue effort to Black Lives Matter. She defines her politics as a struggle for 'social, economic, and racial dignity.'" That doesn't sound like socialism to me.

Democratic socialism is a political philosophy that advocates political democracy alongside social ownership of the means of production[1] with an emphasis on self-management and/or democratic management of economic institutions within market socialism or decentralized and

participatory planned economy.[2] Democratic socialists hold that capitalism is inherently incompatible with the democratic values of liberty, equality and solidarity; and that these ideals can only be achieved through the realization of a socialist society. Democratic socialism can be supportive of either revolutionary or reformist politics as a means to establish socialism.[3] So, democratic socialism is still a form of socialism. Adherents want social ownership of the means of production. Such ideology is out of the mainstream in America, and adherents are susceptible to criticism and ridicule.

Most progressives are social democrats: they are not completely opposed to private wealth and corporations. They just want private wealth to be adequately taxed, regulated, and counter-balanced by a robust social safety net, for the sake of the common good. Think FDR, Robert Kennedy, and Dennis Kucinich, not Eugene Debs. Think the mixed Nordic model, not democratic socialism.

Social democracy is apparently the position of Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez, and, I'm sure it's the position of most of the millions of followers of Sanders. Words matter. I have no problem with people who are really socialists calling themselves socialists. I do have a problem with sloppy language that can harm the Left.

For heaven's sake, and for the sake of the progressive movement, Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez should call themselves what they are: social democrats!