

# What is Ethical Socialism?

Forming the Ethical Socialist Caucus

# Defining the Term

*Ethical socialism* refers to the view which holds that one ought to be a socialist because human needs can only be met when the people democratically control the means of production.

- Ethical socialists think we ought to live under socialism but socialism is not inevitable.
- Ethical socialists are critical of inflexible political thought.
- Ethical socialism has often been interrelated with religious socialism.
- The case for socialism lies not in economic, efficiency, materialist, or rationalist arguments, but as a moral imperative

# Clarifications

- We do not think ethical socialism is incompatible with Marxism
  - We welcome Marxist comrades
- We do not think anyone who does not describe themselves as an ethical socialist is therefore “unethical”
  - The term is borrowed from a historical tradition that gave ethics a central role
- Although we want to learn from the history of ethical socialism, we want to avoid the mistakes of past socialists (ethical socialists included)

# Our Principles

## 1. An Inclusive DSA

- a. Democratic socialists must take responsibility for welcoming comrades of different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives

## 2. Effective Organizers and Communicators

- a. Democratic socialists must be able to communicate with non-socialists in order to organize them around common goals

## 3. Building Democracy and Democratic *praxis*

# Towards an Inclusive DSA

- Adopting an intersectional perspective which acknowledges that racism, sexism, ableism, and other forms of structural oppression have their own reality independent of directly economic concerns
- Avoiding “dogmatism” and ideological inflexibility
  - I have tried to do this in my presentation
- Avoiding factionalism by facilitating democratic practices

# Training Effective Organizers

*Because* members of the working class are frequently not class conscious, and...

*Because* explicitly Marxist theories are often inaccessible to workers who do not have a background in socialism and/or labor organizations:

Ethical Socialists hold that we must speak to workers in accessible terms, appealing to their immediately felt values and needs.

“Meet people where they are” is a practical principle for good organizing

# Building Democracy and Democratic *praxis*

- This is something we must do both ‘internally’ and ‘externally’
- Ethical socialists aim to train and develop these skills

## Internally:

- We must each take responsibility for maintaining safe, inclusive spaces
- We must respect both the spirit and letter of the law in DSA
- We must promote the success of comrades with whom we disagree to build a diverse mass movement, giving practical evidence of our good faith
- We must always focus on working through disagreements on our strategies toward shared goals
  - This means avoiding *ad hominem* arguments

# Break

- Are these good values for a new caucus?
- Are we missing anything?

Turning to our external goal of democracy, economic and beyond:



# What are the sources of income under capitalism?

Labor income (working)

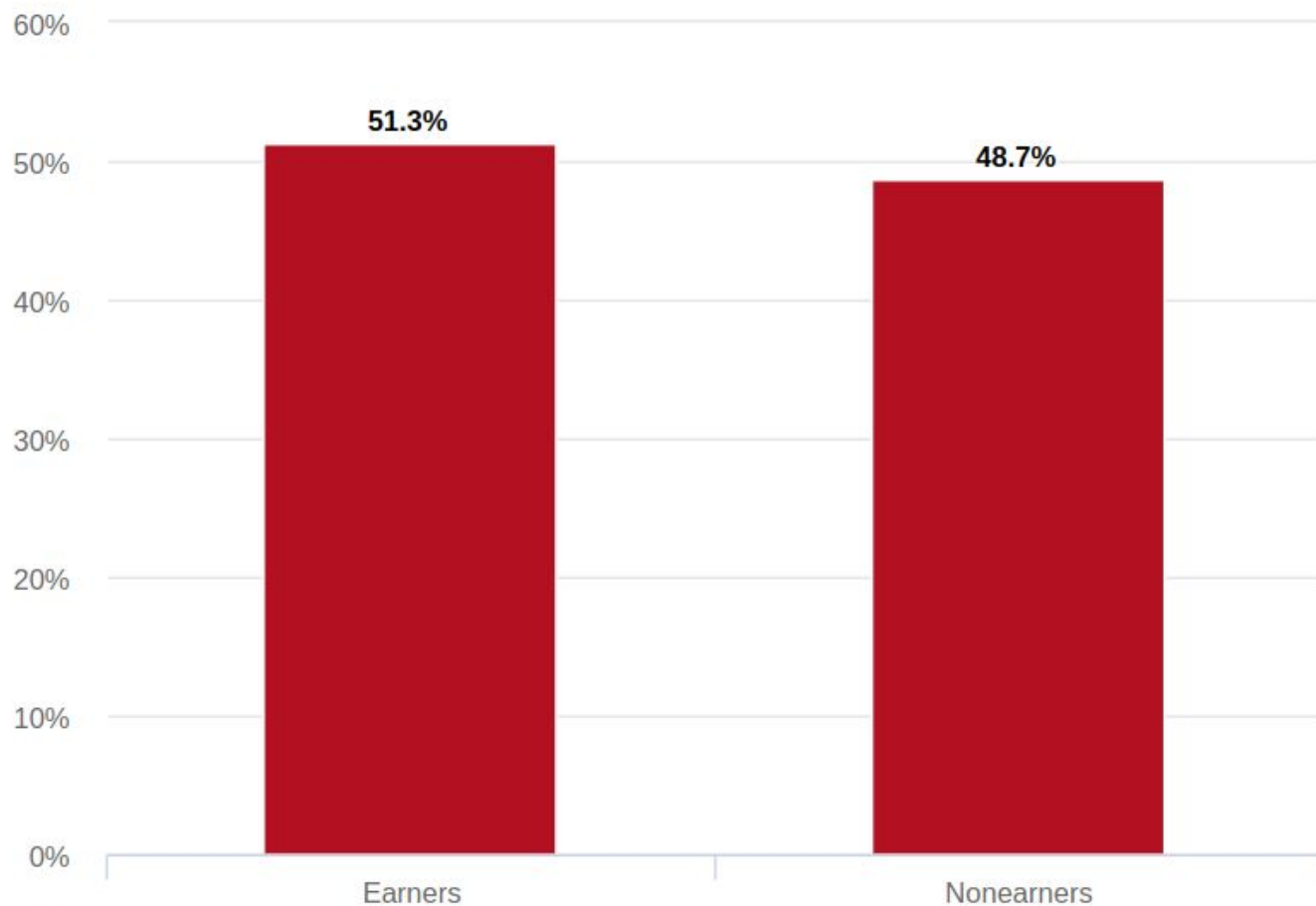
Capital income (ownership of assets like stocks, bonds, real estate)

If you do not own capital and you do not work, you have no income.

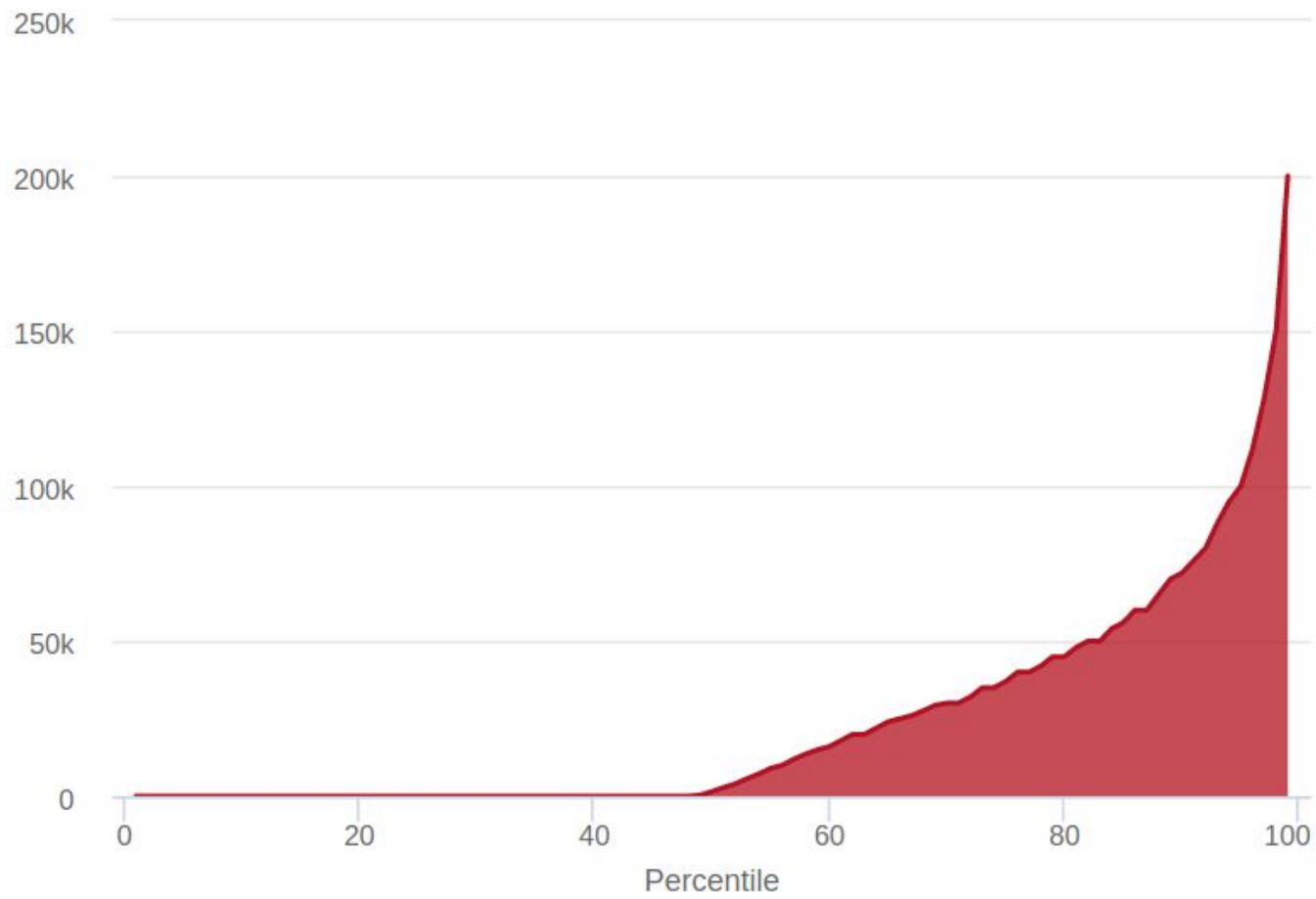
Capitalist governments create welfare states to support people without market income (with varying levels of generosity)

Q: What percentage of Americans have zero labor or capital income?

## Share of Population Who Are Earners and Nonearners (2016)

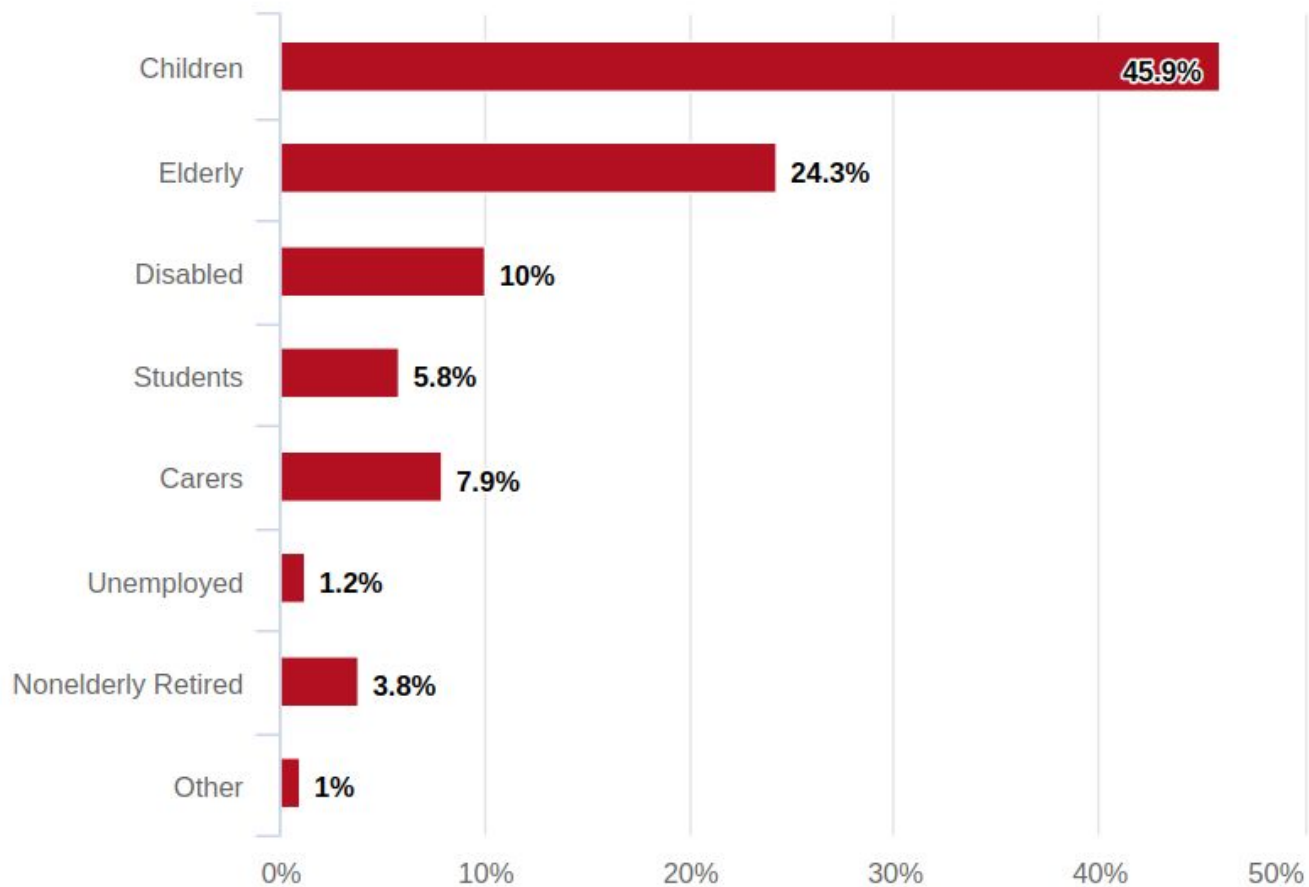


Personal Earnings by Percentile of Entire Population (2016)



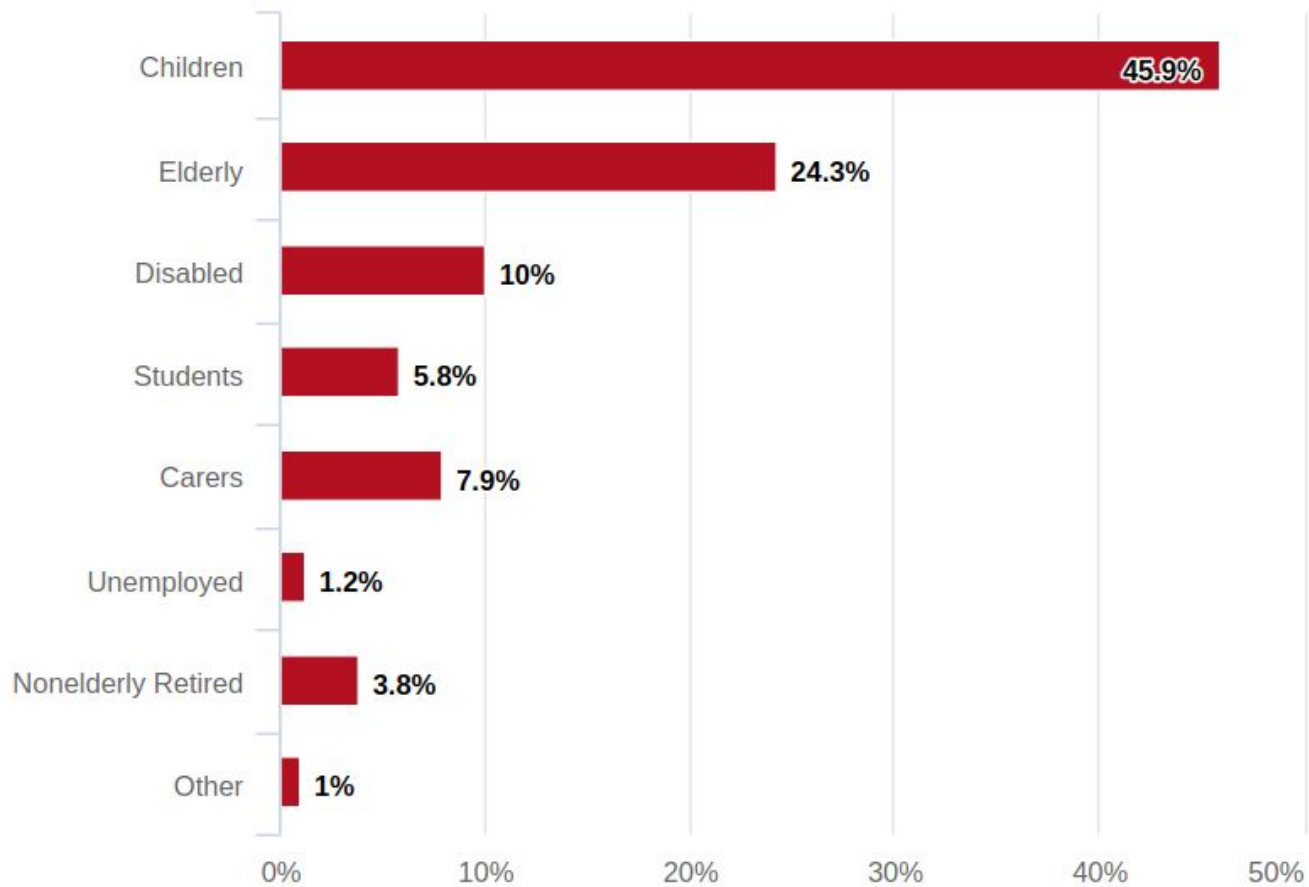
Q: Who are all these people  
with zero labor or capital  
income?

## Who Are the Nonearners? (2016)



94% of people with no income cannot or should not work. 1% cannot find work.

## Who Are the Nonearners? (2016)





# Ethical socialism

Workers must have decisive control over their working conditions.

But!

A form of socialism that marginalizes non-earners in economic democracy will systematically perpetuate ageism, ableism, child poverty, and will undervalue care work.

DSA Ethical Socialist Caucus was founded in part because there was no caucus highlighting this as a problem.

# Expanding Socialist Analysis and Research

- We believe that new information on policy and theory helps organizers in DSA develop better praxis
- What topics would you like to see ethical socialists research?
- What *shouldn't* we research?

# Sources

Authors: Kyrie Larcher, Chris Krco, Tom Hansberger, Ian Gunther, Nick Cook

Data was from the Census Bureau: Annual Social and Economic Supplement of the Current Population Survey

All graphs reproduced from:

Matt Bruenig (2017). Who was Poor in 2016 and Why our System Keeps Failing Them. People's Policy Project.

<https://www.peoplespolicyproject.org/2017/09/12/who-was-in-poverty-in-2016/>

# Join the Ethical Socialist Caucus

If you identify as ethical socialist and would like to be involved, write down your email and chapter on my sign in sheet.

- We want to include you in the development and adoption of our formal platform

**[info@ethicalsocialism.org](mailto:info@ethicalsocialism.org)**

Slides are posted to [ethicalsocialism.org](http://ethicalsocialism.org)

# Join the caucus - wishlist

Let me know if you have something to contribute. A partial wish list:

Non-Marxist socialism is very underdeveloped. We would like to be a resource for understanding non-Marxist socialist thinkers and movements.

- We are particularly interested in learning more about non-Western socialism
- Some ethical socialists have also been important theologians. We would like to learn more about ethical socialists who found their way to ethical socialism through other religions

Web design, graphic design, audio/visual educational resources