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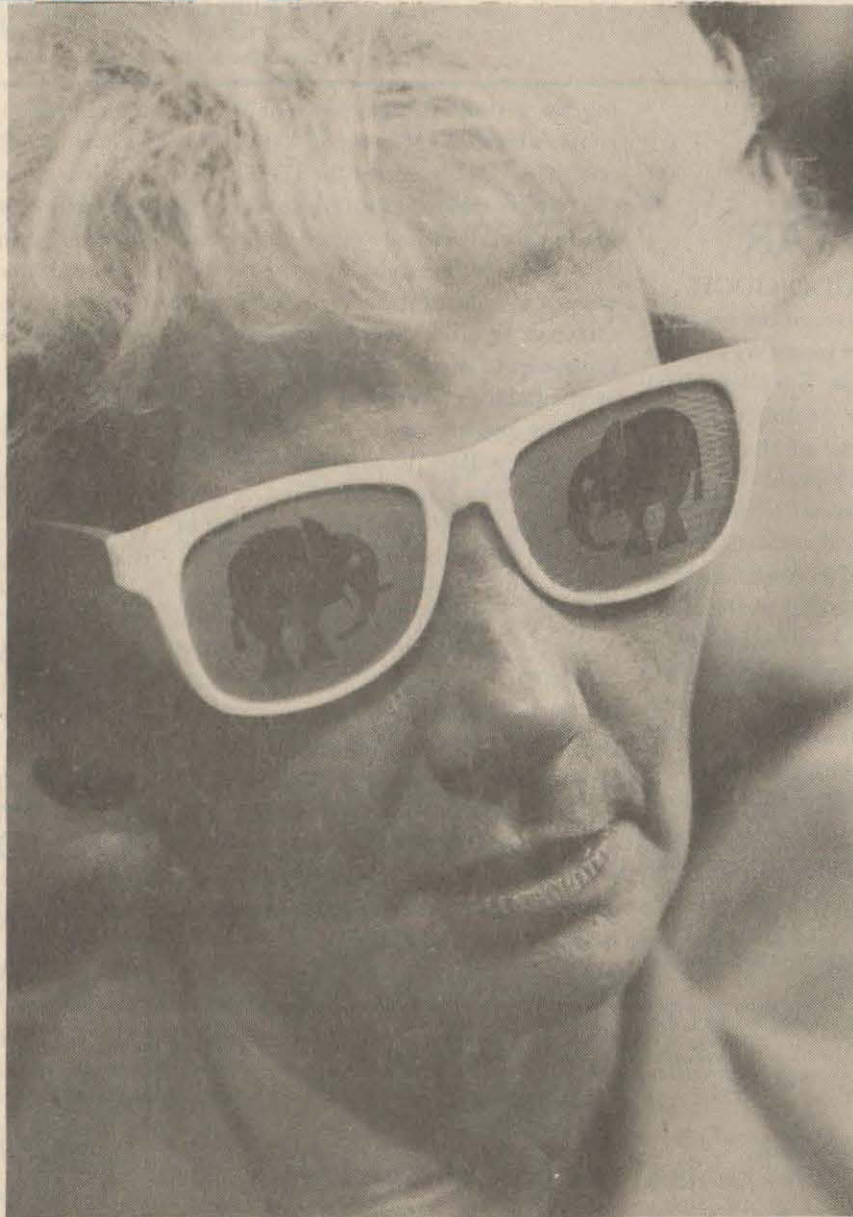
# DEMOCRATIC Left



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Newt World Order  
The State of the Union 1995

# Inside Democratic Left

THE STATE OF THE UNION 1995

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## EDITORIAL

### FACING THE NEW YEAR

BY CHRISTINE RIDDIOUGH

As you read this, two of the meanest men in U.S. politics are presiding over the new Congress. House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole are in charge of the first all-GOP Congress in forty years.

Sixteen blocks down Pennsylvania Avenue, an ineffectual President Clinton is trying to regain the confidence of American voters by moving to the right. Clinton is listening too hard to the Democratic Leadership Council and other "new Democrats" who suggest that the elections reflect a simple desire on the part of voters (particularly those "angry white men" we've been hearing so much about) for less government.

How can we as democratic socialists respond to the elections? There are two things we need to do:

» work with other groups to fight the Republican agenda, and

» mobilize grass roots activists for a long-term struggle to build a visible and viable democratic left in the U.S.

#### Fighting the GOP Contract

The GOP Contract With America is an outrageous Republican wish list that takes from the poor and gives to the rich. It proposes to pass a balanced budget amendment at the same time as taxes are lowered and military spending is increased.

The Contract proposes to cut spend-

ing by getting the government out of people's lives and shoring up "family values." One high priority for the GOP is their welfare reform plan, encapsulated in the so-called Personal Responsibility Act. The act is a direct assault on the right of women to control their own sexuality; to establish families free of abusive relations; and to survive outside of the patriarchal families favored by the right.

Key provisions of the act include denial of welfare to unmarried women under 18 who have children out of wedlock, ineligibility of the child born out of wedlock for cash assistance for the entirety of his or her life, and permanent ineligibility for AFDC for anyone who has received aid for 60 months. The bill would also provide money for Newt Gingrich's orphanages, but not for abortions. It would deny assistance to *legal* immigrants.

Fighting this "reform" will be a key priority for DSA. In the coming months we'll be working in coalition with other groups to stop this Draconian measure. Right now the chances of stopping its passage do not look good, but progressives cannot simply cave in to the right. Win or lose, mobilizing grass roots activists will be crucial.

#### Building a Visible and Viable Democratic Left

While our chances to win in the next two years may be slight, we can only improve them by mobilizing the grass roots. For too long organizations in Washington have relied on insider lobbyists to carry their message to Congress, whether that message is one of gay and

lesbian rights, environmental protection, or cuts in military spending.

It's clear that that strategy hasn't worked. When it comes to lobbyists, we're outgunned by the corporations and moneyed interests. Our real strength lies in our ability to mobilize people around values of equality, justice and democracy.

But getting back to the grass roots doesn't mean simply getting more people to write more letters—it means inspiring a vision and providing leadership to a movement. That's been missing for some time. In fact, in the midst of movements that seek to collaborate with corporations and cooperate with business executives, DSA is one of the few groups left that has a vision of a different kind of society. Our task now is to make that vision available and inspiring to people. **DL**

Christine Riddiough is a Vice Chair of DSA.

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# No-Paradigm Democrats

## Liberalism in Collapse, Republicans in Power

BY HAROLD MEYERSON

This month's elections should have come as no surprise. They provided proof positive that the liberal epoch has collapsed—but then, it had been rotting for years. In Congress, much of the right's agenda had been blocked not by liberal majorities but by venerable chairmen bottling up measures in committee. In the districts over the past 15 years, the Democrats had increasingly been winning re-election less through the mobilization of people than through the mobilization of PACs. When, this November, some of the most important Democrats in the land actually had to scare up some sentient beings to pound the pavement, they found there was no one to turn to. At the base, the Democratic Party had become as hollow and dry as one of T.S. Eliot's spiritual landscapes.

### I. Democrats Ain't Got No Class

Would that the decay of their base were the Democrats' foremost problem. The real death sentence for an enduring Democratic majority is more elemental and more intractable: *They can't deliver prosperity anymore.* The economy is getting stronger, but income growth is concentrated entirely within the wealthiest 20 percent—that is, within a core Republican constituency. Outside that core, reports of the recovery seem greatly exaggerated. In the boom year of 1993, the aver-

age household's income fell by \$312. Full-time manufacturing jobs declined by 660,000, overtime grew so pervasive that the work week stretched longer than at any point since World War II, downsizing continued, wages were flat. Historically, Democrats' *raison d'être* is to alleviate conditions like these. When they don't, election days take unpleasant turns.

So there's good news—sort of—and bad news coming out of the election returns. The good news, a close reading of the exit polls suggests, is that voters weren't so much rushing to endorse the Republican Contract With America, or even to repudiate all government, as they were rejecting the Democrats' (and Bill Clinton's) stewardship of the economy. The bad news is that there's no plausible fast fix for the Democrats' stewardship of the economy. The notion of rebuilding an enduring Democratic (or any center-left) majority—*regardless* of whether the party moves discreetly right or boldly left or just paddles along in the middle—is, for the foreseeable future, utter fantasy.

Let's begin with the good news. (The bad, if I'm right, is too ghastly to contemplate quickly—or sober.) It was, to be sure, a very conservative electorate that turned out to make Newt Gingrich speaker: conservatives made up 37 percent of the voters in the networks' exit polling, up from 30



Mark Ludak/Impact Visuals

At a demonstration of unemployed workers in New York City.

was a steady 47-to-49 percent. This November, that figure plummeted to 37 percent, with the fall sharpest among the kind of blue-collar workers who had been the very foundation of the New Deal coalition. Now, deindustrialized and downsized out of secure, adequately paying jobs, they have turned their ire on blacks, Latinos, and other groups who remain aligned with the Democrats, and on the Democrats themselves.

Those are not the only objects of their ire. In the summer of '93, the center-right Democratic Leadership Council commissioned a poll of Perot voters—disproportionately downwardly mobile males—which found that they were also seething at corporations and overwhelmingly opposing NAFTA. They were even keeping

one eye cocked for any Clinton program—like more affordable college loans or greater health security—that might potentially benefit them.

percent just two years ago. Gun owners, radio-talk-show listeners, and followers of the religious right were all amply represented. It was a more anti-government electorate than it was two years ago, too: the percentage saying government was doing too much rose by 15 points.

And yet, even this electorate wasn't voting to dismantle the New Deal; by a margin of 49 percent to 40 percent, they actually preferred "current government economic policies" to those of Ronald Reagan. What lurked behind the vote was still that old it's-the-economy-stupid mentality: three out of five of the voters who thought the economy was getting better voted Democratic; three out of five of the voters who thought it was getting worse voted Republican. Unfortunately for the Democrats, 74 percent of the voters said they were either no better—or worse—off than

one eye cocked for any Clinton program—like more affordable college loans or greater health security—that might potentially benefit them.

Winning these voters back to the Democratic column had been the core of Clinton's strategy. Increasingly, middle-class whites had viewed the Democrats as the party that taxed them to fund programs for somebody else—for racial minorities, welfare recipients, immigrants. Clinton's idea was to reinvent universal programs that helped the white middle class, too: college loans, job retraining, and, above all, national health. But he couldn't deliver. Job retraining and an ambitious National Service Corps (where you could repay college loans through two years of community service) were sacrificed to the gods of deficit reduction. National health—whose two chief particulars, universal coverage and employer-mandated financing, retained their popularity despite an immense campaign against the program—was killed in Congress.

And when Clinton couldn't deliver, when he declined to make common cause with these voters on NAFTA, what remained of his program? A liberalism stripped of any class component, a liberalism that seemed only to be advancing the interests of gays in the military and welfare mothers and illegal aliens. By their sins of omission and commission both, the Democrats had clearly become the enemy's party. They had furled the banner of class, and white working- and middle-class voters, particularly males, weren't exactly flocking to the rainbow banners of race and

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**A**fter years of mobilizing PACs instead of people, the Democratic Party has become as hollow and dry at the base as one of T.S. Eliot's spiritual landscapes.

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they had been two years ago.

Indeed, the most downwardly mobile economically are the most rightwardly mobile politically. In the midst of a general crisis, the Democrats have a particular crisis with white men—a group that constitutes a mere 40 percent of the electorate. From 1986 through 1992, the rate of white male support for congressional candidates

gender.

Still, there remains one time-tested way to break white working-class voters out of their own identity politics—unions. This November's vote merely confirms that union membership remains the best way to alter voting patterns in a Democratic direction. According to the network exit polls, voters from union households went Democratic by a 61 percent to 37 percent margin, while voters from nonunion households were going Republican, 53 to 47. Among white males, the gap was even greater: union members going 52 percent to 48 percent Democratic; nonunion going 66 to 34 Republican.

The problem isn't, as is frequently alleged, the waning allegiance of members to the world-view of their unions. It's just the waning number of members. In 1984, voters from union households constituted 26 percent of the electorate. In the Dukakis-Bush race four years later, the figures held steady at 25 percent. Two years ago, just 19 percent of the voters in the Clinton-Bush contest were union, and this November the figure fell to 14 percent: *in one decade, paralleling the drop in union membership, union-household members had been almost cut in half as a percentage of an electorate that itself was shrinking.*

Throughout the decade, though, the Democrats have, with some exceptions, reacted with indifference to the decimation of this key constituency, whose decline is in considerable part a function of closable loopholes in labor law. It's hard to imagine Newt Gingrich reacting with similar equanimity if an assault were waged on such right-wing redoubts as the National Rifle Association, the Christian Coalition, or talk-radio broadcasters.

So it's not merely that the Democrats are having trouble reinventing middle-class prosperity. They've also left their base undefended—at the very moment when the Republicans are picking that base apart.

## II. Republicans in Power

It's one thing for Republicans to be masters of politics in an age of insecurity, quite another to be masters of governance. The ever unusual Jack Kemp has complained that the party's Contract With America "has no urban policy...to reach out to the underclass." But the Republicans hardly need to reach out to the underclass: the underclass



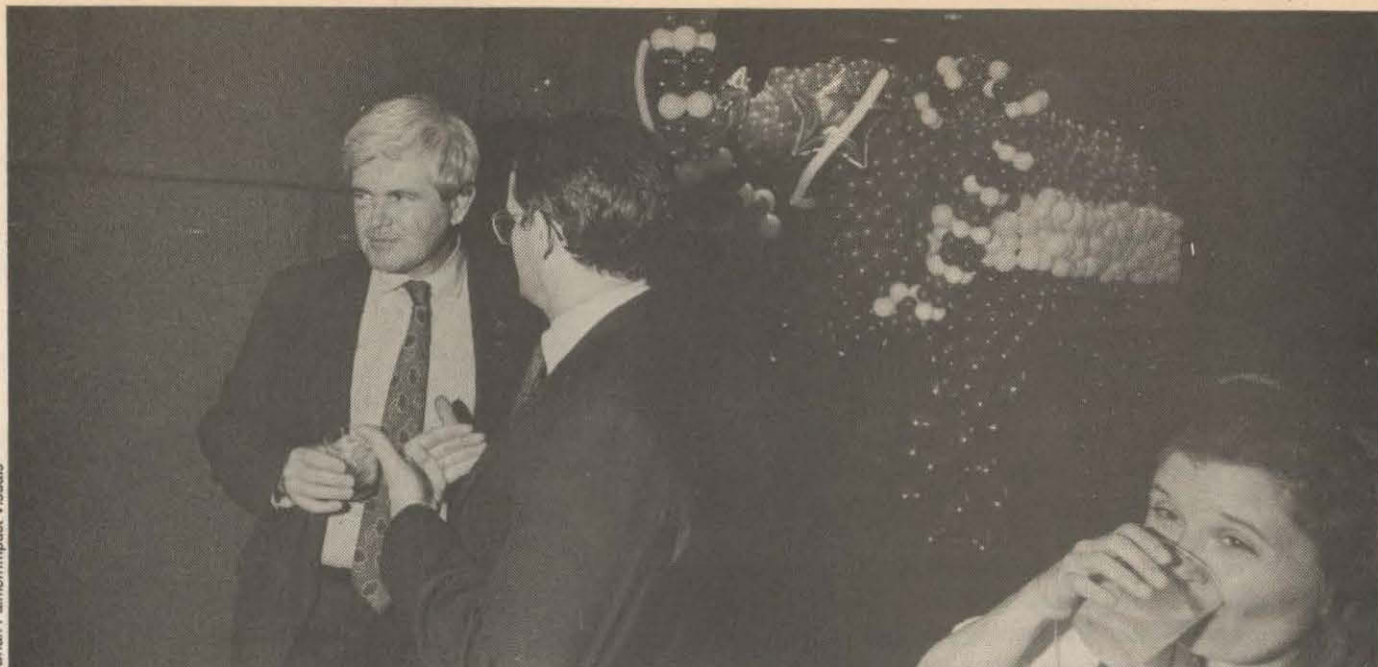
Jim West/Impact Visuals

functions as scapegoat in their electoral calculus. The truly damaging omission from the Contract is any language about stagnating wages and incomes—an issue the Republicans can elide for only so long. For the war on welfare and immigrants and runaway government will do nothing about the downward mobility or running-in-place that most Americans are experiencing. The war on crime won't make the cities, or the suburbs, one whit safer if the number of poor people continues to explode, much less if the GOP successfully removes restrictions on guns.

But the Democrats can't simply rely on Republican sins of omission to return them to power; they need some sins of commission, too. Some points on the GOP agenda may actually exacerbate Americans' feelings of insecurity. Gingrich,

**NAFTA was a defining issue for the Clinton presidency.**

Brian Palmer/Impact Visuals



A master of politics, yes—but also a master of governance?

after all, has committed himself to making us the most competitive nation in the world. One recent study already listed us No. 1 on an international index of competitiveness, which means that American employers have unparalleled freedom to move their employees around (or lose them entirely). A Republican commitment to increase this kind of competitiveness may not prove wildly popular.

Consider, for instance, that the Labor Policy Association—a group of 225 of the *Fortune* 500 corporations—views the incoming Congress as a marvelous opportunity to loosen the laws on overtime, something it's been unable to do for these forty years. More broadly, if the Republicans want to read their vote as a mandate for corporate deregulation, they're putting themselves at some risk. The Philip Morris PAC may have helped dislodge Henry Waxman as chair of the Health and Environment Subcommittee and replaced him with their Republican lap dog, Thomas Bliley—whose Richmond, Virginia district is home to Philip Morris. But it's hard to argue that letting up on the tobacco industry is high on the voters' to-do list when Californians have just rejected by a 69-31 margin Philip Morris' initiative to weaken anti-smoking ordinances.

Cutbacks in government programs is another area where the right may overplay its hand. There are really two separate constituencies for cutbacks. Beyond question, there is immense support for cutting back spending on *them*—welfare recipients and immigrants. But only among various business, journalistic and other opinion-leader

elites do we find major support for cutting back spending on *us*—for clamping down on the entitlement spending of Social Security and Medicare. (And that may be because the opinion leaders are so rich they're effectively exempted from the consequences of these cuts—our *us* is their *them*.)

Alas for the Republicans, all the serious economies are to be found in the major entitlement programs, and while Social Security is politically untouchable, the Republicans are making serious noises about going after Medicare—not frontally, but through spending caps, means-testing, the balanced-budget amendment and the like. That may constitute a back door to revive some portion of health reform, for the only two ways to get this part of federal spending under control are either Medicare cuts or universal health insurance with controls. I'm not suggesting the administration should reprint Ira Magaziner's epic blueprint. I *am* saying there are some points to be scored here.

The most questionable plank in Gingrich's platform is a return to supply-side economics, which the exit polls showed Americans explicitly rejecting even in comparison to the dread Clintonomics. Nonetheless, the Republicans are steering us back to those feckless days of throwing money at the rich and the Defense Department. Gingrich & Co. are even talking about making Ronald Reagan's budget director, James Miller, head of the Congressional Budget Office. (By the way, since Miller and the whole supply-side gang

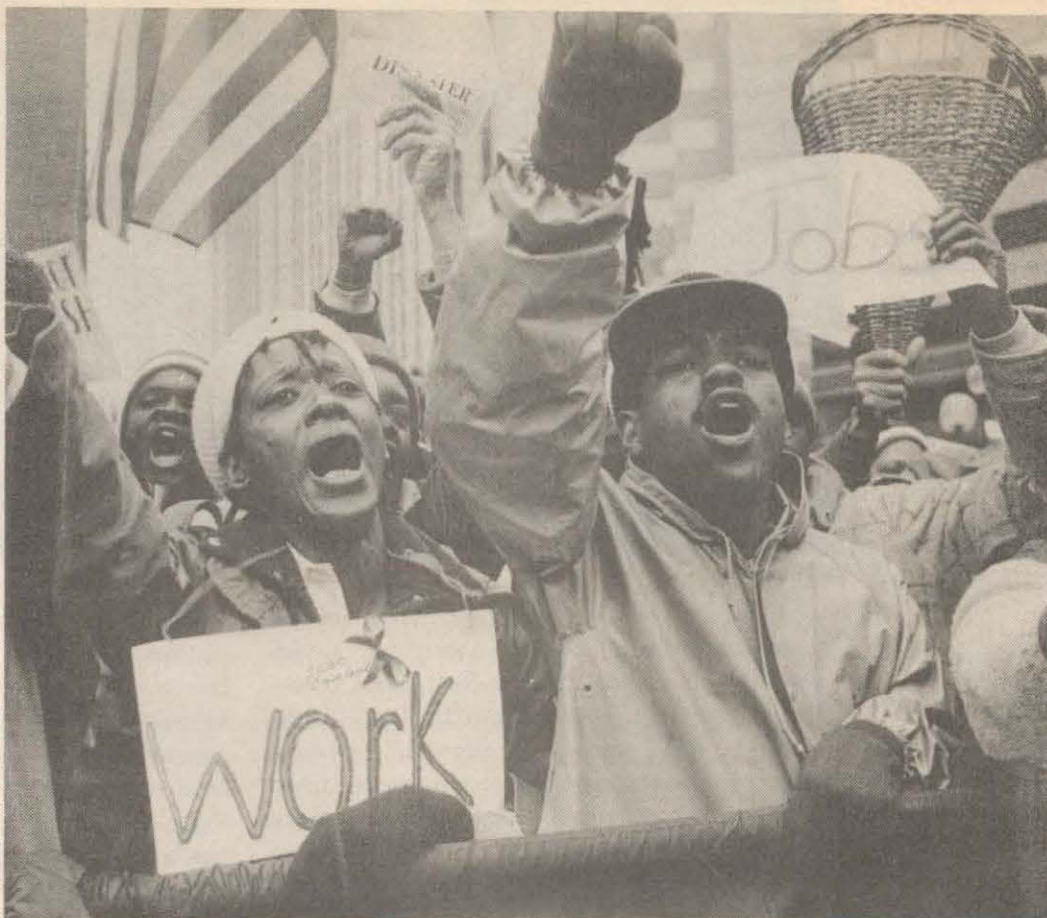
are proven budget-busters, why isn't the bond market shrieking with alarm, as it did for the six months immediately following Clinton's election, until he abandoned virtually all his investment initiatives in favor of deficit reduction? Could it be that the bond traders aren't simply creatures of dollars and cents, that they actually let their ultraright politics guide their steely, market-oriented decisions? Just wondering.)

Defense increases are even trickier to justify. Keep in mind, most Republicans oppose the kinds of intervention that increasingly characterize the post-Cold War world: Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia. They're going to find themselves arguing both for neo-isolationism and higher military budgets; the anthem of their new-age army will be "We're Here Because We're Here."

The Clinton administration is getting abundant advice on how to deal with the Gingrich Contract. My suggestion—in the grand tradition of Wee Willie Keeler's adage "Hit 'em where they ain't"—is to put at least some emphasis on its omissions, on its silence on the question of the declining pre-tax incomes of American families. That means renewed attention to issues of wages and hours and mandating management to set aside funds for training. It means working with overseas allies and with international organizations on international labor standards. It means a new emphasis in trade agreements on setting pay standards and guaranteeing worker rights. The Republicans won't go along with any of this, but so much the better. If Clinton wants to wage a Trumanesque attack on a do-nothing Congress, the economic security issue is where he should begin.

### III. If You Liked The McKinley Era, You'll Love This

I've heard two discussions in this campaign season that summarize the broad economic visions of the two parties, and they're cumula-



Phil van LierImpact Visuals

tively disquieting.

For all the rhetoric of the Gingrichites, it's been hard to get a coherent statement of their view of how America is to regain its prosperity. Gingrich himself sounds like Alvin Toffler recorded at 33 and played at 78. The most authoritative Republican economic vision I've encountered came from *Wall Street Journal* editorial-page flugelman John Fund, who suggested on a post-election radio talk show that the nation's govern-

**A demonstration  
against welfare  
cuts in  
Columbus, Ohio.**

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**A**merican employers have unparalleled freedom to move their employees around (or lose them entirely). A Republican commitment to increase this kind of competitiveness may not prove wildly popular.

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ment had first been enlarged in response to a national emergency in 1917 and never yet reduced, and that only now had the era of emergencies and enlarged governments at long last come to an end. We should return to the natural order of things, he adjured, with the economy freed to resume its pre-1917 course, and with its rough

June 1994:  
Striking workers  
are pepper-gassed  
in Decatur, Illinois.  
Defending  
workers' rights  
internationally will  
be a central task  
for the left during  
the new  
political era.

Jim West/Impact Visuals



edges smoothed out by private charity.

The most eloquent liberal counternarrative came from Mario Cuomo, whose stump speech was often an apologia for the New Deal Order—how government provision for schools and scholarships, public works and affordable housing, retirement assistance and unemployment aid, had taken a country of great but maldistributed wealth and made it into the world's first middle-class-majority nation. Cuomo, of course, was not only more eloquent than Fund. He was also right. The problem with pre-1917 America is that the vast majority of Americans were poor. (Fund, no doubt, went through one of those multicultural history curricula and never learned the rudiments of mainstream American history, which is why he is an editor of the *Journal* editorial page.) The great achievement of post-World War II America, followed by post-World War II Europe, was to use

for decades to come (though fleeting Democratic administrations as the Republicans screw up are a distinct possibility). Ironically, what the Democrats need to restore prosperity is—I shudder even to write it—bigger government. That doesn't mean more bureaucracies at home. It means the kind of transnational institutions that stabilize the global economy and distribute its wealth much as the national institutions did within the national economies of the United States and Western Europe. But building global Keynesianism may well be the work of several generations.

So—does all this mean we're in the midst of a Republican realignment? Is this a period like the one between 1896 and 1932, when the Republicans promoted the growth of national corporations, when maldistributed wealth seemed the natural order of things and the electorate was vigilantly policed to make sure not too many poor people could vote? Are we now to have the Toffler-Gingrich replay of the McKinley age, with the GOP this time as the guarantor of the New Age Maldistribution of Wealth, and manipulating public resentment at the outsiders among us?

It's a distinct possibility. So is an oscillation between the two parties. So is the creation of new parties and extra-party movements demanding national purity in the absence of national prosperity. Welcome to the era of decline without quick-fix—or even midrange plausible solution. Don't believe the flacks; we're not awash in New Paradigms. No Paradigms would be more like it. **DL**

*Harold Meyerson is a Vice Chair of DSA and executive editor of LA Weekly, in which a different version of this essay first appeared.*

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**D**efenses of the New Deal era are correct, but they do not tell us what to do now that the globalized economy has radically transformed the playing field.

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the tools of the mixed economy to create something new in human history—mass prosperity.

And what is disquieting is that neither Fund's narrative nor Cuomo's tells us what to do now. Fund merely offers a prescription for poverty, Cuomo a nostalgic look back at an era of politically engineered national affluence that a globalized economy has sent reeling into history.

That's the bad news: why the Democrats can't deliver prosperity anymore, why an enduring Democratic majority is an unlikely prospect



# The California Health Care Massacre

## Lessons from the Defeat of Proposition 186

BY MICHAEL LIGHTY

In the aftermath of the overwhelming election defeat (73 to 27 percent) for California's single payer health care initiative, Proposition 186, it is easy to find failures: not enough money for media ads, not enough public mobilization, a coalition that was not multiracial, plus a host of other human failings. Steve Tarzynski, the long-time Los Angeles activist who chairs DSA's Health Care Task Force, summed up these failings as "monumental ineptitude and a profound lack of political judgment."

On the other hand, in the context of the Republican sweep, the defeat of Proposition 186 may tell us that no matter what the campaign did, a program associated with "big government" as easily as is single payer did not stand a chance of electoral success in the media-driven politics of California. Despite the "remarkable job of grassroots organizing," according to California Nurses Association Government Relations Director Beth Capell, the campaign could not overcome "the anti-government tide." Sadly, Proposition 186 was never close enough in the polls for campaign strategy to make a difference.

For an initiative to win in California requires an emotional pull that few issues can generate. Some campaign strategists looked to the quick upset victory of the 1988 auto insurance reform measure, Proposition 103, as a model. But this analogy was flawed: in 1988 nearly every voter paid for auto insurance, was angry, and wanted relief. Similarly for the success of 1978's Proposi-

tion 13 among homeowners, a huge chunk of the electorate: every single homeowner pays property taxes, and most were eager to see them reduced. But health insurance is different: over 80 percent of the population, and a greater percentage of the electorate, has health insurance mostly paid for by someone else. Whereas most voters pay a monthly bill for auto insurance (whether they need it or not), only about 10 percent of the population has a significant experience with the health care industry each year, and only then do they pay significant out-of-pocket costs. Though many of the insured were worried and wanted some change, health reform, even health security, did not become the defining issue of the election.

Instead, Proposition 187, the initiative that restricts undocumented workers' access to public services and turns many social service providers into INS enforcers, was on the minds of seemingly everyone. Governor Wilson featured racist images of illegal immigrants in his television spots, the local news covered student walk-outs, and candidates' positions on 187 became front-page news. Although there was no paid TV blitz by either side, "illegal immigration" was the defining emotional issue of the election. Had Proposition 186 generated that level of attention and debate, then the 103-type victory 186 campaign strategists thought possible would have been within reach.

Even then, there is a political reality of California politics little understood outside the state: the votes are in the south. 186 staffer and DSA



Jerome Friar/Impact Visuals

The Gray Panthers rally for single payer.

member Tom Gallagher points out that the proposition received as many votes in conservative Orange County, where it got 19 percent of the total, as in all of San Francisco, where it won. Despite the over 1400 house parties, and the dedication of the volunteers who collected the 1.1 million signatures in early spring to get the initiative on the ballot, the organizing was, in Gallagher's words, "a Bay Area effort that tried to graft on southern California."

In the face of these obstacles, the 186 campaign did lay out the rationale for single payer in terms that addressed the uncertainty many people feel about the future of health care. Attacking the insurance companies and promoting the theme "Everyone is at risk," the campaign did resonate with grassroots supporters and reached a broader audience through last-minute television spots. From the beginning, campaign strategists realized that health security, not reform as a charity for the uninsured, was the only message that could appeal to likely voters.

Unfortunately, the anti-186 effort got on TV early with the message that 186 meant a government takeover of health care. The message of security, and the inherent complexity of any health reform measure, even a reform as relatively

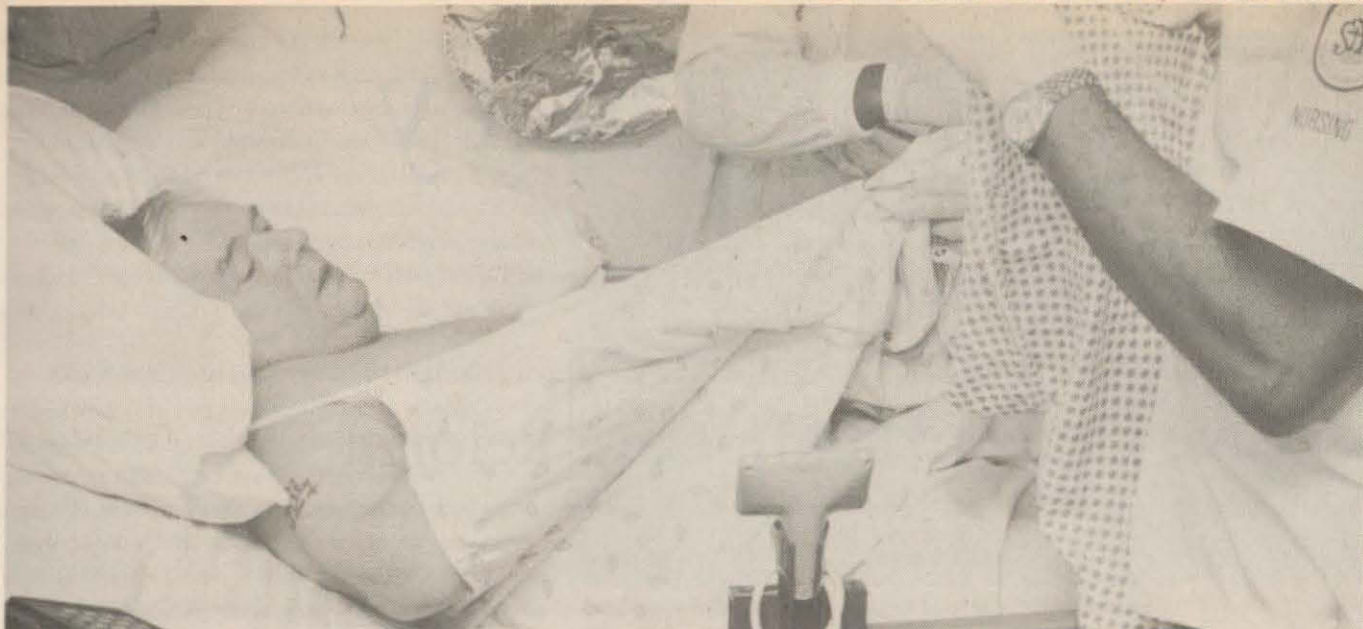
simple as single payer, could not overcome voters' distrust of government. The message of risk may have hurt the campaign, according to Tarzynski, who suggests that "when the economic times are hard, people want to risk less and hold on to what they have."

Surprisingly, the attacks on the insurance industry that did run were not that effective, according to CNA's Beth Capell. Arguably, the pro-186 television campaign could have hit the insurance companies earlier and harder, forcing or enticing them to spend money and perhaps suffer the same fate as did tobacco giant Philip Morris, which lost its effort in November to weaken smoking control ordinances when its expenditures became the defining issue. As Gallagher points out, however, the anti-186 campaign signaled early on

that they would not make the mistake of overspending. Besides, 186 never had the big donor resources to wage such a media campaign. The real problem, from Gallagher's point of view, was the lack of an easily digested sound bite or billboard message to counter the "big government" charge.

Tarzynski cites another problem with the message: the failure to promote a positive program. This would have taken on the anti-government charge by emphasizing the aspects of single payer that have strong middle class appeal, such as choice of provider, no co-payments or premiums, local control of health services, and effective cost control. Unfortunately, as is typical for initiative campaigns, the media showed a profound lack of interest. They did not want to hear about or report the positive aspects of either the Canadian system or the cost-saving mechanisms built into Proposition 186. Even a Kaiser Family Foundation study released in the last weeks of the campaign demonstrating these cost savings generated very little coverage. In short, the media coverage was either "non-existent or abysmal," according to Gallagher, who also points out that only in San Francisco, where the newspapers were shut down by a strike during the last week before the election, did the initiative gain a majority (55 percent).

Absent a popular groundswell or an extended



Ansell Horn/Impact Visuals

paid media campaign, there was no pressure on the media to give 186 a close look beyond the usual "objective" report of the positions of both sides. That kind of neutral reporting gave automatic credibility to whatever was said by opponents and severely undermined the initiative. For example, no reporter dug deep enough to report that a supposedly impartial study had miscalculated the federal Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements to the state, a fact that should have immediately discredited the widely cited conclusion that Proposition 186 would cost California billions of dollars in underfunded liabilities.

The media might have noticed that since health care reform had failed in Washington by the time of the campaign's home stretch, the 186 single payer initiative was the one reform idea left standing. However, this federal failure may have cut both ways. If a version of the Clinton plan had succeeded, there would have been momentum for reform going into November. Absent that momentum, the whole idea of health reform was discredited. On the other hand, since Washington had failed to solve the problem of health security or to address the demonstrated desire for change, that did create an opening for state-based reform. The 186 campaign itself never arrived at a clear position about the meaning of the defeat in Washington or how to position the referendum in the context of national reform.

Such positioning remains a real challenge for activists in state-based single payer coalitions, where the action will be for the foreseeable future. Capell of CNA sees the fight as a long-term effort, through the legislature or through another initia-

tive, to "convince a majority of Californians that there is a crisis and single payer is the best solution." As Capell points out, when 42 percent of the uninsured vote against single payer, one realizes how pervasive the anti-government ideology is.

In the face of this anti-government tide, single payer activists may see initiatives as the best means to get the attention of millions of people. According to Gallagher, Proposition 186 increased the number of people who know what

In a given year, only 10 percent of the population has a significant experience with the health care industry.

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**T**he California campaign made its share of serious mistakes—but even if we organize perfectly, fighting for real reform in this political climate will be extremely tough.

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single payer is by tenfold. "How else can you do that?" he asks.

But what about the larger question: how do you convince people that government can effectively displace a whole industry and transform one seventh of the economy? Tarzynski doesn't believe it will be possible to run another single payer initiative in California for many years. Instead, he sees the need for "building a broader multiracial movement, reforming campaign finance, and developing a southern California base." In California, and probably around the country, it's "first things first." **DL**

*DSA National Political Committee member Michael Lighty is a Labor Representative for the California Nurses Association.*

# Toward Victory

## Why This Is No Time

## To Give Up On Health Care Reform

BY HARRIS GRUMAN

Reports of the death of health care reform are much exaggerated. In Colorado, Florida, and a half dozen other states the campaign has just begun in earnest. What *has* died is the idea that a “compromise” program, like the oxymoronic “managed competition,” would smooth the path. Another casualty has been our naiveté in assuming that such a historic shift in U.S. society could be accomplished quickly or could rely on the spontaneous support of a jaded and atomized public.

Health care reform—specifically the creation of a single-tier, publicly-accountable universal health care system (a.k.a. “single payer”)—should still be at the top of the democratic left’s agenda. Single payer is still perhaps our best answer to the widespread disaffection with politics embodied in movements for campaign finance reform, term limits, and independent candidacies. Single payer, not only as a program, *but as a process*, strikes right to the heart of that malaise, offering a potential democratization in both the economic and political arenas.

### Reinventing Government: Progressive Programs and Economic Democracy

We all know why single payer is the socialist issue *par excellence*. The argument has been made with great force in these pages by Michael Lighty and others. Even the most skeptical voices in our own camp have never attacked the basic tenets of a single tier of quality, public accountability, and non-profit regulation. There are some areas, however, that need clear articulation in a

politically conservative climate that seems particularly unreceptive to practical solutions involving social insurance and collective responsibility.

On the left, single payer allows us to combat our own internal tendency to fragment around identity and ideological issues. All of our communities have an equal stake in a progressively-financed, publicly-accountable system of universal health care. Same-sex couples would no longer be excluded from the benefits available to heterosexual marrieds; the poor and the rich, young and old, whites and people of color, the disabled—all would receive health care as a right.

The message we need to get out to other constituencies on the left is simple: *get in on the ground floor*. The broader and more inclusive the coalition that achieves single payer, the more responsive that program will be to the special needs and alternative therapies favored by different constituencies.

To the general public, our message is the same as the one Bernie Sanders takes to the farmers of Vermont. Liberalism is bankrupt, but it is we, and not the neoliberals, who are offering a vision of how to “reinvent government.” We are calling for something wholly new in American politics: *progressively-funded* universal social programs and *economic democracy*.

The victory of Gingrich & Co. has led to a new attack on the New Deal and Great Society eras. Although this is an ominous development, we should build on our own critique of these programs. The New Deal failed to deliver on many of its promises. Social Security, its crown jewel, is

now extremely regressively funded (in an age of welfare bashing, its continuing popularity despite this fact attests to the popularity of *universal* social programs and the potential popularity of *progressive* universal programs). Worse still is the legacy of means-tested programs of the so-called Great Society period. • The strategy of expropriating charity from the working class to “feed Tiny Tim” has played itself out; the result—a nation of Scrooges.

Our first step in reinventing government, and re-legitimizing the public sector, is to further the struggle for progressively-funded, universal social programs. The health care crisis is where we must start. Since the health care crisis touches almost everyone but the wealthy, single payer offers a better chance than other potentially universal social programs (e.g. housing, unemployment insurance) to build a majority coalition for class-based politics.

Our second step is to give a practical form to our idea of economic democracy. Even the most basic socialization of the insurance function would be a great victory. The insurance industry is hated as an unproductive and parasitical force by consumers, but its enormous role in manipulating political discourse has been largely veiled from the public. They are a huge unaccountable power, working, like a shadow government, on a de facto reform of our health care system: “managed care,” managed by cartels.

Insurance is also a weak link in the ideology of the free market. The greatest savings in insurance do not come from competition; they come from spread of risk. Well, you cannot spread risk any further than the entire population. The insurers do the opposite, dividing populations and “creaming” healthy premium groups.

The struggle against this parasitic industry gives us excellent opportunities to raise the question of democratizing health care. Co-ops, workplace democracy, community boards, and preventive health centers could come to replace corporate control of medicine. State reform bills will vary most in this regard (see the single payer referenda in Massachusetts, which emphasize community control). Let at least fifty flowers bloom, and we might see not only socialized insurance, but reinvigorated civic activism in daily life.

### Health Care Reform Not Built in a Day

In the face of this year’s political setbacks in Congress and in California, some feel that health reform is not the “progressive wedge issue”



David Rae Morris/Impact Visuals

we have been looking for. As I see it, this interpretation rests on too short a time frame. Our disappointments during the last year should not blind us to health reform’s potential across the next decade. We should not forget, for example, that it took ten years to move from *Brown vs. the Board of Education* to the Civil Rights Act.

The setbacks themselves are of dubious significance. In Congress, *managed competition* received a stunning defeat. Good riddance, though in the short run it has hurt us by tainting all reform. The defeat in California only pointed up what many in DSA already knew: it takes a lot longer than a year to wage a campaign on that scale.

We should be sobered, not defeated. To retreat would be to squander a phenomenal effort in base-building. Around the country, in fact, single payer forces are consolidating a truly social democratic movement of unions, seniors, women’s organizations, public health groups, and progressives inside and outside the Democratic Party.

### How We Will Win

As in Canada, single payer could take hold state by state. If we win majorities for single payer in a half dozen states (establishing the system, even in one state, would require federal enabling legislation, particularly exemptions to federal pension and Medicare laws), we will have built the base for a progressive resurgence by 1998. To do that, we have to close the “California Gap,” that same 73 percent to 27 percent defeat that fairly accurately reflects the ration of the mobilized progressive electorate nationwide. In the absence of our message, the middle third are

The administration’s reform plan may lie in tatters, but single payer activism goes on. For information about DSA’s January 21 Health Care Activist Conference, see page 17.

A Brooklyn, New York rally to protest the underfunding of public hospitals under the Guiliani administration.

Catherine Smith/Impact Visuals



slipping rightward, even if they still vote for Democrats. We don't have a better issue than single payer to relegitimate our perspective, but closing the gap means taking it to that middle third face to face.

The lessons from California are: take the time you need; emphasize grassroots voter education; and keep the process participatory and democratic. The second is central. While our media campaign should be as extensive and sophisticated as possible, there is no substitute for grassroots organizing. The big successes for single payer on November 8 were in San Francisco, Oakland and Berkeley, where Proposition 186 passed comfortably, and in six Massachusetts legislative districts, where single payer referenda passed (see page 15). We must emulate and surpass the grassroots efforts in these places by doing the full precinct and door-to-door work necessary for victory. In Colorado, for example, we are engaged in a two-year project that will culminate in a ballot initiative. Whatever the outcome, we will not pack up our bags, but proceed into the next phase.

The first year of a two-year campaign to win single payer at the state level (via initiative, referendum or legislation) should concentrate on two goals: first, gathering together the potential leadership of the coalition to support a state organization with sufficient funds (in Colorado, \$1500 in monthly pledges was deemed adequate to begin), a steering committee, officers, and coordinating staff (part-time or "loaned" from a member organization). Second, building the infrastructure for a grassroots campaign by organizing on two constituency levels: geographical regions and interest groups.

Locals of the coalition should be established in every town or region of the state, with regular meetings, strategic planning committees on media, outreach, and voter education, officers, bank accounts (in Colorado, locals receive a half dues share on memberships from their area) and databases. The state organization should put staff on the job of identifying local organizers and helping them progress from an organizing committee structure to a full local chapter.

The need to build a broad democratic coalition of organized

constituency groups goes without saying. The real challenge is to translate an impressive endorsement list into the tens of thousands of votes it should represent. Thus, while broadening the coalition, every effort should be made to *reach the rank and file memberships of our endorsers*. This means taking the message to organizations from top to bottom and bottom to top, developing internal educational campaigns together with our supporting organizations.

At the beginning of the second year, the coalition should be ready to launch a campaign with paid organizers, campaign headquarters and precinct captains in every region and city of their state.

The role of DSAers in all this is simple: we have the vision and commitment to facilitate the process outlined above. We should have the discipline to take whatever role we're assigned, while making sure everything that needs to be done is done. The only thing we ask in return is recognition of who we are—when DSA earns a seat at the table, *it gets one*. And we earn it by keeping attention focused on the practical goal of winning a grassroots campaign.

It was this kind of grassroots campaign for some form of universal health care system that launched the British and Canadian social democrats into national prominence. Socialists have always taken the long view in this country. Let us patiently build popular networks for health reform that can win. DL

*Harris Gruman is a Staff Organizer for the Colorado Coalition for Single Payer. He is also a co-founder and the Secretary of Colorado DSA.*

# Health Care Update

## It Was a Very Bad Year: A Not-So-Funny Top Ten List

As DSAers have been saying at town halls for the last three years, "Socialists have been for universal health insurance since 1888." We didn't expect miracles following the election of Harris Wofford, or Bill Clinton, and we certainly haven't gotten any. However, since single payer was a principal activity of DSA nationally during 1994, and since in many cases we can be proud of our performance as informed activists in state coalitions, here's a Top Ten list to remind us of recent obstacles to national health insurance as we consider strategy for the future:

1] The **medical-industrial complex** spent over \$200 million to defeat any major deviation from the corporatization of health care—many times what our coalitions had to spend.

2] An almost universally hostile **mass media** ignored and/or distorted our movement. Interlocking directorships between media empires and insur-

ers didn't help matters. (Remember, the *New York Times* has *two* insurers on its board—and the story's the same at Time Warner, General Electric/NBC, etc.)

3] The **Clintons**, while focusing attention on the issue, mismanaged the process with their secretly devised managed competition plan.

4] **Organized labor is relatively weak** as a social movement these days, and was itself split on the health issue.

5] The right has successfully, if temporarily, **delegitimized the state** as the vehicle for social amelioration of any kind. This reached comic proportions in the famous quote from a 76-year-old Social Security recipient: "Get the government's hands off my Medicare!"

6] Our side had expected to exploit divisions in the **corporate world** that never materialized. These days, even large employers with a stake in cost-cutting are too committed to anti-statism

to support serious reform.

7] Certain **unhelpful Democrats** in Congress played a huge role in shaping the public debate. See under: Breaux, Cooper, Foley, Boren, et al.

8] **William Kristol** wrote an effective memo urging Republicans to oppose all reform bills "sight unseen." Earlier in the year, even Dole and Michel had been making noises about universal coverage.

9] Frightened middle- and working-class voters, many of them hanging on by a thread in the **globalizing economy**, may have placed health care lower on their list of anxieties than we had expected. (It's *good* jobs, stupid!)

10] The ground has shifted. Even MD's are being proletarianized in the rush toward **managed care networks**. Perhaps the Marcus Welby images our side sometimes used to sell single payer no longer resonate.

-- Jeff Gold

## Massachusetts: A Modest November Victory

Boston DSA helped win a small but symbolic victory for single payer health care in a little noticed campaign in Massachusetts. A coalition that included DSA put a question supporting single payer health care on the November 8 ballot in seven state senate districts and one state representative district. The eight districts covered nearly 20 percent of the state's voters, and spanned the state geographically from Gloucester to Springfield. The pro-single payer question won, gaining more "Yes" votes than "No" votes in six of the eight districts where it was on the ballot.

Unlike California's Proposition 186, the Massachusetts referendum

faced no organized opposition from the insurance companies. There were other handicaps, though, including the fact that there were nine statewide referendum questions on the ballot, and the single payer question was not included on ballot question checklists printed in most newspapers or published by statewide organizations. Even the number of the question varied from district to district, and sometimes even within the district itself. The margin of victory was narrow, and there were many blanks (ballots cast with no mark on the single payer question). Still, a majority of the voters who chose to mark the question voted in favor of a system clearly identi-

fied on the ballot as a tax-financed, single payer plan. This flies in the face of some of the favorite claims of the ascendant right, so the significance of the victory should not be minimized.

The campaign was also very important as a grassroots organizing and educational effort. Hundreds of volunteers around the state participated, many of whom had never been involved in a political campaign before.

Boston DSA was active in the campaign at the statewide coordinating committee level, and in at least four of the local ballot committees, including the one that achieved the highest ratio of "Yes" to "No" votes of any district.

-- David O. Knuttunen

# DSAAction

## DSA Midwest Activist Meeting Set

A major DSA Midwest Regional Activist Conference will be held in Chicago on May 12 and 13. This meeting, which was postponed from November, will be held in conjunction with the thirty-seventh annual Chicago Debs-Thomas-Harrington Dinner. DSA activists from throughout the midwest are encouraged to attend.

DSA leaders and members will exchange ideas about how to strengthen DSA locals and commissions, and how to coordinate the organization's work throughout the region.

Panels and workshops will address labor activism, the global economy, DSA local development, and the state of progressive electoral politics.

A detailed announcement of this conference will be published in the March/April issue of *Democratic Left*. In the meantime, for more information contact the national office or write Chicago DSA at 1608 North Milwaukee, room 403, Chicago, IL 60647.

### SOCIALIST FORUM

DSA's discussion bulletin  
needs *your* contributions.

*Socialist Forum* Number 23  
will be published in March.

We are soliciting essays of up to 2,500  
words on two topics:

- 1) Toward a New DSA Political  
Perspectives Statement (including  
responses to Alan Charney's  
essay in Number 22).
- 2) The Meaning of the 1994 Elections.

Deadline: February 10.

For subscription information and a free  
copy of *Socialist Forum* Number 22, write to  
Margie Burns at the national office.

## Toward a New DSA Political Perspectives Statement

We all know how profoundly the worldwide political landscape has changed during the past five years—in some ways for the better, in many ways for the worse. The delegates to DSA's 1993 National Convention decided that the world has changed so seriously that DSA should work toward adopting a new official Political Perspectives Statement. This document, which would be similar to the statement produced at DSA's founding convention in 1982, would be a declaration of the organization's core principles, broad political outlook, and strategic objectives for the next several years.

If sufficient consensus emerges, this new Political Perspectives Statement will be approved by delegates to the 1995 National Convention in November (look for a Convention announcement in the next issue of *Democratic Left*). The process of developing a draft document between now and November should, of course, involve as many voices as possible from DSA's locals, commissions, Youth Section chapters, and rank-and-file members. A major element of this process will be *Socialist Forum*, DSA's twice-yearly discussion bulletin. The Fall 1994 issue of *Socialist Forum* included an essay by DSA National Director Alan Charney, in which he suggested themes for a new Political Perspectives Statement. The next issue will be published in March, and will include a wide range of suggested themes for the Statement, including responses to Charney's essay. As always, all DSA members are encouraged to contribute to *Socialist Forum* (see the notice below).

DSA's National Political Committee will develop a draft Political Perspectives Statement for circulation and discussion. This draft Statement will be published in the March *Socialist Forum*. DSA locals, commissions, and Youth Section chapters are also encouraged to hold discussions on this draft's strengths and weaknesses. For more information, contact David Glenn at the national office.

### ORGANIZER POSITION AVAILABLE

The national office of Democratic Socialists of America seeks a full-time Organizer. Responsibilities include organizing college- and community-based DSA chapters, providing training and organizing assistance to chapters, coordinating the DSA Speakers Bureau, and organizing national and regional conferences. Candidates should be well-grounded in progressive politics and possess excellent writing and speaking skills. Position requires a great deal of travel and long hours. Full health benefits are provided. The Organizer will work closely with DSA's elected volunteer leadership and with activists across the country to develop strategies and projects to promote the principles of democratic socialism.

DSA is an affirmative action employer. People of color are strongly encouraged to apply. Please send résumé and cover letter to Alan Charney, National Director, DSA, 180 Varick Street, New York NY 10014.



## DSA Commission Leaders Plot '95 Strategy

Leaders of almost all of DSA's commissions met on December 10 at the DSA national office to discuss their common strengths and common problems. The meeting set plans for something unique in DSA's history—a joint activist project coordinated by all of the commissions.

This project will help build DSA's activist response to the Republicans' domestic policy agenda, especially their plans for welfare "reform." As the GOP Congress attempts to dismantle our inadequate social safety net, they are creating a potential mass base of opposition. Many of the largest feminist, anti-racist, and environmentalist organizations in the country have already pledged to mobilize their memberships in resistance.

The political climate suggests that these progressive social movements will probably lose most of the important battles in Congress this year. DSA's commission leaders are concerned about *how* we lose these battles: will the left pursue an insider/lobbyist strategy, or will we build an activist movement that embodies and promotes a radical critique of social and economic relations? It is especially important that, as we fight against the Republicans' plans for welfare "reform," we discuss democratic and progressive alternatives to the present social safety net.

Detailed plans for this project will be developed during January. Look for an announcement in the March/April issue of *Democratic Left*.

DSA's commissions include an African American Commission, an Anti-Racist Commission, a Commission on Religion and Socialism, an Environmental Commission, a Feminist Commission, a Latino Commission, and a Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Commission. For information about joining these commissions, contact Margie Burns at the national office.

### REMINDER

#### DSA Health Care Activist Conference

Saturday, January 21 ♦ noon to 5 pm

DSA national office ♦ New York City

❖ evaluating DSA's health care activism,  
1990-1994

❖ debating the future of health care reform

DSA national office: 180 Varick Street, New York City. Varick Street is the extension of Seventh Avenue south of Houston Street.

180 Varick Street is one and a half blocks south of Houston Street.

The office is easily accessible from the A,B,C,D,E,F,1,and 9 subways.

Call Margie Burns at 212/727-8610 for more detailed directions.

## On Line With DSA: A Few Points

1] DSA's e-mail address is [dsa@igc.apc.org](mailto:dsa@igc.apc.org).

2] There is a "listserv" mailing list called dsanet for members and friends of DSA. To subscribe, send a message to: [dsanet-request@quantum.sdsu.edu](mailto:dsanet-request@quantum.sdsu.edu). Your message should contain only the single word "subscribe" (without the quotes). To post messages on dsanet, send them to: [dsanet@quantum.sdsu.edu](mailto:dsanet@quantum.sdsu.edu).

3] DSA materials are archived in the Economic Democracy Information Network gopher. The address of this gopher is [garnet.berkeley.edu](http://garnet.berkeley.edu) at ports 1250, 1251, or 1252.

4] By February 1, DSA will be participating in the "Left On Line" (LBBS) system initiated by South End Press and *Z Magazine*. Look for details in the next *Democratic Left*. (To those of you who have already signed up for LBBS through DSA: Apologies for the delay and thanks for your patience.)

## The DSA Library

Beginning in the next issue of *Democratic Left*, we will regularly publish a listing entitled "Recently Published Books by DSA Members." Our hope is that this listing will improve the circulation of ideas throughout the organization, and help locals and Youth Section chapters update their study group curricula.

At least to begin with, we will define "recent" broadly, and publish listings for any books published during the past three years.

If you or any of your DSA comrades have published lately, please send detailed information to David Glenn at the national office.

# Immigrants' Rights After NAFTA

## The Struggle Against Proposition 187

BY DUANE CAMPBELL AND ERIC VEGA

In mid-1993, a failing economy and governmental retrenchment had combined to make California's Pete Wilson the most unpopular governor in recent history, with public approval ratings below 20 percent. In November of 1994, Wilson won re-election with over 56 percent of the vote. Two factors combined to deliver victory to Wilson: a mean-spirited, hostile, divisive and racist campaign particularly targeting the Mexican and Mexican American population, and an inept campaign by Democratic gubernatorial candidate Kathleen Brown.

The voters of California voted 62 percent to 38 percent in favor of Proposition 187, the initiative to restrict illegal immigration. Proposition 187 was initiated by Alan Nelson and Harold Ezell, both high ranking officials in the Immigration and Nationalization Service (INS) during the Reagan administration. A number of organizations, including the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), H. Ross Perot's United We Stand America, and the Republican Party worked together to qualify the initiative.

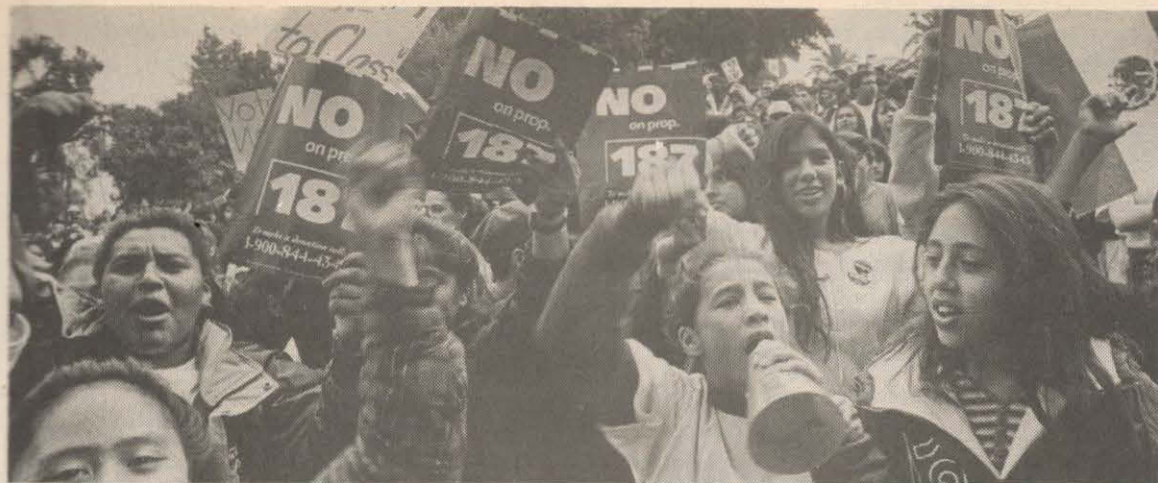
The initiative requires teachers to verify the immigration status of students, and even of parents. It calls on the schools to expel students who cannot prove their legal status and to expel students whose parents cannot prove their citizenship status. It requires police, nurses, and doctors to report the names of persons who "appear" to be undocumented. If implemented, these provisions

would exclude about three hundred thousand children from schools, health clinics, and social services. The initiative has already led to widespread violent attacks on Mexican "looking" individuals and produced fear, distrust, and anger in the Latino community.

Make no mistake about it. This was an anti-Mexican, anti-Latino campaign. While the Governor said he welcomed legal immigrants, the photos, the references, and the scapegoating were clear. Governor Wilson and the Republican Party gave over \$400,000 to the Yes campaign, and he used most of his commercials to promote stereotypes and prejudice. This assault cannot be forgotten, nor forgiven.

The state Democratic Party failed badly in this election. Most Democratic candidates avoided the immigration issue until the last two weeks of the campaign, only becoming involved when the mass activism and the "street heat" forced them to take a stand. Democrats can no longer win elections in California without a high Latino turnout, yet Latino leadership in the party is invisible.

California's population is 56.3 percent white, 26.3 percent Latino, 9.4 percent Asian, 7.4 percent African American, and 0.6 percent "other" (including Native Americans). But the state's *electorate* is not nearly so diverse. According to exit polls, the actual voters in this election were



Thor Swiffling Visuals

**Election Day:**  
High school students in Porterville walk out in protest.

80 percent white, 9 percent Latino, 7 percent African American, and 4 percent Asian and other. An overwhelmingly European American electorate continues to rule California. Voter exit polls show that Latinos voted against Proposition 187 three to one, African Americans split their vote fifty-fifty, and the Anglo electorate passed the proposition by over 60 percent. It was this white electorate—organized, funded and galvanized by Pete Wilson and the Republican Party—that passed Proposition 187.

Immediately after the election, attorneys for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), CRLA, and three major school districts immediately sought injunctions preventing the implementation of the measure. Governor Wilson ordered state agencies to draft regulations for its implementation. Various restraining orders have been placed on Proposition 187, and most of the provisions will probably not be enforced for at least a year, if ever.

The immediate task of the DSA Latino Commission is to build upon the work of the many activists who opposed Proposition 187. On November 19, we sponsored a training and discussion session for student activists at California State-Sacramento. An emerging California Latino Civil Rights Network is taking leadership in the campaign, and DSA activists are assisting as we can.

Civil rights organizations and other progressive social movements are continuing to mobilize to repeal Proposition 187 through demonstrations, boycotts, citizenship campaigns, voter registration drives, and other forms of activism. On December 10, thousands of activists around the country, including many DSA members, participated in public demonstrations of outrage against

the proposition.

One of the major national campaigns against Proposition 187 will be a boycott of RJR Reynolds/Nabisco. This boycott, initiated by the Latino Civil Rights Network and endorsed by the DSA Latino Commission, is designed to punish the corporation for its heavy support of the California Republican Party during 1994. The Republicans were the anchor of the campaign to place Proposition 187 on the ballot, a campaign that

## Take Action!

All DSA locals, commissions, and Youth Section chapters are encouraged to take part in the movement to repeal Proposition 187. Here's what you can do:

- ❖ Hold forums, teach-ins, and debates to educate yourselves and your community about the issue. For suggestions and resources to help you do this, contact David Glenn at the DSA national office.
- ❖ Organize in support of the RJR Reynolds/Nabisco boycott. For a boycott organizing kit, send one dollar to the DSA Latino Commission, P.O. Box 162394, Sacramento, CA 95816.
- ❖ Participate in local and statewide anti-187 coalitions. One excellent way to stay abreast of the movement is to subscribe to the electronic mailing list on 187. Write to [LISTSERV@CMSA.BERKELEY.EDU](mailto:LISTSERV@CMSA.BERKELEY.EDU) with this message: `Subscribe 187-L [your name]`. If you don't have access to a computer and a modem, contact the national office for information about activism in your area.

would have been much more difficult without the hundreds of thousands of dollars that RJR Reynolds/Nabisco was pumping into the party.

RJR Reynolds/Nabisco is also an attractive choice for this campaign because its marketing strategy heavily targets both the Latin American region and Latinos in the U.S. In Puerto Rico, Reynolds products account for roughly 75 percent of the cigarette market. In Mexico, Reynolds has ambitious plans for expansion, and is operating a joint venture with La Moderna, the largest cigarette manufacturer in the country.

**D**SAers, labor activists, and people of color have a common interest in resisting the current campaigns against immigrant communi-

ties. We have a lot to gain from solidarity, and a lot to lose from divisive scapegoating campaigns that attempt to shift the blame away from our leaders' own failure to manage the economy. Short-sighted stopgap measures rooted in nativism and fear are not the answer to our structural economic problems. The real causes of these problems are things like inequitable tax structures, misallocation of public resources, and the flight of jobs to more "profitable" places. **DL**

*Duane Campbell teaches at California State University at Sacramento and is Secretary of the DSA Latino Commission. Eric Vega, an attorney in Sacramento, is Co-Chair of the DSA Latino Commission.*

## The Peso Crisis

**T**he government of Mexico devalued the peso by 15 percent on December 23, and then allowed the currency to "float" in search of its market value. By December 29, the time of this writing, the peso had dropped dramatically, creating a national economic crisis, and the U.S. government had intervened to save its NAFTA partner.

The original 15 percent devaluation was designed to deal with Mexico's growing trade imbalance. The peso/dollar exchange rate had been artificially maintained for over a year, thanks largely to a line of credit extended by the U.S. treasury. Mexico incurred huge trade deficits as a result of opening its markets for NAFTA. The government had imposed a series of solidarity "pacts" designed to keep salaries low. The average Mexican family has seen an actual decline in real income over the last six years. Even with economic repression, the economy was veering out of control.

The devaluation, the first since 1982, revealed the weakness of the "Mexican miracle" alleged by neoliberal economists. The Salinas government had promised rapid growth based upon expectations of foreign investment. Last New Year's Day,

the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas reminded the world that major parts of Mexican society have been left out of the modernization process. This month's devaluation revealed that the broad middle class and working class of Mexico will have to pay (through wage freezes and inflation) for the neoliberal economic strategy.

During the last decade, the friends of former President Salinas de Gortari have amassed spectacular fortunes by buying former state industries at bargain-basement prices. The economy was allowed to inflate precariously to avoid a recession during this critical election year.

The new PRI government of Ernesto Zedillo blames the economic crisis on the uncertainties caused by the Chiapas rebellion, refusing to recognize the fundamental flaws in the neoliberal scheme. An economy that enriches the upper 20 percent while forcing the broad majority into increasing poverty is inherently unstable.

The peso crisis produces even more instability and will discourage desperately needed investment. President Zedillo has already imposed a sixty-day wage and prize freeze. In past such cases in Mexico, the wage freezes have been enforced but prices have climbed.

Certainly prices of imported items will climb.

As always, there are winners and losers from economic policies. Among the Mexican winners this month have been large bank owners and capitalists who keep the bulk of their capital in dollars, often sending their dollars out of the country just prior to devaluation. Over four billion dollars left Mexico in December, canceling any hoped-for investment gains.

The peso crisis reveals an underlying instability in the Mexican economy, now tightly linked to the U.S. economy by NAFTA. The labor costs of producing autos and electronics in Mexico will go down from between 20 and 40 percent. The Clinton administration, unable to find 15 billion dollars in 1993 for economic stimulation in the U.S., this week immediately found six billion dollars to help bail out the peso.

The Mexican government will be forced to pay rising costs of debt maintenance and IMF-style structural readjustment. And working people in Mexico, dominated by less-than-free labor unions, will bear the burden of a policy that brings prosperity to the few and poverty to the majority.

*-- Duane Campbell*

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# Fight Poverty, Not Women's Freedom

## A Statement by Women Scholars

**T**his statement was written and signed in response to the Clinton administration's welfare "reform" bill introduced in the summer of 1994. Spurred by this proposal, Republicans are now championing much worse barbarisms. We should not let ourselves be driven into supporting the bad in the hopes of fending off the worse. We stand against policies that deprive poor children and scapegoat poor mothers. A politics of blaming the poor fosters a downward cycle of impoverishment, stigmatization, and despair.

-- Linda Gordon, Frances Fox Piven, Louise Trubek

**A**s women scholars who have studied welfare programs in the United States and other democracies, and who share a concern for poor women and children, we feel a responsibility to speak out in opposition to the Clinton administration welfare reform proposal.

The most publicized feature of the proposal is a two-year lifetime limit on cash assistance from AFDC. The limit shreds precisely that portion of our social safety net on which poor women and children rely. Yet the evidence shows that the majority of recipients do not stay on "welfare" very long at one time, but turn to AFDC when they are forced to by work or family emergencies. Many women also turn to welfare to escape from domestic violence. A two-year limit would destroy that lifeline.

The Bush administration began freely granting waivers allowing the states to "experiment" with "reforms," and the Clinton administration is continuing this practice. Few of these waivers concern true experiments or reforms. Instead, reminiscent of the

nineteenth century when welfare was a system of disciplinary tutelage, they usually cut welfare grants which are already everywhere below the poverty level. Some states are reducing family benefits if a child is truant or if an additional child is born. From the beginning of AFDC in 1935, the federal government provided some protection against the arbitrary ill-treatment of recipients by states and counties. That protection should not be forfeited.

The effort to present a "revenue-neutral" welfare reform has resulted in the ludicrous prospect of severe cut-backs in programs that serve some of the poor in order to pay for programs that will ostensibly help others of the poor. Clearly this makes little moral or programmatic sense.

Just as troublesome as these programmatic initiatives is the vilification of welfare recipients for lacking the values of work and responsibility which has characterized the administration's talk about reform. This rhetoric undermines respect for the hard and vital work that all women

do as parents. It is particularly egregious when directed against poor single mothers who confront the triple burdens of heading households, parenting, and eking out a livelihood. Given the popular misimpression that welfare recipients are overwhelmingly minority women, this pillorying of poor women also contributes to racist stereotypes.

While women have always been consigned to low wage jobs, the situation of women trying to support children has worsened dramatically in the last two decades as wage levels plummeted. The administration proposal is silent about that problem.

Real welfare reform should be directed to ending poverty, not welfare. We should strive for widely available day care, medical insurance, and education, and for improvements in working conditions and wages. At the same time we should preserve the programs of social support—variously called social security or welfare—that have been vital to the safety, health and morale of millions of women, men, and children in the U.S.

## Signatories of the Women

## Scholars' Statement on Welfare Reform

Emily K. Abel, UCLA ♦ Mimi Abramovitz, CUNY ♦ Martha Ackelsberg, Smith ♦ Mona Adler, U Regina ♦ Julia Adams, U Mich ♦ Randy Albelda, U Mass Boston ♦ Nedda C. Alibay, CUNY ♦ Christa Altenstetter, CUNY ♦ Ann Rosegrant Alvarez, Wayne State ♦ Nancy Amidei, UWash ♦ Teresa Amott, Bucknell U ♦ Susan Amussen, Union Institute ♦ Elizabeth S. Anderson, U Mich ♦ Karen Anderson, U Arizona ♦ Karin J. Anderson, New School ♦ Fran Ansley, U Tenn ♦ Rita Arditti, Union Institute ♦ Clarissa Atkinson, Harvard ♦ Dr. Harriet Baber, U San Diego ♦ Lois W. Banner, USC ♦ Carol Barash, Rutgers ♦ Lucy Barber, Brown ♦ Nancy Barnes, New School ♦ Pauline B. Bart, U Illinois, Chicago ♦ Rosalyn Fraad Bavandall, SUNY ♦ Gail Bederman, Notre Dame ♦ Leslie Bender, Syracuse ♦ Trude Bennett, U North Carolina ♦ Betty Ann Bergland, U Wisconsin, River Falls ♦ Barbara R. Bergmann, American U ♦ Sharon Berlin, U Chicago ♦ Sally A. 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Harvey Finkel/Impact Visuals

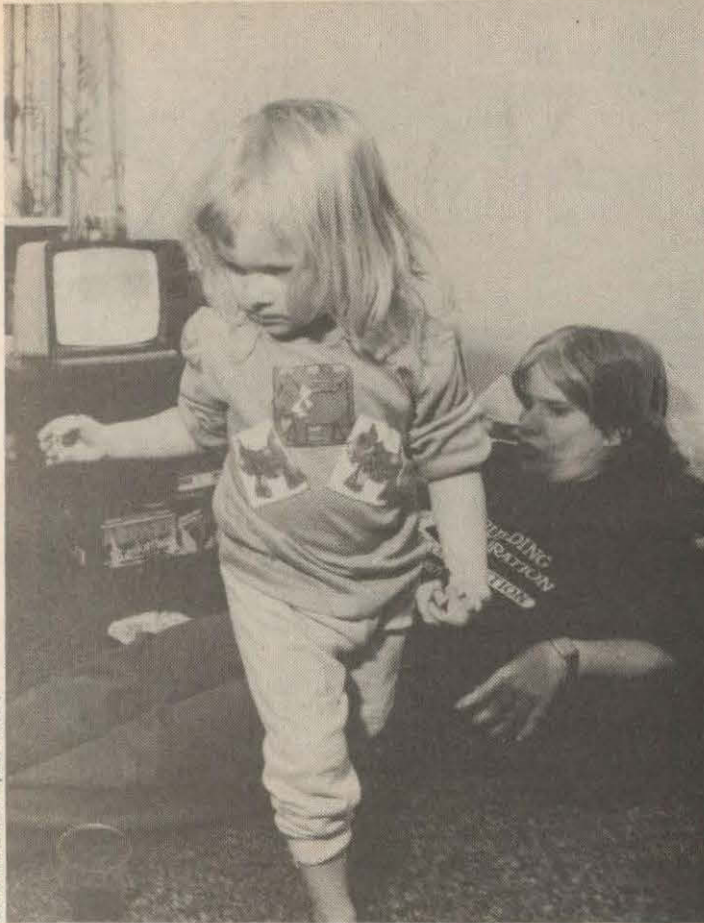
The Kensington Welfare Rights Union, a new activist coalition in Philadelphia, marches to denounce proposed state cutbacks.

The whole thing is crazy. It ignores not only the hard numbers on assorted bottom lines but everything we know about what children need: intimate attachments, individual attention, love. It also ignores many decades' worth of settled family law, which has steadily increased the rights and status of out-of-wedlock children, and a century of painfully gained historical evidence of the inadequacy of publicly funded institutional living to keep children safe from sadists and predators.

-- Katha Pollitt on orphanage-based welfare "reform" in *The Nation*

Contributions to the effort to defend women and children on welfare can be sent to:

- ♦ The DSA Commissions Joint Project (see page 17), c/o DSA, 180 Varick Street, twelfth floor, New York, NY 10014.
- ♦ The Coalition on Human Needs, 1000 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20007.
- ♦ Up and Out of Poverty NOW! Coalition, c/o National Organization for Women, 1000 16th Street NW (Suite 700) Washington, DC 20036.



Catherine Smith/Impact Visuals

A family receiving public assistance in Massachusetts.

To add your name to this list of signatories, write to Frances Fox Piven c/o The CUNY Graduate Center, 33 West 42 Street, New York, NY 10036.

◆ Paulette Olson, Wright State ◆ Laura Oren, U Houston ◆ Ann Orloff, U Wisconsin ◆ Sherry Ortner, U Mich ◆ Susan Ostrander, Tufts ◆ Martha Ozawa, Wash U, St. Louis ◆ Nell Painter, Princeton ◆ Mary Brown Parlee, MIT ◆ Eve Passerini, U Colorado ◆ Carole Pateman, UCLA ◆ Lisa Peattie, MIT ◆ Rosa Maria Pegueros, U Rhode Island ◆ Donna Penn, Brown ◆ Ruth Perry, MIT ◆ Rosalind Petchesky, CUNY ◆ Jean Peterman, U Illinois, Chicago ◆ Barbara Pine, U Conn ◆ Frances Fox Piven, CUNY ◆ Uta Poiger, Brown ◆ Janet E. Poppendieck, CUNY ◆ Christina Pratt, Dominican College ◆ Arline Prigoff, Cal State Sacramento ◆ Laura M. Purdy, Wells College ◆ Lara E. Putnam, U Mich ◆ Karen Pyke, USC ◆ Mary Ann Quaranta, Fordham ◆ Rayna Rapp, New School ◆ Sarah Raskin, Trinity ◆ Leslie J. Reagan, U Illinois, Urbana-Champaign ◆ Sherrill Redmon, Smith College ◆ Ellen Reese, UCLA ◆ Pat Reeve, U Mass, Boston ◆ RoseAnn Renteria, U Colorado ◆ Margery Resnick, MIT ◆ Catherine K. Riessman, Boston U ◆ Alice Robbin, CUNY ◆ Betty D. Robinson, U Southern Maine ◆ Jeanne B. Robinson, U Chicago ◆ Pamela A. Roby, U Cal Santa Cruz ◆ Anna Rockhill, U Mich ◆ Ruth Roemer, UCLA ◆ Beth Rose, Vanderbilt ◆ Nancy E. Rose, Cal State San Bernardino ◆ Sonya O. Rose, U Mich ◆ Ruth Rosen, U Cal Davis ◆ Beth Spenciner Resenthal, CUNY ◆ Joyce Rothschild, Virginia Polytechnic Institute ◆ Hiasaura Rubenstein, U Tenn ◆ Sara L. Ruddick, New School ◆ Lois Rudnick, U Mass, Boston ◆ Leila J. Rupp, Ohio State ◆ Mary P. Ryan, UC Berkeley ◆ St. Ann Convent, East Harlem ◆ Barbara J. Sabol ◆ Susan Sandman, Wells College ◆ Rosemary C. Sarri, U Mich ◆ Wendy Sarvasy, UC Berkeley ◆ Saskia Sassen, Columbia ◆ Gwen Saylor, Wartburg Theological Seminary ◆ Jane Sharp, Kings College, London ◆ Eunice Shatz, U Tenn, Knoxville ◆ Marilyn M. Schaub, Duquesne ◆ Elizabeth M. Schneider, Brooklyn Law ◆ Brooke G. Schoepf, Woods Hole ◆ Juliet Schor, Harvard ◆ Barbara Schulman, Clark ◆ Leslie Schwalm, U Iowa ◆ Dore Seavey, Wellesley ◆ Gay Seidman, U Wisconsin ◆ Carole Shammus, U Cal Riverside ◆ Karen Sharma, New School ◆ Kristin A. Sheradin, U Rochester ◆ Mary T. Sheerin, Union Institute ◆ Jessica Shubon, Brown ◆ Barbara Sicherman, Trinity ◆ Ruth Sidel, CUNY ◆ Deborah Siegel, Rhode Island College ◆ Helene Silverberg, U Cal Santa Barbara ◆ Louise Simmons, U Conn ◆ Barbara Levy Simon, Columbia ◆ Andrea Y. Simpson, U Wash ◆ Beverly R. Singer, Columbia ◆ Louise Skolnick, Adelphi ◆ Carol Smith, CUNY ◆ Judith E. Smith, U Mass, Boston ◆ Susan L. Smith, U Alberta ◆ Ann Snitow, New School ◆ Sue Sohng, U Wash ◆ Renee Solomon, Columbia ◆ Rickie Solinger ◆ Roberta Spalter-Roth, American U ◆ Jane M. Spinak, Columbia ◆ Judith Stacey, U Cal Davis ◆ Barbara Stark, U Tenn, Knoxville ◆ Rose Starr, CUNY ◆ Anne A. Statham, U Wisconsin, Parkside ◆ Catherine A. Steele, Syracuse ◆ Judith Stein, CUNY ◆ Vicky Steinitz, U Mass, Boston ◆ Susan Sterrett, U Denver ◆ Joyce West Stevens, Boston U ◆ Mary H. Stevenson, U Mass, Boston ◆ Landon R.Y. Storrs, U Wisconsin ◆ Diana L. Strassmann, Rice ◆ Philippa Strum, CUNY ◆ Amy Swerdlow, Sarah Lawrence ◆ Meredith Tak, PEN ◆ Shelly Tenenbaum, Clark ◆ Nancy M. Theriot, U Louisville ◆ Margaret Susan Thompson, Syracuse ◆ Sharon M. Thompson ◆ Barrie Thorne, USC ◆ Carolyn Tice, Ohio U ◆ Kip Tierman, U Mass, Boston ◆ Roberta Till-Retz, U Iowa ◆ Shirley Tilloston, Dalhousie U ◆ Louise A. Tilly, New School ◆ Susan Traverso, U Wisconsin ◆ Joan Tronto, CUNY ◆ Louise Trubek, U Wisconsin ◆ Sandra G. Turner, Fordham ◆ Adrienne Valdez, U Hawaii, Manoa ◆ Deborah M. Valenze, Barnard ◆ Dorothy Van Soest, Catholic U ◆ Heidi Vickery, New School ◆ Kamala Visweswaran, New School ◆ Lise Vogel, Denison ◆ Nancy R. Vosler, Wash U, St. Louis ◆ Elaine M. Walsh, CUNY ◆ Joanna K. Weinberg, U Cal San Francisco ◆ Helen Weingarten, U Mich ◆ Nancy Weiss, Syracuse ◆ Beth Weitzman, NYU ◆ Dorothy E. Weitzman, Boston College ◆ Carolyn Crosby Wells, Marquette ◆ Janice Wood Wetzel, Adelphi ◆ Marianne H. Whatley, U Wisconsin ◆ Lora Wildenthal, Pitzer ◆ Lucy A. Williams, Northeastern ◆ Rhonda M. Williams, U Maryland ◆ Ann Withom, U Mass, Boston ◆ Eleanor Witttrup, U Mass, Lowell ◆ L. Mun Wong, CUNY ◆ Nancy A. Worcester, U Wisconsin ◆ Susan M. Yohn, Hofstra ◆ Marilyn Young, NYU ◆ June Zaccone, Hofstra ◆ Mary K. Zimmerman, U Kansas ◆ Paz Mendez-Bonita Zorita, Arizona State ◆ Yvonne Zylan, NYU

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# Justice and Reconciliation

## A Report from Mozambique's

## First National Multi-Party Elections

BY KATHLEEN SHELDON

The elderly couple slowly entered the Nhacoho polling station, an elementary school classroom near Morrumbene, Mozambique. The woman's feet were wrapped in rags, and she supported her painful steps with a large pole held in both hands. As the electoral officials handed the man and the woman their ballots, they spent a full minute explaining the voting procedure including how to fold the paper ballots so as not to smear the inked fingerprint mark made by illiterate voters. As the couple turned toward the voting booths, the man's face filled with pride and purpose.

These were just two among hundreds of voters I observed in Inhambane province in southern Mozambique in October during that country's first ever national multi-party elections. I was one of three thousand international observers from the United Nations who spent several days watching the voting process; observers were also sponsored by the European Union and the World Council of Churches, among other organizations. Our presence was to help ensure that the voting was free and secret, that voters were not intimidated, that the ballot boxes remained sealed over the three days of voting, and that the ballot counting which took place on a fourth day of electoral activity followed established protocols.

The elections were the culmination of years of efforts to reach a peaceful end to a long war between Frelimo, Mozambique's ruling party since independence in 1975, and Renamo, a terrorist organization funded for years by apartheid South Africa. South Africa had sponsored an

incredibly destructive destabilization campaign in Mozambique. This regional effort was matched by Western capitalist nations who pressured Frelimo to abandon its socialist project.

Frelimo, once a self-described Marxist-Leninist vanguard party, responded to these realities by making several important concessions to the peace process. Mozambique joined the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in 1987 and adopted their demands to privatize the economy under a structural adjustment program. In 1990 the national assembly and Joaquim Chissano, Mozambique's president, introduced a new constitution that ended Frelimo's one-party rule. A peace accord was signed between Frelimo and Renamo in 1992, and various opposition parties were formed. A lengthy series of negotiations worked out the specifics of Mozambican electoral law.

Renamo refurbished its image from an international pariah known for burning schools and clinics and for committing horrific massacres and atrocities to a legitimate political party under Mozambican law. Renamo's leader, Afonso Dhlakama, met with international political leaders and was accepted as a legitimate candidate for president of Mozambique, despite a series of obstructionist moves by him that contributed to delaying the elections originally scheduled for October 1993. (For an excellent discussion of the regional history, see William Minter, *Apartheid's Contras: An Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique*, Zed Books, 1994).

Mozambique, the poorest nation in the world



A rally for Frelimo in the northwestern city of Tete.

by many measures, has an economy based on agriculture. Most families cultivate rice, maize, manioc, and vegetables to feed themselves. Major exports include prawns, cashew nuts, tea, and cotton. Frelimo had made agriculture a national priority, but generally financed state farms rather than family farming. As a result of this and other misguided policies, there was certainly anti-Frelimo sentiment in parts of the country where many felt neglected by their national government. Renamo, though financed largely by South Africa, was known to have support inside Mozambique in some rural areas. It was able to establish military control over perhaps one-fourth of Mozambique's territory in the center of the country, though the extent of its administration is disputed. As the war and poverty worsened, many Mozambicans held Frelimo responsible for their difficulties. Yet Renamo's history of brutality was well-documented, and it was disturbing to hear a campaign chant that went, "Dhlakama, friend, the people are with you" (*Dhlakama, amigo, o povo está consigo*).

Although Frelimo and Renamo were the main contenders in the elections, many other smaller parties also emerged. Several of these were founded by Mozambican businessmen who had been in exile for years, and were interested in bringing capitalism back to Mozambique. It was difficult to discover just what political positions were held by some parties, as clarifying statements and publications were scarce. Most of these parties were quite small and experienced a bewildering number of splits and coalitions, often the result of personality conflicts rather than actual political differences.

In the election itself, there were twelve presidential candidates (ten backed by parties and two running as independents) and twelve parties and two coalitions of parties fielding candidates for the national assembly. Although this election did not include provincial or local balloting, there was a somewhat cumbersome set of two ballots for each voter, one with the names and photos of the presidential candidates, one with the party names and symbols. Voters could mark an "x" or make a fingerprint to indicate their choices for president and for assembly.

The voting process itself demonstrated Mozambican patience and tenacity. Originally scheduled for two days (October 27 and 28), a third day of voting was added late on the 28th, and then a fourth day of counting was needed because the lack of lighting meant that the ballots could not be counted until daylight on October 30. Each of the 7,500 polling stations had a board of five electoral officials as well as several party monitors (similar to U.S. poll watchers). These people remained at their polling stations from October 26, the day before the election, through the counting. Most stations had no electricity, no running water, and limited food supplies. Many observers, including myself and my UN partner, a Hungarian police lieutenant, helped when we could by purchasing food, flashlights, and batteries for the stations we were observing. Despite such difficulties, officials and monitors—including some mothers with infants—remained at their posts until the election was over. When Dhlakama called for a Renamo boycott of the elections on the first day of voting, citing supposed irregularities, the international media reported it as a potential disruption to the entire election. Yet his statement meant little or nothing in rural areas such as where I was. Renamo party monitors at the nine polling stations I observed remained at their posts on the second and subsequent days of the election, and Dhlakama rescinded his boycott.

Despite some logistical problems and minor irregularities, the elections were considered free and fair by international observers. Ballots were cast by 87.8 percent of registered voters. The

results, available in each locality within a day of the elections, were not compiled at the provincial and national levels for nearly three weeks. Dhlakama conceded defeat on November 15, having garnered only 33.7 percent of the vote to the 53.3 percent won by incumbent Frelimo president Joaquim Chissano. All other candidates combined won just under 13 percent of the vote, ensuring the demise of most of those parties (parties must have 5 percent of the vote to contest future elections).

The assembly votes were much closer, in part because a number of voters who chose Chissano, positioned last on the presidential ballot, also marked the last position on the assembly ballot—a slot held not by Frelimo but by the Democratic Union (UD, for União Democrática), a coalition of four smaller parties. The apparent confusion was a result of voter illiteracy and of Chissano's campaign, which told voters they should mark the last position to vote for him. This certainly cut into Frelimo's lead in the assembly race; of 250 seats, Frelimo now holds 129 to Renamo's 112; a further 9 seats went to the UD.

Renamo's support arose from dissatisfaction with Frelimo policies as well as fear of continued warfare. One early poll quoted a man in southern Mozambique saying that in his village they had decided to split their votes evenly between Frelimo and Renamo so that the fighting would end. Many welcomed the election outcome, which confirmed Frelimo's leadership while allowing Renamo to claim positions within the national government. Though Dhlakama has pledged to work with the government, his history of renegeing on promises, including his call for a boycott during the elections, indicates that continued wariness is needed. Nonetheless, it appears that Mozambique will not suffer from a renewal of warfare such as Angola has experienced. Stories of reconciliation at local levels between Frelimo and Renamo soldiers and others, plus the changed role of South Africa under President Nelson Mandela, bode well for continued peace.

Sadly, the effects of the war will persist, as the presence of up to two million land mines means casualties will continue to mount. In addition, the effort to demobilize both Frelimo and Renamo forces and form a new unified military has met with delays and difficulties. The past year has been marked by violent uprisings by soldiers waiting in demobilization camps for weeks with-

out food, money, or prospects for work, and the process is far from complete. The UN presence has also been controversial. Some have described the UN role as a "recolonizer." There was evidence everywhere of the high-profile presence of UN forces—the UN police and military, for instance, were much better supplied than Mozambican armed forces and police and the white UN tanks and trucks were very visible.

It is still difficult to determine socialism's future in Mozambique, a former "People's Republic" once held up as an example of positive reforms in health and education as well as in the economy. Though Frelimo won these elections, their lead was small and they now must confront the reality of widespread critical opinion and opposition. Though components of a stronger Mozambican left exist in the newly active trade unions, in women's agricultural cooperatives, and among some members of Frelimo, they are not well coordinated. Cynical responses to the elections have come from within and outside of Mozambique, though from different political perspectives. Criticism from the left has suggested that the elections were simply an expensive exer-

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**I**t is still difficult to determine the future of democracy and socialism in Mozambique—but these elections marked an important step.

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cise in international appeasement, a response to pressures from the U.S. and others to develop a western-style democratic government. Yet right-wing sentiment long before October undermined the election process by calling for a "government of reconciliation," which would include Renamo no matter what the election outcome. Frelimo consistently rejected this concept, saying the election results should be accepted. The U.S. ambassador to Mozambique commented that elections themselves do not constitute democracy, implying that Renamo should be accommodated. Despite these nay-sayers from divergent political perspectives, tens of thousands of Mozambicans put in years of effort toward these elections. As a national project, the election process was a contribution to peace in this war-scarred land. **DL**

*Kathleen Sheldon, a DSA member, lived in Mozambique for two years in the early 1980s and has written on the history of women and work in Mozambique.*

# On the Left

by Harry Fleischman

## Alaska

Alaska DSA continues to develop a network of health care activists. The climate for state-level activism improved dramatically in November when Democrat Tony Knowles, a committed single payer advocate, was elected governor. For more information, write Niilo Koponen by e-mail: [rsnek@aurora.alaska.edu](mailto:rsnek@aurora.alaska.edu).

## Indiana

Central Indiana DSA and the Indianapolis Peace and Justice Center organized a December 14 vigil in downtown Indianapolis to demand the repeal of California's Proposition 187. The vigil was held during the afternoon rush hour and was highly visible.

The local sent a contingent to the November 5 Eugene Debs Award Banquet in Terre Haute. This year's honoree was United Mine Workers President Richard Trumka. The local continues to do activist work in solidarity with the striking Caterpillar and locked-out Staley workers in Decatur, Illinois. They are working to develop an informal statewide coalition with Indiana members of the Committees of Correspondence and the Socialist Party USA.

## Illinois

Chicago DSA also continues to mobilize in solidarity with the striking and locked-out workers in Decatur. The local helped support a Christmas caravan of food and toys for the workers and their families.

Chicago DSA also participated

heavily in this year's Midwest Radical Scholars and Activists Conference, held in mid-October. Speakers including Elaine Bernard, Rafael Pizarro, and Stanley Aronowitz debated such questions as electoral strategies and the future of work. Members of the local also organized a full-day session on religion and socialism.

The University of Chicago Youth Section chapter has played a major role in that campus's student activism against Proposition 187.

## New York

During the fall New York DSA sponsored a series of lectures on the history and meaning of Soviet communism. The series was led by DSA Vice Chair Jim Chapin, who now works as a political adviser to New York City Public Advocate Mark Green. Local DSA activists continue to be involved in the New York City Breaking Bread Project, which was initiated by the DSA African American Commission (see the July/August 1994 issue of *Democratic Left*).

The local is planning a February 5 fundraising brunch in honor of DSA Honorary Chair Bogdan Denitch. For more information, call New York DSA at 212/727-2207.

## Ohio

Ohio University DSA worked on a wide variety of campaigns during the fall. They helped to produce a progressive "Disorientation Guide" that was distributed to thousands of incoming students. OU-DSA also organized a candlelight vigil in solidarity with democratic activists in Haiti when the crisis was at its peak, and is working with another student organization to achieve domestic-partnership housing benefits for students.

The chapter finished up the semester by hosting DSA Honorary Chair Bogdan Denitch. Bringing wine and good cheer to an election-depressed chapter, Bogdan spoke to a diverse crowd about the issues of identity politics and Yugoslavia.

## Pennsylvania

Philadelphia DSA held a major re-organizing meeting on November 20. Nearly forty people, including DSA National Director Alan Charney and DSA Field Coordinator Ginny Coughlin, attended. The local established a new leadership, set plans for activism and discussion during the next several months, and considered creating regional and neighborhood branches.

## Virginia

Charlottesville DSA initiated a broad local coalition that sponsored a Breaking Bread event on November 18. Nearly four hundred people attended the event, which was co-sponsored by the University of Virginia Women's Center, the UVA Student Union, and several progressive churches and synagogues.

Speakers included DSA Honorary Chair Cornel West, the presidents of the UVA African American Student Association and Asian American Student Association, and a migrant farm worker. The crowd literally broke bread, and there was a great deal of audience participation and discussion.

The local is currently laying plans for 1995. They intend to participate in emerging activist coalitions opposed to Governor Allen's plans for welfare cutbacks and a massive prison-building program.

## About This Column

In future issues of *Democratic Left*, "On the Left" will be expanded to cover a greater variety of DSA local and Youth Section activity in more depth. If you are active in a local or Youth Section chapter, please send information about your activities both to the national office and to Harry Fleischman. Harry's winter address is 4700 Gulf of Mexico Drive #206D, Longboat Key, FL 34228. After April 1, please write to him at 454 Prospect Avenue #111, West Orange, NJ 07052.

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## Letters to Democratic Left



### Worker Ownership

Dear Editors,

I mostly agreed with Alan Charney's analysis of the elections ("The Meaning of 1994," November/December)—although I don't agree that President Clinton's programs were the sole reason for the Republican majorities in both houses.

My opinion is that we need to do those things suggested by Charney in the fight against racism, poverty, and so forth. On the other hand, we also need to pay attention to questions of worker ownership and workplace democracy. We should press for an increase in Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs). Our political agenda should call for government assistance to help employees purchase factories that are threatened with closure.

I think that widespread ESOPs would mark a profound step away from the "me the individual" attitude that the Republicans have exploited so well. Both as workers and as consumers, citizens would be more aware of our interconnectedness and the importance of collective responsibility. This

could be the first of many stages toward broader social ownership.

*John Trimboth, Jr.  
Conneaut, Ohio*

### New Year's Resolutions

Dear Editors,

These are the New Year's Resolutions I hope that DSA's volunteer leadership, staff, and rank-and-file members will adopt during 1995:

1] We will budget our time so as to make realistic plans.

2] When we say we'll do something, we'll do it.

3] If we can't or won't do it, we'll just say no.

4] We'll attend to the small things.

5] We'll keep our eyes on the prize but hold on to what's right at hand.

*Theresa Alt  
Ithaca, New York*

*Letters should be addressed to David Glenn at DSA, 180 Varick Street, New York, NY 10014. Please include a telephone number. Letters may be edited for space or clarity.*

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# PRESENT PROGRESSIVE

BY DSA NATIONAL DIRECTOR ALAN CHARNEY

One great irony of the 1994 election is that it has brought about a perverse realization of the party realignment strategy traditionally associated with DSA's late co-chair, Michael Harrington. This strategy was always predicated on transforming mass liberalism into an American version of social democracy. Tactically, this meant building the left wing of the Democratic Party until it became the dominant force in that party. This left wing would consist, first and foremost, of progressive labor unions in alliance with feminists, anti-racist activists, and environmentalists—that is, the social movements. In the process, of course, certain conservative and moderate elements of the party would either be won over or abandon the Democrats.

Today, the Republican Party has in fact seized the bulk of the Dixiecrats—the southern conservative bloc that had been staunchly Democratic since the Civil War. The old Democratic big-city machines, which were another bulwark of the New Deal coalition, have for the most part disintegrated. And what is left? White "social liberals," African Americans, a diminished trade union movement, the remnants of the ethnic urban machines, and scattered activists from a diverse array of social movements. This is only a small portion of the electorate—but it is also, objectively, the social democratic base that the Harrington strategy envisioned. The Democrats' loyal electoral base, though seriously narrowed, is for the first time clearly progressive.

The bad news is that the Republicans have a coherent program—the worldwide neoliberal project that is called conservatism in the United States—and we do not. We—and I mean both DSA and the broader U.S. liberal-left—have an old-fashioned social democratic vocabulary that does not address the fundamental problems created by the ascendancy of global capitalism. Their policy ideas may be spectacularly foolish, but the Republicans are living in the present and we are living in the past.

Harrington himself argued as much

in 1986, in his last strategic work, *The Next Left*:

The contemporary crisis is more radical than the Great Depression of the thirties or the "stagflation" of the seventies. When it is resolved, America—and the world—will have been more fundamentally transformed than they were fifty years ago....Economic progress can now be the cause of social marginalization rather than social integration....And at the same time, the economic and political basis of the Western Left for the past half century—the link between economic growth and social justice—is, in its traditional form at least, going, going, gone.

Yes, it is a stupendous irony: conditions have never been more favorable for building a genuine progressive electoral force, albeit on a plurality—not a majoritarian—base. But tragically, we lack a strategy and a program for this next left. At this time, we are not capable of leading. Again, Harrington foresaw this historic dilemma:

The left could also fail because it does not understand its distinctive role in coping with the radical future now underway. It is not simply the proponent of economic planning, of public priorities as opposed to private profit, of a new productivity through tapping the suppressed creativity of the people. It is for these things in a unique way: through the transfer of power to men and women at the base, to "ordinary" citizens. Before those who want to protest that this is a creaking, ancient utopia rise up, let me hasten to agree with them. I would only add that it is now also a *realpolitik*.

I don't mean to argue, of course, that the left has no new ideas. In fact, we are blessed with dozens of vital intellectual currents, from feminist social criticism to market socialist theory. But these new currents have not yet produced a vibrant, coherent political program that captures the imagination of millions, as the Republican program has. Inventing such a coherent "next left"—a left that squarely recognizes the implications of the globalized economy—is the central strategic task awaiting us.

Some people are convinced that the strategy is simply to make the Democratic Party into the electoral expression

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of its progressive base. Others are arguing that we must construct a new independent party as the electoral expression of this base. Still others favor an amalgam of the two—the so-called inside/outside strategy. I would argue, however, that any strategy that focuses primarily on "electoral expression"—whether inside or outside the Democratic Party—is fundamentally off the mark.

What is on the mark? Answering this question will be DSA's most important task during 1995. Please take part—write for *Socialist Forum*, hold discussions with DSAers in your area, exchange ideas with all the progressive activists you know. Rebuilding the left will be a long process, and, as Harrington wrote, it's very possible that we will fail. Fighting back Republican assaults and helping to create a vibrant, forward-looking left will require all of our intelligence and energy. I hope that you will join us. **DL**



# Janie Higgins Reports as told to Steve Max

**L**et's privatize Social Security. The government screws up everything, right? The free market does it better, right? Social Security is going bust. Today's young people are pensioning off a bunch of rich seniors, but when it comes time for this generation to collect, there won't be a dime left. Leave pensions to the private sector and get government off our backs.

This Republican logic rests on a touching faith in the security of private pension plans. But are corporate pensions really so safe? Surprise! Labor Secretary Robert Reich says that "millions of Americans are still in danger of not getting their pensions." Underfunding of corporate pension plans is at \$71 billion and climbing yearly. How come the hate-government crowd sharpens its knives for Social Security, but never mentions the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation, the federal agency that guarantees benefits for 41 million workers in private plans? Or are some kinds of big government okay?

**T**ales of our tough-on-crime Congress. One federal crime-busting agency has asked to expand its operations by spending the fines it collects from criminals—with no extra charge to the taxpayer. So how come the Republicans aren't cheering? No dice, says Senator Phil Gramm, now in line to head the Securities Subcommittee. The Senator says he won't allow the Securities and Exchange Commission to expand investigations of fraud claims against the securities industry. Neither will he allow reforms helping investors sue for fraud. Gramm fears that the agency will become "too intrusive." His House counterpart, Representative Jack Fields, praises legislation that would discourage small investors from suing big companies by making the loser pay all of the winner's legal fees. Says Fields, "If someone is going to impose costs on a company, they should be liable for it."

You notice that these guys never worry about the police or the FBI being "too intrusive," but when it comes

to investigating what Merrill Lynch sold to Orange County, suddenly they're all in the ACLU.

**A**nyone hear a giant sucking sound? Ross Perot said that the value of the peso would fall 25 to 30 percent after NAFTA passed, and Ralph Nader agreed with him. Everyone called them crazy, especially Bill Clinton. It just happened! As of December 28, the devaluation is at 40 percent and still rolling.

Goods made in Mexico and sold in America suddenly got 40 percent cheaper for us to buy. But U.S. exports just got 40 percent more expensive on the Mexican market. So much for the notion that NAFTA would encourage Mexicans to buy more from the U.S. because our goods, newly duty-free, would be priced down. Count on U.S. companies to take advantage by sending even more jobs South, and selling the products back here.

The big losers: Mexican workers facing high cost imports and rising inflation. The Mexican government blames the uncertainties caused by the rebellion in Chiapas for the crisis. (Never mind that many NAFTA skeptics had predicted the peso's fall long before anyone heard of the Zapatistas.) With NAFTA's benefits supposedly held hostage by the rebels, watch for talk of U.S. aid or intervention.

**T**he Newt math. The Associated Press reports that to make good on their pledge to balance the budget by 2002, some Republicans are investigating creative arithmetic. Budget balancing within seven years would require the GOP to spend \$1.4 trillion less, even before their promised tax cuts. Enter the concept of "dynamic scoring," which conservatives prefer. If a tax cut can be claimed to boost the economy, it can be considered revenue. Cutting the capital gains tax gives the rich more cash to invest, so instead of counting it as less money for the government, count it as an increase! It's Reagan's old Laffer Curve come back dressed up in the latest budget speak. And they call socialists unrealistic.

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