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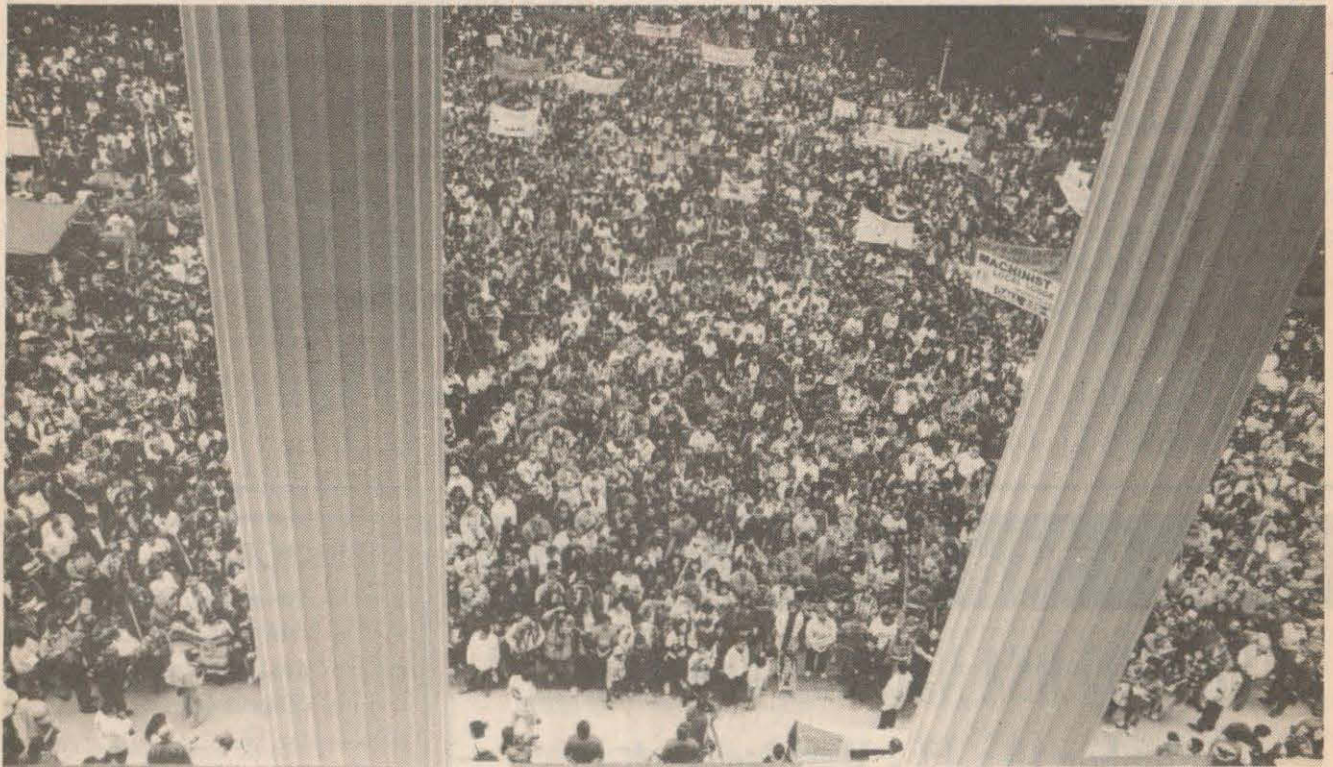
# DEMOCRATIC Left



September/October 1995

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## Now or Never

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### Labor Day 1995

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## Final Notice:

### The 1995 DSA National Convention

November 10 - 12 ♦ Washington, D.C.

Everyone is welcome—but in order to make this year's Convention as inexpensive as possible, we've had to set an early deadline for registration. So if you're interested in attending, contact DSA Program Coordinator Michele Rossi *immediately* at 212/727-8610 or [dsa@igc.apc.org](mailto:dsa@igc.apc.org).

If you'd like to submit resolutions to be considered at the Convention, the deadline for getting them to the national office is October 26.

For more detailed information about the Convention, see the notices in the May/June and July/August issues of *Democratic Left*.

## DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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# The Rise of the Right and the Future of Justice

BY RON DELLUMS

The Republican "revolution" of 1994 has brought forth some of the weakest political arguments and cruelest policy proposals that our nation has seen in this century.

But even though I work to oppose the conservative agenda with all of my energy, in a certain way I feel refreshed by what has happened in the last year. Ironically, the sea change in Congress has focused the left's attention and allowed us to concentrate on the big questions. After all, the Republicans, in their misguided way, are asking some *very* big questions. As their "Contract With America" puts it: How can we build a government and a society based on "accountability, responsibility, and opportunity"?

Tens of millions of anxious middle class Americans answered this question by voting Republican last year, and thus promoted the interests of such famously accountable and responsible institutions as the tobacco industry and the defense lobby. But the conservative agenda will only increase the economic anxiety of the middle class: it will make it easier for employers to mistreat workers and to ship jobs overseas, easier for states to deny unemployment assistance, easier for people to fall through the cracks of our health care system.

To build a society that embodies true responsibility, accountability, and opportunity, we must turn to the values and policy proposals of the democratic left.

Only with broad economic equal-

ity and a strong public commitment to the values of freedom, responsibility, and democracy in our families, communities, and workplaces can we build the kind of society we want our children to inherit. This doesn't mean huge government bureaucracies and mountains of regulation. It means simple policies that favor democratically-managed firms over undemocratic ones, and freedom over authoritarianism. Many of the changes we need don't involve government at all; they require social

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**To build a society that embodies true responsibility, accountability, and opportunity, we must turn to the values and policy proposals of the democratic left.**

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movements of the left that can embody and promote the values of democracy and tolerance.

But our country's most urgent crisis is the mammoth, and growing, gap between the fates of the rich and the fates of the poor.

This is why I have proposed the Living Wage/Jobs for All Act. This bill is grounded in the principles declared by Franklin D. Roosevelt in his 1944

State of the Union address: that every American has "the right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the nation."

The Act would instruct the President to take whatever steps necessary to:

- ◆ reduce the unemployment rate for U.S. adults to 3 percent or less within three years;
- ◆ guarantee U.S. workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively, and to give appropriate diplomatic and trade-policy support to democratic trade unions in the rest of the world;
- ◆ and guarantee adequate health care services and workplace safety for all.

These reforms would involve an array of public and private works programs to rebuild our schools and hospitals and a reduction of the standard work week to 35 hours. They would be financed in part through the increased revenues generated in a full-employment economy.

Does this legislation have any chance of passing in the current political climate? Probably not. But economic justice and full employment are real possibilities, and we have a duty to raise them. We must raise them in the halls of Congress as well as in schools, workplaces, and communities throughout the nation. **DL**

*Ron Dellums, a Vice Chair of DSA, is the ranking Democratic member of the House Armed Services Committee.*

# Perestroika on Sixteenth Street

Can a revitalized  
AFL-CIO point the way for the left?

BY HAROLD MEYERSON

American liberalism is sinking fast. Democrats with national aspirations, current or future—Bill Clinton, Bill Bradley, Bob Kerrey, Al Gore—are triangulating like crazy to distance themselves from traditional liberals. Congressional Democrats are unable to keep many in their ranks from voting with the Gingrichites, and some from converting altogether. And at the base, liberalism's core constituencies—anti-racist, feminist, and environmentalist organizations—seem unable either to rethink positions and strategies or mobilize their troops. If a liberal perestroika is in order, it is nowhere to be seen.

That, at least, is the conventional wisdom. It is largely right save in one huge particular: the linchpin of American liberalism, the labor movement, has embarked upon the most thoroughgoing change of directions in nearly fifty years. Labor's perestroika has already led to the first ouster of a national federation president in a century, a merger wave that may rationalize the entire movement, a more diverse leadership, and a long overdue re-emphasis on organizing.

Whether the change will continue apace, whether it will be up to the challenge of a capitalism gone global, is by no means clear. What is strikingly clear is that all the pundits bemoaning or deriding American liberalism's

paralysis are missing a revolution that's breaking out under their noses.

Still, after the Brezhnev-like torpor of labor's recent decades, the critics can be at least partially forgiven for looking anywhere else for change. This was, after all, the movement headed by Lane Kirkland, who, when asked as recently as February to articulate any new union perspectives, had referred the questioner to Samuel Gompers' catechism on "more virtue and less vice" and defended government's role by citing the Rural Electrification Administration's 1930s replacement of the kerosene lamp. And just last year, the AFL-CIO's own pollsters had reported back from focus groups that the word most commonly used to describe American labor was "dinosaur."

Now, the dinosaur has stirred. Since late spring, the movement has:

◆ Forced Kirkland's resignation as AFL-CIO president. Until this year, the presidency was a position to which incumbents clung until literally or effectively dead. In the 109 years since Samuel Gompers founded the AFL in 1886, the AFL and the AFL-CIO had had only five presidents—four, if you discount Peter McGuire, who served a year in the middle of Gompers' forty-year reign. By way of contrast, during that

time there have been 21 presidents of the United States—and nine popes.

◆ Witnessed the announced merger of its three foremost industrial unions—the United Auto Workers (UAW), the Machinists, and the United Steelworkers—as well as the merger of the International Ladies Garment Workers (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers (ACTWU) to form UNITE: the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees. As far back as the 1940s, legendary UAW leader Walter Reuther had been pushing for a consolidation of the metal trades unions; now, unionists are at long last contemplating the reduction of the eighty or so national unions with crazy-quilt jurisdictions into a movement of fifteen or twenty powerful internationals. Moreover, new UAW president Steve Yokich has

proposed establishing a North American Metal Workers Federation to enable U.S., Canadian, and Mexican workers to bargain more effectively with transnational corporations.

◆ Seen the emergence of a new generation of union leaders, like the UAW's Yokich, who pledged a merger in his June inaugural address and, with the Machinists' George Kourpias and the Steelworkers' George Becker, delivered in July; and Carpenters' president-to-be Doug McCarron, who has sponsored such successful and innovative campaigns as the organization of the immigrant Mexican villagers who comprise Southern California's drywall-worker labor force.

◆ Above all, experienced the formation of a progressive coalition of internationals that is beginning to transform the fundamental strategies and folkways of the movement. The unions that came together to oust Kirkland and that hope to elect union leaders John Sweeney, Richard Trunka, and Linda Chavez-Thompson to head the AFL-CIO at the Federation's convention upcoming in October have three primary demands: that the AFL-CIO devote a vastly increased proportion of its resources to consoli-



Rick Reinhard/Impact Visuals

dated organizing drives; that it devote both more resources and more thought to political mobilization, by itself and in greater coalition with other progressive forces; and that it embrace rather than shun the role of public presence and public voice on behalf of American workers. These ideas, utterly elementary but nonetheless marginal just six months ago, have suddenly become consensual within the brave new post-Kirkland movement. Even more remarkably, the coalition's campaign has legitimated (well, partially) the idea of public dissent and self-criticism. "I want a labor movement that can admit its imperfections," Sweeney vowed during a debate with AFL-CIO interim president (until recently, longtime Secretary-Treasurer) Tom Donahue in Los Angeles this August.

#### Social Unionism

The coalition's agenda isn't altogether new; it's more nearly the road not taken. Indeed, it's pretty clearly an updated version of the program Walter Reuther would have implemented at the AFL-CIO if, as was widely anticipated at the time of the 1955 merger of the two federations, he had succeeded George Meany as president.

In March, Justice for Janitors (SEIU Local 82) marched in Washington for tax fairness and for the organizing rights of janitors and parking lot attendants. More than 100 arrests followed.



Jim West/Impact Visuals

Five thousand Detroit residents showed up to apply for jobs being offered by the Post Office.

But Reuther's most conspicuous failure may have been his inability to build support among his fellow presidents for his brand of aggressive social unionism. After Reuther's death in 1970, that tradition was carried on by AFSCME's Jerry Wurf, the UAW's Doug Fraser and the Machinists' William Winpisinger, among others; but they remained a distinct minority among their colleagues.

Over the past decade, to be sure, individual internationals, regions, and locals were busily crafting an updated brand of social unionism. After twenty years of undeterred corporate lawbreaking, a number of unions—the Clothing

to labor's topmost decision-making bodies.

It was not until this winter that the dissident descendants of Reuther and Wurf were suddenly able to forge a majority. What made the difference was November's electoral debacle. For years, labor had counted on Congress to preserve the gains of the 1930s and 1960s. Now, the last line of defense was gone; new offensives had to be launched. Sweeney approached Kirkland about greatly increasing the Federation's contribution to the Organizing Institute, which schools both rank-and-file unionists and college students in innovative organizing approaches and places the students in organizing drives, but Kirkland demurred. AFSCME president Jerry McEntee approached the Federation with his idea for Project '95, a coalition effort aimed at retaking the House, but again, Kirkland demurred. With that, McEntee and Sweeney began canvassing their colleagues about Kirkland's removal. In short order, they amassed support from a coalition that included not just the core of the old CIO (the Auto Workers, Steelworkers, Mine Workers), but the Machinists, Ron Carey's new-model Teamsters, the Carpenters and the Laborers. And what began as somewhat inchoate dissatisfaction among top labor leaders with the Big Sleep of the Kirkland era evolved in the course of the year to potentially the most profound reshaping of labor since the founding of the CIO.

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What began early this year as inchoate dissatisfaction with the leadership has evolved into what may be the most profound reshaping of labor since the founding of the CIO.

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and Textile workers in the South and SEIU's Justice for Janitors campaign are two notable examples—developed a culture of guerrilla organizing, with tactics ranging from community alliances to civil disobedience. In the 1993 campaign against NAFTA, unions probably activated more of their members and forged more alliances than in any political action drive in years. But there was depressingly little indication that this renewed activism had filtered up

At first glance, the contest between John Sweeney and Tom Donahue for the AFL-CIO presidency seems devoid of revolutionary undertones. Both Sweeney and Donahue, after

all, are products of the Meany mainstream. They even hail from the same New York local—local 32B of the Service Employees, the union of New York's doormen and building service workers.

But first glances can deceive. Although both campaigns represent serious change from the Kirkland era, Sweeney's campaign is a more radical departure than Donahue's. As Kirkland's Secretary-Treasurer for the past sixteen years, Donahue was both a pillar of the old order and a quiet innovator, chairing the Federation's Commission on the Evolution of Work, assembling a first-rate office on trade issues, and serving as the Organizing Institute's one champion within the AFL-CIO hierarchy. (Its even fiercer champions included Sweeney, McEntee, and other coalition stalwarts.)

And as president of the Service Employees since 1980, Sweeney has arguably been the nation's most successful trade unionist during what has otherwise proved a period of union collapse. Since he took office on the eve of Reagan's first inaugural, Sweeney has increased SEIU membership from 625,000 to 1.1 million. Committing nearly one-third of the SEIU's program budget to organizing at a time when most internationals were investing considerably less than 5 percent of theirs, Sweeney spearheaded campaigns that organized workers widely regarded as too insecure (janitors, many of them immigrants) or too far-flung (home health care workers) or too status-anxious (the office workers of 9-to-5) to join, much less fight for, a union. He did this with an organizing staff recruited from a wide range of social movements and with a leadership that increasingly reflected SEIU's ever more diverse membership.

Both candidates' platforms mark a clear departure from the Federation's past practice—albeit clearer still in Sweeney's platform than in Donahue's. Each side places organizing at the center of its mission. Sweeney and his coalition call for pouring \$20 million a year into organizing—enabling the Organizing Institute (OI) to train one thousand new organizers over two years, establishing a Sunbelt Organizing Fund, and waging a Union Summer campaign in 1996 that will recruit one thousand college students for organizing drives. Sweeney envisions a somewhat CIO-like coordinated organizing structure, establishing an office of Strategic Planning to oversee multi-union drives, having a core of Federation officers on tap for joint

offensives, motivating and training individual union members to get active in the campaigns.

Donahue is also committed to increasing the OI's resources so it can train up to 1,500 organizers in the next two years. However, he argues that the Federation cannot now spend the \$20 million Sweeney is calling for without increasing dues, which he's not willing to do; nor does he support Sweeney's call to separate out the Federation's organizing department from its Field Service office, where it has languished for the past several decades. Sweeney's program is the more far-reaching and immediate, but either program would be a far cry from the near-extinction of organizing that characterized both the Meany and Kirkland years. The one survey that attempted to gauge the level of organizing during recent years was undertaken by Marshall Ganz and Richard Rothstein in the mid-80s. It found that among the 7,000-plus full time unions staffers and elected leaders in California at that time, 184—a little over 2 percent—were organizers, half of them in the private sector.

Sweeney is also proposing a pooling of resources to help in bargaining and strikes—setting up a Federation strike fund, a national strike support team, and a center for strategic campaigns to help with bargaining and corporate campaigns. He wants to establish a political organizing training center and a labor-oriented think tank. Both Sweeney and Donahue talk about international work almost exclusively in terms of corporate campaigns and gaining lever-

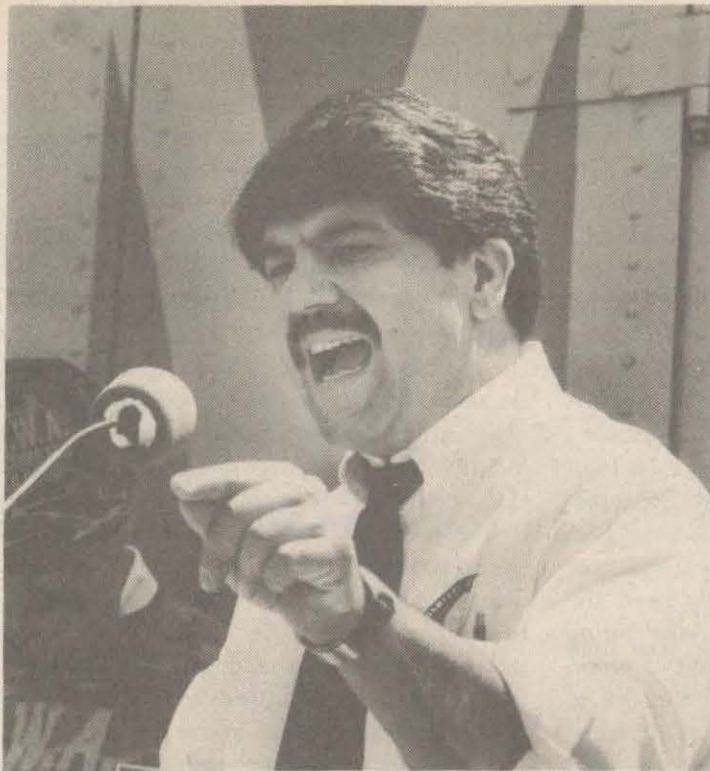
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**U**nder Sweeney's leadership, the SEIU has nearly doubled in size, with an organizing staff recruited from a wide range of social movements.

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age in bargaining and organizing—that is, in terms that would sound strange to Jay Lovestone, Irving Brown, and other Federation cold warriors of generations past (and that probably would sound strange to some of the Federation cold warriors who still walk its halls today).

**D**uring the Los Angeles debate, Donahue noted both wryly and accurately that the first people who had asked him to run for the Federation presidency were the leaders of the progressive coalition, Sweeney among them. At that point, earlier this year,



Jim West/Impact Visuals

**United Mine Workers president Richard Trumka, a candidate for AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer.**

Donahue didn't run, of course; he stuck by Kirkland and announced that he'd retire to New Mexico after the October convention. At that point, the coalition began looking for another candidate, Kirkland bowed to the inevitable and resigned, and Donahue proclaimed his new availability.

Only—and this is the major distinction between the two—he was now the candidate of the Kirkland die-hards. The union leaders who had said, No, it was more important not to rock the boat, had now become the linchpin of Donahue's support. It was not a force with which McEntee, Sweeney, Trumka, Kourpias & Co. felt they should compromise away what might be labor's last chance at rebirth. They had, they believed, the votes to elect an unambiguous candidate for change, and that candidate was Sweeney.

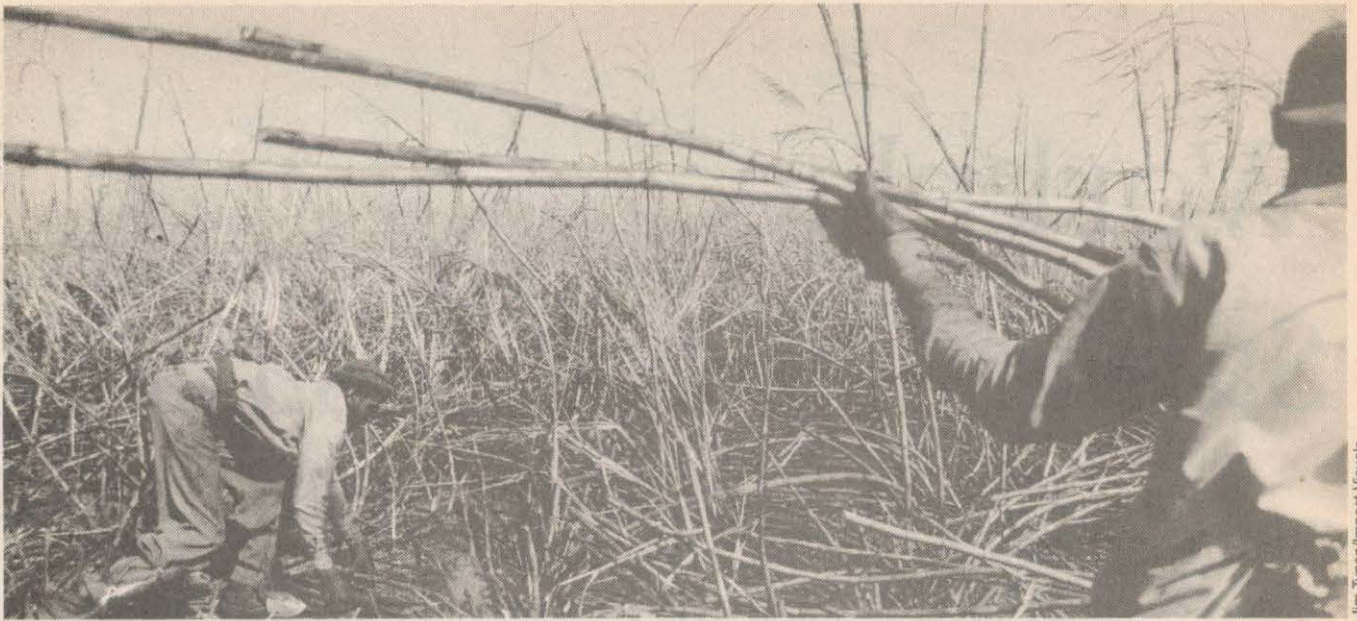
"Fault me for loyalty," Donahue proclaimed, when, in the Los Angeles debate, a questioner took him to task for never breaking with Kirkland. The issue isn't Donahue's loyalty to Kirkland, though; it's his loyalty to the Kirkland *apparatus*—the regime Kirkland put in place that has now become the base of Donahue's campaign. It includes the Field Service Department, which year after year tried to defund the Organizing Institute because the OI

was doing what Field Services should have been doing and wasn't. It includes a political operation that has seldom been inclined to work in coalition with other progressive social movements. It includes Kirkland's chief-of-staff, to whom Donahue has entrusted the consolidation of the Federation's foreign policy groups. Donahue's personal staff may include some of the more able people in the movement, but the building—AFL-CIO headquarters—houses many of the worst, the most stodgy and sectarian. And the building has become the center of Donahue's support. Donahue is a man caught between two regimes—the Kerensky of this quasi-revolution—who could have been

the candidate of change but was unwilling to break the ties that had bound the movement to the point of immobility.

Sweeney was willing to break those ties. And perhaps the clearest indication of the emerging differences between the two candidates and between the two coalitions is their choice for a number-two candidate. Donahue's was Barbara Easterling, a functionary of the Communications Workers whose most notable achievement in her years in the movement was to have helped lead the opposition to a pro-choice resolution during an AFL-CIO convention. The progressive coalition's choice was Richard Trumka, widely regarded as the movement's pre-eminent young leader, and one of the movement's most (and few) exciting public figures of any age. The 46-year-old Trumka has been president of the Mine Workers since he ousted the incumbent at age 33, and he's an alumnus of Jock Yablonski's Miners for Democracy—the first major rank-and-file insurgency of the post-1955 era. During his tenure he has led difficult but successful strikes against Pittston Coal and the Bituminous Coal Operators Association. He may be the movement's most powerful speaker, but more than that, he has time and again crafted campaigns that combine old-fashioned militance





Jim Tyrant/Impact Visuals

Sugar workers in  
Belle Glade,  
Florida.

with compelling appeals to the broader public (in the BCOA strike, the UMW scored big with the message that their mines were the most productive ones). Trumka has also been one of the most trenchant critics of labor's *ancien regime*. Sweeney and Trumka are proposing that the AFL-CIO create a third leadership position of Executive Vice-President, which they propose to fill with AFSCME's Linda Chavez-Thompson. Daughter of a Texas sharecropper, Chavez-Thompson spent the past twenty years organizing public sector workers in a right-to-work state.

#### A Democratic Army

From a broad democratic-left perspective, the changes that are beginning to sweep through labor, and the prospect of a Sweeney/Trumka/Chavez-Thompson AFL-CIO administration in particular, are a genuine occasion for hope—at a moment, moreover, when nothing else in the nation's politics provides so much as a bogus occasion. The movement to consolidate unions into much larger, more effective units, and to try to assemble some authentically transnational union federations, could bring desperately needed bargaining power to a battered working class. It's particularly auspicious that the merger movement coincides with the legitimization of dissent and internal democracy that the challenge to Kirkland and the Sweeney candidacy have offered. As the AFL-CIO's own polling clearly shows, Americans are far more enamored of workers' rights than they are of unions, and the larger the union, the less enamored they become. A more accountable and diverse leader-

ship will be indispensable to a union movement seeking to grow. At its best (and the UAW in the 1930s and 40s is a prime example), a union achieves a kind of oxymoronic status; it's a democratic army. The changes that the progressive coalition have put in motion would move labor in both those directions.

That said, it is in several particulars, alas, not 1935. Unions have already dropped from national consciousness. The battle for AFL-CIO leadership may be generating more copy and airtime than labor has received in decades, but it remains a story of interest to far fewer Americans than followed John L. Lewis's formation of the CIO sixty years ago. Secondly, the organizing battles that today's unions may soon be undertaking (most certainly in my own city, Los Angeles, capital of the sweatshop nouveau) will be fought on brutally unfavorable terrain. Often as not, they will be conducted not plant-by-plant but sector-by-sector in a given region. They may at times look less like the drives of the 1930s and more like a combination of the 1960s and the 1910s—militant and confrontational, mobilizing entire communities, linking immigrant groups to more long-standing residents, enlisting the power of the churches and the zeal of volunteers. No cause should pose a greater challenge to progressives' ingenuity, nor exert a greater claim on their energies and time. **DI**

*Harold Meyerson, a Vice Chair of DSA, is executive editor of LA Weekly.*

# Workplace Safety Under Assault

## The Gingrich squad takes on OSHA

BY JOEL SHUFRO

Corporations including General Electric, Amoco, and United Parcel Service are spending millions of dollars each year to lobby government to loosen regulations that protect working people. During the last five years, members of Congress have received \$37.1 million from Project Relief, a political action committee (PAC) established to weaken federal regulations. This is approximately nine times the amount of money given by the National Rifle Association, a lobby reputed to be one of the most powerful in Washington. In the wake of the Republican victories in 1994, Project Relief's investment may be about to pay off. The effect of the Republican onslaught, according to House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-MO), will be to "bring back the workplace atrocities and sweatshop standards that we have strived to eliminate for more than half a century."

Nowhere is the threat to workers' rights more evident than in the attack on the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA), the agency charged with guaranteeing workers' rights to "a safe and healthy workplace free of recognized hazards." In the name of regulatory relief, Congressional Republicans and right-wing Democrats have mounted an attack that, if successful, will gut OSHA and

reverse decades of progress in reducing on-the-job hazards and exposure to toxic substances. So drastic are the proposed cuts that the Department of Labor estimates an additional 50,000 more workers would be injured on the job and another 50,000 would be at an increased risk of contracting work-related illnesses each year.

The components of the campaign against OSHA include:

- ◆ an attack on OSHA's enforcement budget as well as specific prohibitions for the expenditure of funds for important new standards to reduce workplace hazards;
- ◆ introduction of legislation (H.R. 1834, S. 526) that would eliminate an employer's obligations to provide workers with a safe and healthy workplace "free from recognized hazards," prevent OSHA from promulgating needed new safety and health standards, and abolish federal agencies designed to protect worker safety and health;
- ◆ legislation that would repeal current safety and health regulations that regulate some of the nation's most dangerous industries, prevent the timely passage of proposed new standards, and require detailed comparative risk assessment of hazards and cost-benefit analysis of rules before



Alain McLaughlin/Impact Visuals

they could be promulgated.

On August 4, the House of Representatives voted 219-208 to cut the budgets of OSHA and its research arm, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). The bill slashed OSHA's enforcement budget by 33 percent—reducing OSHA's ability to enforce safety and health regulations. Currently, OSHA's meager budget allows workplaces to be inspected on average once every 87 years.

In addition, Republicans placed riders on the appropriations bill which prohibit OSHA from issuing a standard or guidelines or even from collecting data on repetitive strain injuries, the nation's leading cause of occupational illnesses. The rider also barred OSHA enforcement of its newly promulgated fall protection standard, which would require the use of protective equipment for heights of six feet or more, rather than the former standard of sixteen feet.

In what is seen as a first step toward eliminating the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), OSHA's research arm, the bill cut 25 percent of the agency's budget and eliminated all funding for the training of occupational safety and health professionals.

These budget cuts, together with the riders

prohibiting OSHA from working on new standards, will result in the unnecessary exposure of tens of thousands of workers to occupational hazards including tuberculosis and repetitive strain injuries.

In June, Rep. Cass Ballenger (R-NC), a plastics manufacturer with a long history of antipathy toward OSHA, introduced the so-called Safety and Health Improvement and Regulatory Reform Act of 1995 (H.R. 1834). Companion

**Workers in textile factories, such as this one in San Francisco, face a special risk from repetitive strain injuries.**

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**T**hese budget cuts will result in the unnecessary exposure of tens of thousands of workers to easily preventable occupational hazards.

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legislation has been introduced in the Senate by Judd Gregg (R-NH). The proposed legislation would gut what limited rights workers currently have to a safe and healthy workplace. The bill would:

- ◆ make compliance with job safety laws voluntary by preventing OSHA from issuing fines until employers are given a chance to correct problems, except in cases involving fatalities, serious injuries, or imminent danger—undercutting the incentive for employers to comply with

safety and health regulations until the inspector shows up;

- ◆ strip workers of their rights by prohibiting their unions from filing a complaint about job hazards on their behalf and requiring workers to notify their employers about any alleged safety violations before filing a complaint with OSHA—thus exposing workers to retaliation from employers;
- ◆ reduce fines for employers by eliminating penalties for willful violations and limiting penalties for serious violations that threaten injury or death;
- ◆ eliminate an employer's legal duty to provide a safe and healthy workplace;
- ◆ eliminate NIOSH, the agency that conducts scientific research upon which OSHA standards are based;

◆ prevent new standards dealing with workplace hazards from being promulgated by requiring lengthy risk assessments and cost-benefit analyses, thereby ensuring that new standards would be tied up in court indefinitely. Employers would have rights to challenge proposed and existing regulations, thereby setting the stage to eliminate protection workers currently have from exposure to cancer-causing chemicals.

According to the AFL-CIO, passage of the Ballenger/Gregg bill would "break the promise made by Congress to American workers that their health and safety would be protected on the job."

This legislation would subject hundreds of major regulations to elaborate studies of how effectively they control risks to job safety, to the environment, and to public health and

## what you can do

The legislation that would destroy OSHA will probably be voted on before the end of October. The time for post cards, demonstrations, and public outrage is now. Contact your local Committee on Occupational Safety and Health (COSH) to learn how you can help:

### ALASKA

Alaska Health Project/Anchorage

phone: 907/276-2864

fax: 907/279-3089

### CALIFORNIA

Worksafe/San Francisco

phone: 415/543-2699

fax: 415/882-4999

Los Angeles COSH

phone: 213/931-9000

fax: 213/931-2255

Sacramento COSH

phone: 916/442-4390

fax: 916/446-3057

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Alice Hamilton Occupational Health Center

phone: 202/543-0005

fax: 202/543-1327

### ILLINOIS

CACOSH/Chicago

phone: 312/666-1611

fax: 312/243-0492

### MASSACHUSETTS

MassCOSH/Boston

phone: 617/524-6686

fax: 617/524-3508

### NEW YORK

NYCOSH/New York City

phone: 212/627-3900

fax: 212/627-9812

WYNCOSH/Buffalo

phone: 716/833-5416

fax: 716/833-7507

### PENNSYLVANIA

PhilaPOSH/Philadelphia

phone: 215/386-7000

fax: 215/386-3529

### TEXAS

TexCOSH/Beaumont

phone: 409/898-1427

(no fax)

what each regulation would cost. The bill would give employers broad legal grounds to challenge any new regulation.

The bill would have profound adverse impact on worker safety and health as well as upon the public. Agencies would be forced to spend their time re-examining existing, and often effective, regulations rather than addressing new hazards and developing better regulatory approaches. In addition, the bill would clog the courts with unnecessary litigation as companies utilize the numerous opportunities for judicial review embodied within the bill.

Although this legislation has so far been defeated by a Democratic filibuster in the Senate, "moderate" Democrats, who are under intense pressure from industry, may introduce a compromise version.

In an attempt to blunt the Republican attack, OSHA has attempted to "re-invent" itself by becoming more responsive to corporate interests. OSHA has announced a series of initiatives designed to appease business. These include:

- ◆ a dramatic reduction in penalties for small employers found guilty of knowingly putting workers at risk of death or physical harm;
- ◆ expansion of voluntary protections and compliance programs, which exempt employers from routine OSHA inspections if they submit the appropriate paperwork to the agency;
- ◆ telephone responses, rather than full-fledged OSHA inspections, for non-formal complaints to the agency (complaints made without a whistle blower's identity being revealed);
- ◆ delay and limiting the application and scope of a new standard designed to reduce repetitive strain injuries, the largest single cause of occupational disease.

OSHA's response has been harshly criticized by unions and Committees for Occupational Safety and Health, 25 locally based coalitions of unions, safety and health activists, public health, medical and legal professionals. In a July letter to Joe Dear, the Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA, the COSH groups criticized the agency for "rolling back safety protections in a misguided effort to block congressional attempts to dismantle the agency." According to the COSH groups, "Trying to fend off congress-

sional attacks on OSHA by having the agency gut itself is a losing strategy." Nancy Lessen, Director of Policy for the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health in Boston, argued, "Strengthening OSHA would help the agency fulfill its original mandate, which did not pledge to make employers happy; it pledged to save workers' health and lives."

The AFL-CIO and local COSH groups are organizing to defeat the Republican initiatives. The AFL-CIO has placed television and radio spots targeting congressional sponsors of H.R. 1834 and is urging their membership to flood Congress with petitions and postcards demanding that Congress not undercut workers' rights to a safe and healthful workplace.

The fate of the legislation is uncertain. The Senate has yet to take up the Appropriations Bill, although there have been proposals to cut OSHA's budget even more severely than in the House bill. Although Clinton has announced that he will veto the House-approved budget, what cuts the administration is willing to accept is unknown. Representative Cass Ballenger's bill is scheduled to be marked up in mid-September and voted upon by the House in early October. However, whether the anti-OSHA sentiment is as virulent in the Senate is unclear.

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**S**trengthening OSHA would help the Agency fulfill its original mandate, which did not pledge to make employers happy; it pledged to save workers' health and lives.

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Letters should be sent immediately to members of Congress and the Senate opposing the proposed legislation and budget cutbacks. DSA members interested in joining the joining the fight back should contact their COSH group or call the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health's Save OSHA Committee at 212/627-3900. **DL**

*Joel Shufro is the Executive Director of the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH), a coalition of 200 local unions and 400 safety and health activists and health, medical, and legal professionals in the New York City area. Jim Young, NYCOSH's Director of Public Affairs, assisted in the preparation of this article.*

# Power Across Borders

From global solidarity to global organizing

BY GINNY COUGHLIN

Two years ago in a Decatur, Illinois union hall, a group of Mexican trade unionists met with workers from the local A.E. Staley corn processing plant. Staley's new owner, British transnational Tate & Lyle, was waging a war against the union by imposing dangerous new work rules and threatening workers with twelve-hour shifts and benefit cutbacks. Three months later these attacks culminated in Tate & Lyle's locking the Staley workers out of their factory. The vicious Staley lockout, now over two years old, has captured the hearts of trade unionists and progressives across the U.S. and—thanks to a strategy of international organizing by a core of Staley workers—the solidarity of people around the world.

Meetings like that of the Staley workers and workers from Mexico were virtually unheard of ten years ago. But they are quickly becoming commonplace in the U.S. labor movement as trade unionists from the rank-and-file to the AFL-CIO leadership seek out creative and effective strategies for combating corporate control of the global economy. The Decatur meeting eventually led to a Staley strike support network in Mexico City—and to a strategy of solidarity that ranges from Staley support groups around the world to a newly-formed international council

of Tate & Lyle unions. The Staley support network is organizing a boycott of Pepsi and Coke, pressuring them to stop buying corn sweeteners from Tate & Lyle. While this tactic is not new—unions and citizens' groups have for years been organizing international boycotts—the Tate & Lyle council of unions may prove to be a novel and effective organizing strategy. Staley workers recently used the council to organize a presence at a Tate & Lyle stockholders meeting in London. Staley workers also made a presentation at a Europe-wide council of Pepsi unions to explain the boycott.

Staley union member Mike Griffin was one of the first to recognize the international implications of the Staley lockout. "Multinational corporations are going around the world driving down wages and working conditions. We understand that here in Decatur." Griffin, fired by Staley for his union activities, now travels around the world talking to workers about the struggle at Staley and how it is connected to similar conflicts in nearly every country.

While the Staley story is not unique, it provides a powerful illustration of the transnational corporate agenda—and how that agenda is forcing down wages and working conditions worldwide. According to a report by



Gary Schochet

David Ranney of the Alliance for Responsible Trade, "Tate & Lyle's actions are consistent with a global trend, evolving since the mid-1970s, for supranational corporations (corporations without national or local roots or loyalties) to drive down standards (wages, working conditions, workplace and food safety, and environmental) and attack any efforts to intervene. Eliminating unions is a part of this strategy . . . ."

At the beginning of the 1990s, this new international threat came to the fore in the guise of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Labor responded with the first working class movement this country has seen in years. Many trade unionists and other progressives have since realized that NAFTA was neither the beginning nor the end of the free trade wars. In fact, the call for "free trade" is in many ways a smokescreen for something much bigger—corporate control of the global economy. Free trade agreements, which don't simply open closed borders but rather rewrite trade rules to make it easier for corporations to control the global marketplace, are one part of transnational capital's strategy for increasing control.

The Staley story points up another essential piece of the strategy: so-called "flexible" labor market practices that cut wages, lengthen working hours, eliminate health and safety measures and bust unions. Agribusiness conglomerate Tate & Lyle and its U.S. counterpart Archer Daniels Midland are running around the globe

buying up small independent agricultural companies like A.E. Staley, busting their unions, driving down wages and working conditions worldwide, and eliminating the competition that free trade advocates herald as benefits of free trade. If ADM is supermarket to the world, it's a market in which fewer and fewer people can afford to shop.

As U.S. trade unions are more and more confronted by harsh trends of the global economy—whether through political battles like NAFTA, through one-on-one activity with workers in other countries, or by the powerful attacks of transnational corporations—they are developing a wide variety of creative responses. The passage of NAFTA may have been a big defeat for labor, but the new cross-border organizing tactics that labor and citizens' groups developed during the NAFTA battle may prove to be the basis for a powerful new strategy for international labor organizing.

The United Electrical Workers (UE), which represents workers in an industry that is rapidly moving production to Mexico, has been among the most successful at building on the cross-border tactics of the anti-NAFTA movement. Through a strategic organizing alliance with a small independent labor federation in Mexico, the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT), UE locals raise money to pay the salaries of Mexican trade unionists organizing in electronics-indus-

On Labor Day, trade unionists and other activists picketed GAP stores throughout the country to protest sweatshop conditions in the textile industry throughout the world. (For more information about the GAP's role, see page 18.)

try maquiladoras owned by U.S. corporations. The UE and FAT also work together to sponsor worker-to-worker delegations, NAFTA monitoring, and even sending Mexican workers to help in U.S. organizing drives.

Building on the investigative and media work of the National Labor Committee, the newly merged Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Technical Employees (UNITE), recently launched a campaign to force major U.S. retailers like the GAP and Eddie Bauer to get their contractors in Central America to respect the basic human rights of workers there. The National Labor Committee just completed a tour by two teenage women from El Salvador and Honduras who told their stories of being forced to work twelve- and sixteen-hour shifts for as little as 43 cents an hour making clothes for sale in the U.S. The tour received an impressive amount of press coverage, including over 50 newspaper and magazine articles. During the tour UNITE organized demonstrations against the GAP in twenty cities, including a march to GAP corporate headquarters in San Francisco.

In another Decatur battle gone international, workers at the Decatur plant of Japanese-

owned tiremaker Bridgestone/Firestone have taken their strike to the streets of Japan. Workers from Decatur teamed up with Japanese workers to picket the Tokyo headquarters of Bridgestone and leaflet at street corners and subway stations in Tokyo. This type of action is unheard of in Japan, where workers tend to be very deferential to corporations.

Perhaps the most extensive and successful international organizing effort by a U.S. union was the 1991-92 Steelworkers' campaign against global metals trader Mark Rich in response to a lockout at the Ravenswood Aluminum plant in West Virginia. Ravenswood had been bought by a trio of independent investors that included the right-hand-man of international billionaire and fugitive Mark Rich, who was hiding out in Switzerland from a U.S. indictment for trading fraud and racketeering. Ravenswood workers, with the help of the Steelworkers and the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department, traveled around the world organizing international pressure on Rich and on creditors of Ravenswood to get them to force an end to the lockout. The two-year campaign, waged on five continents in twenty-two countries, combined with an NLRB victory, brought an end to

## Bertha Luján: "Solidarity Across All Borders"

*When Bertha Luján, a leader of the Mexican Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT) spoke at the Socialist Scholars Conference in New York in April, she called for a new international labor effort to resolve the social and economic crisis in Mexico—and throughout North America:*

The Mexican crisis and the way in which the U.S. and Mexican governments are handling it favors large corporations and threatens the future of democracy and social justice. The moment is right to advance in consciousness raising and to demand the renegotiation of NAFTA.

We need to struggle on two fronts: for democracy and for a change in our country's economic model. We are proposing the following points as a plan of action:

1. To begin a campaign to inform the public on the dimensions, responsibilities and social repercussions of the foreign debt.

2. To promote solutions that confront the root problems of the Mexican crisis, and that go beyond guarantees of short-term credit, including the renegotiation of the foreign debt, the creation of compensatory funds, and the renegotiation of NAFTA.

3. To demand that the support Mexico receives to get through the crisis not include conditions demanding the renunciation of our national sovereignty, to reject the privatization of strategic areas and the mortgaging of national resources.

4. To oppose the idea that the workers of Mexico, United States, and Canada should pay to bail out the inves-

tors in Mexico. To struggle throughout North America for expansionary and full-employment policies. To defend social programs and support collective union negotiations in all three countries.

5. To promote movements to develop new agreements—both within and outside of NAFTA—that will provide fundamental and long-lasting solutions to labor and immigration, giving full respect to the rights of immigrants.

Finally, at this conference, we appeal to the democratic American forces that they oppose and struggle against the racist and anti-immigrant policies of their country. Now more than ever, we believe in the need for solidarity among workers and citizens across all borders.



the lockout and a complete victory for the union in 1992.

Ravenswood, however, is a rare example of a successful international campaign that immediately strengthens the bargaining power of workers. Most union efforts to confront the global economy are educational, aimed at helping workers understand the cross-border connections of their struggles, or solidarity-based, aimed at using the power of U.S. workers and consumers to gain rights for workers at U.S. owned plants abroad. Although the UE and FAT call their efforts a "joint organizing strategy" they acknowledge that for now the FAT is doing the organizing and the UE is doing the solidarity work. For UNITE, the need to tackle economic globalization is clear, with companies moving most U.S. apparel and textile jobs overseas. And in their campaign with the National Labor Committee they are engaged in creative, hard-hitting efforts to take on transnational corporations.

During the anti-NAFTA fight unions developed a new international solidarity that was based not simply on U.S. workers supporting the causes of foreign workers, as much international solidarity of the past has been modeled. But rather this new solidarity is based on combatting the common enemies of workers everywhere—transnational corporations and their political agenda. It is an exciting and essential new vision of union organizing that recognizes the powerful threats posed by the global economy and the potential force that workers gain from fighting side-by-side with comrades around the world. But it's a vision greatly in need of a strategy.

Despite the success of international campaigns, labor continues to lose power in the transnational-controlled global economy. Joe Uehlein of the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department has worked on many international labor campaigns and has thought a lot about developing a strategy out of labor's international organizing. According to Uehlein, in order for unions to get to a point at which cross-border campaigns actually achieve power for workers, these campaigns must look beyond educating and influencing policy and toward building structures that will allow for the international coordination of organizing and bargaining efforts. "We have to get from transnational support to transnational bargaining."

One strategy that international labor is de-

veloping is the regional council of unions, like the Tate & Lyle council and the Pepsi council. These councils—international meetings of union leaders from one transnational corporation—began in Europe as a mandate of the European Union treaty. While it's been a struggle to ensure that the councils are union-controlled and not manipulated by corporations, some of the councils are inching towards winning more power for workers. Several have been successful in pressing for transnationals to adopt programs for worker training and the promotion of women, as well as progressive plant-closing policies. And now unions from outside of Europe, like the Staley union, are participating in the councils. "It's a long way from collective bargaining, but at least it's a step in that direction," says Kurt Stand, the North American regional director of the International Union of Food and Allied Workers.

Like a young child just learning to walk, visionaries in the labor movement are stumbling and groping toward a strategy for taking on global capitalism. The efforts of individual unions in the U.S. would be greatly enhanced by some form of national coordination. Just such a thing is on the horizon. If the Sweeney/Chavez-Thompson/Trumka slate is elected to lead the AFL-CIO in October, they pledge to set up a

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**T**he cross-border organizing tactics that labor developed during the NAFTA battle may prove to be the basis for a powerful new strategy for international organizing.

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transnational corporate monitoring project and a center for strategic campaigns.

In the long run, labor's conundrum is that its ability to wage powerful international campaigns is dependent on its ability to sign up millions of new union members. International campaigns alone, even highly effective and visible ones, won't organize new members. However, they could give labor the vision and inspiration to begin to reverse their declining membership numbers.

*Ginny Coughlin, a former DSA staff member, is the staff organizer of New York DSA and the founder and coordinator of GLOBE: The Global Justice Education Project.*

# A Call to Action:

## How DSAers Can Help Salvadoran Textile Workers Fight for Justice

**A**t the Mandarin factory in El Salvador, workers sew t-shirts for the GAP. Each shirt costs \$20 in U.S. stores, but the workers only get 12 cents per shirt. Last year the GAP made over \$300 million in profit and its CEO paid himself over \$2 million. Meanwhile, the Mandarin workers live in shacks without running water or electricity.

**T**his summer, two teenage women workers from Central America came to the United States to describe conditions in the garment shops of the region. They came with the help of the National Labor Committee and UNITE: the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees. Judith Viera worked for Mandarin—that is, until the company illegally fired her for union activity. Claudia Molina is from Honduras, but the experiences she recounted were almost identical to Judith Viera's. Workers in both countries are forced to work twelve- to fifteen-hour shifts. Both Judith

and Claudia would like to continue their educations—they left school after the fifth grade—but their employers would not let them leave at night to attend classes.

They sewed clothes not just for the GAP, but for many other major U.S. retailers.

**A**fter weeks of bad publicity, the GAP finally asked for a meeting with the National Labor Committee and the two workers. Company officials at the GAP and other stores pointed to their codes of conduct, which call for decent labor standards in all their contracting shops. But Judith and Claudia and other workers had never heard of a code of conduct, and it certainly was never enforced.

**A**n important point made by the National Labor Committee tour was that unless codes of conduct are rigorously enforced and conditions monitored, they are meaningless. Worse, they can become

public relations ploys, allowing companies to claim they won't tolerate abusive conditions while not investigating or stopping actual abuses.

Please take the time to write a letter to the

GAP—a sample is below—demanding an independently monitored code of conduct. For more information about this campaign, contact Ginny Coughlin at the national office.

### A SAMPLE LETTER TO THE GAP developed by the National Labor Committee

[Note: The following should be used only as a guideline. We encourage people to send original letters, and to indicate other organizations from which they may have heard about the case. A greater diversity of letters will have a greater impact on the company.]

**Mr. Donald G. Fisher**  
Chief Executive Officer  
The GAP  
One Harrison Street  
San Francisco, CA 94105

Dear Mr. Fisher:

The story of the Mandarin factory in El Salvador has recently come to my attention from a [colleague/friend/denominational source, etc.]. I am disturbed by the testimony of 18 and 17 year old women who:

- » work 12 to 23 hour shifts.
- » are forced to work overtime.
- » have no opportunity to pursue or complete their educations.
- » are subject to verbal abuse and sexual harassment from their supervisors.

For a company that prides itself on enlightened public behavior, this is a disturbing story to say the least. The fact that Mandarin is Taiwanese-owned is no excuse for the GAP to be a party to such an operation.

How can you justify the exploitation of these young women given the success and profitability of the GAP? I have come to see the GAP in a whole new light and await your answer as to how you monitor such heartbreaking situations.

On my end, I plan to inform my [church/synagogue/union/etc.] about the exploitation of workers at the Mandarin factory—and the complicity of the GAP—and to monitor this situation to see what changes occur to improve the terrible conditions at the Mandarin factory. I am not sure my conscience will allow me to purchase another GAP product until I am convinced that some human progress is being made at the Mandarin factory.

Please note that I am not interested in company whitewashes or pre-fabricated "investigations" at Mandarin. I would like to see some independent verification that teenagers can get an education if they want one.

Given my plans to share the information with my organization, I would appreciate an honest and factual response from you.

# Rockslide in Mexico

## Independent unions fight for their survival

This summer DSA Youth Section activist Josh Zuckerberg and New York student Amy Dalsimer traveled to Mexico for the International Labor Rights Fund, a Washington-based non-profit organization. The team's objective was to investigate the possibility of using NAFTA's side agreement on labor rights to file a complaint on behalf of Mexico's workers. Building an effective international defense of workers' rights is something that the left has talked about for decades, but today it is more urgent than ever: it's clear that the left won't survive in any country if we can't make this kind of solidarity a reality. The following report from Mexico suggests some of the challenges that we will face.

BY JOSHUA ZUCKERBERG

Mexico's political and economic crisis has disappeared from headlines in the U.S., but it has not been resolved. On the contrary: inflation currently runs 42 percent higher than the government-sanctioned 10 percent increase in the minimum wage, and over a million people lost their jobs in the first six months of 1995. Mexico's independent labor movement—which has played a leading role in the campaigns for democratic reforms and for a social/environmental charter for NAFTA—is in a fight to survive. Privatization, austerity, and aggressive anti-union tactics are threatening its future.

A few words of background: Most of Mexico's labor movement is not independent, but instead dominated by undemocratic "corporatist" unions. Corporatist unions are called so because of their symbiotic relationship with the Independent Revolutionary Party (PRI). The PRI controls and supports these corporatist unions through the Congress of Labor (CT), which is made up of the various official labor confederations. These "official" unions com-

prise the labor sector of the PRI—they have standing as part of the official party organization and its parliamentary delegation. The PRI machinery controls and rewards this compliant labor leadership with various kinds of political patronage. (For more detail, see Dan La Botz's excellent *Mask of Democracy* [South End Press, 1992].)

Mexico's corporatist unions have responded to the economic crisis with acquiescence. In January, as the currency crisis was unfolding, the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), the largest of the corporatist-government affiliated unions, representing close to two million workers, signed "The Unity Agreement to Overcome the Economic Emergency," an accord among business, government, and the official labor movement, which established that the minimum wage was to increase by 7 percent while businesses would work vigorously to keep prices low. In reality, while the daily minimum wage went from a paltry 13.9 pesos in December 1994 to 16.7 pesos in June, the price of milk and eggs (to name a sample)

increased by over 50 percent (a liter of milk costs 2.85 pesos and a kilogram of eggs costs 5.40 pesos).

In addition to the exorbitant inflation and decreasing wages, the CTM and other corporatist unions were ordering their locals to be as "flexible" as possible. In a March interview with *El Financiero Internacional*, Juan Millan, head of communications for the CTM, argued that "unions should cooperate however they can to save jobs—whether that means salary cuts, working half-time, whatever...in this atmosphere, there's no question of strikes." While the official unions were urging flexibility, numerous independent unions were faced with extinction.

"I'm Full of Miracles":

### The Struggle at Kirkwood Industries

Auto-parts makers at a Mexican affiliate of U.S.-based Kirkwood Industries attempted to organize an independent union in March and were rewarded with massive layoffs. The workers had been complaining of ramshackle and unsanitary bathrooms; a filthy eating area; sexual harassment; and an unreasonable, arbitrary work schedule. They demanded an election in which workers could choose whether they wanted to remain represented by the CTM or join STIMACHS, a union affiliated with the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo ("Authentic Labor Front," or FAT). The FAT is a confederation of democratic unions whose leadership was heavily involved in the struggle against NAFTA.

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**W**hile the official unions were urging flexibility, numerous independent unions were faced with extinction.

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When the Kirkwood workers began to organize for STIMACHS, the CTM withdrew and was replaced by the COCEM (Confederation of Workers and Peasants of the State of Mexico—another corporatist union.) On March 21, fifteen COCEM thugs and armed police officers took Ernesto Alfonso Recanco, a leader of the independent union drive, to a local restaurant to urge his resignation. Recanco refused and was fired the same day. Another worker, Celia Montagna, described being fired after she was caught fraternizing with the workers who were organizing for STIMACHS. Other workers were

refused protective gloves and goggles as retaliation for their participation in the organizing drive.

By June 21, the day of the election, 150 of 250 workers had been fired. Although the local conciliation and arbitration board made it possible for some of the fired workers to return for the vote, the election remained a farce. On the morning of the election, a truck of hired thugs appeared outside the plant gates to harass and threaten the workers. Once inside, the workers were forced to vote in front of their manager and armed guards. The vote was not secret and those workers who remained employed with the company were told that the consequence of voting for the independent union would be dismissal. Most of the fired workers took the company's minimal severance package, an understandable response during this economic crisis. The "victory" the other workers awaited was a legally mandated severance package that would leave them with more money than their counterparts who accepted the earlier package.

Jaime Flores, an organizer for the FAT who receives additional funding from the United Electrical workers of the United States, declared that the FAT would continue to target Kirkwood as a plant to be democratically organized. Recanco, the fired worker and activist, told us that he had not given up hope in the FAT and that he had not been scared away from the prospect of organizing at his next workplace. "I'm full of miracles," he said, "and I'll continue to fight for better conditions." Despite this promise, it was clear that whatever organizing was to happen at the Kirkwood plant would have to happen without Recanco and his fellow workers, who for now join the ranks of the country's eight million unemployed.

### Fighting Against

#### Corporatism in the State of Quintana Roo

Other independent unions have been attacked even more directly by the government. The Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants of Quintana Roo (CROC-QR) has been attempting to create a democratic current within the corporatist union structure of the CROC National and has met with violence and judicial coercion. The rift between the CROC of Quintana Roo and the state government developed in 1993 as the union, led by Salvador Ramos, attempted to



Amy Dalsimer

affiliate and organize taxi drivers and a sector of campesinos.

In March 1993, the CROC of Quintana Roo affiliated with 56 ejidos (communal land holdings run by campesinos) organized as the Federation of the Workers of the Land. In June 1994, the state's taxi workers also affiliated with the CROC of Quintana Roo. These workers, who were represented by the Andres Union, sought outside representation from the CROC because their union was a "bosses' union, not a workers' union." These drivers have very few protections: they work on commission, twelve hours a day, six days a week, with no social security or vacation and holiday benefits. The taxi system is run by a few of Quintana Roo's wealthiest families, who are deeply connected with the governor of the state, Mario Villanueva Madrid.

On August 29, 1994, the governor brought together the CROC-QR union leaders and proceeded to threaten them with death, imprisonment, and trumped-up drug trafficking charges. The governor forced the leaders to sign a document stating that they would dissociate from the taxi workers and the campesinos. For the rest of the year the leaders of the union, and Ramos in particular, were subjected to various attempts to frame the leadership, including an episode when state police forces were witnessed bringing dynamite into the union headquarters.

The governor then enlisted the help of CROC-National leader Alberto Juarez Blancas. In the early morning of March 19, 1995, the police arrived at the union headquarters with

members of the state's elite riot squad. The police used a truck to bust down the door, while other officers escorted goons sent by Blancas into the building. The goons burst into the union hall where sixty campesinos and workers, who had been using the hall as a dormitory for a weekend conference, lay sleeping. The goons viciously attacked these workers with bats and iron bars screaming that they had been sent by Blancas and the governor to show who was really in charge. Present during this onslaught was the CROC-QR's Federal Deputy Virginia Betanzos Moreno who was also beaten. Later, the police refused to allow the Red Cross into the area to help the wounded. When the workers were finally taken to the hospital, the reports of their injuries were stolen.

The next day the union's headquarters, locals, and adult education center were all closed down and boarded up. Ramos was banned from the state and went to Mexico City to plead his case.

The CROC National has imposed a substitute leader, Roberto Castellanos Tovar, on the workers of the CROC of Quintana Roo. Tovar has not been elected and enjoys little if any rank and file support. Ramos remains in exile in Mexico City, working now with Manuel Fuentes, a renowned labor lawyer, to develop a case against the state government of Quintana Roo and the CROC National.

#### The Attack on Route 100's Bus Workers

On April 8, Luis Miguel Moreno Gomez, the Transport and Highway Secretary of

**"Not one step back!":**  
in August, bus workers in the independent Route 100 union voted at a union meeting.

Mexico City, declared that the Route-100 bus service of Mexico City was bankrupt. This announcement sent into effect an avalanche of mysterious deaths, massive layoffs, and suspect jailings. So far, three government officials have either "committed suicide" or been ruthlessly executed in connection to this case while the 12,000 bus workers have been severed from their livelihood. Also caught in this rockslide have been the independent union's eleven elected leaders and longtime legal counsel Ricardo Barco Lopez, who, charged with complicity in acts of managerial corruption, have been in jail, some for months before in early August the complaining witnesses began to appear after a dozen missed court appearances. Blatantly absent from the judicial probe into the quasi-public company's alleged mismanagement have been the twelve past administrators who have directed the company in the last fourteen years.

The lawyers for SUTAUR (the Independent Union of the Auto Workers of the Urban Auto Transport Workers of Route 100) have fought back against the massive layoff by attacking the legal foundations of the bankruptcy. They argue that bankruptcy should not be applied to a public, not-for-profit entity. The city had budgeted 150 million dollars this year for the bus system but expected it to generate only about 60 million dollars. Hence, the government funded and administered the bus company as a service

law."

Another glaring problem in this case is the question of jurisdiction. It was the First District Court of Mexico County that handed down both the bankruptcy decision and then hours later stripped the union of its representative status and its collective bargaining agreement. However, the Federal Labor Law clearly states that a conciliation and arbitration board (a labor court) must approve or disapprove of CBA terminations. The conciliation and arbitration board is also the only body that can strip a union of its representative status. Hence, the SUTAUR lawyers have challenged the First District Court as being far beyond its jurisdiction when it dissolved the contract and the union.

In an attempt to undermine the union's response to the fallacious bankruptcy proceeding, the government arrested eleven union leaders and the union's principal legal counsel. At first, the government declared that these leaders were responsible for the mismanagement and corruption within the company. However, after keeping these leaders in jail for five months, the government has produced no evidence of corruption. More importantly, not one of the past administrators of the company has been investigated for his role in any possible misconduct. Instead, the government had to develop a case using ex-workers, most from as far back as 1986, who stated that they were entitled to more money from a union benefit package. These ex-workers were very unclear as to the facts and were unable to identify Barco or the other leaders in the courtroom. This same exact case had been brought and dismissed by a civil court in 1989.

Both the union headquarters and the lawyers' offices were ransacked as the government sought desperately to persecute the union leaders. The police conducted warrantless searches into the homes and offices of the union leaders and the legal counsel. The government then proceeded to freeze the bank accounts of the union and the lawyers notwithstanding the "fact that there is no legal basis in Mexican law for such an action," states Professor Ruiz. The freezing of the union funds has forced the workers to live off pan-handling in the streets, selling donated goods, and the small amount they have received from international solidarity.

The crackdown against SUTAUR should be seen as both an act of repression against popular

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**T**he government seems prepared to submerge the law as it crushes any strong and independent voices that might resist the sweep of neoliberalism.

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to the public; "it is a constitutional commitment to support working people's basic needs," argues Jorge Garcia Ramirez, a member of the National Democratic Lawyers Front (FNAD). The public need for cheap transportation services is suggested by the fact that Mexico City, which is four times the size of Los Angeles, has four million fewer cars. According to Professor Enrique Gonzalez Ruiz of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), "the application of bankruptcy to a non-commercial entity clearly undermines the basic ingredient of bankruptcy

movements and as a preparatory step paving the way for the further privatization of Mexico. Barco, along with other members of SUTAUR's legal team, had been named by the Zapatistas as their legal team between April and August of 1994. The union itself had spoken out vociferously in defense of the Zapatistas when the uprising occurred and helped organize the caravans of food and clothing that was sent to the people of Chiapas.

The bankruptcy of Route-100 and the ensuing dissolution of the union opened the way for the Federal District Department to realize its original objectives outlined in the Integral Transport Plan, which foresaw the formation of private bus lines consisting of 3,000 buses. This scheme responds to the demands of several high ranking privatizers like Carlos Hank Gonzalez, owner of a Mercedes-Benz bus manufacturing subsidiary, who want to enter the transport market.

The union remains united. 11,000 of the original 12,000 have refused the severance package and re-employment with the company, which began running the service a week after the bankruptcy was filed without a collective bargaining agreement or benefits for the replacement workers. The union has been active on the streets organizing weekly rallies and spearheading the "unofficial" May Day Rally that brought

out close to a half-million enraged workers from across the country.

The government, in its attempt to privatize its infrastructure and open its economy to foreign capital, seems prepared to submerge the law as it crushes any strong and independent voices that might resist the sweep of neoliberalism. All of these unions were, and remain, a part of that small but vocal chorus that continues to shout its discontent to power. None of the workers or leaders involved in these struggles seemed prepared for surrender. In fact, on our last day in Mexico City we visited the SUTAUR headquarters, where thousands of workers had been standing in the sweltering airplane hangar of an assembly hall for six hours. We expected to see a group of workers worn down and demoralized by extended unemployment, hunger, and government harassment; instead, we found a solidified union with fists pumping into the air and voices raised to the chant: "Ni un paso atras; Ni un paso atras!"—Not one step back, not one step back! **DL**

*Amy Dalsimer, a student at the Hunter School of Social Work in New York City, provided extensive translation and research assistance for this article.*

*Joshua Zuckerberg, a DSA member, is entering his second year at Brooklyn Law School.*

## what you can do

### Letters of protest should be faxed to the following:

President

Ernesto Zedillo Ponce De Leon

011-52-5-271-1764

011-52-5-515-1794

Labor Secretary

Dr. Santiago Onate Laborde

011-52-5-645-5594

### Fax letters of support for the SUTAUR workers:

011-52-5-550-2863

For information about the UE and FAT's "adopt an organizer" program, contact Robin Alexander at 412/471-8919.

# A Left-Wing Conscience in the Mystery Section: Lia Matera's *Designer Crimes*

BY JO-ANN MORT

Female detectives are in. Mystery novels written by women with female sleuths as the main attraction are big sellers. Yet what sets Lia Matera's character, Laura di Palma, ahead of the pack is not only her tough, uncompromising nature, but her left-wing leanings and her class bias.

In a series of novels set in and around the Bay Area, Matera—herself a lawyer—introduces her readers to a lawyer who appears to have a stronger bent for investigation than for litigation.

Laura di Palma is a feminist with a dilemma. She tries to make it in the white-collar world of upper crust San Francisco law firms. But her values keep invading her corporate space. Not to mention her personality, which doesn't allow her to feel comfortable in an Armani dress-for-success suit. As she describes herself in her latest book, *Designer Crimes* (Simon & Schuster, 1995), di Palma is a "ballbreaker with a problem."

In this, the fifth volume in the di Palma mystery series, Laura's entangled in a dispute with a large corporate law firm and is also defending a high school friend in a murder trial in her Pacific Northwest hometown. While the dual plots at first appear to have no connection, it soon becomes clear that the stories are intriguingly intertwined.

Di Palma has decided to sue her former boss for slander. While discussing this case one day with a labor lawyer, di Palma is shot at. The bullet misses our heroine and kills her lawyer, who dies mouthing the phrase, "designer crimes." The novel takes off

on a chase up and down the West Coast and into a world where computers are weapons in an extra-legal effort to gain redress for aggrieved employees. In a world where workers are increasingly without union protection to address workplace wrongs, lawyers are being called upon to take up the employees' cases. As di Palma's on-again, off-again detective boyfriend, Sandy Arkelett, tells her:

"I guess it's pretty hard for an employee to get a grievance fixed. . . the law's on the employer's side. For one thing, employees can't strike without getting replaced, not anywhere anymore, not really. . . and the government body that's supposed to hear employee grievances got packed with pro-employer lawyers during Reagan and Bush."

Di Palma acknowledges this wisdom with an aside to the reader: "Even the skeleton of old labor laws, picked clean by the 'right-to-work' forces of the eighties, were rarely enforced by the National Labor Relations Board. Maybe the Democrats would change that. But so far, their 'probusiness' agenda had been merely promanagement."

The plot bounces from boardrooms to the back rooms of warehouses to the small-town courtrooms of the mythical Hillsdale, somewhere north of San Francisco, where di Palma has agreed to defend her high school friend (and onetime sweetheart), who faces a murder rap. Brad Rommel was the romantic loner in high school, whose argument with the world makes it impossible for him to function adequately as a grown up. Di Palma takes on his case because she

holds a residue of sympathy for him—and for her hometown. Even though she left for the big city years ago, di Palma still responds to the allure of neighborly Hillsdale, which is one reason she continues to feel uncomfortable in the world of corporate law firms. Some of the best musings in the novel are about the demise of the Hillsdales of the world—places where shopping malls have overtaken Main Streets.

At each step, the author keeps you guessing about the novel's outcome. The resolution to the mystery eludes the reader almost up to the final page, and not before di Palma finds herself shot at again and even jailed for an alleged murder attempt.

*Designer Crimes* is a mystery of the old school. Matera's writing is expressive and sharp. Di Palma is not only a feminist lawyer with a left-wing conscience. She's a hard drinking, risk taking woman, uncertain about how to resolve the dilemmas of her personal life. The reader is brought to understand the class-based grievances of those who were brought up on the wrong side of the tracks in di Palma's hometown; and the same inequities underlie the novel's other storyline, in which computer hackers and labor lawyers fight back for aggrieved workers. This mystery novel is so well written that it can be read for pleasure or for social observation. Either way, Matera's is a unique voice on the literary scene.

*Jo-Ann Mort, a Vice Chair of DSA, is Communications Director of UNITE: the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees.*



# Socialism Without Apologies

BY RON ARONSON

How deep is our crisis? Observed on a pickup truck's bumper outside a coffee shop in Royal Oak, Michigan, last week: "I think, therefore I'm not a socialist." Six years ago we cheered the overthrow of Communism in Eastern Europe, supporting movements our comrades participated in and often even led, and anticipated that without the albatross of Communism, socialism was in for a renewal. Wouldn't it now be possible, as the poet André Codrescu said on revisiting his homeland after the overthrow of Ceausescu, to "dream about socialism again"? More than dream: with its ugly face overthrown, wouldn't we now be able to make a democratic and humane socialism into a realistic alternative?

We know the answer. Something very different has gotten unlocked. The most complex society that has ever existed is now dominated by an absurd, reductionist free enterprise individualism. "Privatization" is the order of the day, as we retreat from every common commitment to our society's and each other's well-being.

Adding to our troubles is the new world economy. Although globalization is not new, and although it is not universal, conservatives are raising the twin banners of international competition and the free movement of capital to lower standards of living so that the best-off workers may become more "competitive." It is the threat of capital flight that has become

universal.

These political, economic, and ideological currents represent the "objective" aspect of our crisis. What is perhaps even worse is the "subjective" aspect: that we socialists don't even know what socialism is anymore. The people who thought up the bumper sticker may know what they're talking about, but do we? Socialism is most assuredly not nationalization of industry, or a large government, or state control over more and more areas of life. Nor is it simply reforming capitalism à la the Scandinavian welfare states. Reforms do not slowly accumulate to become, as some once thought, democratic social control over the means of production. In short, most of what has widely been termed "socialism"—communist state socialisms, welfare state reforms, nationalizations—no longer represents meaningful models for various lefts to rally around. This is one reason why, in *After Marxism*, I argue against our speaking of socialism at this moment and for our taking up the broader label of *radicalism*.

Why we are socialists? This is the first time in over a hundred years when the answer is not waiting in the streets and knocking on the door in the form of visible, tangible struggles, labor movements, political parties, social movements, governments in power. The question is, Why not go out of business entirely, considering that our task is not only to rebuild a movement

but to reinvent its meanings.

## Why Socialism?

"I think, therefore I'm not a socialist." The facts seem to be with this bumper sticker. Still, let us dispute it: the *facts* are with it, *as long as you don't start thinking about them*. Once you start, you confront the most absurd possible paradox: consumer capitalism has built a social life largely on frivolity, fluff, and fashion—our second-largest export is TV programs and movies—that moves farther from vital needs every day. This ever-more-whimsical "society of the spectacle," as Guy Debord called it, has become an ever-harsher world of the bottom line, where social decisions are increasingly made by the iron logic of profit-and-loss calculations. Iron logic driven by false needs, false needs driven by iron logic—if any society cries out for an alternative, it is advanced capitalism. But the problem is, as we rethink the alternative to an undemocratic system of privilege and power, as we think of something far more effectively radical and democratic than the socialisms we have known, we are *only thinking*—we cannot find a socialism worthy of the name anywhere we look.

We need not be apologetic about being socialists either on grounds of realism or of

*social* values. Let us take these one by one.

First, we seek to build a broad, unifying movement. Why, for example, not be involved only in local organizations or single-issue protests? Why not just work exclusively with, say, unions, or feminist organizations, or anti-racist groups? Or why not just make the environment or reproductive rights, or health care, our driving concern? Rather, we come together as *socialists*. Not because we see social control of the means of production as the solution to all or even most of such problems. As my daughter explained to me when she was organizing DSA activities at Michigan State University a few years ago, DSA tries to be an umbrella under which to gather all struggles. It does so because as blacks, gays, and women have learned recently, just as workers learned long ago, no movement by itself is capable of achieving its goals. No single movement is strong enough when standing alone. And each, to tackle the deepest structures of its own oppression, must eventually contest oppression as such. In other words, the women's movement, like the black movement, like the gay movement, becomes radical in the sense of going to the root, and to succeed it must attack the social tolerance shown toward all forms of oppression. This is not to assume any a priori unity, but rather to pose a *project of unifying*—not just women or gays or people of color or workers or native peoples, but all those who are oppressed. It suggests that we are not seeking just a better society for one or another group, but for everyone. We are universalists, committed to general human emancipation.

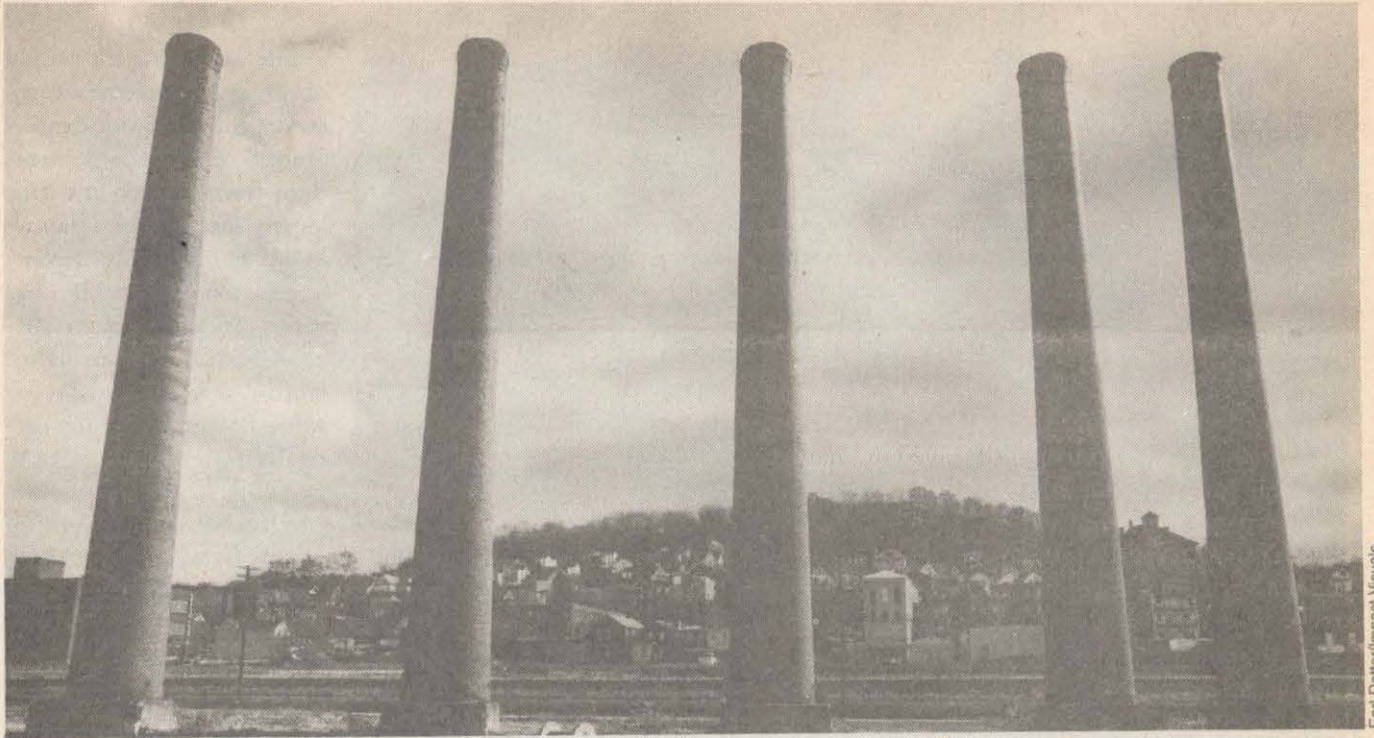
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**W**hy are we socialists? This is the first time in over a hundred years when the answer is not waiting in the streets and knocking on the door in the form of visible, tangible struggles.

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vision or of values. Nor need we doubt that our cause is just, or even that there are good and strong reasons to continue the struggle, in fact reasons to hope that we can make real advances. First, because we are working for a broad and united movement against oppression; second, because we seek an economy that can get us out of the Hell of advanced capitalism, and can only be called cooperative or collective—or socialist. Third, because we stand by the "socialist" reforms and features of our own and other societies that have made life worth living. Fourth, because we struggle for solutions to our collective problems in forms that recognize, and base themselves on, our *social* character and genuinely

Once socialism was the affair of the workers, but not narrowly. In the words of "The Internationale," the working class would "become the human race." In the Marxist tradition, proletarian emancipation was to lead to universal emancipation, and a single decisive change—collective ownership of the means of production—was seen as the turning point to a future free society. Today we know better—many changes are needed, at all levels and on behalf of many victims of oppression. But our commitments to democratic socialism and radical democracy inspire us to see when and how these struggles hang together. If other radicals share these commitments, then let us join them and them us; the name is not important, but it is the unifying



Earl Dotter/Impact Visuals

impulse that counts. In point of fact, however, it is usually those who call themselves socialists who have that impulse.

The impulse has a name: solidarity. At its most powerful, and most radical, it honors individuality and group identities, to be sure, but it stresses our common humanity. It projects the willingness to struggle alongside others against our various and specific oppressions, and encourages them to struggle alongside us against ours, eventually looking to reach more deeply and connect more widely, with and for—everyone.

### A Socialist Economy?

We begin then with this impulse to build a truly universal movement—even without a clear picture of its shape. We know it will have many targets, and one of its main ones is the capitalist economy. I can hear the author of the bumper sticker snickering: “Think about it, be realistic. Capitalism works. Socialism doesn’t.” In the wake of all the follies and disasters produced under the name of “socialism,” we should indeed develop our economic models with a skeptical eye (and we should all follow the debates raging in left-wing journals about planning and “market socialism”). But we should also be realistic about capitalism. We should be realistic about the inequality and irrationality that have always been built into capitalism, and about the

devastating, demoralizing effects of letting its problems fester. The “realists” accept, even celebrate, a society that must dismantle its claims to be a society if they’re to face themselves when they wake up in the morning. Think of it: the United States now has more private guards than public police. Whole areas are abandoned to rats, toxic wastes, and the poor. Our public space, strained for resources, shrinks and grown more and more uncivilized. More and more members of our society are taught to see themselves as individual “investors” worrying about what they’re getting in return rather than as citizens. The right-wing social vision of a Hobbesian war of all against all becomes truer by the day.

Think about it: if we are to overcome these trends we will have to institute what can only be called a cooperative or collective or democratic—or socialist—economy. Why? Even if Marxism is over in many respects, Marx’s insight has never been truer that under capitalism the profit-driven economy shapes the rest of society in its own image. It swallows up all of social life.

The alternative will be forms of economic life that are collective and democratic and non-exploitative, including, as appropriate, federal, state, and municipal forms of ownership, small individual businesses—all managed as far as possible by the workers themselves. National parks, veterans’ hospitals, public libraries, mu-



nicipal water systems, worker-owned businesses, the co-ops of Mondragon, Israeli kibbutzim -- these and other successful approximations of socialism within capitalist societies furnish models from which we will be able to build our socialist vision for the next left.

Continuing to think realistically, to face facts, I want to briefly mention a third reason for continuing to be socialists without apology: the "social democratic" reforms and structures of our own and other societies. Postmodernist hesitations about "grand narra-

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**O**ur senses of democracy and equality, solidarity, and freedom have deep roots in our culture and history, and daily life confirms them as often as it denies them.

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tives" aside, it would not take us too long to brainstorm key features of what would generally be recognized as a good life within today's societies. As a matter of fact, the United Nations does this, and regularly rates countries according to measurements of well-being—the social democratic societies and Canada come out on top, the U.S. well below the top ten. The key considerations include health, longevity, eco-

nomie well-being for people of all ages, employment security, the quality and availability of education, freedom from danger and violence, the universal availability of rights and liberties, access to vital public services, freedom from discrimination -- in other words, the historically attained and generally accepted prerequisites of a good life.

But we are talking, after all, about a complex web of welfare state benefits usually won by socialist and social democratic parties. Certainly these are all reforms within the context of capitalism, which nowhere have succeeded in scaling the

walls of property and privilege and profit. Nevertheless, it is better to live better than to live worse, and it is precisely those reforms named "socialist" that have made this possible.

### The Social Spirit

I think, therefore I'm a socialist. But if we are so few today, sidelined by events, so scattered, why do bumper stickers take the trouble to denounce us? Our fiercest detractors must still see us as a force to be reckoned with. No matter how weak we seem, they are right in two senses. First, labeling every collective social undertaking—the post office, the water supply, bus systems, libraries, schools, roads—as socialist contains a deep truth: to live a human life is to live a social life, and doing this depends on recognition of our social character and its conscious coordination. The only question is not whether, but how much, of our common life is socialized, and how democratically we do so. The right is haunted by this truth, and tries to hide the sweeping extent of our common, public, shared life behind its individualist pastoral fantasies.

Second, everything I have argued implies that we are socialists because of our values, and our values are produced naturally by the conditions of modern social life. There are three premises that we share. First, that social institu-



David Bacon/Impact Visuals

tions and arrangements are not external or secondary, but are the very stuff from which individuals make their lives—which means that politics and society lie at the deepest levels of individual identities and possibilities, and also that our “natural” condition is as likely to be social and solidaristic as brutal and competitive. A second belief is in the malleability of these social structures. We know how profoundly they have changed over time, and also that current arrangements are less facts of nature than they are the result of certain relations of power and privilege, and historically modified and redefined by democratic movements. They can be changed, and they most certainly will. Third, we believe that *all individuals* possess the possibility and the right to flourish individually and to govern collectively. As Marx said, the full development of all should be the condition of the full development of each.

The fact is that our ideas did not drop from the sky. Our senses of democracy and equality, solidarity, and freedom have deep roots in our culture and history, and daily life confirms them as often as it denies them. In order to remake the world into one without solidarity, the right blind themselves to the social being at

the root of all our traditions and practices. But they are haunted by the truth that we represent. What produces socialist values is not our refusal to face facts or to think, but our grasp of the social roots of the basic American values of freedom, democracy, and fair play—and the way these are denied in our society’s everyday life. Those who are unwilling to open their eyes and look around them to see the source of our values and the truth of our socialist ideas can still find them in the works of Marx and other radical critics—if they dare to read. The point is that everyday reality, and basic American values, produced us as socialists, and will continue to produce others like us—until those values are realized and the reality is changed. The problems will not go away and, as we see all around us, they will only worsen. The right may have its moment, but we will continue to haunt them because we embody the truths they are repressing.

*Ron Aronson is the author of several books, the most recent of which is After Marxism (Guilford Press, 1994). He teaches at Wayne State University in Detroit. This essay is based on a talk he gave at the 1995 DSA Youth Section Summer Conference in Chicago on August 18.*

## A Letter from Zagreb

BY DARAKA LARIMORE-HALL

September 5

I write from Zagreb, typing this letter on a borrowed laptop, while I glance at the television across the room. Some ironist at Croatian State Television has decided to broadcast reruns of *North and South*, the U.S. Civil War epic. Later comes one of Croatia's most popular programs: *Santa Barbara*, an American soap opera set in my home town.

Last week the leadership of the former Yugoslavia's democratic opposition met in Crikvenica, on Croatia's Adriatic coast. This week-long "summer school," hosted by the Transition to Democracy Project, serves as one of the few chances for democrats to meet their counterparts on the other side of the bitter war that has scattered a once-united Yugoslav dissident community.

Participants and observers attended from the Balkans and from Western European social democratic parties, unions, and humanitarian organizations. DSA Honorary Chair Bogdan Denitch, the conference's principal organizer, views the summer school as a critical resource for Eastern European democratic activists. The information shared and networks developed here, Denitch asserts, help to bolster a beleaguered left with few opportunities to network across borders.

Discussion at the conference centered around three important issues: nationalism, labor rights, and the upcoming Croatian elections. Recent military victories in the formerly Serb-occupied Krajina region by the Croatian army have put the question of nationalism at the top of the issues facing the Croatian left. Though ev-

eryone in the democratic community opposes the formation of a "Greater Croatia" through annexation of Bosnian territory, the nation's three social democratic parties are divided in their analysis of the action in the Krajina, a largely Croatian area that was part of the Croatian republic in the old Yugoslav federation. Discussion of the Krajina led to general questions about the socialist theory of nationalism (or rather, our lack thereof), and what our general response to the chauvinism of the Croat and Serb regimes should be. This question emerges as the central divisive element for the Croatian left, with parties variously denouncing each other as "utopian" or "quasi-nationalist."

Croatian labor activists, who have seen their movement all but destroyed by official reaction and popular apathy, spoke of the need for workers' unity and increased attention by opposition politicians toward the struggling post-communist trade union movement. Croatian workers face both strong-arm repression and rapid deindustrialization, and unions themselves are often seen by the general population as anachronistic, communist holdovers. Some on the democratic left, moreover, say that some unions are unwilling to cooperate with existing social democratic electoral organizations.

Croatian elections, scheduled for later this year, are seen by many here as decisive for the democratic left. Three social democratic parties will fight elections in Croatia, and the next few months will see a variety of coalition-building efforts. Vladimir

Bebitch, a Social Democratic MP with a reputation for dramatics, attended the Crikvenica conference in order to persuade regional SD factions to put him at the top of a left alliance. Reaction was cool. Bebitich, who has been a member of nearly every opposition party (right and left) in recent years, does not command much respect from socialist activists. If social democrats do not make a strong showing in parliament next term, everyone here seems to agree, they will be eliminated as serious political contenders.

One of the most important facets of the conference for me was the presence of social democratic youth from Eastern and Western Europe, and the mixture of perspectives such youth participation brought to the conference. Comrades from Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Serbia, France, and Croatia met and discussed future cooperation and shared ideas about the future of the student left in Europe. This meeting proved indispensable for me as a grounding in the confusing development of democratic socialist politics in Eastern Europe. Though scores of groups are claiming the democratic left mantle, many are dangerously unreconstructed or fronts for nationalist tendencies. Increased participation by the DSA Youth Section in this kind of international work will improve our activists' understanding and our ability to build a serious democratic socialist movement for the next century. DL

*Daraka Larimore-Hall, a co-chair of the DSA Youth Section, is a sophomore at the University of Chicago.*

# WE ARE ALL ORGANIZERS.

Here and abroad, employers and their allies are seeking to deny workers their right to organize unions.

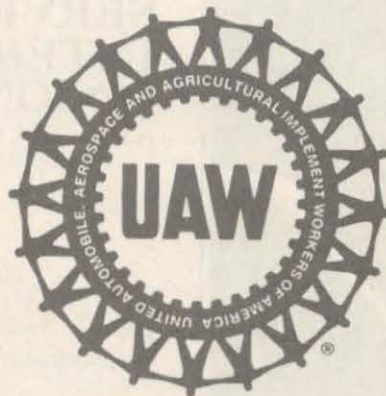
By keeping wages low in non-union workplaces, they then demand cuts from the rest of us by saying we're not "competitive."

If we want to defend our own gains, we must organize those workers who don't have unions. We bargain stronger when we bargain at full strength.

We can all become organizers by talking to friends who work in non-union workplaces, by volunteering to leaflet, by walking on a picketline, and by boycotting products from unfair companies. While anti-worker laws make our job harder, we can't wait for the laws to change. Indeed, the more workers we organize, the easier it will be to win pro-worker laws.

Let's start today to bring about a better, brighter future for all.

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*Written and edited by DSA Youth Section alums.*

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### **CENTRAL OHIO:**

George Boas, 614/297-0710

824 Kerr Street, Columbus OH 43215

**CHICAGO:** Kurt Anderson, 312/384-0327

1608 N. Milwaukee Ave., 4th floor

Chicago IL 60647

**DETROIT:** Roger Robinson, 313/822-4639

653 Pemberton, Grosse Point Park MI 48230

**IOWA CITY:** Jeff Cox, 319/338-4551

112 S. Dodge, Iowa City IA 52242

### **MAHONING VALLEY:**

Allan Curry, 216/534-9327

117 Caroline Avenue, Hubbard OH 44425

### **MIAMI UNIVERSITY OF OHIO:**

Adam Morenberg, 513/523-1772

103 E. Sycamore Street

Oxford, OH 45056

aadam@aol.com

### **OBERLIN COLLEGE:**

Matt Stinchcomb, 216/775-6760

OCMR Box 2394, Oberlin OH 44074

### **OHIO UNIVERSITY:**

Mike Heffron, 614/594-3307

25B North Congress

Athens OH 45701

mheffron@ousace.cs.ohiou.edu

**ST. LOUIS:** Dave Rathke, 314/773-0605

3323 Magnolia, St. Louis MO 63118

**TWIN CITIES:** Dan Frankot, 612/224-8262

695 Ottawa Avenue, Saint Paul MN 55107

### **UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO:**

Daraka Larimore-Hall, 312/643-6457

1511 East 57 Street #2E, Chicago IL 60637

dklarimo@midway.uchicago.edu

## South

**ARKANSAS:** Jason Murphy, 501/372-2152

c/o ACORN, 523 West 15th Street

Little Rock AR 72202

**AUSTIN:** Dick Fralin, 512 320-0257

2409 West Eighth Street, Austin TX 78703

## CHARLOTTESVILLE:

Claire Kaplan, 804/295-8884

Route 1 Box 1250, Troy VA 22974

**HOUSTON:** Elroy Sullivan, 713/781-9442

9306 Beverly Hill, Houston TX 77063

**RICHMOND:** Irene Ries, 804/355-6618

P.O. Box 5011, Richmond VA 23220

soc4ier@cabell.vcu.edu

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### ALABAMA-BIRMINGHAM:

Coe Douglas, 205/942-5233

1140 Rue Maison-B, Homewood AL 35209

## West

**ALASKA:** Niilo Koponen, 907/479-9466 (fax)

P.O. Box 70252, Fairbanks AK 99707

### ALBUQUERQUE:

Gerry Bradley, 505/881-4687

6008 Ponderosa NE, Albuquerque NM 87110

**COLORADO:** Harris Gruman, 303/444-9049

3075 Broadway #D, Boulder CO 80304

**EAST BAY:** Dean Ferguson, 510/763-8054

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### LOS ANGELES - CENTRAL:

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P.O. Box 291864

Los Angeles CA 90029

### LOS ANGELES - VALLEY:

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Glendale CA 91202

### MARIN COUNTY:

Mark Wittenberg, 415/388-6396

215 Throckmorton Avenue #2

Mill Valley CA 94941

### SACRAMENTO VALLEY:

Duane Campbell, 916/361-9072

PO Box 162394, Sacramento CA 95816

**SAN DIEGO:** Virginia Franco, 619/276-6023

5122 Gardena Avenue, San Diego CA 92110

### SAN FRANCISCO:

Michael Pincus, 415/695-0111

1095 Hampshire, San Francisco CA 94110

**SEATTLE:** Craig Salins, 206/784-9695

6221 Greenwood Avenue North

Seattle WA 98103

### SONOMA COUNTY:

David Walls, 707/823-7403

943 McFarlane Avenue, Sebastopol CA 95472

### COLORADO UNIVERSITY-BOULDER:

Tom Shelley, 303/449-5377

660 Quince Circle, Boulder CO 80304

# DSA Action

## Town Meetings on Economic Insecurity

DSA locals across the country have moved forward with the "Town Meetings on Economic Insecurity" project. DSA activists and other progressive leaders in each city are assembling coalitions including unions and other progressive social movements to sponsor these meetings. At each meeting, elected officials and community members will give testimony and exchange ideas about the twenty-year decline in wages for the majority of U.S. workers.

The goal of the meetings is to build public consciousness of the problem of wage stagnation, and to bring public attention to progressive policy proposals that could address the problem. Media coverage of the town meetings will be an essential component of the project's success.

The first of these town meetings was organized by Washington/Maryland/Northern Virginia DSA. This local organized a September 27 meeting at a predominantly African-American church in Northeast Washington. At least one member of Congress was scheduled to speak.

The Washington hearing will be followed by at least a dozen others during the next eight months. The next major hearing will be in New York City on October 28. Look for extensive coverage of this project in the next issue of *Democratic Left*.

The project, which was developed by the National Political Committee, is being coordinated by DSA Program Coordinator Michele Rossi. For more information, contact Michele at the national office.



Duane Campbell

In June, DSA Latino Commission chair Eric Vega was among the speakers at a Sacramento rally in defense of affirmative action. Vega and other activists in Sacramento Valley DSA have been among the leaders of a pro-affirmative action coalition called the Sacramento Educational Consortium.

## Directory of DSA Commissions

### ❖ African

#### American Commission

Shakoor Aljuwani, *convenor*  
Lynne Mosley Engelskirchen,  
*convenor*

telephone c/o DSA national office:  
212/727-8610

newsletter:

*Our Struggle/Nuestra Lucha*  
P.O. Box 162394  
Sacramento, CA 95816  
subscription: \$15/year

### ❖ Anti-Racism Commission

Duane Campbell, *chair*

newsletter:

*Our Struggle/Nuestra Lucha*  
(see above)

### ❖ Commission on Socialism and the Environment

Mark Schaeffer, *convenor*  
J. Hughes, *newsletter editor*

newsletter: *EcoSocialist Review*  
c/o Chicago DSA  
1608 N. Milwaukee, fourth floor  
Chicago, IL 60607  
subscription: \$8/year

### ❖ Feminist Commission

Christine Riddiough, *chair*  
Lisa Foley, *vice chair*

newsletter: *Not Far Enough*  
5123 Fifth Street NW  
Washington, DC 20011  
subscription: \$10/year

### ❖ Latino Commission

Eric Vega, *chair*

newsletter:  
*Our Struggle/Nuestra Lucha*  
(see above)

### ❖ Lesbian/Gay/

#### Bisexual Commission

(in transition; see page 42)

### ❖ Commission on Religion and Socialism

Rev. Steve Copley, *co-chair*  
Rev. Judith Deutsch, *co-chair*  
Jack Spooner, *newsletter editor*

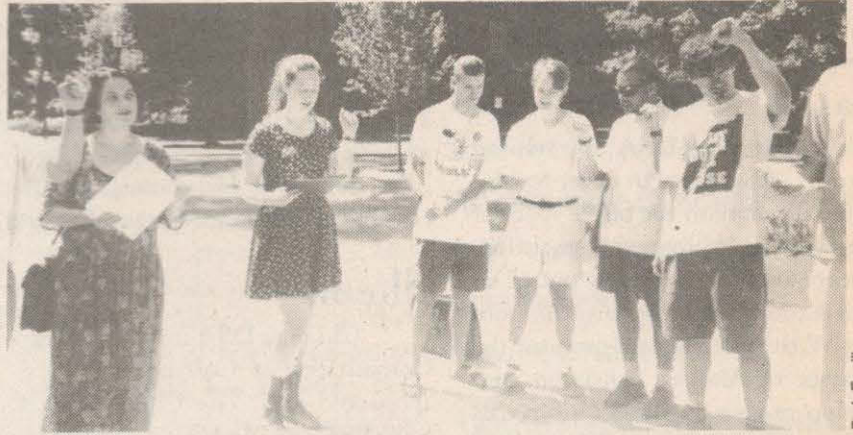
newsletter: *Religious Socialism*  
P.O. Box 80  
Camp Hill, PA 17001  
membership/subscription:  
\$12/year

# DSAAction

## DSA Youth Section Gathers in Chicago

From August 17 to 20 at the University of Chicago, DSA Youth Section activists and other progressives gathered for the nineteenth annual DSA Youth Section Summer Conference. Usually held in rural areas in the past, the conference this year took advantage of the urban resources that Chicago had to offer. Students came from a diverse range of schools, including Colorado University at Boulder, New York University, the University of Alabama-Birmingham, Oberlin College, Iowa State, the California State University at San Bernardino, Harvard, Knox College, and Ohio University.

The conference stressed the rebuilding and reinventing of the Youth Section. Conference participants elected a new national leadership for the Youth Section, and developed a political action agenda for the coming year. Another important objective of the conference was to strategize about the possibility of building a broad coalition of radical student and youth activists. During the weekend DSAers explored this possibility with representatives from the University Conversion Project and the student sec-



**For the nineteenth year in a row, we came back from the summer youth conference with photographs of dispirited-looking students singing "The Internationale" with their fists limply in the air. Don't be fooled, though: these DSAers were actually trembling with political fervor. They only look this lame because the Saturday night party ended at 5 a.m., just a few hours before this was shot.**

tion of the National Organization for Women.

Guest speakers during the weekend included Adolph Reed, Jr., Professor of Political Science at Northwestern and columnist for *The Village Voice* and *The Progressive*; Joanne Landy of the Campaign for Peace and Democracy; Erich Hahn of the U.S./Guatemala Labor Education Project; Soren Ambrose of the Fifty Years Is Enough

IMF/World Bank Campaign; and Ron Aronson, author of *After Marxism*.

Workshops included "Prisons and Politics in America," "Strategies for the Labor Movement," "Queering America," "Corporate Control of Higher Education," "New Directions in Feminist Theory," "The Health Care Crisis," "Art and Activism," and "Democratic Party Strategy in '96."

—Carmen Mitchell

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Return to DSA, 180 Varick Street, New York, NY 10014 212/727-8610

# On the Left

by Harry Fleischman

## Alaska

Fairbanks DSA has closed down its office space in order to contribute its share to the office space of a new statewide progressive coalition. This coalition, which grew out of an April demonstration against the Contract With America, will monitor the behavior of Alaska's legislators and develop progressive policy proposals for the state. For more information, contact Louise Silet at 907/455-6569.

## California

San Diego DSA has been active in two city-wide coalitions working to promote voter registration and to defend immigrants' rights. Their coalition partners include Neighbor to Neighbor, the Mexican American Women's National Association, the National Organization for Women, and the Support Committee for Maquiladora Workers. DSA National Director Alan Charney spoke to a large group of San Diego activists on September 6.

San Francisco DSA has initiated a large coalition that will sponsor a November 11 town meeting on economic insecurity. Speakers will include DSA Vice Chair Ron Dellums. For more information, contact Tom Gallagher at 415/826-1362.

## D.C./Maryland/ Northern Virginia

D.C./Maryland/NoVA DSA will, of course, be the host local for DSA's 1995 National Convention. Leaders of the local have been ex-

tremely busy planning the November 10 public forum that will feature DSA Honorary Chairs Cornel West and Barbara Ehrenreich, as well as the November 11 "Celebration of Activists' Lives," which will include Dorothy Healey and Carmen Mitchell.

But the local hasn't stopped there: they also co-sponsored the first of DSA's national series of town meetings on economic security. This hearing was held in a church on September 27 and was scheduled to feature three members of Congress: Neil Abercrombie (D-HI), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), and Maxine Waters (D-CA).

## Illinois

Chicago DSA and the Chicago Committees of Correspondence co-sponsored a "Second City School of Socialism" at Roosevelt University throughout July and August. Topics included economics, electoral politics, and socialist history.

The Chicago local recently welcomed a delegation of twenty trade unionists from Gotenburg, Sweden who came to experience Chicago's labor heritage. Their tour was arranged by Professor Stan Rosen of the Chicago Labor Education Program of the University of Illinois. The Swedish delegation presented the DSAers with a pewter candle holder made in Gotenburg for "when times are dark."

The local continues to work in support of the locked-out A.E. Staley workers in Decatur by building the "cola campaign"—urging Coke and Pepsi to stop buying corn sweetener from Staley.

Meanwhile, the Youth Section chapter at the University of Chicago is organizing in support of the International Union of Socialist Youth's Day of Action in Defense of Immigrants and Migrant Workers.

## Indiana

*The Left Connection*, a newsletter produced jointly by the Indianapolis Committees of Correspondence, the Indiana Socialist Party, and Central

Indiana DSA, celebrated its first anniversary during the summer. In the latest issue CoC activist George Fish reports favorably on the May 13 DSA Midwest Regional Activist Conference.

## Massachusetts

Boston DSA heard DSA National Director Alan Charney at an August "retreat and radical Bar-B-Q" at the home of Democratic State Representative Jim Marzilli in Arlington. Charney worked with local leaders to develop a strategic plan for the local's work.

That plan will certainly include continued participation in MASS-CARE, the coalition for a state single-payer health care plan for Massachusetts. Harris Gruman, a co-founder of Colorado DSA, recently joined MASS-CARE's staff.

## New Jersey

DSA National Director Alan Charney met with Central New Jersey DSA in early September to discuss the upcoming national Convention and the local's goals and needs.

In August, I spoke at the local's pool party and new member reception about my experiences as Norman Thomas's campaign manager in 1944 and 1948, and about Thomas's relevance to contemporary political movements.

## New York

DSAer Ben Nichols is running for re-election as mayor of Ithaca. His administration has created domestic-partnership registration, expanded public parks and transportation programs, and promoted legislation to ensure that security deposits are returned to responsible renters. DSA National Political Committee member Theresa Alt is also running for public office; she seeks a seat on the Common Council from the Fourth Ward (central Collegetown).

Elsewhere in Ithaca, Cornell student activists, including DSAers,



are building a highly successful group called "Students Against the Contract on America." This campus coalition works closely with the local United Auto Workers, the Center for Religion, Ethics, and Public Policy, and other progressive organizations. Among the coalition's work has been a campaign in support of Cornell service workers.

New York DSA has initiated a town meeting on economic insecurity, which will be held at Judson Memorial Church on October 28. Speakers and presenters will include progressive elected officials and social movement activists from throughout the New York left.

New York DSA, City University of New York DSA, and *Dissent* magazine will co-sponsor a public forum on affirmative action at the CUNY Graduate Center on October 10. For more information, contact New York DSA at 212/727-2207.

DSA Field Coordinator Carmen Mitchell and New York DSA staff organizer are developing a new

activist network of DSA youth in New York City. This network will initially concentrate on issues of global labor and immigration rights. For more information, contact Carmen or Ginny at the DSA national office.

## Pennsylvania

Delaware Valley DSA has grown rapidly during the past year: it now has active branches in West Philadelphia, Bucks County, Mt. Airy/Northwest Philadelphia, and Delaware/Montgomery Counties. The local's focus is on urban politics: together with the Committees of Correspondence, the Consumer Party, and other organizations, it has created an Urban Agenda Working Group that works on issues of public education, access to capital, and housing. This task force will work with progressive members of the Philadelphia City Council to promote public discussion and action on these issues. The West Philadelphia branch has organized a study group on the city's politics and power structure.

## DSA on the Internet: 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](mailto: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](mailto: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 Thanks to the Herculean efforts of Chicago DSA activist J. Hughes, DSA now has a top-notch site on the World Wide Web. There you can find goodies ranging from articles from *Democratic Left* to minutes of National Political Committee meetings to DSA's FBI files. Plus, there are well-organized links to just about every other website on the left. Access us at:

<http://ccme-mac4.bsd.uchicago.edu/DSA.html>

See you in  
Washington  
November 10-12!

Greetings from D.C./  
Maryland/Northern  
Virginia DSA  
your DSA Convention hosts

## We Mourn Their Loss

The family of democratic socialism has suffered many losses this year. Among the comrades who have recently died are David Livingston, the retired president of United Auto Workers District 65, who received New York DSA's Eugene V. Debs/Norman Thomas Award in 1990; and Cleveland Robinson, who was also a leader of District 65 for many years. Martin Luther King, Jr. once called District 65 "the conscience of the labor movement."

Bernard Rifkin, who received the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee's Debs/Thomas Award in the 1970s, recently died at the age of 84. He was a UAW Education Director and helped create the world's first fully accredited labor college: the School of New Resources, an AFSCME-affiliated college founded at the College of New Rochelle in 1972.

Finally, Emanuel Geltman, one of the founding editors of *Dissent*, passed away in early September. Manny's sweetness and editorial acumen will be remembered by all who knew him.

—H. F.

# Dear Margie

Letters, real and imagined, to  
DSA Membership Services Coordinator Margie Burns

Dear Margie,

Several weeks ago, I asked the national office to send me information about DSA's Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Commission, but I haven't heard anything. What gives?

—The Impatient Red

Dear Impatient,

It's that old organizational story—as its original core leadership has grown into new careers and found new commitments, the DSA Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Commission has slowly drifted into inactivity.

We don't want things to stay this way: Claire Kaplan, the last elected chair of the commission, is eager to help revive it as a communications and support network for lesbian, gay, and bisexual DSAers across the country.

But she can't do this alone. Consider this column a *call for new leadership—especially for a new pair of Co-Chairs—for the commission.*

The commission was formed around five years ago by a group of lesbian, gay, and bi DSA Youth Section activists. Its initial goal was to build bridges between lesbian and gay organizations and other expressions of the democratic left—trade unions, environmentalist groups, and so forth. It was also designed to help lesbian and gay DSAers share experiences and debate DSA's positions and outlook.

The commission initially published a regular newsletter, *Socialism and Sexuality*, and created DSA's first-ever Internet mailing list. In 1991, the commission's leaders helped to prepare a special issue of *Democratic Left* devoted to lesbian and gay issues.

In 1992 and 1993, the commission played a role in building links between lesbian and gay organizations and single-payer health care coalitions.

Then, as all good things must come to an end, the commission's leadership slowly burned out, the newsletter came out a little less frequently, and the political discussions over the Internet came to a halt. That's why Claire has asked us to make this call for new leadership.

A new leadership for the commission might want to take on these challenges:

- ◆ reviving *Socialism and Sexuality* and the Internet discussion group.
- ◆ sending representatives to attend meetings of the Human Rights Campaign Fund, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and other national lesbian and gay organizations.
- ◆ building lesbian and gay participation in DSA's broad political activities, and helping DSAers to debate the relationship between lesbian and gay politics and our more traditional economic concerns.

If you are interested in helping to revive the commission, please write to me here at the national office, and I'll pass your messages on to Claire. If you're interested in possibly being a Co-Chair, please write a short candidate statement. We'll use the commission's most recent mailing list to conduct an election by mail.

Send letters to: Dear Margie, c/o DSA, 180 Varick Street, twelfth floor, New York, NY 10014. Fax: 212/727-8616. E-mail: [dsa@igc.apc.org](mailto:dsa@igc.apc.org).

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Class issues have returned to the center of American politics. As we make the transition from a nationally-focused economy to a global economy—a transition from an era of mass prosperity to one of mass pauperization—questions of growth, employment, and economic justice have become burning issues for the middle class as well as the poor. We have moved from a virtuous cycle of rising productivity, profits, and wages to a vicious cycle of rising productivity, rising profits, and declining wages. Where economic growth once meant rising living standards for the majority, today growth means rising living standards for only a minority.

So class issues have returned—but, so far, not in a form that should give much comfort to radicals. Economic insecurity is driving much of the popular support for the reactionary Republican program. The scapegoating of the poor, immigrants, and people of color is rooted in part in the declining living standards of the vast majority. The sometimes irrational opposition to government programs also has its source in a simple fact: when income stagnates, taxes become an economic burden. The only recent issue for which economic insecurity has cut our way was the opposition to NAFTA. But progressive forces were unable to capitalize on this class-based mobilization and build a broader campaign against transnational corporations. In fact, it was our inability to follow-up on NAFTA that revealed our fundamental weakness.

It's the ultimate irony. The problems of working people have returned to the center of American politics and the left now lacks the capacity and the vision to respond and lead. As socialists, it is our job to play a decisive role in turning this situation around. Here is what we must say: the transnational corporations are the driving force be-

hind the global economy—driving down wages, living conditions, and environmental standards on a worldwide scale. Our strategy must go to the root of the problem by reining in and transforming the transnational corporations. But the capacity of any national government, even under ideal political circumstances, to regulate corporations is limited in a globalized economy.

The left must take a fundamentally new approach to building institutions of democracy and justice. First, our campaigns must be conceived and carried out in internationally, in addition to the national arena. Second, they must address directly the need for economic democracy in ways that go beyond government regulation. In

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**We must no longer avoid raising, front and center, the question of ownership and control of the transnational corporations.**

---

other words, we can no longer postpone building a genuine movement of international solidarity and cooperation among working people. It's a pressing necessity now. And we must no longer avoid raising, front and center, the question of ownership and control of the transnational corporations. Again, this doesn't mean simply turning to *state* ownership—primarily it means democratizing corporations through worker and consumer ownership and control. In the era of mass prosperity, socialists could avoid these perilous questions. The realization of economic democracy is the only hope for saving political democracy.

Now we come to the bottom line. Today, there is only one class-based institution—the trade unions—that has the capacity to take the lead in putting forth a new strategy and program for the next left. As weak as the American labor movement is, it is our greatest hope. Here are five fundamental changes that need to take place in the union movement—many of which have already begun: First, labor must become a truly transnational movement, not simply through cooperation among various national unions, but through the formation of integrated, cohesive international unions. Second, it must project a political program that speaks to the interests of working people as a whole, organized and unorganized. Third, it must recognize that a new progressive strategy depends upon a long-term alliance between unions and the social movements, representing a merger of the struggles for social and economic justice. Fourth, it must come to terms with the pivotal role of immigrant labor in revitalizing its ranks, and that new organizing will be driven by the struggles of immigrant, primarily Latino, workers. Finally, it must expand its economic program, making changes in ownership and control of corporations—economic democracy for working people—its strategic goal.

These may seem like utopian, impossible goals in this intensely reactionary period. But let's step back 100 years, before there were genuine national unions and before industrial unionism had become dominant. These impossible ideas led to a strategy that through trial and error, advance and defeat, constituted the working class foundation for the post-war era of mass prosperity. So bringing the long-view into our everyday political work is absolutely essential. Without it, we cannot rebuild a progressive movement. This process has to start—and it has started—in the unions.

# In Solidarity,

We must be united around  
a single front and banner  
for the quest of ownership  
and control of the  
international corporations.

# UNITE!

UNION OF NEEDLETRADES, INDUSTRIAL AND TEXTILE EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO, CLC

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- Arthur Loevy** *Secretary-Treasurer*
- Bruce Raynor** *Exec. Vice President*
- Edgar Romney** *Exec. Vice President*

UNITE! is a merger of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union