



THE MAGAZINE OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA



DEMOCRATIC

LEFT



*Electoral
★ Issue! ★*



SOCIALISTS ON THE BIG SCREEN
TRADE POLICY
CHAPTER ROUNDUP
PUERTO RICAN RESISTANCE
STUDENT PROTESTS



SUMMER 2018 VOL. XLVI, NO. 1



From the National Director

It's About Power

By Maria Svart

When I was a union organizer, we periodically did something called a structure test. For example, we might circulate a survey in the workplace about conditions. The data from the survey were useful in telling us what problems were widely and deeply felt, but so was the response rate and pattern, because it told us who was *not* participating.



Later in a campaign, a higher level, riskier test might be a “march on the boss.” Would everyone in the workplace sign a public petition, and would all those on a shift leave their posts and barge, together, into the bosses’ office to confront them with a demand?

With the union, bosses either felt intimidated by the workers united and met our demands or they did not. Workers would not plan a march on the boss unless they believed that their co-workers were ready and that the workers could come out of the march more powerful. In other words, the march on the boss was simultaneously a test and a tactic as part of our larger strategy.

Because we are in this fight to win, it matters whether we are unified or not and whether our strategies and tactics actually build power in measurable ways. It is not enough to simply feel radical.

DSA’s theory of change is that we must build power not just in the economy through workplaces, but also in the formal political realm. We know that who holds state power has a profound impact on our everyday lives and on the terrain of our war with capital. A recent popular tweet captures the essence of the issue: “You’re ‘just not that into politics?’ Your boss is. Your landlord is. Your insurance company is. And every day they use their political power to keep

your pay low, raise your rent, and deny you coverage. It’s time to get into politics.”

November 7, 2017, was a test, as was May 15, 2018, and every other election this year. These were and will be real-world tests to find out whether DSA has the power to elect democratic socialists in local races. So far, we can be proud of our record, as, most recently, when nationally endorsed Sara Innamorato and Summer Lee joined locally endorsed Elizabeth Fiedler and Kristin Seale in winning their Democratic primary races for the Pennsylvania State House in May. Innamorato and Lee blew their conservative Democratic incumbent opponents, both members of a well-entrenched political dynasty, out of the water by huge margins.

A few lessons from our work so far:

1. When we win, we grow; and when we grow, we win, because winning gives us hope in dark times. Our state governments in many cases have been making austerity budget cuts or ratcheting up overt violence against our communities for years. In this environment, every time we feel that we have gained some power moves more people into collective action.

2. We aren’t going it alone. Unions, single issue, voter engagement, and newer ally organizations like Our Revolution are often with us in the trenches. For example, the United Electrical Workers union was the first to break ranks with labor and endorse Innamorato and Lee; Reclaim Philadelphia knocked on 50,000 doors for Fiedler; and the Sierra Club, other environmental, and reproductive rights organizations gave significant contributions to several candidates—and did the same for Lee Carter in 2017. DSA is the democratic socialist current in a broader movement, and if we’re to build a mass movement, we need to be where the masses are. This is one reason that power mapping and coalition work are topics in our Regional Leadership Trainings.

3. Finally, while we savor these victories and build toward the next ones, let’s keep in mind that electoral work as practiced by DSA is an extension of other movement work, something we do year round and in between elections. DSA’s three field organizers are traveling throughout the country this summer to help chapters think through how to build a powerful grassroots base through various campaigns confronting local targets. Elections are

continued on page 9

Contents

Building Electoral Power.....	3
DSAers in Office.....	5
DSA Chapters Go for Victories	7
From Canvass to Campaign	10
Kitchen Table Socialism: Trade Policy.....	11
Student Protests: the East LA Walkouts.....	12
Puerto Rican Resistance Grows.....	13
Marx and Debs on the Big Screen	14

Art by Andrea Guinn, Aneesh Bhoopathy, and Hallie Jay Pope

Building Electoral Power

By Amelia Dornbush and Sam Lewis

If working people are going to create a new democratic socialist society that works for everyone, we need to take political power. This means taking electoral politics seriously—both in terms of winning specific elections and in terms of winning democratic socialist political majorities that can create a new set of social and economic rules.

Unfortunately, people may vote once or twice a year, but capitalists vote every day through the stock market and the labor market. They have the power to threaten their opponents' livelihoods or reward those who protect their privileges. That is why elections alone are not enough. Socialists must also play a role in organizing the working class through labor unions, community organizations, and social movements. Our political candidates and campaigns must be used to inspire confidence in and build all forms of working-class political action.

But even though it isn't sufficient by itself, winning elections is key. We cannot claim to speak for the majority and act in their interests if we cannot win individual elections, and if we cannot win individual elections, we certainly can't win a majority of people to our vision for a new society.

At DSA's 2017 national convention, delegates voted to make electoral work a top priority. The National Electoral Strategy passed by the National Political Committee fleshes out that mandate by focusing on how DSA chapters can use this work to expand their own capacities, electoral and otherwise. Now is the time for every DSA chapter to start recruiting candidates for local office. Already, DSA has elected candidates across the country, from Montana to Virginia. These victories don't give us a governing majority anywhere, but they do help us develop the skills necessary to win. By building up an independent campaign apparatus capable of putting candidates in office (or removing them from it), we establish a fighting political arm of the so-

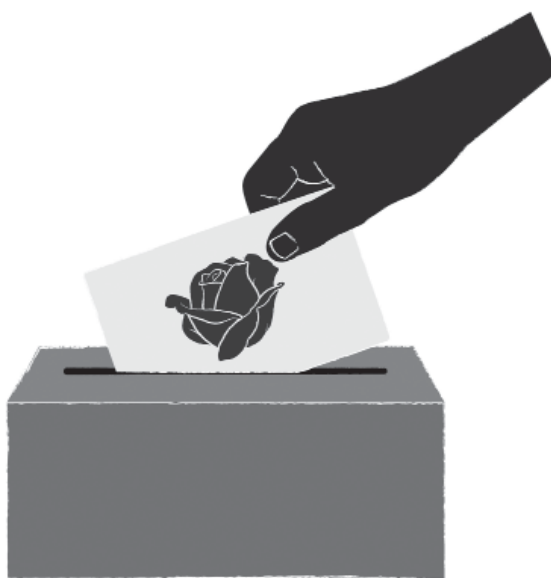
cialist movement that can take on the far right with a more inspiring vision for the future than what the Democratic Party mainstream has to offer.

A case in point is the New York City DSA, which endorsed two candidates in 2017. In both of those campaigns, DSA members trained and managed their own canvasses, printed their own literature, campaigned openly as members of DSA, kept copies of all data from the fieldwork, wrote their own press releases, and insisted on canvassing in the areas targeted as strategic not just for the campaign but also for DSA's own expansion. When DSA members joined the staff of campaigns, they stepped down from their decision-making DSA roles, to ensure that the campaign would always be accountable to the organization instead of the other way around.

NYC-DSA's candidates' campaigns gave members a chance to work alongside working-class groups on issues of concern to their members. DSA member Jabari Brisport's city council campaign focused on a crucial affordable housing

fight in rapidly gentrifying Crown Heights, Brooklyn. He didn't win the election, but he did win the endorsement of New York Communities for Change, a major tenant organization, in its first-ever endorsement of an openly socialist candidate. NYC-DSA is taking a similar approach in 2018, as it canvasses for Julia Salazar's State Senate campaign in the Democratic primary while organizing to form tenant associations to fight for universal rent control in her district.

When DSA-backed candidates do win elections, they can make big changes in people's lives. Gregorio Cesar won a city council race in Austin, Texas, and joined DSA a year later. Cesar led a huge mobilization to make Austin the first Southern city to pass paid sick leave—an immediate benefit to 200,000 workers. Alderman Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, a DSA member who holds elected office in Chicago, Illinois,



Aneesh Bhoopathy

uses his position to counter Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials by notifying community members when immigration raids are happening. Recently, he was voted off the Chicago City Council Latino Caucus after he used a parliamentary procedure to delay approval of Mayor Rahm Emanuel's \$95 million police training academy.

Having members in office gives DSA opportunities for coalition building and for implementing policies that strengthen the capacity of the working class to fight. Elected officials have access to resources in terms of staff and funding that are otherwise out of reach for many community organizations. As more DSA members are elected, the organization will have to navigate the tensions of being in power and developing the accountable, democratic structures we want to see in the future.

Building a working-class socialist movement capable of taking power means we must reach well beyond our own membership. Across the United States, there are working-class majoritarian political projects developing, especially at the municipal level. DSA members and candidates should learn from groups such as the Richmond Progressive Alliance in California, New Haven Rising in Connecticut, and Cooperation Jackson in Mississippi. In Richmond, the RPA majority has been able to lead the state in pushing wage increases, rent control, and even using the threat of eminent domain to fight bank foreclosures. That majority has been maintained for more than a decade, even as candidates backed by Chevron oil consistently outspend them ten to one. DSA locals in California have now endorsed former Richmond mayor Gayle McLaughlin in her run for lieutenant governor.

These coalitions force DSA to consider its role in the broader progressive movement. For instance, Chokwe Antar Lumumba has pledged to make Jackson, Mississippi, the "most radical city in the world." His organization is deeply rooted in the black radical tradition, but he doesn't identify as a socialist. As we continue to interpret and further develop a national electoral strategy, DSA chapters and, eventually, our national organization will have to decide how much weight to place on campaigning for self-identified socialists and how we see our role in a broader working-class movement.

“Building a working-class socialist movement means we must reach well beyond our own membership.”

In most of this country, unions and community groups do not operate within self-consciously working-class electoral coalitions like the RPA, which means DSA members should have an eye to building such coalitions. A single victorious candidate expressing our values can be the catalyst for many organizations to join a more ambitious political project, as long as we remain committed to advancing

the material needs of their members.

The deck is stacked against working-class politics due to unfair ballot access rules, a growing wave of voter-suppression laws, and the flood of corporate cash that the billionaire class can unleash into the electoral process whenever its interests are threatened. Building a democratic socialist movement requires

understanding these challenges and overcoming them. Every DSA chapter can advance our national priority by taking the steps to develop an independent electoral apparatus capable of putting our own candidates in office and holding them accountable to our beliefs.

But we shouldn't stop there. DSA chapters should begin to assess the balance of power in their area at the local, state, and national level. We should plan not just for the next city council elections, but to build an enduring socialist majority in the years and decades to come. ❖



Amelia Dornbush was co-communications coordinator for the NYC-DSA Brooklyn Electoral Working Group before



moving to Lansing, Michigan.

Sam Lewis is a union organizer in Brooklyn, New York, and co-coordinator of the NYC-DSA Brooklyn Electoral Working Group.

Check out DSA Weekly

(formerly the DL Blog)

Go to dsausa.org and click on a weekly dose of diverse analyses and reports. There are links for pitching an article or writing a letter to the editor.

DSAers in Office

By Tom Gallagher

Are socialist candidates and office holders part of the new normal? Well, maybe not just yet, but the experiences of five successful DSA candidates suggest that point may not be too far off.

Seema Singh Perez, born in Varanasi, India, became a naturalized U.S. citizen at age 13. Knoxville, Tennessee, has been home off and on for 40 years, for the last 20 of which she has worked to improve healthcare access for women, people with HIV/AIDS, and those experiencing homelessness. She runs a jail alternative program for domestic violence offenders. Although a long-time progressive, Singh Perez did not consider herself a socialist before the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign. “He spoke the truth in ways that I just hadn’t heard...honestly... I cried,” she says. “It suddenly struck me, I could/should be [in] government.” So she ran for city council and became one of its first two women of color. Just four months into a four-year term, she counts among her early priorities housing and income inequality and increased training in the trades, particularly for women.

First-term Maine State Representative Mike Sylvester, a DSA member since 2014, who has been involved with several socialist groups over the years, also says he was “excited by Bernie Sanders’s campaign. Bernie said everyone should run,” and with his district representative term-limited out, he decided to do just that. Leaving little doubt as to where he stood, his campaign signs proclaimed, “Elect a democratic socialist.” Involved in union organizing for 20 years, with SEIU, UFCW, CWA, AFT, and Justice for Janitors, Sylvester explains, “I came out of an organizing culture where you say what you think.” Few would argue with the results: his 83% final election vote was the highest in the state. He acknowledges that he did get hissed during his first House speech, but what actually raised hackles among a few of his colleagues was

the fact that he mentioned unions.

khalid kamau grabs your attention from the first letter of his name, written in lower case, in keeping with Yoruban African tradition. Now an attorney, kamau has driven a bus for the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority and was drawn into labor and political organizing in opposition to the agency’s outsourcing of public employee jobs. He believes he is the first Black Lives Matter organizer elected to public office. A Sanders national convention delegate, he also cites the central importance of that campaign, telling the Progressive.org, “I don’t

think any of us yet recognize how monumental [Bernie’s] campaign was....Every presidential race brings into the political process a new generation of volunteers, but Bernie galvanized a group of highly educated, highly skilled activists, folks pretty much already politically involved. Then, he charged us to run for local office, specifically, as a way of both infiltrating and transforming the Democratic Party, and working our way up the political ladder.”

In kamau’s case that ladder started with his election to the city council of South Fulton, Georgia, a brand new municipality of 100,000, nearly 90% of whose population is African American. His immediate priorities include developing the new city’s infrastructure; a \$15-per-hour minimum wage for city employees, with paid family leave and health benefits; and political education. He’d like some of that political education

to occur on the election day holiday he has proposed for the city. Of DSA, he says, “I received more support financially and time support from the DSA than from the Democratic Party of Georgia. I will work for them forever because their principles are my principles.”

As Lee J. Carter told American University’s WAMU, he met with deep skepticism when he announced his challenge to the Republican majority



“It suddenly struck me, I could/should be in government.”

whip of the Virginia House of Delegates: “The conventional wisdom was he can’t be beat. That was sort of unanimous. Everyone said that the entire 21 months I was running.” Carter won by nine points, one of fifteen General Assembly seats Democrats took from Republicans that day. The difficulty the five-year Marine veteran experienced in securing workers’ compensation benefits following an on-the-job injury was what moved him to action.

As he said, “I’ve always been interested in politics. I’ve followed it as a spectator sport, mostly yelling at people on Facebook. I never saw myself as being a candidate for office. I always thought that was something for doctors and lawyers and retirees. But I saw firsthand how leaving working-class issues up to entirely doctors, lawyers and retirees meant that the working class of America was being left behind, so I decided to step forward and fix some things.”

Ultimately, he would be the target of a classic, old-fashioned red-scare mailer featuring caricatures of him and “Comrade Joseph Stalin,” among others, and he realized that “if you’re to the left of Barry Goldwater, Republicans are going to call you a socialist regardless of whether or not you actually are, so you may as well draw some knowledge from that political tradition.” It’s a tradition he did not come to until Sanders, of whom he says, “He went out there and said, ‘I’m a democratic socialist. Here’s what that means: It means I believe in strong unions, healthcare for everybody, and an end to discrimination.’ Well, that’s what I believe in, too. I dug a little more into it, and I realized a lot of the problems we have in today’s society reflected in electoral politics are symptoms of economic problems.”

He’s now trying to use that knowledge to reform workers’ compensation, limit campaign contributions from corporations, and create a state-level single-payer healthcare plan.

Although also a Sanders delegate, Carlos Ramirez-Rosa got his start earlier, in 2015, when he defeated a three-term incumbent backed by Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, becoming the youngest alderman on the 50-member city council and the first openly gay Latino ever elected to office in Chicago. Seeing himself as “a movement-elected official,” Ramirez-Rosa’s broad agenda includes reinstating a corporate “head tax” on firms with more than 50 employees—abolished by Emanuel—the

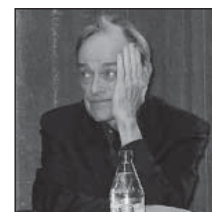
proceeds of which would go to Chicago schools; creating a Civilian Police Accountability Council; public election financing; and divesting city funds from companies involved in the Dakota Access Pipeline. “I was very explicit that I would be an organizing alderman,” Ramirez-Rosa told the *Nation* magazine, “that I would work to build a base of people in my community who will hold me accountable and fight for progressive change—and who, when I pick fights with Rahm Emanuel, will have my back.”

Ramirez-Rosa, who was reading Noam Chomsky in high school, told *Jacobin* magazine that “Democratic socialism means that the people govern every facet of their lives, whether it be the economic structure or the government that’s determining the policies that impact their lives.”

Sylvester of Maine had concluded simply, “Socialism makes common sense. You’ve just got to talk about specifics and when you’re in office you have to have the facts and do the things you say you’re going to do.” He believes that a person wants to feel that “my government is actually doing something; it makes my life better; and I have a say in that.”

For now, Singh Perez, who cites Seattle socialist city councilor Kshama Sawant as an additional influence (“She and Bernie made me think this can be done—I can do it.”) finds her greatest challenge may be that she is by nature a quiet person in a “job that seems to be for extroverts.” ❖

Tom Gallagher is a DSA member living in San Francisco. He is a former chair of Boston DSA and a past member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives. He has served as a convention delegate for Bernie Sanders and George McGovern.



RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP NOW

DSA doesn’t get big grants or any government funding. We need you and your membership dues. Renew now and keep the political revolution going!

Call for Articles

The Winter 2018 edition of *Democratic Left* will be devoted to socialist feminism, focusing on the ways that gender intersects with other socialist concerns and approaches. We are seeking submissions on a range of topics as well as information from socialist feminist groups detailing practices at work in your group: how your group operates, your main projects, and approaches that other chapters can emulate. For more information or to submit, please email Laura Colaneri at icolaneri6@gmail.com

DSA Chapters Go for Victories

By Meagan Day

Democratic Left asked chapters to tell us what they're working on in the electoral arena. This list isn't complete, but it's a window into the inspiring hard work that DSA chapters are doing around the country to shift the political terrain.

The **National Electoral Committee** is assisting chapters in building the capacity to run their own campaign operations, independent of any particular candidate. Since the beginning of the year, the NEC has been conducting chapter outreach, researching candidates for endorsement, hosting trainings, and educating chapters about campaign finance law issues.

Philly DSA canvassed for Elizabeth Fiedler and Kristin Seale in their winning primary races for the Pennsylvania State House. Using DSA's independent canvassing operation that interfaced with Fiedler's and Seale's campaigns, DSAers talked to voters about issues important to the working class in advance of the May 15 Pennsylvania Democratic primary elections. As with Medicare for All canvassing efforts, members stressed the importance of de-commodifying healthcare. Unlike with general M4A canvassing, they were able to argue that electing two fierce, left-wing women would go a long way toward enacting better healthcare policies. Fiedler won her race by a dozen points, with unusually high turnout at the polls. She ran on a platform of universal free healthcare and education, criminal justice and environmental reform, and democracy both in the workplace and in the political process.

Pittsburgh DSA went all out for Summer Lee and Sara Innamorato, both members of DSA, who won primaries for House Districts 34 and 21, respectively. Lee and Innamorato beat two cousins, Paul and Dom Costa, who are members of an established Democratic Party political family in Pittsburgh. Both women ran on platforms of economic equality, criminal justice reform, Medicare for All, tuition-free public education, and other popular DSA positions. Headlines around the country proclaimed victory for democratic socialists, such as, "A Democratic Socialist Landslide in Pennsylvania" and "Socialist-Backed Candidates Sweep Pennsylvania State House Primaries." Neither woman has a Republican opponent in the November election.

Sacramento DSA held an eight-hour Candidate Forum in April and endorsed four candidates: Gayle McLaughlin for lieutenant governor; Tristan Brown for Sacramento City Council District 7; Rachel-

anne Vander Werf for American River Flood Control District; and Phillip Kim for State Senate District 4. Brown, Vander Werf, and Kim are Sacramento DSA members, and chapter members are excited to move on their campaigns.

Brown's campaign offers a very compelling opportunity for the chapter. Sac-

ramento is an early adopter of the Voters' Choice Act, which gives every voter a ballot a month before the election, extends the time when polling places are open to 11 days, and more. The chapter will identify low-propensity registered voters and canvass their homes with the intention of boosting turnout in what are often low-participation mid-terms. Voter turnout in Brown's district could be from 6,000 to 8,000 voters, and if the race is close, a few hundred votes could determine it. Canvassing could make the difference.

East Bay DSA is working on three electoral campaigns this season: National DSA endorsee Gayle McLaughlin, running as an independent for lieutenant governor; Jovanka Beckles, an East Bay DSA member running for state assembly; and a ballot initiative to repeal state-imposed limits on local rent control. The three campaigns fit together nicely: When McLaughlin and Beckles served together on the Richmond City Council, they helped pass the state's first new rent control measure in 30 years, inspiring housing activists in other cities around the state to follow suit. More info at <https://ebdsapac.org/>.

New York City DSA has endorsed Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in her campaign to be the Democratic candidate to the U.S. House of Representatives in New York's 14th congressional district. Ocasio-Cortez is a working-class, Latina democratic socialist running on a platform of Medicare for All, a universal jobs guarantee, tuition-free public college, and



Jovanka Beckles, East Bay DSA member and candidate for state assembly, at the UC workers' strike in May, showing off her DSA Medicare for All swag.

abolishing the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency. Her opponent in the Democratic primary, the incumbent, Joe Crowley, takes Wall Street and real estate money and uses his position as chair of the Queens Democratic Party to suppress candidates who challenge the vaunted Queens political machine. Queens branch members are very excited about the campaign and drew 34 canvassers to the kickoff event on April 28. With citywide endorsement, other DSAers should join the campaign.

New York City has also endorsed DSA member Julia Salazar in her bid for the New York State Senate. She is running in Brooklyn's 18th district, which includes Bushwick, Williamsburg, and other neighborhoods in North Brooklyn, against a developer-backed incumbent. "We don't operate with a vision of scarcity," said Salazar in a speech asking for the endorsement of NYC-DSA. "We operate with a vision of abundance." NYC-DSA delegates voted overwhelmingly in favor of her campaign, and the chapter held a kickoff event on May 19.

Chicago DSA has avoided running or supporting candidates in larger races in favor of ballot measures that correspond to its wider campaigns, while supporting candidates in hyper-local races for administrative offices. In the March election the ballot referendum in support of lifting the ban on rent control received wide support, and the chapter's effort secured it a voice on the steering committee of the coalition organizing for rent control in Chicago. Other big electoral wins came in April in the races for local school councils, where eleven DSA members ran and ten secured seats. Some ran unopposed, but in five of the six contested races, DSA members won, in some cases receiving nearly twice as many votes as the opposition.

Orlando DSA is supporting Chardo Richardson for U.S. Congress in Florida's 7th district and Robin Harris for Orange County Commissioner.

Richardson is an Air Force veteran and lawyer who has served as president of the Central Florida ACLU while working for a local teachers' union. Richardson supports single-payer healthcare, free public college, a \$15 minimum wage, an end to U.S. involvement in regime-change wars, and a complete restructuring of the criminal justice system leading to the end of the War on Drugs. Richardson is challenging incumbent congressional representative Stephanie Murphy in a Democratic primary. Murphy, a "blue dog" conservative Democrat, voted for Kate's Law, which punishes undocumented im-

migrants for returning to the United States after deportation, and for the recent bank deregulation bill. She has also consistently refused to support single-payer healthcare.

Harris is a local activist who has worked on a wide array of issues and has stood up for workers, LGBT folks, and communities of color. The district she aims to represent includes economically oppressed and historically neglected communities of color in West Orlando. She is challenging the incumbent county commissioner, who has supported zoning changes that have paved the way for harmful gentrification in the area. The race is nonpartisan, but Harris has been active in the local Green Party.

Metro DC DSA has endorsed six candidates for county- and state-level offices in Montgomery County, Maryland. All candidates are running in the Democratic primary, which takes place on June 26. Chapter members have knocked on thousands of doors and helped build a strong regional coalition to support the candidates. For more information about these candidates (or about Metro DC DSA's electoral work in general), you can visit the Metro DC DSA Solidarity PAC website at <http://dsasolidaritypac.org>.

DSA San Francisco is hard at work on two critical local ballot measure campaigns: Yes on F and No on H. Proposition F, which has been spearheaded by DSA and a host of tenants' rights organizations, would guarantee a right to counsel for any San Francisco resident who has been served with an eviction notice. In 90% of eviction cases that go to court, landlords have a lawyer and tenants don't. As a result, the vast majority of cases are decided in favor of the landlords simply because tenants do not have the resources to defend themselves. Prop F would help to protect vulnerable tenants from eviction and displacement, prevent homelessness, and win vital power for the working class in San Francisco in the fight against the capitalist-manufactured housing crisis.

Proposition H is a measure written by the San Francisco Police Officers Association that would allow the POA to create its own use-of-force policy involving tasers, which would bypass the oversight of the Police Commission and dispense with the (already watered-down) de-escalation training they're supposed to be implementing. DSA SF opposed the use of tasers from the beginning. Prop H would allow police officers to use tasers on anyone, including people who pose absolutely no threat.

DSA-LA is gearing up for a campaign in partnership with a coalition of grassroots organizations in support of a statewide ballot measure to repeal Costa-Hawkins, a 1995 law that puts severe limits on local rent control measures. If this ballot measure is successful, the chapter will pressure the City of Los Ange-

For more information about DSA's electoral strategy and endorsed campaigns, go to <http://electoral.dsausa.org/>

les and nearby municipalities to expand rent control and tenant protections to every tenant in the city.

In the June 5 primaries, DSA-LA is also supporting Gayle McLaughlin for lieutenant governor and Steve Dunwoody for State Assembly. Dunwoody is a DSA member and 2016 Bernie delegate running against the local political machine on LA's west side.

DSA-LA is also a part of the Public Bank LA coalition to pressure city lawmakers to create a public bank, which would save millions in fees and pave the way for more democratic control of local finance. And along with comrades across the state and country, the chapter is canvassing regularly for Medicare for All in the form of the California SB-562. ❖

Meagan Day is a staff writer at Jacobin magazine whose work has also appeared in the Baffler, In These Times, Mother Jones, The Week, n+1, and elsewhere.



Paid political advertisement paid for by Democratic Socialists of America, Inc., 75 Maiden Lane, Ste 702, New York, NY 10038, independently of any candidate or committee. No candidate has approved this advertisement.

IT'S ABOUT POWER/continued from page 2

concrete tests. Election cycles are predictable and thus a useful scorecard of our effectiveness at building a multi-racial, working-class base that is self-conscious, strategic, and powerful.

Elections are also real fights in the class war, battles that we need to win because they have real consequences.

In this issue of *Democratic Left*, Amelia Dornbush and Sam Lewis's piece explores how and why DSA electoral campaigns can be powerful engines for building independent working-class power and a base that is broader than DSA's existing membership. Tom Gallagher profiles some of our elected officials, and Meagan Day looks at the work of a number of DSA chapters carrying out our national electoral strategy of using campaigns to build capacity in our chapters rather than simply providing ground troops for candidates. Puya Gerami's piece is a case study of Central Connecticut DSA's electoral work from power analysis to strategic plan. And rounding out the issue, Laurence Peterson, Jack Suria-Linares, Maurice Isserman, Nicole Díaz González, and Michael Hirsch look to current and historical situations and struggles that offer lessons that should inform our electoral work.



Dozens of DSA leaders attended the Texas Leadership Training in Houston, Texas, in February. This was the second of ten trainings for elected chapter and organizing committee leaders scheduled for 2018. National staff and experienced local organizers led sessions on strategic campaign design, power mapping and coalition building, one-on-one organizing conversations, leadership development, our three national priorities, our core political beliefs and theory of how to build power and make change, and more. Photo by Kristian Hernandez.

From Canvass to Campaign

By Puya Gerami

Since the Great Recession erupted, the Republican Party has wrested trifecta control over the majority of state governments in the country. This rightward power shift is not limited to the heartland. In Connecticut, the Democratic supermajorities that used to dominate both legislative chambers have been reduced to a razor-thin margin in the House and an even tie with the GOP in the Senate, while popular support for the outgoing Democratic governor has hit rock bottom. This dramatic political change has occurred during a long budgetary crisis. While Republicans seek to eliminate public-sector union rights, many Democrats remain in thrall to austerity and refuse to confront the real crisis afflicting Connecticut: Our state consistently ranks not only among the most affluent in the country but also among the most unequal.

What can democratic socialists do to change this situation? Like many budding chapters, Central Connecticut DSA was born during the membership surge after the 2016 presidential election. Early on, we recognized the need to articulate an alternative vision that challenged the prevailing neoliberal consensus. This means advocacy for robust unionism, public investment, wealth redistribution, and racial and gender equity.

One of our first major efforts was an issue-based canvassing project through the Working Families Party. (Connecticut is one of the few states with fusion voting, which allows candidates to receive cross-endorsement from multiple parties.) DSA members and our allies collected 500 signatures on a petition demanding that state legislators reject spending cuts and public worker layoffs and instead tax the rich. Although politicians and the media typically dismissed or denounced this agenda, local residents endorsed it overwhelmingly.

Support for our agenda was especially strong in Wallingford, a working-class town with high union density that voted for Barack Obama in two presidential elections before giving the edge to Donald Trump and Republican State Representative Craig Fishbein. In his first term, Fishbein has distinguished himself as one of the most reactionary lawmakers in Connecticut. He has sponsored legislation undermining unions and restricting abortion access. This past spring he was one of just four

representatives to vote against a pay equity bill and the lone opponent to a bill reversing the police procedure that mandated the arrest of victims in domestic violence incidents along with their aggressors.

As a result of our positive discussions with residents in the district, we decided to challenge Fishbein. Two of our members, Charles Decker and Justin Farmer, had just been elected to municipal council positions in the region. Now we aim for state office. In February, DSAer Dan Fontaine, who resides with his family in Fishbein's district, launched his campaign.

Fontaine's campaign for the 90th House District expects to receive Democratic and WFP endorsements and has already generated remarkable energy. We have continued to refine our agenda by asking for support from voters using a survey to discuss core issues, including progressive tax reform, paid family and medical leave, a \$15-per-hour minimum wage, and tuition-free state college. Fontaine

has received hundreds of small donations from residents on their own doorsteps, thereby qualifying handily for public financing. We are also constructing a labor committee composed of numerous activist unions in an effort to involve a diversity of rank-and-file members from across the area.

Although our short-term goal for this effort remains the defeat of an incumbent with a shameful record, we hope to create a local political organization that is built to last. With a candidate and core campaign team consisting almost entirely of DSA members, this project offers the opportunity to vastly improve individual skills and chapter capacity—not to mention a chance to recruit new members. We are developing and honing relations with unions and community organizations for the first time. Most important, we are strategically mobilizing thousands of residents to advance a program for equality and justice. ❖

Puya Gerami is education director at District 1199 New England, the largest healthcare union in Connecticut, and a graduate student in history at Yale. He is a member of Central CT DSA.



Andrea Guinn



Trade Policy

By Laurence Peterson

How should we socialists understand trade—and how can we act on that understanding? Our forebears have at times opposed free trade, and one of Donald Trump's appeals to workers was a promise a return to a mythical past. We know that our current trade system is tainted with the usual capitalist miseries, wastefulness, and exploitation. But in an age of globalization, it's hard to know how to fight so all workers get the full return for their labor when they toil under vastly different conditions. They're subject to vastly different governmental systems and levels of financial support and are situated within super-complex supply chains, while at the mercy of the consequences of unpredictable currency movements.

Simplistic calls for either free trade or tariffs no longer fit our complex economies. How can we begin to understand the issues, much less formulate socialist policies? Here are a few suggestions for beginning this challenging but essential process:

Let the success of the past inspire you to develop new solutions for the future.

The familiar trade system of exploitation has perhaps been surpassed by "super-exploitation" (the forcing of wages *below* subsistence level) at essential points in the supply chain. We must orient our activism to the basic condition of all workers. However, the policies developed after the Second World War in the industrialized world that supported strategic tariffs and currency policies and allowed for a jump in living standards and working conditions won't work today. Today's global capitalist economy features incomparably freer flows of finance, and, enabled by much more advanced technology, will almost certainly provoke a trade war among partners who have become dangerously dependent on trade outcomes. Such a trade war could lead to another great recession. Our activism must be powerfully and strategically oriented to avoid this, as well as to improve the condition of workers, both here and abroad.

Don't be fooled by—or afraid of—populism. Much populist rhetoric, especially when regurgitated by the mainstream media, is idiotic or repulsive. But there's no denying that the dramatic collapse in living standards that we see around us affects working people primarily and turns some of us into bigots or discourages thought, and even hope. It is our mission to engage with our fellow workers so we can fight together effectively to improve conditions.

Donald Trump is an unmitigated disaster. Trump's trade policies offer two things: vapid opportunities for self-serving publicity that accompany his introduction of tariffs and tearing up of trade deals and the much more damaging and extensive blows to all workers that result from the deregulatory policies concocted and overseen by his gazillionaire cronies and the Republican-led Congress. Capitalism is the ultimate enemy, but we should never forget who is pushing its take-no-prisoners agenda.

Be smart: keep learning. There is nothing simple about trade and the interna-

tional system, as Marx himself would emphasize. Challenge yourself to read and keep up with rapidly changing conditions so your activism will become more effective.

Get involved with local labor struggles and read the business press. Labor organizations are a great source of information on trade issues. And good newspapers like the *Financial Times*, as Noam Chomsky never tires of pointing out, are not solely propaganda outlets. Business leaders and bourgeois politicians rely on them for accurate information they can act upon. Reading the business press in tandem with trade-savvy radicals is a sure way to embark on more effective trade activism. ❖

Laurence Peterson is a member of DSA/Boston chapter and serves on the Democratic Left editorial committee.



Hallie Jay Pope

Changing the Conversation

Too Young to Vote; Old Enough to Protest—the East LA Walkouts

By Jack Suria-Linares and Maurice Isserman

When tens of thousands of high school students walked out of their schools to protest gun violence this March, whether they knew or not, they were following in the footsteps of teenagers 50 years ago who sparked a movement for better schools and Chicano pride in immigrant neighborhoods in East Los Angeles.

On Tuesday March 5, 1968, Garfield High School students in East LA walked out to demand funds for their run-down campuses, creation of college prep courses, better trained teachers, and an end to police brutality. (Garfield, like a number of schools in the area, had a dropout rate of more than 50% prior to graduation.) Their decision sparked walkouts across the city and solidarity throughout the country, leading more than 22,000 students to join the “blowouts,” as they were called. Their list of demands included protection for the arts, for teachers for their political beliefs, and for education that highlighted the strength of the Chicano community.

The East LA walkouts provided a catalyst for what became the Chicano movement throughout the Southwest. It proved that young students of color can, in fact, influence the political terrain and, more important, that politics need not remain inside an imposed, racially based spectrum of issues. Instead, the students focused on the impact their terrible education had on material conditions in their communities.

David Sanchez, a founder of the Chicano rights group the Brown Berets who played a key role in the original protest, told the *Los Angeles Times* on the 50th anniversary of the blowouts, “We caught the entire nation by surprise. Before the walkouts, no one cared that substandard schools made it all but impossible for Chicano youth to find strength and pride in their culture, language and history.... After the walkouts, no one could deny that we were ready to go to prison if necessary for what we believed....With better education, the Chicano com-

munity could control its own destiny.”

The 1968 blowouts took place with at least the tacit support of some teachers, another fact worth noting after a springtime of teacher protests for better pay and working conditions. Sal Castro, a history teacher at Lincoln High School, openly supported the walkouts, which cost him his job, although he eventually gained reinstatement. When he and his students walked out, he told historian Mario T.

García, “I didn’t think of the historical importance of this day. I just knew it had to be done.... I loved being a teacher and didn’t want to be anything else, but I guess because I was a teacher I had to do what I had to do...”

Many of the students who participated in the blowouts went on to

campaign against police brutality, to support the United Farm Workers, and to protest the Vietnam War. (The 1970 Chicano Moratorium, for example, brought 20,000 antiwar protesters onto Los Angeles streets.) This was a political awakening sparked by people not old enough to vote, the effects of which can be felt in Los Angeles—and, indeed, throughout the Southwest—down to the present day. And just like the students of East Los Angeles, their successors in the Movement for Black Lives and in the fight to end gun violence have already changed the political climate of our time. ❖

“I didn’t think of the historical importance of this day. I just knew it had to be done . . .”



Jack Suria Linares was born and grew up in Los Angeles, where he currently resides. He received his master’s degree in Labor Studies at the CUNY-Murphy Institute in New York City and is now working on

education policy. Maurice Isserman is a professor of history at Hamilton College and the author, among other books, of The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington.



Puerto Rican Resistance Grows

By Nicole Díaz González

May Day 2018 was one for Puerto Rican history books, again. As last year, thousands gathered in San Juan's "Golden Mile" financial district to protest austerity measures ordered by the congressionally imposed, unelected fiscal control board and implemented by a puppet government. And, as in 2017, all hell broke loose when a militarized police force attacked and pursued protesters for two miles with tear gas, pepper spray, batons, and rubber bullets.

Such a crackdown in the financial district is no longer a rare sight. This two-block area in San Juan is home to UBS, Banco Popular, Banco Santander, and other financial institutions, as well as large law firms that profited from Puerto Rico's crisis, whether by speculating with retirement funds, abusing debtors, intervening in a highly questionable bond issuance, or promoting anti-worker legislation that benefited "job-creators." So, when people, undaunted by last year's tear gas, came back to the same spot, local and federal authorities were not amused. The fact that thousands are putting some of the blame on banks and the board is a great breakthrough.

Things were changing even before two intense back-to-back hurricanes struck the island and both the federal and local governments failed miserably to address the people's needs. The natural phenomena only further accelerated the human disaster of centuries of colonialism, neoliberal policies, and widespread corruption. After a decade of recession, austerity measures, including a sales tax, budget cuts, the biggest bond issuance in history, massive public employee layoffs, tax exemptions for foreign millionaires and multinational companies, and privatization masked as public-private partnerships have brought Puerto Rico to its knees.

In 2016, the Puerto Rican government lost access to the markets and could no longer supplement insufficient income with loans. In response to the (creditors') emergency, the U.S. Congress approved the PROMESA bill. There was no "bailout." Instead, the bipartisan legislation granted power over any decision related to public spending and economic policies to the so-called Fiscal Oversight Board. In exchange, supporters explained, the bill provided for a legal mechanism to manage creditor claims that would temporarily protect the government, similar to a stay in a bankruptcy procedure. During the debate around the bill, many Puerto Ricans learned that our island's destiny is actually in

the hands of the Congressional Natural Resources Committee, right there next to national parks and mining ventures.

The "reforms" ordered by the board eliminate protection against unfair dismissals and further reduce private-sector workers' sick days. How this will help the economy is unclear. A paltry raise of \$1 per hour would not even apply to workers under 25.

On the other hand, mismanagement of the public Electric Power Authority has led to repeated calls for its privatization, which have increased after the almost complete destruction inflicted by Hurricane Maria. Still, two examples of privatization give reason for caution: First, there's the telephone company, owned today by the hated Claro, and then we have the tolls managed by Autoexpreso and its rage-inducing and malfunctioning system of automatic fines for passing through with insufficient funds on the account.

Every day more Puerto Ricans are opting for resistance. Those in power are striking back.

Starting last year, local and federal authorities began a campaign against activists, even describing some as criminal organizations or terrorists. Some of those arrested by local police in protests are accused of felonies, even though the alleged crime barely amounts to a misdemeanor. Others are released without charges but told they are under investigation. Facebook posts and videos are used as evidence, and activists are threatened with prosecution for speech critical of the board, the government, or the police. Even the FBI intervened recently when agents confiscated the mobile phone of activist Scott Barbés.

Retaliation seems to be fueling more support for resistance. Maybe too many feel that they have nothing to lose. Discontent is growing in Puerto Rico, and that is our best bet for redemption and reconstruction. ❖

Nicole Díaz González is an activist and attorney based in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She is a member of the Partido del Pueblo Trabajador and a partner of Brigada Legal Solidaria, which provides free legal advice and representation to activists.



Marx and Debs on the Big Screen

By Michael Hirsch

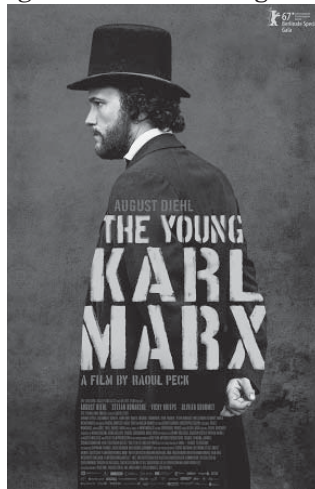
With the possible exceptions of Sergei Eisenstein's early odes to the Russian revolutions and Herbert Biberman's 1954 strike anthem *Salt of the Earth*, the last time U.S. audiences saw a big-screen testament to socialism may have been *Reds*, in 1981. But with the appearance of two new films—one a taut melodrama on Karl Marx's formative years and the other a blistering documentary on the life of Eugene V. Debs—the drought may be ending.

Raoul Peck's *The Young Karl Marx* brings to a mass audience not just the revolutionary ideas of Marx and his friend and collaborator Frederick Engels, but an approach to politics and history that still has no peer. Charting the world as he saw it, Marx wrote, "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole." Has anything changed?

The film, taking up its story in 1844, follows two young men who challenged not only leading thinkers of the academy but also radicals removed from real struggles. It ends with the publication of "The Communist Manifesto" in 1848, when neither of the authors was yet 30 years old.

Heavily influenced by the German philosophers Georg W.F. Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach, the duo created not just a philosophy but a politics. They took from Hegel the idea of the dialectic as a clash of opposites leading to a synthesis and applied it to institutions and movements as a framework for action through understanding power and powerlessness. From Feuerbach, they adopted the idea of reality as materially based, though reliant on human will and activity.

Unlike the era's utopian socialists, Marx and Engels based their politics on a reading of economic relations in which the dominant culture does not determine economic facts on the ground; rather it is the relations of production that shape the state and its politics.

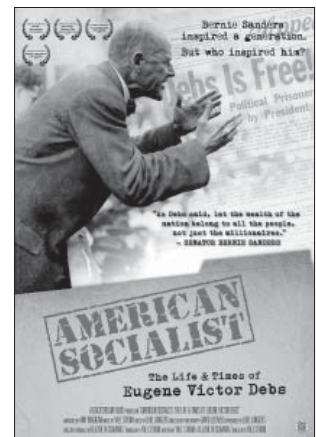


The film's treatment of factory worker Mary Burns, Engels' longtime lover and part of the group that helped him investigate conditions among Manchester's poor, is a pleasant surprise. Although it posits Burns as a dissident worker at Engels' father's factory—for which there is no known evidence—it presents her as a self-directed militant at a time when women in the workforce were invisible to scholars and journalists. It also counters the usual treatment of Burns, whom historians often either ignore or mention in a snarky aside, given that she and Engels never married.

Peck, who also directed the feature film *Lumumba* and the documentary *I Am Not Your Negro*, which profiled James Baldwin, has said, "From the outset, I decided to make a film that would speak to the widest audience, without distorting historical truth." He keeps his word.

Homegrown Socialist

Another film with no distortion is documentary film director Yale Strom's *American Socialist: The Life and Times of Eugene Victor Debs*. It is a faithful and much-needed appraisal of the militant labor leader, five-time Socialist Party presidential candidate, and class-war prisoner jailed for opposing U.S. entry into the First World War. Debs was a fiery, moral force in a corrupted era, and his legacy is well served by the new production. In examining Debs's biography, the film joins the highly praised but less-well-distributed 1979 Debs documentary by then little-known Bernie Sanders.



Debs was among the greatest orators this nation ever produced, yet no recording of his voice survives. Even foreign-language speakers were won over, with many testifying that Debs's mannerisms alone were magnetic, his fist smacking his palm as he offered such injunctions as, "Progress is born out of agitation. It is agitation or stagnation."

The film makes clear that Debs, a strong railroad worker-unionist, didn't start out as a socialist; that

transformation came after Grover Cleveland broke the 1894 American Railway Union strike using the mendacious claim that strikers were sabotaging mail delivery. Debs, the union president, went to prison a militant trade unionist and, courtesy of a prison-cell reading of Marx's *Capital*, came out six months later a committed revolutionary, though of a discernibly homegrown type. He would, for example, define socialism as "Christianity in action." For Debs's religiously inclined listeners, greed and the pursuit of personal wealth were presented as sin.

It was the Socialist Party's principled opposition to the First World War as an imperialist war and a thinly disguised land grab that led to its undoing and to a five-year prison sentence for Debs under the administration of the ostensibly liberal Woodrow Wilson. Debs's crime: violating a 1917 Espionage Act provision against urging young men to evade the draft.

On July 16, 1918, Debs was in Canton, Ohio, to address the Ohio Socialist Party's state convention and visit comrades jailed for speaking out against the war. "I must be exceedingly careful," he told the convention delegates, "prudent as to what I say.... but I am not going to say anything that I do not think. I would rather a thousand times be a free soul in prison than to be a sycophant and coward in the streets."

Government stenographers in the crowd noted his comments selectively. Prison followed, due to the alleged danger that his remarks, those of a known "agitator," posed to troop recruitment—and this just months before the Treaty of Versailles was signed. A red scare followed the war. Foreign radicals were rounded up and deported. Native-born leftists of any stripe were imprisoned.

Running for president on the Socialist ticket in 1920 while incarcerated, Debs garnered just under a million votes. Even as late as 1921, on the eve of leaving office, Woodrow Wilson refused to pardon Debs. It was the GOP's Warren Harding who granted Debs and 23 others a Christmas commutation.

Although he was a hero to many, Debs did not

Arrange a showing of *American Socialist*

DSA has arranged with the film's distributor for a special screening fee that will be good prior to November 2018 and to purchase DVDs at a greatly reduced cost. Your chapter can arrange an evening of socialist education and camaraderie in your community. For more information, write to film@dsausa.org

seek adulation. As he put it in 1906 to an audience of workers in Detroit: "I would not be a Moses to lead you into the Promised Land, because if I could lead you into it, someone else could lead you out of it. You must use your heads as well as your hands, and get yourself out of your present condition."

His was a U.S. variant of Marx's insistence on working-class self-activity, that the emancipation of working people was not the prerogative of elites no matter how well-intentioned, but a task largely of the workers alone. Debs's often quoted statement to his trial judge makes much the same point:

"Years ago, I recognized my kinship with all living beings, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest on earth. I said then, and I say now, that while there is a lower class I am in it; while there is a criminal class I am of it; while there is a soul in prison I am not free."

Debs's heroes were not the great and good, but the ordinary people who showed uncommon bravery and solidarity with one another, often under extraordinary and intolerable conditions.

Marx and Debs may not yet be household names for the majority in this country, but these films serve as vivid introductions. View them and talk them up. ❖

Michael Hirsch is a New York-based politics and labor writer and an editorial board member of New Politics. Far fuller versions of his Marx and Debs reviews appeared in The Independent.

Send Greetings to *Democratic Left* on Labor Day

Wish us well, pay tribute to a comrade or comrades, advertise your book or company (and perhaps take a tax deduction), or show off your chapter logo and web address. This magazine is the public face of our organization. We're bigger than ever, so let's make this the biggest Labor Day issue ever. Send a check or donate online, specify that it is for *Democratic Left*, and you'll see your name in the Labor Day issue.

Don't delay. Deadline is July 10, 2018.

NAME ONLY	ADS
Reader: \$20 <input type="checkbox"/>	One-eighth page: \$125 <input type="checkbox"/>
Supporter: \$40 <input type="checkbox"/>	Quarter-page: \$250 <input type="checkbox"/>
Sustainer: \$60 <input type="checkbox"/>	Half-page: \$500 <input type="checkbox"/>
Booster: \$80 <input type="checkbox"/>	Full page: \$1,000 <input type="checkbox"/>
Cadre: \$100 <input type="checkbox"/>	Inside front/back cover: \$1,200 <input type="checkbox"/>

Email your copy to msvart@dsausa.org and mail your check to Editor, *Democratic Left*, Suite 702, 75 Maiden Lane, New York, NY 10038. If you are advertising a service or product, the cost may be tax deductible to you as a business expense.

Moving? Let us know: info@dsausa.org. The Post Office charges for every returned copy of *Democratic Left*. Save time and money and email us now with your old address and the new one.

Change the USA! Join the DSA!

Yes, I want to join the Democratic Socialists of America. Enclosed are my dues (includes a subscription to *Democratic Left*) of:

\$175 Sustainer \$110 Family \$45 Introductory \$20 Student \$27 Low-Income

Yes, I want to renew my membership in DSA. Enclosed are my renewal dues of:

\$175 Sustainer \$110 Family \$60 Regular \$20 Student \$27 Low-Income

Enclosed is an extra contribution of \$50 \$100 \$25 to help DSA in its work

Name _____ Year of Birth _____

Address _____

City / State / Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-Mail _____

Union Affiliation _____ School _____

BILL MY CREDIT CARD Circle one: MC Visa No. _____

Expiration Date _____ Signature _____

Security Code _____

MY INTERESTS ARE

- Labor
- Religion
- Youth
- Anti-Racism
- Feminism
- LGBTQI Rights
- International
- Environmental Justice
- Other

Return to:

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA

75 Maiden Lane, Suite 702
New York, NY 10038
212-727-8610
info@dsausa.org
www.dsausa.org

DEMOCRATIC LEFT

(ISSN 1643207) is published quarterly at 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 702, New York, NY 10038. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY (Publication No. 701-960). Subscriptions: \$10 regular, \$15 institutional. Postmaster: Send address changes to 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 702, New York, NY 10038. *Democratic Left* is published by the Democratic Socialists of America, 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 702, New York, NY 10038. (212) 726-8610. Signed articles express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily the organization.

Editorial Team: Zinzi Clemmons, Laura Colaneri, Meagan Day, Maurice Isserman, Barbara Joye, Christine Lombardi, Stephen Magro, Jessie Mannisto, Don McIntosh, Laurence Peterson, Joseph Schwartz, Boaz Vilallonga
Founding Editor: Michael Harrington (1928–1989)
Art Director: Andrea Guinn **Production:** Ed Hedemann

Executive Editor: Maria Svart **Editor:** Maxine Phillips
DSA Weekly: R.L. Stephens, Editor-in-Chief; Christine Lombardi and Tyler Curtis, Managing Editors; Miranda Alsknis; Bonnie Bailey; Anne Clark; Jarek Ervin; Daniel Gutiérrez; Evan Heitkamp-Boucher; Marian Jones; Jorge Tamames; Joshua Whitaker

Democratic Socialists of America share a vision of humane international social order based on equitable distribution of resources, meaningful work, a healthy environment, sustainable growth, gender and racial equality, and non-oppressive relationships. Equality, solidarity, and democracy can only be achieved through international political and social cooperation aimed at ensuring that economic institutions benefit people. We are dedicated to building truly international social movements—of unions, environmentalists, feminists, and people of color—which together can elevate global justice over brutalizing global competition.