

*We Need Bernie • Identity, Privilege, and Power • A Tale of Two Reports*

# DEMOCRATIC LEFT

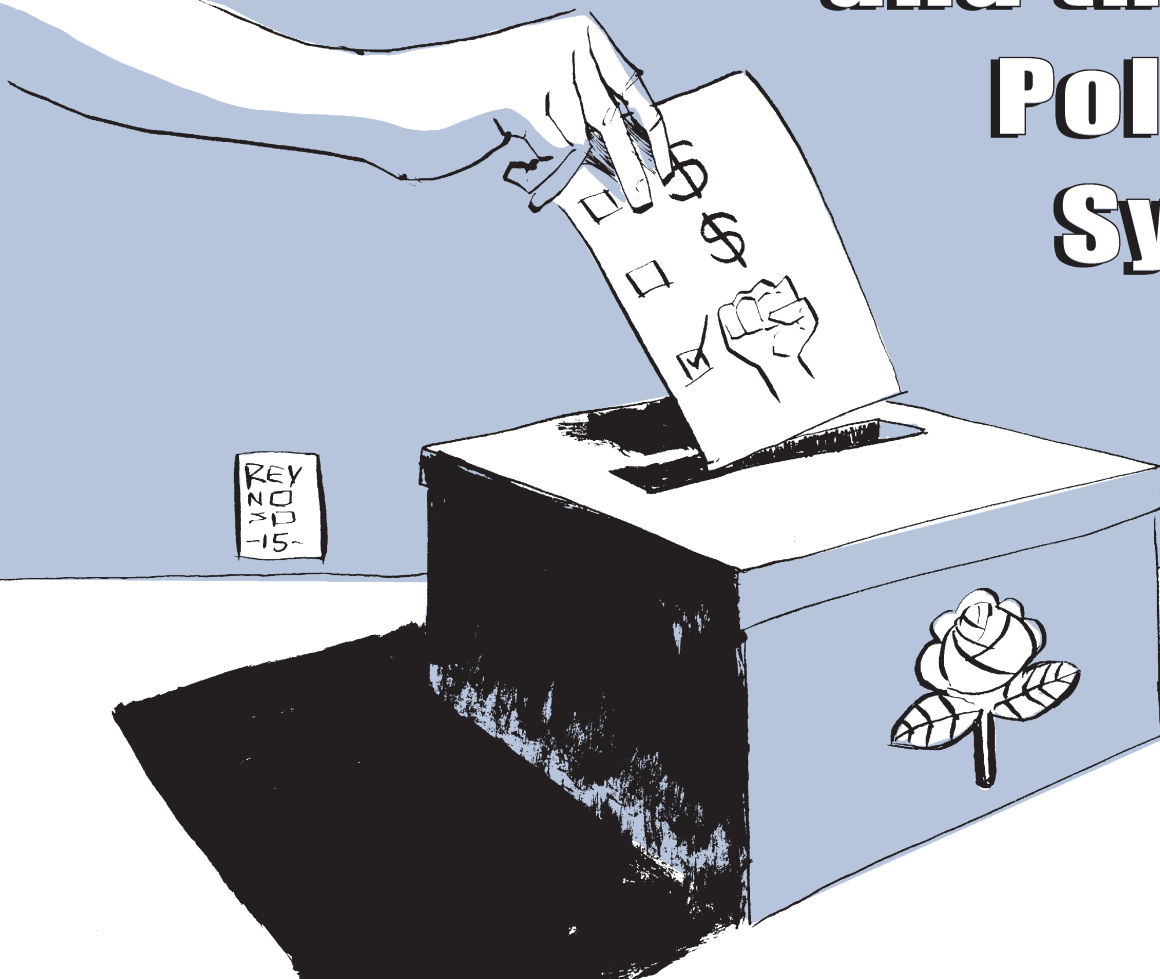
Vol. XLIII, No. 1, Summer 2015 

*the magazine of the  
Democratic Socialists  
of America*



[www.dsausa.org](http://www.dsausa.org)

## **Socialists and the U.S. Political System**



**From the National Director**

# Organizing with Class and Identity

By Maria Svart

One of my favorite DSA T-shirts reads, “We organize with class.” It sums up what makes us different from other progressive activists. We understand that the capitalist class has an inherent interest in exploiting the working class and has structured society and all of our institutions accordingly. Yet, we also recognize that the ruling class shapes institutions and social relations not just to regulate and control people based on their position in the economy but also on their gender, race, age, sexual orientation, and other categories. In other words, based on other aspects of their identity.



For example, we women are taught from birth to be caretakers—of children, of men, of elderly relatives. In our capitalist system, we receive no economic support for carrying out these tasks. This has implications beyond the family, in that traditional women’s work, even when women are paid for it, is more devalued than that of men. Thus, child care, elder care, home health care, and food workers are some of the lowest compensated workers in our economy. It is to black feminists Kimberlé Crenshaw and those from the Combahee River Collective that we owe the insights of intersectionality, the idea that dominant groups use various aspects of our identities to exclude the subordinate groups from power and decision making and that these intersections of identity must be taken into account along with class when organizing for political power.

In other words, we don’t ask people to leave parts of themselves outside the door when we’re creating our political movement. We know that our unity

is in fact *stronger* when we better understand the complexities of what we’re fighting, so we need *everyone’s* insights. We know that black women experience sexism differently than white women because of racism, and black women experience racism differently than black men because of sexism. Similarly, all men benefit from male privilege, but black men benefit less than white men because of racism. It’s a similar dynamic with class: working-class people have a common interest against capitalism, but precisely because racism and sexism exist alongside with and intersect with capitalism, we are vulnerable to the divide-and-conquer tactics of the economic ruling class.

Which brings us to the presidential election. Our first black president may be followed by our first female president, both of them good on some issues but horrible on others. Just as the far right whipped up a racist frenzy against Barack Obama, it will make misogynist attacks on Hillary Clinton. We must stand against these attacks for what they are, but also fight the idea that any one individual can inherently represent the interests of all who share some aspect of that person’s identity.

Some feminists celebrate Clinton simply for being a woman, rather than taking a holistic look at her policy choices related to women, and more important, her policy choices related to *all* women, whether poor women, migrant women, women workers, women of color, LGBT women, and so on. We don’t want individualistic, “Lean-in” versions of feminism. We want socialist feminism. We understand women’s shared interests as well as our differences and want to make sure no one is left behind just because one woman can break through the glass ceiling.

Cooperatively and democratically building the socialist movement to value the perspectives we each bring is the only way we can combat the seductive ideology of the ruling class: that individual merit

continued on page 15

## Contents

Socialists and the U.S. Political System.....	3
Running with Bernie .....	6
“Privileging” Movements or Clubhouses? .....	7
Regulating the Police .....	8
Calling In and Showing Up.....	9
Pigs Fly in Alberta.....	10
Worker Co-ops Gain Traction .....	11
Paying a Price for Sexual Orientation .....	12
Not Waiting for Lefties to Engage the Arts .....	13
Making Sense of Occupy Wall Street .....	14

Cover art by Frank Reynoso

## Talking about DL

If you would like to participate in a telephone discussion group about this issue of *Democratic Left*, please r.s.v.p. at [dsausa.org/calendar](http://dsausa.org/calendar). Call in to 605-475-6333, access code 796617#, Monday, June 29, 5 p.m. Pacific/ 8 p.m. Eastern.

# Socialists and the U.S. Political System

By Joseph M. Schwartz

Michael Harrington often quipped that the problem with American socialism is that it would be American socialism. By this he meant that socialists in the United States cannot simplistically import lessons learned from Europe, Latin America, or Africa. We live in a continental nation of 50 different states, and, thus, 50 distinct political systems. We also operate within a republican constitutional structure that our “founders” consciously devised to make radical democratic change difficult. If we are to be effective, we have to understand and grapple with the structural biases built into our system. These involve our famous system of checks and balances and separation of powers, plus states’ rights and electoral procedures that are biased in favor of a two-party system.

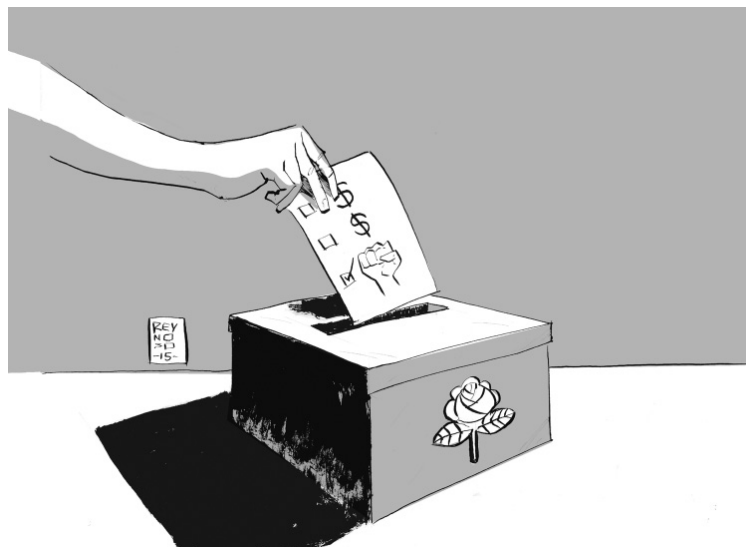
## A Conservative Constitution

Conservatives are correct about one thing: the U.S. constitutional structure is that of a republic more than a democracy. The founders explicitly feared that a majority of indebted small farmers would use their political power to inflate away their debts and threaten the power of slaveholders and bankers. So they wrote a constitution that enhanced the power of educated elites and made rapid democratic change difficult to achieve. To pass legislation in the United States, one must gain a super-majority in both legislative chambers to avoid the possibility of an executive veto. In a unitary parliamentary system, by contrast, if a party gains a majority in the legislature it can implement its program rapidly, as the legislature appoints the executive, and the courts do not have strong powers of judicial review.

The U.S. Senate, indirectly elected by state legislatures until 1913, undemocratically grants equal

representation to each state regardless of population. This shored up the power first of the slave states and later the mining and railroad interests in the mountain West. In addition, the courts in the United States have more power to overturn legislation than in any other democracy. And with the exception of the Warren Supreme Court (1954-1970), courts have usually been on the side of corporate property and privileged minorities.

The Constitution is extremely hard to amend; a successful amendment must gain the support of two-thirds of each chamber of Congress and three-quarters of the state legislatures. Constitutional “political process” issues (for example, *Citizens United*) mostly engage the imagination of educated and economically secure progressives. Look at the white, college-educated base of Common



Frank Reynoso

Cause and People for the American Way.

## Federalism

The United States is as politically, culturally, and economically diverse as all of Europe. State and local governments are primarily responsible for financing education, transportation, public housing, and social welfare. The federal government is largely a military machine, plus an old-age public insurer. Expenditures on “defense” and on Medicare and Social Security account for close to 75% of the annual federal budget. Most federal social welfare programs require states to contribute half the funding and allow the states to control program eligibility. This is because the Southern Democratic plantocracy during the New Deal wanted to deny income-support programs to African Americans.

In our single-district legislative electoral system, left constituencies are disadvantaged by being more concentrated geographically than are conservative voters. People of color, immigrants, unionized workers, and liberal white-collar workers live dispropor-

tionately in large cities, state capitals, college towns, and inner suburbs. Here, progressive Democrats and even open socialists can run competitive electoral races, particularly in nonpartisan local campaigns. But small cities, outer suburbs, exurbia, and rural areas are Republican-dominated and elect the majority of state legislators. The bias in favor of Republican state legislative rule accentuates the negative effects of the geographic maldistribution of left constituencies and too often grants Republicans control of congressional reapportionment. Today, Republicans control every branch of 25 state governments, including the once Democratic pro-labor states of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ohio. Republicans also use blatant voter suppression tactics to preserve their advantage in state politics.

On the other hand, the diversity of our major cities and their growing number of immigrant voters has helped elect relatively progressive Democratic mayors and city councils in New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Seattle, Pittsburgh, Phoenix, and elsewhere. Radicals, though, must still build social movements around housing, immigrant, and low-wage justice issues to offset the power of downtown developers and real estate interests who constrain even the best of elected officials. The left also must recognize that state government's major role in funding urban public education, housing, transportation, and public workers' pension funds means we cannot achieve social democracy in one city. Who rules state government profoundly affects what is possible at the municipal level.

### **Hope in Times of Social Instability**

Yet the barriers to social change posed by our constitutional structure should not overwhelm us with pessimism. The history of the United States is punctuated by radical reform periods: Reconstruction, the Progressive Era, the New Deal, and the civil rights era. Militant social movements can make major gains when ruling elites prove incapable of solving major social crises. During these periods a moderate reform party temporarily controls all three branches of government, in part because it incorporates into its electoral coalition some of the protesting constituencies and part of their political agenda. Periods of conservative reaction often follow these periods of radical reform, with the left having to play defense.

The democratic reforms that the left defends to this day mostly came into existence during the New Deal (1934-38) and the Great Society (1964-66). In those very brief periods the Democrats controlled all three branches of the federal government, and an integral part of their governing coalition consisted of immigrant labor activists in the 1930s and black voters within the Northern Democratic Party in the 1960s. During the New Deal, militancy by the Con-

gress of Industrial Organizations forced the federal government to implement Social Security, unemployment insurance, the minimum wage, and a national right to organize unions. The power of white Southern planters within the Democratic coalition also meant that the New Deal excluded from its major programs domestic workers and farmworkers (that is, blacks and Latinos living in the South and Southwest).

Militant civil rights protests in the South forced Democrats in the 89th Congress of 1964-66 to pass the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts and Medicare, Medicaid, Head Start, and Food Stamps. By 1966, however, Republican gains among Northern white voters opposed to school and housing integration created a congressional coalition of Southern Democrats and conservative Republicans that halted further social progress. The left has been fighting a defensive battle to preserve these gains against the politics of corporate mobilization and white conservatism ever since.

### **Building Independent Left Capacity**

Today, the bipartisan corporate elite cannot deal with rampant inequality, wage stagnation, mass immigration, and continuing, often violent, racial exclusion. In response to this governing crisis, social activists have built fledgling social movements against the New Jim Crow of mass incarceration and for low-wage justice and the rights of undocumented immigrants. Socialists should help fuel these movements, while raising within them "nonreformist" anticorporate demands for massive public investment in clean energy, infrastructure, and in our inner cities, funded by progressive taxation on corporations and the wealthy. Such movements helped spur the election of Kshama Sawant to the Seattle City Council, as well as left independent campaigns for local office such as socialist Jorge Mujica's in Chicago.

Viable third parties are not impossible to build at the state level; but they must be able to capture governorships and build legislative majorities to deliver for their constituencies, as the Progressive Party (Wis.) and the Farmer-Labor Party (Minn.) did during the Progressive Era down through the New Deal. But even here, these independent parties had to cooperate with Democrats in Washington and with Democrats in their own state legislature to pass legislation.

Only in the United States does the state and not the parties themselves control party membership. Thus, U. S. political parties are peculiarly open and amorphous. Anyone, regardless of political views, can register as a Democratic or Republican primary voter. Bernie Sanders can remain a registered "independent" in Vermont while running in the Democratic primaries for president. Our open primary system means that social conflict often runs *through* our major parties rather than *around* them.

Single electoral districts, plus the absence of proportional representation and parliamentary coalition governments, combined with direct election of executives (with legislative veto power) provide major structural incentives for electoral activists to build a “catch-all” two-party system—broad coalitions of diverse constituencies that cobble together electoral majorities. But those coalitions are often riven by internal conflict. Thus, in the Republican Party the libertarian Koch brothers duke it out with small-town Christian fundamentalists on social issues, and in the Democratic coalition the nationally dominant neoliberal corporate political elites often clash with the trade union, progressive, and black and Latino sections of the party.

Regardless of where socialists stand on the first-party-versus-third-party question, unless the left can build a multiracial, anticorporate political coalition that can intervene independently in electoral politics, the left will too often be taken for granted, even abused, by party elites. The Moral Monday movement in North Carolina prefigures this type of “neo-Rainbow” coalition rooted in communities of color, the feminist and LGBTQ communities, and progressive labor activists. DSAers can help build these coalitions at the local level so that the left can punish right-wing Democrats in primaries and withdraw support from such candidates in general elections. These types of coalitions will be best situated to demand the removal of private money from politics.

The Democratic Party national elite remains dominated by neoliberal corporate interests. This is reflected in both Barack Obama’s and Hillary Clinton’s strong support of the Trans Pacific Partnership agreement, even though 75% or more of Democratic Congressmembers are likely to vote against it. The surprisingly broad financial and volunteer support for Bernie Sanders’s presidential campaign reflects the dissatisfaction of the party’s more progressive grassroots base with the Clinton coronation. Although Sanders’s program does not call for full democratic control of the economy, his social democratic platform calls for economic redistribution to fund a Nordic-style welfare state. DSA’s role in this movement is to make clear to volunteers and interested voters that the fight for Sanders’s program must continue after the campaign is over. That can best happen if people join and build DSA.

**“Our open primary system means that social conflict often runs *through* our major parties rather than around them.”**

Socialists should also help build a political trend that backs Sanders but presses him to speak out more explicitly against the New Jim Crow and in favor of an expedited path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

The divergent bases of the two parties pose social contradictions that the left should work to exploit. The near-extinction of white conservative Southern Democrats and northeast moderate Republicans means that the two parties—and their representatives—are more ideologically distinct than ever. The nativist Republicans receive 92% of their vote from whites. The Democratic base, in contrast, reflects the emerging electorate, with 48% of the Democratic presidential vote in 2012 coming from voters of color. We need a neo-Rainbow coalition, such as Jesse Jackson’s in 1984 and

1988. The labor, black, Latino, and progressive base of the Democrats could either push the party left or lay the institutional groundwork for restructuring our current party system.

The Sanders campaign represents a unique opportunity for DSA activists to legitimate our democratic socialist politics with a wide and diverse audience. Our main political task is to build a much stronger DSA. But in doing so our locals should help to construct local multiracial, progressive coalitions that can back credible antiracist and anticorporate candidates, including open socialists. The militant socialist presence within that coalition must contend that the coalition’s goals can be fully achieved only if we democratize control of our economy. And we should advance transformational reforms (such as a financial transactions tax) that advance that goal. The left can only challenge the pro-corporate leadership of the Democrats if the power of political organization forces opportunistic politicians to respond to their constituents rather than to their donors. The organizing needed to accomplish this goal must be grounded in a sophisticated understanding of the U.S. state and of the complex relationship between social movement organizing and electoral politics. ❖

*Joseph M. Schwartz is a vice-chair of DSA and a member of its National Political Committee. He teaches political science at Temple University and is the author of The Permanence of the Political and The Future of Democratic Equality.*

# Running with Bernie

By Dustin Guastella

Now that Vermont senator Bernie Sanders has thrown his hat into the proverbial ring as a contender for the Democratic Party nomination for president, socialists need to play an active role in building his campaign. We also need to think carefully about why a Bernie campaign is important for building the left. For starters, I don't think socialists should work for Bernie in the hopes of "reclaiming" the Democratic Party (when was it ours to begin with?). Further, Bernie's presidential run shouldn't be seen as a means to pull Hillary Clinton to the left, a failing strategy for sure. The real benefit to socialists in building a viable campaign for Sanders in 2016 is the possibility of uniting burgeoning social movements and newly radicalized youth into an organized force. With Bernie running we have an opportunity to be in the center of the debate, to help define socialism against the inevitable red-baiting and partisan mudslinging to come, to bring our analysis forward, and to forcefully advocate on behalf of reforms that hamstring Wall Street and promote democracy.

Regardless of what you think of Sanders's politics, he identifies as a democratic socialist. In my lifetime, no serious presidential candidate has done so. And in the United States, this matters. Sanders presents a clear and compelling narrative of class struggle, not surprising from a man who once belonged to the Young People's Socialist League and who worked as a student organizer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee during the civil rights era. Instead of reciting moralizing narratives about greed and cruelty, Sanders speaks in a way that could help millions of working-class people make sense of their economic situation.

While many liberals and progressives largely agree with such an analysis and have come to view socialism positively, too many of them see the S-word as a liability. If Sanders is the major left-wing challenger, he could help to legitimate socialism as a political ideology in the United States and persuade those sympathetic voters to see socialism as "the name of their desire."

Sanders has been winning elections since he ran for mayor of Burlington, Vermont, in 1981. Although he is a well-respected progressive, some have justifi-

ably questioned his socialist credentials, particularly in the areas of foreign policy and his relative silence on systemic racism. It is our job as socialists to pressure Sanders to be the candidate we need rather than back him uncritically. This means forcing him to boldly challenge racist policing and mass incarceration.

Nevertheless, Sanders has a commendable record in other areas. Long before Occupy and Thomas Piketty made it politically fashionable, Sanders gave speeches on the House floor about the disappearance of middle-income jobs and the growing class divide. So far, he is the only potential candidate who supports a \$15 minimum wage and a trillion dollar jobs program.

In Vermont, Sanders is known for his attention to "pothole issues" and has fought for policies that have endeared him to many of his rural constituents. Recently, he pushed hard for more federal funding for dental care and the establishment of local free dental clinics. This isn't exactly a "sexy" issue, but it shows that Sanders's popularity comes from his success at meeting the needs of poor and working-class Vermonters.

Overall, Sanders's politics are squarely social-democratic. He lavishes praise on the welfare states of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark and he doesn't offer much in terms of moving beyond them. But unlike his European counterparts, Sanders enthusiastically supported the election of Syriza in Greece. He might be the only U.S. senator who recognizes the threat of fascism in Europe and its relationship to neoliberal capitalism. Although Sanders's stance is a progressive social-democratic one, in the United States it is radical.

Our job as democratic socialists is not to make him into a fantasy candidate that he is not. He has real liabilities. Our job as democratic socialists is to seize the moment to take our case to voters in a way that has not been possible before. ❖

*Dustin Guastella is the co-chair of Philadelphia DSA. A longer version of this article, written before Sanders declared his candidacy, appears on the Democratic Left blog site.*



“In the United States, Sanders’s political stance is radical.”

# Are We “Privileging” Movements or Clubhouses?

By Douglas Williams

I have been involved in many organizations that fight for social justice and equality. These groups were diverse in spirit and representation. Why would they not be? Coalition work has been a part of the left since its beginning, and I always believed that any successful effort to organize the working class would have to give priority to communities that have been crushed under the heel of oppression.

It was not until I served as adviser to a queer and trans person of color group at the University of Alabama that I started questioning this outlook. We began each meeting by having attendees give an accounting of all their privileges, which felt a bit like Confessional. The few events that we would have that were open to the public (it was normally a closed group, which is why my wife, who is white, bisexual, and served as co-adviser, was not allowed to attend meetings) would always begin by telling white people in the audience to “think thrice before speaking,” which kind of defeated the point of an open event. Eventually, it got to the point where even non-black queer people of color felt uncomfortable coming to meetings.

Given that the group leaders were immersed in online radical social justice circles where this type of discussion is common, this was not surprising. However, I came to some conclusions that caused me to reverse course in my thinking.

## 1. Identity politics is not working

I italicized what I did because *identity* is crucial to the human experience. It goes without saying that I, a black man who grew up in the South, experience this world differently than my wife, a white woman from the Northeast, even if we both grew up working class. Not to give these experiential differences some thought within leftist activism is to leave tools out of our toolbox when it comes to strategy, regardless of whether we are discussing policies or movement-building. As Steve D’Arcy pointed out earlier this year at the Public Autonomy Project site, the way that New Left-era activists

tended to flatten identity wholesale created both internal and external problems. But spend 15 minutes in most self-described “radical” activist spaces today, and you will find that leftism is now faced with the opposite problem: an increasingly Balkanized landscape where identity and representation become an end rather than a means to ensure

that the spoils of an ultimate working-class victory are not distributed along the same (insert -ist and -ism here) lines as before. Perspective is important, but that becomes clouded when the focus is always on claiming space rather than building communities,

on erecting the perfect clubhouse rather than building broad-based movements rooted in solidarity and respect. The former might be easy and satisfying, but the latter will actually ensure that my children grow up in a different world than I have.

## 2. Organizing has been replaced by posturing

The current dialogue on the social-justice left has become so thoroughly nihilistic that the prospect for ultimate victory over the systems that oppress us in ways big and small seems impossible. D’Arcy highlights this: “The older vocabulary looked at capitalism, racism, and sexism (for example) as social systems or institutions that could and probably would be defeated, once and for all, in the foreseeable future. Accordingly, activists of that era defined and described their movements as struggles for ‘socialism,’ ‘black liberation,’ or ‘women’s liberation.’ By contrast, the new vocabulary tends to suspend judgment on (without denying) the prospects for ultimate victory, and to focus its attention on challenging everyday impacts of capitalism, racialization and gender, in the here and now. This prioritization of resistance to everyday impacts infuses, not only the way activists today talk, but also how they choose what to do.” In

continued on page 15

“We engage in endless repetition of grievances without engaging in a discussion of better practices.”

# Regulating the Police

By Bilal Dabir Sekou

The city was devastated by fire, looting, and violence. Federal troops were called in. The year was 1967. The place was Detroit. Forty-three people died, most of them African American. As the embers cooled, President Lyndon B. Johnson established an 11-member commission chaired by Governor Otto Kerner, Jr., of Illinois. The job of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (popularly known as the Kerner Commission) was to find out “What happened? Why did it happen? What can be done to prevent it from happening again and again?”

The commission investigated 24 disorders in 23 cities and determined that poverty and racism created the conditions for urban unrest, and police actions triggered the outbreak of violence in half the cities. The report identified 12 grievances: police practices; unemployment and underemployment; poor quality housing; inadequate education; ineffectiveness and underrepresentation in the political system (the proportion of black representation in local government was substantially smaller than the black proportion of the population); and discriminatory administration of justice. Sound familiar?

After the fatal shooting of unarmed 18-year-old Michael Brown last summer by a white police officer led to demonstrations and unrest in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, Missouri, an investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice (the “Ferguson Report”) found that the Ferguson police department repeatedly violated the constitutional rights of African Americans by engaging in “revenue-driven policing.” This meant “a pattern of stops without reasonable suspicion and arrests without probable cause in violation of the Fourth Amendment.

The municipal court exacerbated the harm. According to the report, “Minor offenses can generate crippling debts, result in jail time because of an inability to pay, and result in the loss of a driver’s license, employment, or housing.”

The unrest in Ferguson, a string of police killings of unarmed black people, and uprisings in Baltimore, Maryland, have sparked a national debate about race and law enforcement. The “separate and unequal” societies identified by the Kerner Commission still exist. Bringing about change will not be easy.

The key historical role of the police has been to regulate class conflict by preserving the access of elites to basic resources, protecting private property, and controlling the labor force. In African American communities, the police have always been the coercive arm of the government charged with the responsibility of social control, not with the duty of serving and protecting them.

What is needed is an entire reorientation of law enforcement in the United States. The first step is to hold police officers accountable when they break the law. In cases involving a police shooting, a special prosecutor should be appointed to conduct the investigation. Civilian review boards should be independent and have authority. Second, police departments should demilitarize. Third, we should replace the war on drugs with a war on poverty and inequality. Police disproportionately harass and arrest black and brown women and men

“Hold police officers accountable when they break the law.”

for largely nonviolent offenses. We should invest in job training and job creation, provide equal educational opportunity, provide a guaranteed minimum income, assure the right of workers to organize into unions, make available universal childcare, and stabilize and strengthen neighborhoods by eliminating post-industrial blight.

Socialists must continue to march alongside social movement activists under the banner of campaigns such as #Black Lives Matter and #We Can’t Breathe and support groups like the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the ACLU, and Color of Change. White people must make these campaigns a priority. Majority white organizations such as DSA should partner with groups like Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), “a national network of groups and individuals organizing white people for racial justice.” ❖

*Bilal Dabir Sekou is an associate professor of political science at the University of Hartford, Department of Social Sciences, Hillyer College. He can be followed on his blog, Racial and Class Discourse from an Ivory Tower in Connecticut. (www.racialdiscoursect.com).*





# Calling In and Showing Up

## *Five Steps to Being an Effective Ally*

By Betsy Avila

**A**s socialists, we believe in solidarity. We know that an injury to one is an injury to all. But how do we practice solidarity in our everyday lives and in our campaigns? If you've ever wondered why your local chapter only attracts a certain kind of person, ask yourself how you can become a better ally to the people you want to work with. The DSA National Office, with the Young Democratic Socialists, is field-testing a workshop to help members of locals become better allies so that we can build a stronger movement to change oppressive institutions and social structures. What follows is a brief outline of the steps you can take on your own or in a group to begin the process. If you want to follow up with a more detailed workshop, get in touch with the National Office.

Pick any identity group to which you do not belong and try the following:

**Self-reflect:** What thoughts or prejudices might you have regarding an unfamiliar identity or issue? Admitting ignorance or prejudice on an issue or experience is an important step toward being a good ally.

**Self-educate:** Take the initiative and search for books, media channels, articles and blogs written by people with different voices. It's not up to oppressed people to educate you, although some may be willing to do so at the right time and in the right place. Find out where you can learn about alternative viewpoints on the radicalized history of the United States. Whichever route you take, at this point it's important to *listen* most of the time.

**Get active:** The best way to be an ally is to show up. Taking part in coalition work and public actions like marches, rallies, and boycotts directed at fighting oppression and discrimination is critical. Movements always benefit from added voices and bodies. Ask what the group needs from you. You can lend additional support by organizing others like yourself to join the action, too. Be sure to practice listening in these settings as well. This means keeping an open mind, not just thinking about what you'll say next.

**Lead by example:** Not everyone is politically correct or sensitive to the reactions of others around them, but a strong ally stops oppressive behavior in its tracks. Do your best to stop oppressive language and discriminatory practices in

group settings as well as in one-on-one conversations. Developing new group practices when facilitating meetings, such as progressive stack, which means that the people who usually hold back get to speak first, goes a long way toward making sure everyone's voice gets heard. Encourage others to speak up when they hear something that makes others uncomfortable, and stop harmful behavior or language immediately. Remember, if such an incident occurs, **don't call out, call in!** People's mistakes are not an opportunity to shame them in front of others. Reach out to them in private after a meeting or in a private conversation, and calmly explain to them why what they did or said was harmful. Doing this will help individual groups improve the culture of the group.

**Take risks, learn, and keep going:** No one can be a perfect ally overnight. Self-reflection, self-education, and self-correction take practice and persistence. When speaking up you may find yourself in a position where you yourself are called in. Assume good faith on the part of those who are calling you in. They want you as their ally. Listen carefully to constructive criticism and avoid being defensive, especially when this criticism is coming from a comrade. Together, we can learn to accept and celebrate each others' differences and develop a culture of acceptance everywhere. Being allies is key to creating a truly powerful organization. ❖

*Betsy Avila is the Young Democratic Socialists organizer.*



Save the date!  
**DSA**  
**National Convention**  
November 12-15, 2015  
Bolivar, Pennsylvania

# Pigs Fly in Alberta

By Eric Lee

The above isn't a "real" headline, but it describes what happened on May 6 when the New Democratic Party (NDP), a sister party to the recently defeated British Labour Party and a member party of the Socialist International, won a historic victory in the Canadian province of Alberta. The word "historic" is tossed around a lot, but let me explain by anecdote.

The first and only time I ever visited Alberta was in early 1977. I arrived in Edmonton planning to spend a couple of days there. As one does, I went to visit the local NDP, which was a small, sleepy office with one or two people hanging around.

The provincial secretary, Ray Martin, was happy to talk me through Alberta politics. He suggested that I stick around for the opening of the provincial parliament and for the party's provincial convention in a couple of weeks. So I did.

In parliament, I heard speaker after speaker from the conservative government, followed by the lone dissenter, the NDP member of Alberta's parliament, Grant Notley. I met Notley later at the provincial NDP convention, where I delivered greetings from our little group south of the border, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. And then I left.

Notley died in a plane crash seven years later. The party he left behind was stronger, and picked up 16 seats (up from just two) in the election that year, led by Ray Martin. It was to be the NDP's high point, never matched again in what has long been considered Canada's most right-wing province.

Now, fast forward to May 2015. On May 6, Notley's daughter Rachel, who would have been 13 when I visited Edmonton, led the NDP to a landslide victory in the provincial elections. The party won 55 seats, and the ruling Tories just 11 in the 87-seat legislature.

In Canada's most right-wing province, democratic socialists are now in power.

So, yes, pigs fly, miracles happen--and one should *never, ever give up*. ❖

*Eric Lee served on the national board of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (one of the two predecessor organizations of DSA) and is the founding editor of LabourStart (labourstart.org). An earlier version of this piece appeared on his blog [ericlee.info/blog/](http://ericlee.info/blog/).*



## YDS Southern Regional Conference

Atlanta, GA  
August 7-9, 2015  
Contact: [yds@dsausa.org](mailto:yds@dsausa.org)

Check out the New DSA Religion  
and Socialism blog

[religioussocialism.org](http://religioussocialism.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) 727-8610. Signed articles express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of the organization.

**Executive Editor:** Maria Svart

**Editor:** Maxine Phillips

**Blog Editors:** Duane Campbell, Dustin Guastella, Elizabeth Henderson, and Barbara Joye

**Editorial Committee:** Michael Baker, Elizabeth Henderson, Amber Frost, Michael Hirsch, Barbara Joye

**Editorial Advisory Committee:** Duane Campbell, Jeffrey Gold, Frank Llewellyn,

Simone Morgen, Mark Schaeffer, Jason Schulman, Joseph Schwartz

**Founding Editor:** Michael Harrington (1928-1989)

**Production:** Ed Hedemann

Democratic Socialists of America share a vision of a 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 all people. We are dedicated to building truly international social movements—of unionists, environmentalists, feminists, and people of color—which together can elevate global justice over brutalizing global competition.

# Worker Co-ops Gain Traction

By Carmen Dixon and Alexis Posey

As income inequality has grown, so has interest in alternative economic practices, including economic cooperation or worker co-ops. Last year, the city of Madison, Wisconsin, allotted \$5 million over a five-year period to develop worker cooperatives, and this year, the New York City Council approved an allocation of \$1.2 million for 2015 toward the same goal. The New York initiative serves to strengthen and expand the pre-existing worker cooperative economy in the city.

There are more than 40 worker cooperative businesses in New York City. Businesses such as Apple Eco-Cleaning and Pa'lante Green Cleaning are made up of mostly immigrant women who were once making low wages as domestic workers. Other businesses range from bookkeeping to construction to travel agencies to translation services.

Co-ops and their predecessors, mutual aid societies, have a rich tradition in the United States, especially among immigrants and the economically marginalized. Long before establishment of one of the first official worker co-ops in 1844 by the Rochdale Pioneers in Europe, black people had established mutual aid societies in the United States. In 1907, W.E.B. Du Bois identified 154 African American-owned cooperative businesses ranging from agricultural and insurance co-ops to mercantile establishments. Slave narratives reveal free blacks and enslaved people pooling resources to buy the freedom of others as well as to accumulate start-up funds for their own businesses. Much of this history has been recovered by Jessica Gordon Nembhard in the recently published *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*.

Contemporary cooperative development, as in the past, has excited new interest during times of social and economic hardship. This initiative has gained national attention and has created a path for many cities. Nonprofit agencies such as our own often provide technical support and work to build relationships and foster collaboration with city agencies that play a role in economic and community development. For instance, with the support of Small Business Services (SBS) in New York City, partners provide “10 steps to starting a worker cooperative” trainings in SBS satellite locations across the city. In February, the City Council voted for the passage of Intro 423, which requires the City to report on the number of contracts given

to worker cooperative businesses and SBS to report on support services provided to worker cooperative businesses. Intro 423 represents a paradigm shift for worker cooperative businesses in New York City.

We have been contacted by organizations in the District of Columbia who are looking to work with the local government to create a similar model. In Cleveland, Ohio, the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative, formed by a consortium of Cleveland-based institutions, has focused on six low-income neighborhoods. The Initiative aims to create “green” jobs that will “transform neighborhoods.” To date, it has formed a laundry co-op, a hydroponic greenhouse, and a solar energy company.

Is the United States now witnessing a revival of the age-old economic survival practices of exploited communities? Yes to the revival, but in order to achieve sustainability we must work to achieve global labor solidarity.

We acknowledge that some large-scale co-ops, in locations such as Spain and Mexico, have experienced challenges because of competition from other countries providing lower-cost goods. However, past and present cooperative economic practices teach us that businesses deeply rooted in their communities providing goods and services locally can be successful.

With the renewed popular interest in sharing economies, more businesses will develop. Activists can urge local governments to encourage and fund such development to provide models of fair labor practices and provide work in local communities. Most important, these economic models offer opportunities to join economic and political conversations to groups too long denied such access. ❖



Carmen Dixon (left) is the policy and faith organizer and Alexis Posey is senior policy analyst for workforce development for the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies in New York City.

# Paying a Price for Sexual Orientation

By Christine Riddiough

As this issue of *Democratic Left* goes to press, the U.S. Supreme Court prepares to rule on whether state laws preventing same-sex marriage are constitutional. Whatever the ruling, events in Indiana, Arkansas, and other states reveal that the fight for LGBT rights is not over. There is still no federal legislation forbidding discrimination against people because of sexual orientation. Such legislation, at this point, needs to be won on a state-by-state basis.

“Religious freedom” laws may be the entry point for such campaigns. These laws allow employers, landlords, and business owners to claim that their religious freedom is being infringed if they have to provide service to people who do things that their religion forbids. When Indiana passed such a law in March, nationwide outcry caused the legislature to add a clause forbidding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. This was the opposite of what its supporters wanted and marked the first time that such anti-discrimination language had been put into state law. Activists hope to translate this victory into a broader anti-discrimination statute.

The need for anti-discrimination legislation is obvious, but even activists may not be aware of the full economic costs of discrimination, especially for women. A recent study by the Center for American Progress and the Movement Advancement Project entitled “Paying an Unfair Price: The Financial Penalty for LGBT Women in America” finds that LGBT women of all races suffer financially compared to non-LGBT women of all races and all men. Nevertheless, African American and Latina women in same-sex couples are much more likely to be poor than white women in same-sex couples, and older women in same-sex couples have nearly twice the poverty rate of older married opposite-sex couples.

These cold facts translate into heart-rending detail. Take Stacey Schuett and Lesly Toboada-Hall, who were together for 30 years and legally married for part of that time. Toboada-Hall worked for

Fed-Ex for 26 of those years, but upon her death the company refused to give survivor benefits to Schuett. Leyth Jamal, a transgender woman, worked for a department store where she faced harassment and was told to dress like a man and keep her “home life” separate from her “work life.” When she sued the company for discrimination, she was fired. Jacqueline Cote tried to enroll her wife, Dee, in the spousal health insurance benefits offered by Walmart, but was told repeatedly that Walmart didn’t offer health insurance coverage to the same-sex spouses of employees, even though the couple lived in a state that recognized same-sex marriage. The couple has had to pay more than \$100,000 in medical costs, including treatment for Dee’s cancer.

The Defense of Marriage Act has been struck down, but state laws and corporate policies are still a patchwork of protections—or lack thereof—for LGBT people. Thus, without comprehensive civil rights legislation, same-sex couples are still denied rights that opposite-sex couples take for granted, and, of course, individuals continue to be discriminated against.

The combination of gender and sexual orientation hits women harder because many of them have children and are more likely to be in low-paying jobs or receiving lower pay than men with comparable jobs.

Given the current Congress, there is little hope for passage of any law protecting the rights of LGBT people. At the state level, though, in battles against “religious freedom” laws, in the fights for equal pay for equal work, to raise the minimum wage, and in immigration reform, there are opportunities to strengthen the rights of LGBT people. ❖

*Christine Riddiough is an honorary vice chair of DSA and has been an activist for women’s liberation and LGBT liberation for 45 years. The full report is available at [www.lgbtmap.org/unfair-price-lgbt-women](http://www.lgbtmap.org/unfair-price-lgbt-women).*



“There is still no federal legislation forbidding discrimination against people because of sexual orientation.”

# Not Waiting for Lefties to Engage the Arts

By Paul Bedard and Alexis Roblan

**O**n the April 15 national day of action for Fight for \$15, members of New York City's DSA chapter went to the rally and march, then headed down to The Barrow Group Theater in Midtown for a staged reading of Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* and a panel discussion on why unions matter.

The first performance of this 1935 play is a legend in the American theater, a testament to the power of art. Performed for a one-night benefit for *New Theatre Magazine*, *Lefty* was loosely based on the New York City taxi driver strike of the previous year. Odets used the story as a springboard to declare open war on capitalism in the midst of one of the most difficult economic periods in U.S. history and to uncover an unspoken rage just below the surface, a sense that the lives of working people were overly determined by their dependence on a system bent on keeping them in their place. It was performed by The Group Theatre—itself a somewhat radical collective of artists who lived together, made work together, and developed what became known as an “American acting technique.” Contemporary accounts describe the play seeming to unleash something dramatic, communal, and undeniable. By the end of the performance, the 1,400 audience members were stomping and raising their fists to “Strike!” with such vigor that the performers worried the balcony would fall down. It would soon become a much-produced and popular play in small theaters and union halls across the country.

Following the April 15 reading, which packed the 100-seat theater, the panel discussion opened up a conversation on the role of unions today. Maria Svart, DSA national director, gave a brief overview of what unions are and how they work; theater

director Mary Robinson expanded on the significance of *Waiting for Lefty* in today's theater landscape; and Local 1180 Communication Workers of America, AFL-CIO president Arthur Cheliotas gave an impassioned plea for solidarity as unions fight for support and legitimacy in the face of draconian state and federal laws.

The night brought together theater artists, many of whom were unfamiliar with left-wing politics or unions, and labor activists, many of whom were unfamiliar with the role that art has played and can play in political discourse and action. *Waiting for*

*Lefty's* legacy is of performances in auditoriums, union halls, theaters, and civic spaces, making collective action seem possible through honest and direct conversation with the people who live those struggles but believe that they are alone in them.

The power of radical art lies in breaking down that perception of solitude and highlighting shared experiences, in imbuing that discussion with a

sense of both pathos and possibility. The time is ripe for a renewal of that sense, and a radical play that is still relevant after 80 years challenges us to imagine the possibilities for collective action that exist today.

The play is designed to be produced with a minimal set and maximum participation. It offers DSA locals a way to make new connections and reach new groups. You can ask a community theater or campus theater group for professional help, if you need it. To produce your own reading of *Waiting for Lefty*, you'll need (1) actors to interpret and play the parts, (2) a director to stage the reading and guide the actors, (3) a producer to secure the rights (email [george.lane-asst@caa.com](mailto:george.lane-asst@caa.com) with an explanation of the size of the venue and scale of production), (4) rehearsal space,

continued on page 15



The cast, crew, and panelists of *Waiting for Lefty*. Front row (left to right): Maria Svart, Erika Vetter, Andrew Dunn, Randall Benichak, Farrah Crane. Middle row: Arthur Cheliotas, Jeevan D'Souza, Alexis Roblan, Maggie Low, Mary Robinson, Onyinyechi Nwachukwu, Paul Bedard, Nick King, Calandra Daby, Matt Clemons, Frankie Alicea. Photo by Richard Fudge.

# Making Sense of Occupy Wall Street

By Barbara Joye

*The Occupiers:  
The Making of the 99 Percent Movement*  
By Michael A. Gould-Wartofsky  
228 pp., Oxford University Press, 2015

Even as protesters filled Zuccotti Park/Liberty Square in New York City, commentators were analyzing the phenomenon known as Occupy Wall Street (OWS). With *The Occupiers: The Making of the 99 Percent Movement*, sociology doctoral candidate Michael A. Gould-Wartofsky may have written the definitive book to date. He comes to the subject as a participant-observer, narrating the rise and fall of OWS in a lively, engaging style and sorting out “the kaleidoscope of interpretations” and questions OWS raises. His observations are augmented by quotes from some of the 80 interviews he conducted in New York City and elsewhere.

Some of Gould-Wartofsky’s conclusions contradict the corporate mythology that OWS has had no lasting impact in the United States. Instead, he places it within the “99 Percent movement,” to recognize its many antecedents (the Spanish *indignados*, Tahir Square, the Wisconsin Capitol sit-ins, other NYC mini-occupations, and so on) and the subsequent projects OWS spun off or influenced. Throughout, he emphasizes the fallout from the Great Recession that motivated most of the participants—student debtors with uncertain futures, unemployed and underemployed people, the foreclosed and homeless, beleaguered union members, and disillusioned voters.

At a book signing and panel discussion this spring in Atlanta, DSAer Cecily McMillan and organizer Nelini Stamp joined Gould-Wartofsky to comment on OWS’s continuing influence on their lives and political work and on progressive movements throughout the United States. They argued that the influ-

ence can be seen in #Black Lives Matter, the Fight for \$15, and Occupy Our Homes.

Despite the many differences among OWS participants in terms of ideology and socioeconomic status, says Gould-Wartofsky, their key message—“We are the 99 Percent”—resonated long after police drove them from the park. “Occupy was a catalyst for people to think differently, act differently. . . . We couldn’t go back to normal after Occupy,” observed Stamp, a Brooklyn native who at the time was the youth engagement director for the Working Families Party.

McMillan, in 2011 a Young Democratic Socialists national coordinating committee member, contin-

ued to participate in Occupy-related events following the eviction. Later convicted of a felony for assaulting an officer who assaulted her while she attempted to obey police orders to exit an Occupy reunion in the park, she served three months in Rikers Island prison and became an advocate for prisoners’ rights. She currently lives in Atlanta and is writing a memoir about her experi-

ences, while serving a five-year probation. “It’s never really been over for me,” she says.

After working with the Dream Defenders youth action group in 2012, Stamp also moved to Atlanta, where she co-directs Rise Up Georgia, which works on issues such as the criminalization of black people, affordable housing, and public transportation. “I and my co-director Shab Bashiri want to combine the best of traditional organizing, working for real gains for real people, with the excitement of movements like Occupy,” she said.

Despite the many contradictions and limitations of OWS, Gould-Wartofsky concludes that its message “enabled the occupiers to bring class back into U.S. politics without alienating U.S. publics. . . . Amid the aftershocks of the financial crisis, the rise of the 99 Percent coalition may well have played a



Left to right: Nelini Stamp, Michael A. Gould-Wartofsky, and Cecily McMillan. Photo by Reid Jenkins.

role in the reemergence of class conflict as a force in U.S. politics.” Not the final conflict, not by a long shot. Still, he is hopeful that “the 99 Percent movement is likely to persist, to proliferate, and quite possibly to radicalize in the years and decades to come.” ❖

*Barbara Joye is the recording secretary of Metro Atlanta DSA and a member of DSA’s National Political Committee.*

*For further analysis of the impact of OWS, see Maurice Isserman, “The Legacy of Occupy Wall Street,” Democratic Left Winter 2014 now on the Democratic Left blog site.*



**National Director**/continued from page 2

can elevate anyone of any background to power, and that the current system is fundamentally fair and democratic.

That’s why I’m so excited about the Bernie Sanders campaign. Bernie knows that the deck is stacked against the majority of us, and in his campaign he does two things that are critical: he names the capitalist system for what it is and he “speaks American,” meaning that he uses the U.S. idiom of fairness and inclusion to give voice to the powerlessness and anxiety so many of us feel. While we hope he develops a more proactively antiracist platform, we appreciate that Bernie points the finger at the worst culprit, Wall Street, rather than letting the ruling class scapegoat immigrants, people of color, or those it calls sexually deviant.

We know that Bernie’s presence will be the entry point for a new generation of political activists into progressive politics, and if we do our job right, many of those activists will stay as socialist activists long after the election, continuing to fight for collective solutions and transformation of society. We plan to organize our local chapters and members to build momentum and visibility for him and his politics. This will mean street and door-to-door outreach, organizing house parties and happy hours, putting together educational forums, attending political events at the local level, helping build grassroots coalitions to support him, and more, *all done as proud DSAers*. I hope I can count on your support as we build the DSA campaign. ❖

*Maria Svart is the national director of Democratic Socialists of America.*

Paid for by Democratic Socialists of America [www.dsausa.org](http://www.dsausa.org). Not authorized by any candidate or candidate’s committee.

**Movements or Clubhouses?**/continued from page 6

such an environment, everything is turned upside down. We treat the ardent defense of millionaire celebrities as a form of radicalism. We engage in endless repetition of grievances without engaging in a discussion of better practices. We treat every ancillary skirmish like the defining battle of a war that seemingly has no end game. Or, as Adolph Reed, Jr., put it in *Harper’s*, “The left careens from this oppressed group or crisis moment to that one, from one magical or morally pristine constituency or source of political agency....to another. It lacks focus and stability; its métier is bearing witness, demonstrating solidarity, and the event or the gesture. Its reflex is to ‘send messages’ to those in power, to make statements, and to stand with or for the oppressed.”

When will we decide that we have sent enough messages and start building power? Actual power, not the power that comes from perfecting a clubhouse or meeting structure, but rather from the articulation of a vision and a plan to execute said vision? When do we start looking at the moving parts, looking out 5-10-20 years, and start piecing together a strategy to fight the forces of reaction, revanchism, and repression? It is no longer enough to simply act as a town crier, monotonously calling out every problem and grievance facing our world; it is time to act. ❖

*Douglas Williams is a Dean’s Diversity Fellow and Ph.D. student at Wayne State University in Detroit, where he researches labor policy and working-class radical movements. He is a native of Suffolk, Virginia, and he tweets from @TheDW85.*



**Not Waiting for Lefties**/continued from page 13

(5) a room that can accommodate your audience, (6) insurance if your room is not otherwise insured, (7) provocative speakers if you would like to host a panel discussion, (8) a visual artist to design publicity, (9) refreshments, and (10) plenty of time to do publicity and turnout.

*Paul Bedard ([paulhbedard.com](http://paulhbedard.com)) is a founder and artistic director of Theater in Asylum and a Drama League Directing Fellow.*



*Alexis Roblan’s plays have been produced and developed in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. She is a member of New Perspectives Theatre Company’s Women’s Work Project.*



## Send Greetings to *Democratic Left* on Labor Day

Wish us well, pay tribute to a comrade or comrades, list your own labor blog, or advertise your book. This magazine is the public face of our organization. It is going into its 43rd year of bringing you theory, practice, and just plain information about our movement. Let's keep it going and keep it strong. Send a check or donate online and specify that it is for *Democratic Left* and you'll see your name in the Labor Day issue and on the *Democratic Left* blog.

**Don't delay. Deadline for copy is June 30.**

**NAME ONLY**

Reader: \$20 \_\_  
 Supporter: \$40 \_\_  
 Sustainer: \$60 \_\_  
 Booster: \$80 \_\_  
 Cadre: \$100 \_\_

**ADS**

One-eighth page: \$125 \_\_  
 Quarter-page: \$250 \_\_  
 Half-page: \$500 \_\_  
 Full page: \$1,000 \_\_  
 Inside front or back cover: \$1,100 \_\_

Email your copy to [mstart@dsausa.org](mailto:mstart@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.

## 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
  - \$150 Sustainer  \$95 Family  \$40 Introductory  \$20 Low-Income/Student
- Yes, I want to renew my membership in DSA. Enclosed are my renewal dues of
  - \$150 Sustainer  \$95 Family  \$50 Regular  \$25 Low-Income/Student
- Enclosed is an extra contribution of  \$50  \$100  \$25 to help DSA in its work.
- Please send me more information about DSA and democratic socialism.

**My interests are:**

- Labor
- Religion
- Youth
- Anti-Racism
- Feminism
- LGBTQI Rights
- International
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

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 \_\_\_\_\_  
month year

**RETURN TO  
 Democratic Socialists  
 of America**

75 Maiden Lane, Suite 702  
 New York, NY 10038  
 212-727-8610  
[info@dsausa.org](mailto:info@dsausa.org)  
[www.dsausa.org](http://www.dsausa.org)