


DEMOCRATIC LEFT

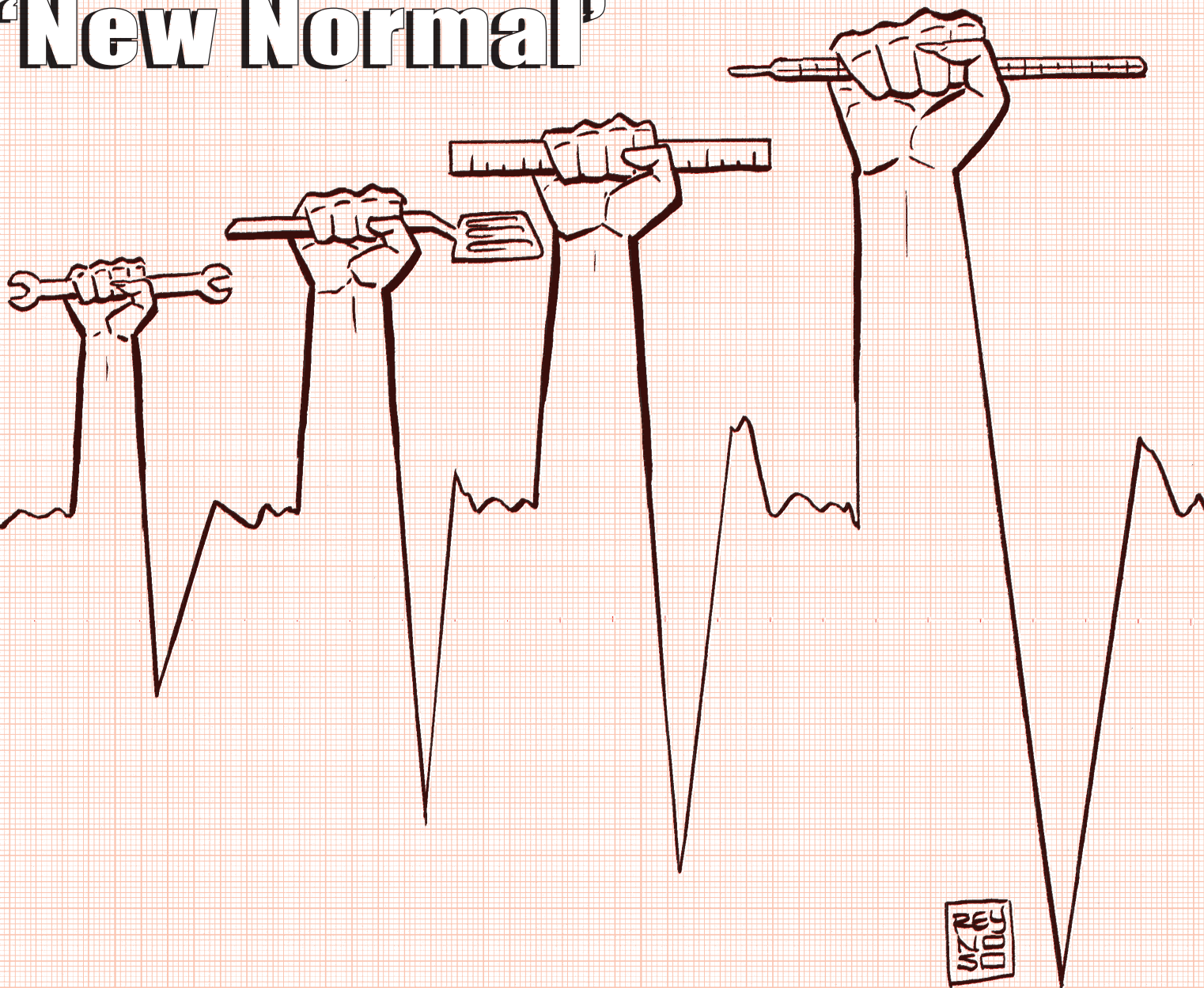
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Organizing in the 'New Normal'



From the National Director

Walking with Vision

By Maria Svart

A union is a group of individuals who get together with their co-workers and approach their boss about conditions at work—together. These individuals are practicing freedom of association. Yet in the capitalist mind, they're engaged in economic extortion. That's not a completely wrong analogy, because workers who form a strong union are capable of forcing the boss to share the results of their collective labor more equitably than are non-unionized workers. That's one thing I learned in my years as a union organizer before joining the staff of DSA: it's all about power.

That's why democratic socialists love unions: we want to expand working-class power and restrict capitalist-class power. Unions are where people learn to fight back and win. Strong unions can fight for political reforms. Those political reforms can affect the structure of the economy, thus making it more democratic. This makes unions dangerous to the capitalist class.

Hence, the current attacks on labor. This September, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear arguments in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, a case that challenges the right of a public-sector union to collect dues from everyone covered by its collective bargaining agreements. If the CTA loses, then the 26 states that still permit unions to collect such dues could become "open shop" states, and public-sector unions could hemorrhage funds.

But the truth is, this is just the latest in decades of assaults on the gains of working people.



Governor Scott Walker's successful rampage in pro-union Wisconsin demonstrates that when big money backs the most extreme version of capitalist ideology, we are unprepared. We have to find new ways to fight back.

How do we organize in the age of the "new normal"? In this issue of *Democratic Left*, you'll read about glimmers of hope in very dark times.

In the last issue, I talked about the need for solidarity, about acknowledging and building on our differences in order to create a powerful and democratic movement. Even as we come together in solidarity, we need to walk with vision. Capitalists have a vision of endless accumulation for themselves. They either do not know or do not care that the end game is destruction of the planet and of "civilization" as we know it.

To me, walking with vision means fixing my democratic socialist ideals in my sights despite the difficult times. I fight every day in immediate battles to protect Social Security, to defend workers who are standing up for their union rights, to gain full civil and voting rights for everyone, to stop racist police violence. This is how to build power. But I do so while also building a community around me that values cooperation and brings strategic, socialist thinking to the front lines. Our end game is not a planet devastated by greed and ceaseless war. Our end game, in the words of James Oppenheim's famous poem, "is a sharing of life's glories: Bread and roses! Bread and roses!" ❖

Maria Svart is the national director of DSA.

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Cover art by Frank Reynoso

David Duhalde Joins DSA Staff

Because of the once-in-a-lifetime organizing opportunity provided by Bernie Sanders's high-profile presidential campaign, DSA will use a recent, unexpected bequest to hire David Duhalde as deputy director of DSA. I have worked with David for nearly a decade, when we both served on the National Political Committee and when he was a very successful YDS organizer in the mid-2000s. I am very happy to be working with him again. He will be based in Washington, D.C.—MS

Worker Centers Expand The Labor Movement

By Kim Bobo

Are you discouraged this Labor Day? There's plenty of bleak news. Wages are stagnant; union representation is declining; Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin have all passed right-to-work laws in the last three years; the Supreme Court may soon gut public-sector unions, and Congress refuses to raise the minimum wage or establish earned sick days.

Still, there is hope. States and cities are raising the minimum wage to levels no one could have imagined just a few years ago. Tens of thousands of low-wage workers are rallying for \$15 an hour. Earned-sick-day laws are passing in states and cities across the nation at an unprecedented rate.

A major source of creativity and fresh thinking comes from worker centers. Although as yet uncoordinated nationally, they have enormous potential to revive a labor movement under brutal attack.

No one knows exactly how many worker centers exist, but observers estimate that there are about 250 in the country. Fifteen years ago, there were just a handful. Only about half of the centers are affiliated with one of the worker center networks. Most operate on their own.

No two worker centers have the exact same programs and approach, although most do the following:

Build power and organize for social change. Worker centers have led and won campaigns to get paid sick days for all workers (San Francisco), strengthen enforcement against wage theft (many communities), require drinking water for construction workers (Austin), remove

employment barriers for formerly incarcerated workers (Chicago), and enact a bill of rights for domestic workers (New York and California). Worker centers are building power and exercising that power to improve conditions for increasingly larger numbers of workers.

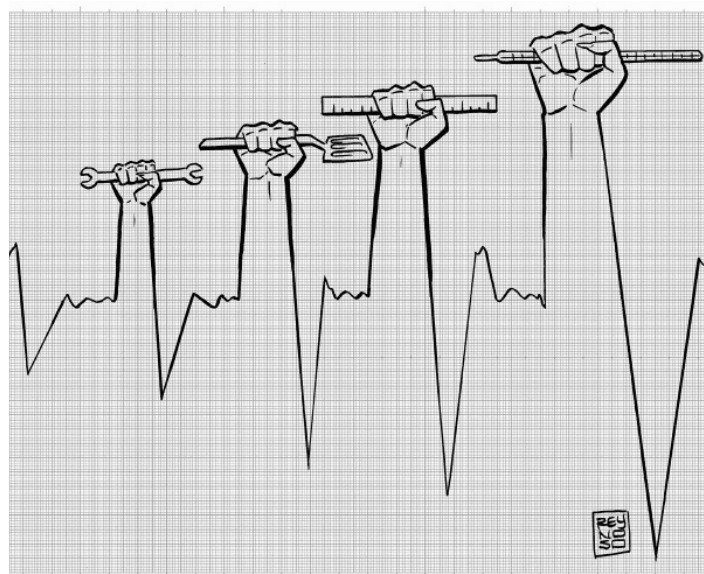
Offer worker rights education and outreach. Most workers without unions have no idea what their rights are in the workplace, let alone what to do if their rights are being violated. Thus, worker centers educate workers about their rights and what they can do to address workplace problems. Worker centers tend to use popular education approaches that engage people based on their lived experiences.

Organize to address workplace problems. Wage theft and health and safety problems are the two most common problems addressed by worker centers. Centers assist workers in filing claims with government agencies,

connect workers with lawyers who can file suits for back wages, refer them to unions if they want to organize a union in their workplace, and organize direct action campaigns to get employers to pay workers their owed wages. One long-time worker center organizer described worker centers as operating in the space between organizing and enforcement. The centers demand enforcement of the laws, but they also organize to change and improve the laws.

Train leaders. Worker centers seek to develop a strong cadre of committed and experienced leaders who represent and are connected with the community. Some of these leaders are being hired by the labor movement.

Develop democratic structures for participation. Many workers are already leaders,



and so the centers affirm and encourage their leadership. Others have never seen themselves as leaders, but become leaders as they organize campaigns.

In addition to the core functions described above, many worker centers also

Arrange for jobs at fair wages. Workers (especially day laborers) create systems for negotiating with possible employers, setting and enforcing wage standards, and sharing the work in ways that seem equitable. Many worker centers promote their hiring halls in the community in ways that produce more jobs for workers.

Create worker cooperatives. Worker centers have created cleaning, cooking, and construction co-ops and companies. Workers decide that they want to start and operate their own businesses so they can create better working conditions and keep more of the profits of their labor.

Offer ESL classes and other special educational programs. Because so many centers serve immigrant workers, many offer English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Casa de Maryland offers financial education classes. Centers affiliated with the Restaurant Opportunities Center United offer training in how to work in the fine-dining industry. Casa Latina in Seattle, which works primarily with day laborers, offers training on how to stay safe on the job, basic green gardening, safe cleaning and safe moving skills. Some centers partner with unions and offer construction trades training.

Advocate immigration reform and fight attacks on immigrants. In many communities, the worker center was started by immigrant leaders or is deeply connected with the immigrant community. Such worker centers tend to be strong advocates for immigration reform and have led efforts to challenge public attacks on immigrants. Some centers assist workers in filing for special immigration programs.

Sponsor social and recreational activities. Some centers sponsor soccer clubs, host dances, and organize activities for youth. Worker centers become a hub of social and communal activities.

Even as organized labor declines in membership, worker centers provide fresh energy. They can help reinvigorate the labor movement by

Affiliating with central labor councils. As of June 2015, 25 worker centers had affiliated with central labor councils, and more are requesting affiliation. The AFL-CIO recently published a guide on how centers can affiliate, and the UCLA

Labor Center produced a report on how those affiliations are going. Both documents can be downloaded from www.aflcio.org/workercenters.

Adding creativity, courage, and passion to labor's ranks. Worker centers take on David-and-Goliath-type fights. They lead hunger strikes, sit-ins, prayer vigils, and delegations to employers. They are masters of direct action tactics. They shake up the "organizing as usual" model of many unions.

Reaching unprotected workers. Worker centers have been organized by workers who are not protected by unions. Mostly they are organized by immigrants, but increasingly centers are formed by or working with African American workers as well. Many of these workers would love to be in unions, but unions are not organizing in their communities or workplaces. These workers are potential union members and allies.

Identifying and training future labor leadership. The labor movement has always been built by strong rank-and-file activists. The leaders who have been formed and trained in worker centers will help shape the labor movement of the future.

Reaching and organizing young people of color. Worker centers are mostly run by young people and mostly led by people of color. Some are even reaching into high schools. *Voces de la Frontera*, with worker centers in Milwaukee and Racine, attracts high school students through its civic engagement program. *Voces* worked on four school funding referenda. On Election Day in 2012, 500 student volunteers and adult mentors knocked on 6,300 doors in Racine, Wisconsin.

Worker centers bring new vitality and vision to the labor movement. They engage thousands of workers in fighting for their workplace rights and training new leaders. Worker centers are not a substitute for unions, but they are a part of the labor movement, one that offers great hope for the future of labor.

So, this Labor Day, don't be discouraged. Connect with a worker center near you. Volunteer. Give money. Be inspired and filled with hope. ❖

Kim Bobo is the founding director of Interfaith Worker Justice and a huge fan of worker centers. Parts of this article are excerpted from a new book she has written with her colleague Marien Casillas Pabellon, forthcoming in 2016.



Organizing in an Open-Shop State

Not Easy, But Still Possible

By Seth Hutchinson

Across the country, we've seen a wave of assaults on the ability of public employees to organize strong public-sector unions. These attacks are an attempt to silence public employees and open up public services to privatization and elimination. Even where these attacks are successful, we can and must continue to organize and fight. My experiences organizing in the South show that this is possible.

I work in an open-shop state, for a non-collective bargaining, non-majority, public-sector union with no right to strike. It's not easy to organize workers under such circumstances, but the fact that my union has been in existence for more than three decades, winning victories, shows that it is possible. The key to organizing success in such an environment is focusing on short-term goals and a long-term vision simultaneously.

The academic term for this double vision is *praxis*. It means asking (1) What immediate tasks and short-term goals can improve the lives of everyone around us? and (2) What is the long-term vision of the world we wish to see? The answers to both questions must be in sync.

In my day-to-day work, I stay focused on the immediate tasks necessary to grow and build a strong union. This includes asking state employees to join the union, asking members to make phone calls to legislators, and establishing organizing committees. We also work toward short-term goals such as winning a pay raise, stopping privatization, and stopping benefit cuts. It's easy to get wrapped up in these immediate goals and tasks, but we must also keep a sense of the bigger picture.

For me, democratic socialism is that bigger picture. This doesn't mean talking about democratic socialism to union members on a daily basis. It means helping my brothers and sisters connect the dots between a pay raise and the notion that every human being deserves a living wage. It means using the immediate threat of privatization in Texas to talk about the billionaire class waging war on workers across the country. Most important, it means sharing an understanding that our union here in Texas is part of a global movement of regular people struggling for a better world. I believe that praxis makes me a better

organizer, and it helps me through all the challenges of organizing in this environment.

In more practical terms, I believe our movement must embrace four key principles if we are to survive the current assault on labor organizing:

Organizing is asking. People don't act unless asked. That means if we want to build a mass movement we must ask a massive amount of people to sign up, get involved, and take action.

Don't make assumptions about people or write anybody off. It's easy to pre-judge people's political beliefs based on where they live,

Private-Sector Success in an Open-Shop State

A substantial pay hike won last year by a minority union in North Carolina illustrates how determined union organizing can succeed in an open-shop state.

In July 2014, production workers at the Cummins Rocky Mount Engine plant won an 80 cent across-the-board hourly increase for technicians and a 75 cent increase for skilled trades, even though they do not have a union contract or a certified majority union.

The year-long struggle was led by the non-majority UE union in the plant, the CDC Workers Unity Committee, part of the manufacturing section of UE Local 150.

Tactics included a petition signed by 330 workers, wearing protest stickers, and confronting the Cummins CEO and the corporate board of directors when they visited the plant.

The union has been active in the plant for 20 years, although it does not have majority membership among the 1,000 employees, who manufacture diesel engines. The local union organizes around workers' issues and won other victories prior to the 2014 wage campaign. (*Adapted by Paul Garver from the UE website.*)

what they do for a living, their accent, or anything else. We must believe that *everyone* has the capacity to be organized into our movement.

Meet people where they are. To build a mass movement, we must convince a lot of folks who don't currently agree with us to join us. To do that, we must find common ground and incrementally pull them further in our direction.

Connect bread-and-butter issues to the bigger picture. We must struggle with ourselves and each other to see that the immediate problems we face as individuals connect to broader structural problems: capitalism, white supremacy, homophobia, and patriarchy. We must help each other overcome our culture's hyper-individualism by seeing that we share our problems with others, and only by banding together for collective action can we overcome them. ❖

For the last 10 years, Seth Hutchinson has worked organizing public employees in Texas. He is currently the organizing coordinator of his union.



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. We ask that you read the issue before calling in. Call in to 605-475-6333, access code 796617#, Monday, October 1, 5 p.m. Pacific/ 8 p.m. Eastern.

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Electronic Global Labor Solidarity

By Eric Lee

In 1848, when Marx and Engels issued their ringing call for workers of all countries to unite, it fell on deaf ears. However, by the 1890s, trade unions had begun to operate across borders, creating permanent institutions that are today known as “global union federations,” which unite transport workers, food and agriculture workers, journalists, teachers, and others.

These federations, which have lasted for more than a century, are at the heart of the global labor movement. They represent the promise of working-class internationalism.

But the global union federations have never had the resources to play the role envisaged for them by such pioneers as Edo Fimmen, who headed up the International Transportworkers Federation (ITF) in the interwar years. Fimmen saw these industrial federations, and not the organization now known as the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), as the heart of a true global working-class movement.

The global union federations include as members individual national unions, not national trade union centers. So, while the ITF will have the Teamsters as one of its U.S. affiliates—and thus be only one step removed from actual workers on the shop floor—the ITUC has as its U.S. affiliate the AFL-CIO, which is somewhat more distant from the shop floor.

It was only in the 1970s, with the rise of what is now called “globalization,” that serious thought was given to turning these incipient global unions into what Charles Levinson, general secretary of the International Chemical, Energy and General Workers’ Federation (now part of IndustriALL), would call a “countervailing power” to the multinational corporations. In Levinson’s view, it was

only a matter of time until employers would be compelled to bargain collectively and directly with global union federations.

At the core of Levinson’s vision were “company councils,” which consisted of worker representatives from transnational corporations who would meet to share ideas and experiences, and to plan strategy. The idea was only a limited success, as the costs of flying in representatives of unions from all over the world proved to be prohibitive. Levinson’s counterpart in the International Union of Food Workers (IUF), Dan Galin, was also a strong advocate of powerful, independent global unions to counter the growing power of transnational corporations.

It was not until the advent of the Internet in the 1990s that unions were finally able to overcome the very high costs of communication and transportation and

begin to truly challenge corporate power across borders. The global union federations, including the ITF, IUF and IndustriALL, were quick to embrace the Net, and were among the first avid users of email back in the 1980s.

For a recent example of how global unions work in this new environment, we need only look at the reaction to the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh in April 2013 in which more than 1,000 workers, mainly in the garment industry, were killed in a building collapse. IndustriALL was able to campaign online and off with considerable success, eventually forcing most of the global clothing brands to contribute to a relief fund.

In addition to the traditional, formal structures using the new technology, entirely new formations exploited the developing technology in order to realize a very old vision of

“With the advent of the Internet in the 1990s, unions were finally able to overcome the high costs of communication and transportation and begin to challenge corporate power across borders.”

working-class internationalism.

LabourStart, founded in 1998, is an example. LabourStart was born as a news aggregator, a website where several hundred volunteers regularly post links to news stories about workers and unions in more than 30 languages. They post on average 250 such stories a day, or more than 90,000 every year, making LabourStart the best source of online news for trade unionists. That news is widely syndicated to hundreds of other trade union websites.

Within the past decade or more, LabourStart has become known as a key platform for international campaigns, a place where unions can mobilize thousands of activists to challenge corporate power and to defend workers' rights where they are under attack. Activists involved in campaigns and the news service come together every year or so in "global solidarity conferences," which are open to all trade unionists to attend.

As I write in the summer of 2015, LabourStart is working with global unions on a half dozen online campaigns, including a demand for the release of a jailed Iranian teacher, a call for a forestry company in Malaysia to stop union busting, and a campaign to pressure the Chinese government to stop targeting pro-labor non-governmental organizations.

Now grown into a network of more than 130,000 trade unionists, LabourStart can mobilize within hours in a way that was unimaginable even two decades ago. Using that network, those campaigns have resulted in a number of significant wins, including getting trade unionists released from jail, forcing employers back to the bargaining table, ending lockouts, and helping unions win strikes. Online platforms such as Change.org, Avaaz, SumOfUs, and Coworker.org have also taken advantage of the Internet to run campaigns.

But the new technology is double-edged. Companies have access to the same technologies, only with much more money. When we flood their inboxes with messages of protest, we also give them the opportunity to write back to thousands of our supporters, giving their point of view. Unions are not always prepared to answer effectively in these cases.

Even when unions and global union federations get it right, there remain challenges. One is surely language. With more than 6,000 spoken languages in the world, and machine translation still not perfect, unions that are serious about global solidarity are obliged to spend ever-in-

creasing sums on interpretation and translation.

Another is division over how to relate to the largest group of workers in the world, those in China. Some (particularly in the top leadership of the ITUC) urge a form of constructive engagement with the existing state-controlled "unions," while others hold fast to the traditional Western union stance of working only with independent—which they see as genuine—unions (which remain illegal in China).

And China is not the only government that represses trade unions. The ITUC's annual report on trade union rights around the globe always makes headlines with its chilling statistics regarding how many trade unionists were murdered in the previous year.

In addition, there remains the problem of what used to be called the lack of "class consciousness"—working people who do not yet fully understand that what unites us as a class is far more important than the things that divide us, such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, race, and gender.

We see this, for example, in the unfortunate call by Gordon Brown, the former British Labour prime minister, for "British Jobs for British Workers" and the use of "Buy American" as a synonym for "Buy Union" among some trade unionists in the United States.

It's not about defending our jobs against other workers who are competing for them; it's about building solidarity across borders and cultures and languages. That means support for migrant workers, solidarity with those in countries like Greece fighting against austerity, and a strategy toward China that focusses on building genuine independent trade unions from the ground up.

Even with those challenges, I'm convinced that the combination of trade union solidarity with the technologies that make such solidarity possible can bring about the vision of Marx and Engels, Fimmen, and Levinson. The workers of the world will unite, and they'll be using their tablets and smartphones to do it. ❖

Eric Lee served on the national board of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (one of the predecessor organizations of DSA) and is the founding editor of LabourStart (labourstart.org).



Will Puerto Rico be the Greece of the United States?

José Gutiérrez interviews José La Luz

In late June, the governor of Puerto Rico, Alejandro García Padilla, announced that Puerto Rico would not incur any more indebtedness and would not be able to meet its current debt obligations. The crisis has been compared to that of Greece, but the analogy is not correct. For background and ideas about how activists can become involved, I spoke with José La Luz, a DSA vice chair and veteran trade unionist, worker educator, and human rights activist. The interview has been condensed and edited for clarity. As Democratic Left goes to press, the situation remains fluid.

Gutiérrez: *The current situation of Puerto Rico has been compared to that of Greece by some people; by others it has been compared to Detroit's. What can you tell us about how you perceive the current economic crisis in Puerto Rico?*

La Luz: Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz has said that Puerto Rico is the Greece of the Caribbean. The only problem with that is that Puerto Rico is not a sovereign country. Puerto Rico is in fact the Greece of the United States, and that is what I want to get across to progressives in the United States. Puerto Rico being its largest territory, the United States bears some responsibility for this debt that has grown to more than \$70 billion. It is one of the highest per-capita debts in the world, even higher per capita than Greece's.

Gutiérrez: *Could you say something about how it got this way? The United States has a big debt, what does Puerto Rico's debt relate to?*

La Luz: The increase in the debt of Puerto Rico is a result of the decline of the Puerto Rican economy. The manufacturing sector of Puerto Rico, which to this day is around 46% of the is-

land's gross domestic product, has been adversely affected by U.S. trade policy and by the decision by Congress to phase out tax incentives that applied to Puerto Rico until December 2005. Like New York City in the 1970s and Detroit today, a

decline in the manufacturing sector has led to lower revenues, a loss of jobs, and residents leaving the island. This decline in the economy has increased the need for social spending at the same time that revenues are decreasing. The increased debt has led to a decline in the credit rating of Puerto Rico, which before the crisis was positive. This has limited the ability of Puerto Rico to borrow money to counteract the decline in the private sector. It's a vicious cycle that had started just before the recession.

Two more factors have adversely affected the Puerto Rican economy. Under the Merchant Marine Act of 1920, Puerto Rico has to ship goods using the U.S. merchant ma-

rine, which increases the cost of importing and exporting goods to the island. This bill affects the cost of living in Puerto Rico and should be phased out. Second, the cost of energy is high because most of the island's electricity comes from petroleum. The island passed Law 82 in 2010 mandating increased use of renewable energy, but it can't spend or borrow enough money to implement the mandate.

This debt has a direct impact on social spending, resulting in massive cuts in public services. The administration of Governor Luis Fortuño laid off more than 15,000 workers. In terms of the politics of austerity, it compares to Detroit. Yes, there are comparisons with Greece and Detroit. But Greece is a sovereign country and as such has some tools that it can use, including restructuring of the debt, which is not an option that



“This crisis is so imminent that all progressive forces in the United States and in Puerto Rico have to work together to address this emergency.”

Puerto Rico has, by virtue of being a territory of the United States. Neither does it have the tools that Detroit has to declare bankruptcy.

There is a broad coalition of nongovernmental organizations and unions and even the business community that hopes to persuade the federal government that Puerto Rico should have the ability to renegotiate its debt with the Wall Street banks and the hedge funds. Former Governor Anibal Acevedo Vila; Professor José Nicolás Medina, a well-known constitutional attorney; and labor leader Roberto Pagán, one of the top leaders of one of the Service Employees International Union affiliates in the island, argue that the federal government has a legal and constitutional obligation to resolve this crisis. The Obama administration has said that it will not intervene. Progressives in the United States must be involved in figuring out what can be done to find a solution to this crisis.

A group led by the SEIU in New York City and other parts of the mainland in the Puerto Rican communities is rallying some support to pressure the Obama administration. My view is that the administration doesn't have the political will and certainly not the political capital to engage in this fight. This has to become an issue for the presidential election. It's far more important at this point than thinking about solutions to the whole question of the relationship of the island to the United States, which as you know, is a perennial debate in Puerto Rico.

Gutiérrez: *In the long term, though, isn't some resolution of the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico part of the answer to the problems of Puerto Rico? Puerto Rico, with a population of 3.5 million people, has the same federal representation as the District of Columbia, which is to say, none. Puerto Rico, as you mentioned, is not a sovereign country, it's subject to federal law, which limits what it can do.*

La Luz: No question about it. It would be irresponsible if I didn't say that. It is something that has taken and will take a long time to resolve one way or the other.

Meanwhile, Puerto Ricans no longer migrate to the northeast and Chicago as in the past. The explosive growth of the Puerto Rican vote in central Florida could be the decisive vote in terms of who becomes the next president of the United States. That was certainly the case in 2012 where the percentage of Puerto Ricans in Florida who voted for Obama was 73%. Arguably, it was one of the main factors that led to

Obama winning Florida in 2012. If that happens again and that votes supports a Democratic nominee, it could decide the election. But that vote shouldn't be given for free. It should be part of a commitment to find solutions to the fiscal and economic crisis in the island.

Gutiérrez: *I understand that the Fortuño administration, the previous administration, had suspended several collective bargaining agreements, but then at the end of his term many of those agreements were restored.*

La Luz: I was intimately involved. I was dispatched to organize the campaign to restore collective bargaining. In effect, what happened is that Law #7, signed in March of 2009, abolished collective bargaining. So we had to get a law enacted to restore bargaining rights and allow us to renegotiate the contracts that had been frozen. Once again, a coalition effort led by unions and allies in the religious community and community organizations fought to restore bargaining rights, and that's why the contracts were renegotiated. But most likely what's going to happen now will be massive layoffs and freezing the contracts because the government has no capacity to pay, and that will be disastrous.

Gutiérrez: *Would you say that the Garcia Padilla administration has been better on labor rights than the Fortuño administration?*

La Luz: They all have to operate within the confines of the government's ability to pay. The Garcia Padilla administration, despite the fiscal and economic constraints, has abided by the terms of the collective bargaining agreements. Even though it hasn't paid the full wage increases that have been negotiated, it has tried for the most part to do so. It has complied with contractual obligations. That may not be an option now, if the finances of the government collapse totally.

This crisis is so imminent that all progressive forces in the United States and in Puerto Rico have to work together to address this emergency. The Obama administration needs to take action now and it has to become an issue on which candidates for the nomination of the Democratic Party take a position. ❖

José Gutiérrez is a member of DSA's national political committee, and a member of Metro DC DSA. Like José La Luz, he is from Puerto Rico. The DSA National Political Committee's statement on the crisis in Puerto Rico is on the DSA website.

'Fast Track' Opposition Reflects Growing Movement for Democracy

By Paul Garver

Throughout the spring, liberal Democrats and some Tea Party Republicans, aided by a coalition of labor, environmental, and progressive groups, joined forces against a massive corporate power grab known as "Fast Track" Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) only to see it narrowly pass the House by a 218-208 vote in early June. TPA and the accompanying Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) bills were signed into law by President Barack Obama on June 29.

Polls show that a majority of American voters oppose "trade deals" that endanger workers' jobs and environmental regulations. But the political game is rigged. Fast Track Trade Promotion Authority, which allows U.S. trade representatives to negotiate agreements in secret (retroactively in the TPP case), is not really about "free trade." Such authority would cement the current inequitable structure of the global economy by enacting three sweeping investor protection treaties (Trans Pacific Partnership [TPP], Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership [TTIP], and the Trade in Services Agreement [TISA]). Together these treaties would make it almost impossible for any political authority in any nation to enforce serious protections for workers, communities, or the environment.

Capital plans to ensure perpetual corporate dominance through the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism for enforcing these treaties. Corporations that claim losses in their expected profits as a result of any governmental action that protects a country's citizens can sue for monetary damages by taking it to a private and secretive panel of corporate lawyers. However, labor, environmental, or consumer organizations have no direct access to ISDS. The rulings of ISDS panels cannot be challenged in any court. Corporate ISDS claims under previous trade treaties are already threatening governments with massive damages for environmental

and consumer protection regulations. For instance, Philip Morris has sued the governments of Uruguay, Australia, and the United Kingdom because those countries require very clear warnings on cigarette packages.

The struggle against these treaties has led to a massive and coordinated global resistance. The "Alliance of Teamsters and Turtles," prefigured in the 1999 Seattle demonstrations, is becoming

“The alliance of ‘Teamsters and turtles’ is becoming an organized coalition.”

an organized coalition capable of driving a deep wedge into the current U.S. two-party system. A key leader of this coalition, former CWA president Larry Cohen, citing Hillary Clinton's belated and equivocal comments on Fast Track and the

TPP, endorsed and will work for Bernie Sanders, a fierce opponent of these corporate-driven trade deals.

Top-secret TPP treaty provisions will become accessible to congressional scrutiny two months before the accelerated debate under Fast Track can begin in Congress. This minor but useful delay is the single concrete achievement of the opposition to date.

Movements in Europe are gaining traction against the TTIP. The struggles in the streets for racial justice, campaigns for improving the lot of low-income workers, for rescuing democracy from the stranglehold of money, for divesting universities from fossil fuel investments are rising . . . and converging. The comprehensive political revolution advocated by democratic socialist Bernie Sanders may not result in his winning the presidency, but its strong appeal to many activists reveals the deep hunger for genuine political change. ❖

Paul Garver, a retired international union organizer, is a member of DSA's National Political Committee and co-editor of Talking Union, DSA's labor network blog (talkingunion.wordpress.com), where you can follow trade issues as they unfold.

DSAers Show Solidarity

By Theresa Alt and Peg Strobel

We have a special issue devoted to labor once a year, but DSA locals support unions and the labor movement all year long. Here are some highlights from the past year:

Central Ohio DSA members joined forces with Interfaith Worker Justice to create the Central Ohio Workers' Center. Members of DSA were key in doing the paperwork to obtain 501(c)(3) status and bringing in a *pro bono* lawyer. The center's focus is on know-your-rights outreach to immigrant workers, especially the large Somali community as well as the growing Latino community.

Chicago DSA has fought for a national tax on the trading of financial assets (popularly known as a Robin Hood Tax) and worked with the Chicago Teachers Union, National Nurses United, and community groups to call for a similar Chicago-based tax to fund workers' pensions as well as human services. Other coalitions are fighting newly elected governor Bruce Rauner's anti-worker "Turnaround Agenda" modeled after Wisconsin governor Scott Walker's game plan. As a core member of the Illinois Fair Trade Coalition, Chicago DSA worked with many union partners to oppose Fast Track and the larger Trans Pacific Partnership.

Greater Detroit DSA works with Michigan labor to prevent the Republicans, who dominate state government, from overturning prevailing-wage legislation. To support prevailing wages, the local honored Patrick Devlin, president of the Michigan Building Trades, at the Douglass-Debs dinner on May 30.

Ithaca DSA has a weekly community access cable television program and a bi-monthly radio program. The local used both platforms to bring talks from the Labor Day Picnic, a Workers' Center

celebration, and Cornell University's Union Days to a wider audience. Thus, community members who couldn't attend the events still heard about innovative organizing for restaurant and retail workers, the new union at the local Health Alliance and Free Clinic, organizing among adjuncts at Ithaca College, and the story of the AFL-CIO's vital cooperation with community and clergy.

Metro Atlanta DSA is actively involved with all the work of the Jobs with Justice Organizing Committee, including the Black Friday action at Wal-Mart, a national event on the Friday after Thanksgiving. A core DSA group of around 25 people joined with organized labor and community in the Fight for \$15 campaign. On several days, including April 15, fast-food workers went out on strike in the early morning, and the demonstrators showed up to escort them back to work and ensure that they would not lose their jobs.

Metro DC DSA supported the DC Labor Fest. The DC Labor Fest—sponsored by the Metro Washington Labor Council and supported by many other labor and social justice organizations—provides a forum for numerous forms of cultural productions with a focus on working people. The films, music, art and walking tours open a window on the experiences, ideas and aspirations of individual workers and their collective



Photo by Reid Jenkins

struggles. Metro DC also supported efforts to organize associates at United Way Worldwide, headquarters of the largest health and human services non-profit in the world not run by a government. Despite a formal agreement to support the labor rights of workers and a long partnership with labor, management conducted a vicious anti-union campaign against the effort.

New York City DSA and YDS rallied for the “Fight for \$15” and sponsored a staged reading of “Waiting for Lefty” in the theater district on April 15. YDS members from throughout the city worked with activists from several schools to prepare banners for the demonstration and to mobilize their classmates.

Sacramento DSA teamed up with the Sacramento Progressive Alliance, the California Faculty Association, Students for Quality Education, and the Campus Progressive Alliance to present a forum on “The Working Class Under Siege,” bringing the Fight for \$15 and the struggle against Fast Track to California State University-Sacramento.

San Diego DSA worked with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the Labor Council, the Machinists and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) to get a citywide increase in the minimum wage passed by the City Council. Unfortunately, opponents derailed the coalition’s victory by successfully challenging the City Council to put the wage increase on a ballot initiative for November 2016, thus delaying and perhaps endangering the increase for workers.

San Diego DSAers also joined with the Citizens Trade Campaign and the San Diego Imperial County Labor Council to urge congressional representatives to vote no on Fast Track. ❖

Theresa Alt is secretary of Ithaca DSA and a member of the DSA National Political



Committee. Peg Strobel is a member of Chicago DSA and the DSA National Political Committee, former director of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, and professor emerita of gender and women’s studies at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

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Demographics and the Care Crisis

By Elena Blanc

The Age of Dignity: Preparing for the Elder Boom in a Changing America

by Ai-jen Poo

176 pp., The New Press, 2015

In this slim but engaging volume, Ai-jen Poo, executive director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), argues that an increasingly aging U.S. population requires a drastic shift in an already inadequate care economy. She contends that a sustainable system of care will entail not only accessible, affordable, high-quality care for all who need it but also fair wages and working conditions for the swelling work force providing that care. Public programs must be restructured and the cultural stigma that surrounds care work, aging, and disability in the United States removed. She urges people to work toward better systems of care on every level, from the national to local co-op living arrangements.

Poo weaves together experiences of recipients of care, unpaid family caregivers, and paid caring professionals with statistical and historical information. She addresses the way that oppressive dynamics of gender, race, class, migration, and age structure the caring economy for both care workers and recipients of care. She also emphasizes how our society has consistently de-prioritized and undervalued care and care work.

Poo's ability to make this demographic and policy issue come alive is no doubt a product of her 15 years of experience in grassroots organizing for domestic workers' rights. Before heading the NDWA, she was the lead organizer for Domestic Workers United (DWU), a New York City-based organization that she and others started in 2000.

In 2010, after a decade of organizing, DWU and its allies succeeded in getting a "Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights" passed in New York State. This legislation was the first in the United States to mandate a number of basic labor protections, including paid overtime and a working environment free from discrimination and harassment within the domestic work industry. Since then,

domestic worker rights activists have won similar legislation in Hawaii, California, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Connecticut, and are currently pushing for a bill in Illinois.

DWU's organizing success in New York centered largely on nannies and their employers. Because employers of nannies are generally affluent, organizers could win support by arguing that fair pay and good working conditions were ultimately good for both recipients and providers of care. Despite their successes, DWU and NDWA

had to confront the limitations to this strategy. The majority of paid domestic workers in the United States are home care assistants and home health aides. They have been hired out of necessity, and their rate of reimbursement for

care is often set by Medicare and Medicaid. Even if employers can pay out of pocket, they still may not be able to afford more than the bare minimum. In these cases, paying more would mean fewer hours for workers and less care for employers, when many people already receive less care than they need.

Therefore, DWU and NDWA brought together care worker, immigrant, senior, and disability rights advocates to form a national "Caring Across Generations" campaign in 2011.

Poo makes a strong case for drastic change in the system. Equally compelling is the idea, which runs throughout *The Age of Dignity*, that to meet the challenge we must stop thinking of care as a "social cost." She prefers to speak of "social investment." The challenge Poo does not pose, though, is whether these goals can be met without overturning the for-profit structure imposed on all economic activity in this country. If the care crisis is as pressing as she suggests, meeting it may entail an even greater paradigm shift, one that replaces a market-based notion of "social good" with one based on human welfare. ❖

Elena Blanc is DSA's membership coordinator.

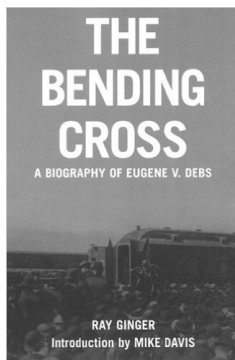


“The cultural stigma that surrounds care work, aging, and disability must be removed.”

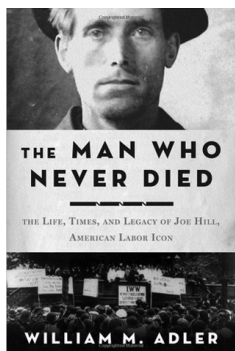
Labor Pioneers: Their Stories

We stand on the shoulders of those who devoted their lives to the cause of labor. We asked DSA activists to share some of their favorite biographies. This is an evolving list. Check the DL blog for further additions.—Ed.

EUGENE DEBS Though best known as presidential candidate of the Socialist Party, USA from 1900-1920, Eugene V. Debs first became important as a leader of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, later becoming a founder of the American Railway Union (ARU). Debs's most famous action as a labor leader was the nationwide Pullman Strike, broken by President Grover Cleveland. After helping found the SPUSA, Debs also took part in organizing the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Ray Ginger's *The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene V. Debs* (1949) is rightly hailed as a classic. If you can't find a cheap used copy, be sure to pick up the 2007 reissue by Haymarket Books, which contains an introduction by veteran Marxist author Mike Davis. —*Jason Schulman*



JOE HILL born Joel Emmanuel Hägglund (aka Joseph Hillström) was a songwriter, union organizer, and labor martyr. Executed in Utah after a show trial, Hill maintained his innocence until the end. One of the best biographies is Gibbs Smith's *Joe Hill* (1969). A later work by William Adler, *The Man Who Never Died* (2011) reveals information that was never introduced during the trial. Hill is best remembered for the phrase: "pie in the sky" and his final wish: "Don't waste any time mourning, organize!" To learn more about him, check out the University of Utah's Joe Hill website at joehill.org. —*Neil H. Olsen*



DOLORES HUERTA Although hundreds of magazine and news articles have been written about her, *A Dolores Huerta Reader*, edited by Mario Garcia, is the first adult book to focus on Huerta's life and work.

Huerta, who is a DSA Honorary Chair, has contributed to movements for union rights and social justice since she helped found the United Farm Workers (UFW) union. The creation of the UFW changed the nature of labor organizing in the Southwest and contributed significantly to the growth of Latino politics in the United States. She became a UFW vice president and was the primary negotiator of the first UFW contracts. Today, at age 84, she speaks frequently at colleges, universities, and high schools where she presents a Latina feminist perspective to labor, civil rights, and immigration issues. Huerta is a founding board member of the Feminist Majority Foundation and serves on the board of *Ms. Magazine*. —*Duane Campbell*



MOTHER JONES DSA member Rosemary Feurer has written, produced, and co-directed a documentary about Mary Harris ("Mother") Jones, who is most remembered for her injunction to "Pray for the dead but fight like hell for the living." After her husband and four children died from yellow fever, Jones became a labor organizer, crisscrossing the country in support of striking miners and families. A powerful orator, she also campaigned against child labor. An Irish immigrant, she opposed white supremacy, supported African Americans and others in low-skilled mining jobs, and worked to bring together Mexican and Italian miners in the Southwest. Information about various biographies and the documentary DVD is available at motherjonesmuseum.org —*Peg Strobel*



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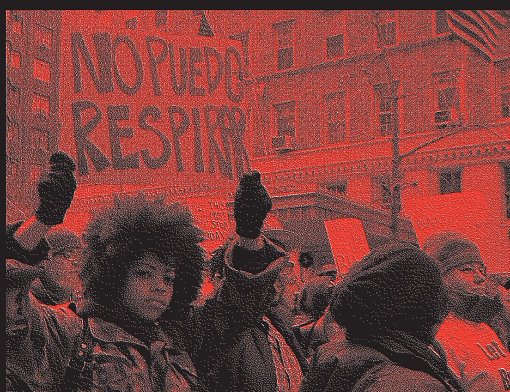
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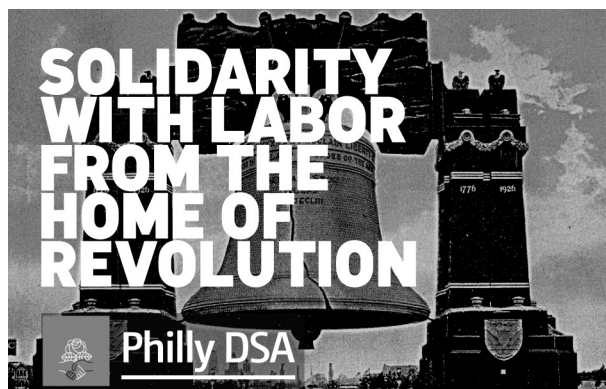
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