

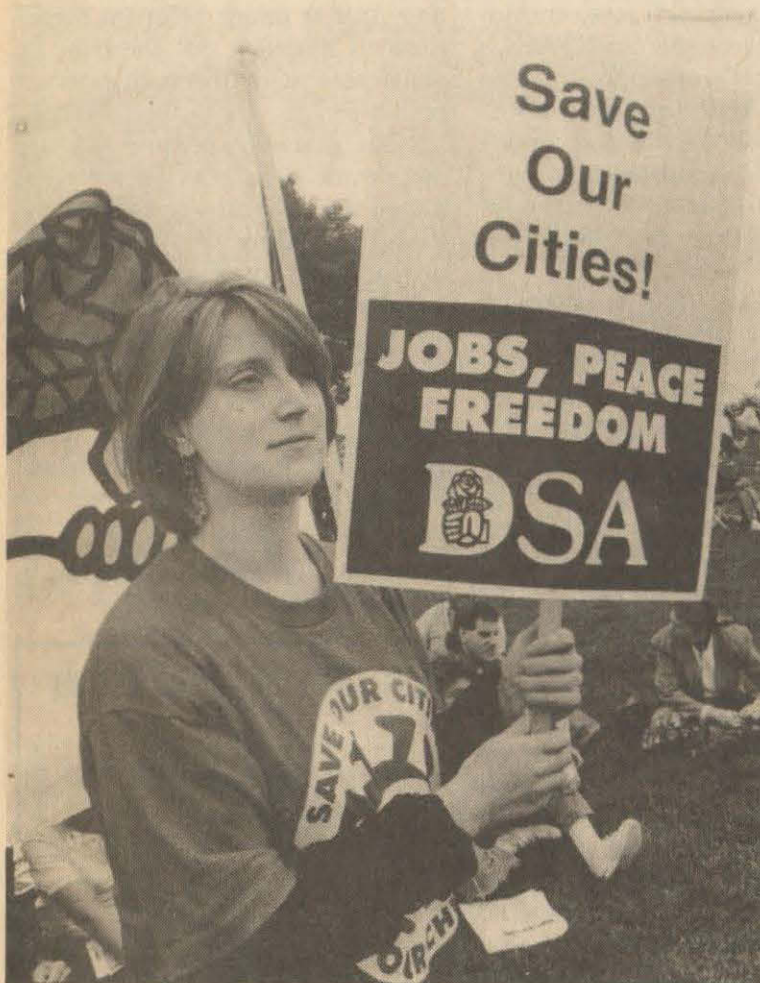
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The Urban Crisis: A Socialist Agenda

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Richard A. Cloward & Frances Fox Piven
Maxine Phillips ● Maurice Isserman
Komozi Woodard*

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cover photo by Andrew Lichtenstein/Impact Visuals

EDITORIAL

POLITICS & PEROTISM

BY HAROLD MEYERSON

IF EVER A YEAR HAD ALL THE preconditions for progressive political change, 1992 is that year. This is the first election to follow the end of the Cold War -- the first in which the billions of dollars we have spent annually on our arms budget could be redirected towards our glaring social needs. This is also the first election to take place in post-prosperity America -- the first election since 1948 in which a majority of Americans do not take prosperity as a given.

And it seems the American people want government to have a role again. But the Democrats (and Bush) are in danger of being pushed aside by a new revolt, a rage against politics. The rise of Ross Perot represents a revolt of the politically de-aligned. By enlisting volunteers to collect signatures, the Perot revolt brilliantly exploits people's desire to re-involve themselves in a political process, something that is all but impossible in the capital-intensive campaigns (consisting largely of fundraising and advertising) that Republican and Democratic candidates characteristically wage. All of Perot's code words -- consensus, "a government of the best people" -- are di-

rected against the political process itself, dismissing such petty considerations as ideology. Ominously, a good chunk of Perot supporters seem happily signed on to their own disempowerment: the demand among the Perotistas, for instance, to have some say in the development of Perot's program has not been sounded.

Ultimately, the danger of Perotism is that the rage against politics could spill over into a subversion of democracy. Perot seems to be advocating a plebiscitary presidency, and while he may not have enough ideology to qualify as a fascist, he emerges from all accounts of his career at least as a very rich thug.

Moreover, there's little in the Perot revolt, save the yearning from which it springs, that would really address the corruptions and disconnections of American politics. Nothing about Perot suggests that he would foster the kind of cross-racial coalition of working- and middle-class and poor that the nation needs; nothing about it remedies the fundamental problem that the bottom 80 percent of American society, largely deunionized and without access to nearly non-existent political parties, lacks rudimentary political organization; nothing about it addresses the corruptions that market forces and wealth have wrought on our politics. Rather than tackle the demobilization and excessive influence of wealth that have subverted American democracy, it takes the talk show world view of the nation's ills: that

what our politics needs is -- less politics. And at times, Perotism comes close to throwing out the baby of democracy with the bathwater of politics.

But precisely because we are democratic socialists, we are committed to a political -- not a market -- model of society. We believe that people must organize themselves and their society to subject economic as well as political decisions to popular control. The Perot movement not only fails to foster a movement in that direction, but by vesting so much power in its leader, it could imperil the very incomplete democracy we currently have. **DL**

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

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Cleaning Up the Reagan-Bush Disaster

BY KOMOZI WOODARD

For the Black community the savage beating of Rodney King was the modern version of the classic American slave whipping. However, African American people are clearly not in the mood to "turn the other cheek." They are increasingly inclined to, as Malcolm X once put it, "take a life for a life, and a head for a head." In this explosive situation, even rumors of such attacks may be sufficient to set off another wave of urban uprisings. Once again the Black ghetto has turned into a powder keg with an extremely short fuse.

Clearly, the roots of this crisis go much deeper than the persecution of Rodney King; this predicament has its sources in basic shifts in corporate investment strategy and federal

urban policy which have turned the inner city into a wasteland. Daniel Patrick Moynihan's notorious policy memo to President Richard Nixon in 1968, advising that the best way to deal with Black problems is "benign neglect," says a great deal about the contemporary political consensus of Washington Democrats and Republicans. However, as the smoke clears in L.A., it is brutally obvious that the negligence of investment in the inner city has not been benign but malignant.

Consider just a few indications of the catastrophic impact of this urban policy of "benign neglect." Since the fires of the urban revolts of the 1960s were quenched by Black mayors and police chiefs, the Black ghettos have suffered in each budget cut. But this policy is very short

sighted. While shifting the burden of crisis after crisis onto the backs of the poor may have allowed for a degree of peace in the suburbs, it has turned the inner city into a fierce battleground. Tragically, for the generation coming of age behind these ghetto walls, warfare is all

by the federal government since World War II, has been devastating for African American social structures.

The contrast between the phenomenal investments in the nation's suburbs and the extraordinary neglect of the inner cities is ominous. One example will suffice. Jonathan Kozol details these savage inequalities in his latest study of public schools; for instance, he found that the money spent per student in suburban Bronxville, New York was about \$15,000 annually, while only \$5,000 was spent on students in New York City. Typically there are no working bathrooms in inner city public schools; and no textbooks for class. And yes, these youth do get the message! Tragically, many public schools have been transformed into large-scale detention centers, the training grounds to prepare Black men to go to prison, where they will do some real time.

Will these rebellions signal the beginning of another Black political awakening?

that they have ever known. Even before the Los Angeles uprising, the level of self-destruction in these post-industrial ghettos was shocking. The message that Uncle Sam has been sending to the inner city is that there is no way out; the appalling homicide rate, rivaled by the proportion of Black youth committing suicide, was perhaps the cruelest indication that young African Americans have heard the persuasive voice of America.

he problems run deeply in the Black community; African American working people have been critically wounded, and the social consequences have been catastrophic. The Black working class was one of the least appreciated strengths of the post-World War II industrial ghetto. That Black working class had articulated a whole network of institutions and mechanisms for both development and control in the urban Black community. However, much of that is no longer in place. The accumulated impact of the massive plant closings has effectively undermined the social strength of working people in these inner city neighborhoods. As far as they are concerned, once they had some influence over their children, but now things are out of control. Let's face it: after being tossed aside by industrial capitalism, it is extremely difficult for unemployed and underemployed parents to make a convincing case for the virtues of hard work.

In fact, this social group had been battered by urban redevelopment and increasing social poverty, even before the disintegrating impact of deindustrialization. The Black working class has been severely wounded by deindustrialization in the workplace and by divestment in the neighborhood: housing, transportation systems, shopping centers, libraries, and schools. Thus, the corporate strategy to shift investments from the city to the suburbs, supported

The schools are symptomatic of a more general retreat from the Second Reconstruction, the nation's commitment to racial equality. It is too early to say what impact the Los Angeles uprisings will have on this situation. Do these revolts mean the beginning of destructive ethnic struggles in the inner city? Or will these rebellions signal the beginning of another Black political awakening? Would that Black awakening influence broader insurgency? We do not have the power of prophecy. But this much we know from history; in the ashes of the urban revolts of the 1960s, a new wave of radical Black organizations arose: the Black Panthers after the 1965 Watts Rebellion and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in the wake of the 1967 Detroit Rebellion.

If a similar situation were to arise, what role would the Left play? Increasingly, those awakening to political consciousness will be watching to see if we will shoulder our political responsibilities. Black youth are looking for a way out: the most conscious youth are searching for answers. Thus, this period is full of great challenges; I think that we can meet those challenges if we put ourselves to the effort. But whatever we do, we dare not disappoint these young people.

Komozi Woodard, a DSA member, is a professor at Sarah Lawrence College.

The Myth of Dependence

Why Welfare Works and Workfare Fails

BY RICHARD A. CLOWARD
AND FRANCES FOX PIVEN

Welfare, or Aid to Families with Dependent Children, reaches about five million families and absorbs a tiny percentage of federal and state budgets. It has nevertheless been the subject of enormous publicity during the past year. Indeed, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, with his penchant for the grandiose, recently explained to the *New York Times* that "welfare dependency" is "the defining issue of post-industrial society." Identifying solutions to dependency has thus become high politics. Presidential candidates, governors and legislators, together with left and right commentators and policy experts, vie to win public attention for their welfare "reform" proposals.

The proposals are remarkably similar. All emphasize that poor women must be coerced to break the habit of dependency on the state. Most solutions rely on market coercion, and a few rely on a combination of both market and state coercion. Charles Murray would simply abolish income supports, forcing poor mothers to expose themselves to the curative discipline of the labor market. Lawrence Mead is less optimistic about the ability of the poor to respond to market sanctions, and calls instead for an "authoritative work policy" that would include systematic monitoring by government, along with rewards and sanctions to force the poor to behave in socially-approved ways.

Liberal policy analysts -- such as David Ellwood -- also find the idea of coerced work appealing, albeit only if coupled with higher minimum wages, and with programs for education and training, health care, and child care. The availability of welfare benefits would thus be temporary, at least for the able-bodied, lasting only long enough to prepare poor women for the labor market.



Martha Tabor/Impact Visuals

It is exasperating that liberals can be so oblivious to the politics of the real world. What they refuse to recognize is that their high-minded proposals for reform simply legitimate repression. There is no reason to believe in the current political climate that minimum wages will be jacked up, or that sweeping health care and day care measures will be enacted. The costs of such measures would far exceed welfare savings. What is happening instead -- just as in past episodes of "reform" -- is that poor women are being forced into the labor market without any lasting protections.

Under these conditions, workfare programs fail, as they always have in the past. Few poor women can command anything except the lowest wages, a problem that is worsening rather than improving. Women who cannot

Without reliable, affordable childcare, working outside the home can be very difficult.

earn enough to feed and house their children end up back on welfare, highly publicized stories of individual successes notwithstanding. Moreover, low-wage employers do not offer health benefits, or they require employees to shoulder much of the costs. And there is the problem of affordable day care. Without massive public subsidies, workfare is nothing but a revolving door.

These being the hard political facts, it would seem the better public policy to shore up supports for women who are struggling to care for children under the jungle-like conditions of urban poverty. The chairwoman of the New York City Housing Authority, Sally Hernandez-Pinero, recently commented on the 75,000 women living in the projects and raising children alone. "Anyone with even a nodding acquaintance with these women knows them for what they are, the sanity of the poor community, resourceful survivors of abandonment, slander and brutality. . . . In many poor communities, they are the only signatures on the social contract, the glue that keeps our communities from spinning out of control." No sane observer would say that these women contribute more to society when they are coerced into jobs flipping burgers.

In the furor over welfare reform, the historic relationship between welfare policy and the power of poor people in the labor market is also being ignored. Harsh welfare policies weaken the bargaining power of poor people by forcing them to accept whatever terms low wage employers offer. Generous welfare policies strengthen them by providing an alternative to the market. The availability of non-market sources of income -- whether called welfare, social assistance, or unemployment assistance -- makes it possible for people to resist wage cuts or re-employment at lower wages and worse conditions. It also makes them less fearful of the argument that unions threaten capital stability and reinvestment.

In countries where social policies have not been cut, working conditions and working-class power have not declined nearly to the extent as in the United States. Canada provides a good comparison, because it is in many ways similar to the U.S. But Canada has not slashed its social assistance programs. To the contrary, Canada raised payment levels during the 1980s. Partly as a result, Canadian poverty rates are about half those of the United States, wage levels are substantially higher -- a severe recession notwithstanding -- and about 40 percent of the workforce is unionized. In addition, a working class party is actually gaining

ground in provincial and national politics. But when the sort of "post industrial" restructuring that requires wage cuts and insecure job tenure is undertaken, an expansive social policy is a serious impediment. The experience of the past decade and a half in the U.S. demonstrates that relationship as dramatically as any period in the history of market economies. The political implication is clear: the Left ought to support generous welfare provisions as part of the overall fight against the massive downward restructuring of wages and working conditions that is underway in the U.S.

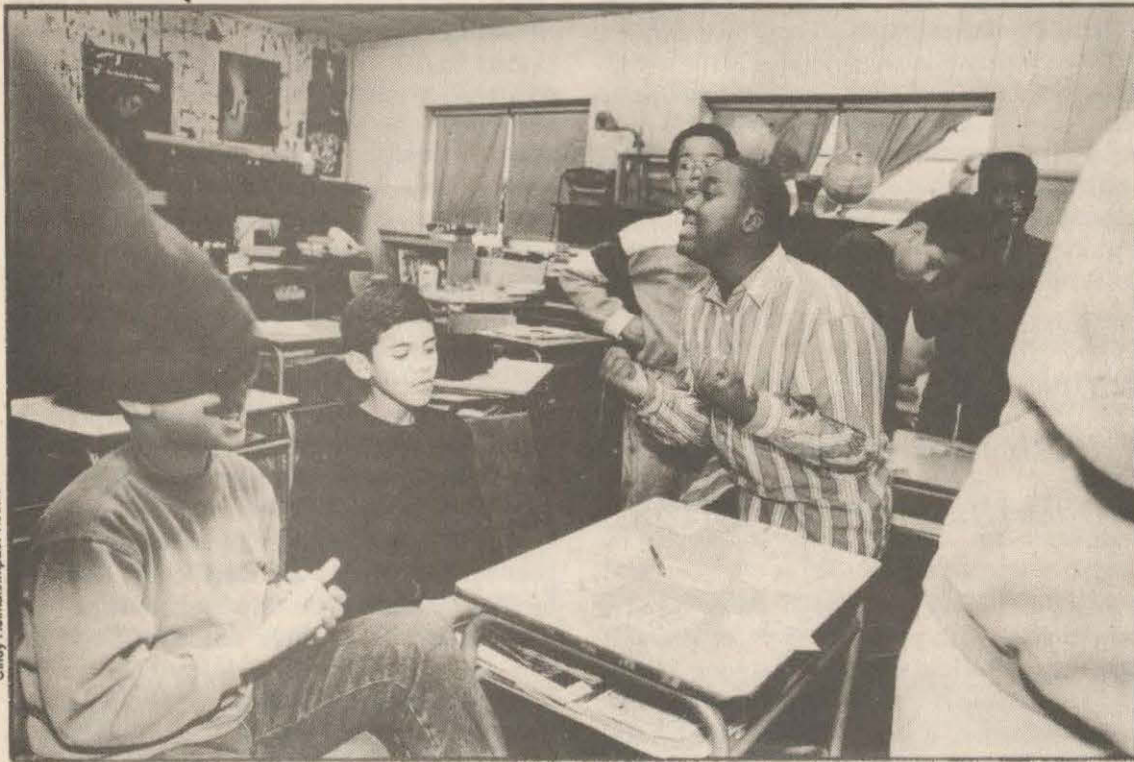
As things stand, American welfare policy is facilitating the decline of wages and working conditions. The falling purchasing power of benefits -- down 40 percent during the past two decades -- makes correspondingly lower wages more acceptable to workers. In a number of states, General Assistance for the able-bodied has simply been eliminated. And as the rhetoric of reform swells, the stigmatizing of recipients intensifies. A host of new humiliating sanctions are being introduced by the states, whether slashing or terminating family grants if a mother is tardy or absent from a workfare assignment, or if a child is truant from school, as well as denying coverage to babies born to a welfare mother. Taken together, these "reforms" make any work at any wage seem preferable to the dole.

If the assault on welfare has contributed to worsening poverty among women and children, to plummeting wage levels and deteriorating work conditions, and to enfeebled unions, why are there so few voices raised in defense of welfare? Why isn't the Left in an uproar? The reason, we think, is that the Left has been confused by the rhetoric about "welfare dependency." Welfare does not generate dependency. To be sure, the low grants and humiliating procedures of the existing welfare system demoralize people. But income security does the reverse. It generates a measure of independence by providing poor women and children with income that is not conditional on low-wage employment and the greed of low-wage employers, and that is not conditional on the whims of male breadwinners either. Of even larger significance, the alternative of generous welfare allowances puts a floor under wages, and thus gives low-wage workers a measure of independence in dealing with employers, too. DL

DSA members Richard A. Cloward and Frances Fox Piven are the authors of several books, including Why Americans Don't Vote.

Liberating Schools

A Democratic Socialist Perspective on Education Reform



Cindy Beiman/Impact Visuals

Students help each other learn at Project Prep, an alternative middle school in the Bronx.

BY MAXINE PHILLIPS

Has the United States given up on public schools? It sure looks like it. We've all read the indictments of the system and seen the slash-and-burn budget battles, but perhaps the most telling cultural sign occurred this spring, when the president of Yale University announced that he would resign to help set up a system of for-profit schools to compete for federal vouchers. "The great experiment in democracy has failed," the headlines might have read. "Now we'll show you how private enterprise can do it."

Sorry. I don't buy it. U.S. business gave up on the United States a long time ago. Now will it "outsource" our teachers, using computers broadcasting from Taiwan, or subject our communities to school closings in its search for cheaper labor? Knowing what the market has done for every other sphere of our lives --

including child day care centers and adult nursing homes -- doesn't give us much reason to hope that it will do better in this arena.

What Works?

Ironically, education is one field in which there is a large body of knowledge about what works and where there are proven track records. The problem is defining the word "works." The parent whose child is now in a Christian academy, away from the godless public schools, is pleased that the school works to inculcate moral values. The parent whose child has learned to read in the strict parochial school is glad that it works. The parents whose children get into elite colleges from elite public schools are pleased that those schools work. But, what do we, as democratic socialists, mean by schools that work?

Work for what? To train a workforce that needs increasingly specialized skills? To assimilate and acculturate large numbers of immigrants? To keep young people off the streets?

Dare we ask that schools be laboratories for a democratic civic culture, mini civil societies? In such societies young people and their mentors would forge their own institutions, working through the conflicts of class, race, gender, and nationality that are writ large in the world. They would develop the empathy, the moral concern, the skills necessary to build a truly "kinder, gentler" nation. (As anyone who has argued with a two-year-old knows, children have no problem grasping ideals of fairness

ing, reading? How and where does what we are learning "fit in"? Could things have been otherwise? Who cares, what difference does it make?

Class size would be small, with a range of ages (K-1, 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, etc.) so that children could be comfortable in some areas and stretched in others. There would be lots of "frills," the things we remember long after we've forgotten the number of presidents of the United States. That means music, art, drama, sports, areas where children can find a voice in even if they are mute giving a book review in front of the class. The classroom would be user-friendly -- no more desks bolted in place, no more terrorization through corporal punishment, no more leaking roofs from decaying infrastructure, no more harassment and humiliation by teachers or fellow students. The student body would be composed of young people from many races and all classes. For years elites have sent their children to schools with some of these characteristics. Hundreds of alternative public schools are struggling to achieve more of this vision.

For instance, my seven-year-old daughter goes to the Central Park East School founded by DSA member Deborah Meier. Starting with a small alternative public school in East Harlem, she has midwived a cluster of three elementary schools and one high school, whose first graduating class of almost all black and Latino low-income youngsters went off to college last year. Although the Central Park East Schools have gained national recognition, they are not alone. Other schools in New York have been modeled after them, and numerous schools throughout the country have formulated their own visions.

Teaching Democracy

How can these schools be successful and how can more be encouraged? Study after study shows that the key ingredients are size, leadership, and money. Only in a small school can the sense of community truly be fostered. Yes, there are large schools that work, and that is because they have huge doses of the other two ingredients. But if we want to foster a democratic culture in the school, the laboratory must be on a manageable scale.

Leadership makes all the difference in motivating teachers and inspiring parents and students. Given the leadership vacuum in the country at large, it's not surprising to find one in education. What is surprising is how many

If throwing money at a school doesn't work, why do people with money spend it to buy the best education?

and justice. They've learned early on that power goes with size and physical strength, and they fight that notion for as long as they can.)

What would a school look like that works to foster tolerance, justice, democratic participation, while at the same time teaching the skills necessary for life in a complex world? Well, it sure wouldn't be neat, tidy, and calm. But it would be exciting.

First, it would be small, about two hundred to three hundred pupils. Teachers and students would know each other and the parents and guardians. This sense of community is perhaps the most important aspect of a school. If we're all in it together, then we're going to give it everything we've got.

The school would be run democratically, with equal voice given to parents, teachers, administrators, and, in the higher grades, students. (Oscar Wilde was right about how many meetings this would mean, but at least child care would be provided.) It would provide excellent teaching for all children, not just those identified as "gifted and talented." The emphasis in the curriculum would be on critical thinking. Reformer Ted Sizer writes of the "habits of mind:" How do we know what we know? What evidence do we think is good enough? What viewpoint are we hearing, see-

inspiring and committed administrators and teachers there actually are. And there could be more. The Coalition of Essential Schools; the Center for Collaborative Education in New York, begun with seed money from Meier's MacArthur grant; and the Rethinking Schools project in Milwaukee are among those working to give assistance and forums to activists.

The Clincher

Then comes the clincher. Money. If a good private school costs about \$5,000 to \$10,000 a year and the teachers are paid almost nothing but have the advantages of smaller classes, supportive administrations, and children who have been creamed off from the general population, how can the public schools get by on less, as the proposed federal voucher system would mandate? How can anyone make a profit on these vouchers? Education activist Jonathan Kozol notes that we "allocate" money for the Pentagon and "throw money at anything that has to do with human pain." If "throwing money" at a school doesn't work, then why do people with money spend it to buy the best education? Our current system of school funding is based on property taxes, an inherently unequal approach that guarantees

that those living in the most affluent areas will have public schools that serve as de facto prep schools.

Where should democratic socialists put our efforts? We can run for the local school boards, we can publicize examples of schools that work well, we can get involved in our teachers' unions, we can become active in our children's schools, we can lobby for school-funding reform. It's not easy. School politics are as cut-throat as a Senate race. Whether it's building contracts or your children's job prospects at stake, tempers flare.

The stakes are high. A lot of national politicians want to ride the education issue into office. The U.S. president actually did, thereby becoming an oxymoron. We have to make sure that they don't ignore or maim the issue once elected.

Have we given up on our great democratic experiment? Some have. But in communities throughout the country there are those who haven't. Let's give them some help. **DL**

Maxine Phillips is the managing editor of Dissent. She knew that her daughter's school was "working" the day she was asked, "Mommy, why is there a national holiday for Columbus when he cut off the hands of the Indians?"

RESOURCES *for educating and organizing*

There is a wealth of information about schools that work and why the current so-called federal initiatives won't. For a brief overview of the latter question, see the interview with Deborah Meier on "Bush and the Schools" in the Summer 1991 issue of *Dissent*.

For the most recent hardcover look at programs that approach the ideals outlined above, read DSA member George Wood's book *Schools That Work: America's Most Innovative Public Education Programs*, Dutton, 1992. Wood lists the following organizations:

- The Institute for Democracy in Education, McCracken Hall, Ohio University, Athens, OH 45701; 614-593-4531

- The Coalition of Essential Schools (for secondary schools), Box 1938, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912; 401-863-3384

- The Foxfire Teacher Outreach, c/o Hilton Smith, Rabun Gap, GA 30568; 404-746-5318

- The Center for Collaborative Education, 1573 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10029; 212-860-8935

- Educators for Social Responsibility, 23 Garden Street, Cambridge, MA 02138; 617-492-1764

Journals and newsletters for classroom teachers include the following:

Democracy and Education, published quarterly by the Institute for Democracy and Education (see above).

Hands On, published quarterly by the Foxfire Teacher Outreach (see above).

Rethinking Schools, 1001 E. Keefe Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212

Fairtest Examiner, published by the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, Box 1272, Harvard Square Station, Cambridge, MA 02238

July 30 - August 2, 1992

The National Coalition of Education Activists will hold a national conference on "Breaking Barriers: Schools and Social Justice In Our Communities," in Milwaukee.

For information write: National Coalition of Education Activists, PO Box 405, Rosendale, NY 12472; or call 914-658-8115.

ON THE LEFT



by Harry Fleischman

CALIFORNIA

San Diego DSA participated in a voter registration drive as a member of the San Diego Organizing Project (SDOP), a coalition of churches and political organizations that came together as a result of the years of deterioration due to neglect by the elected officials in "America's Finest City." A platform was developed which laid out the issues plaguing the community. Mayoral candidates for San Diego were invited to a community speakout, where over 700 people gathered and by night's end, the candidates promised to adopt the SDOP platform.

San Francisco DSA hosted a successful new members meeting, and is sponsoring a Mission/Vision discussion group. Activists there are coordinating the DSA Media System Reform Task Force.

East Bay DSA is working in coalition to defeat Governor Pete Wilson's welfare initiative.

Peninsula/Stanford DSA is participating in a socialist discussion group. They sponsored a visit by independent presidential candidate Ron Daniels.

Valley DSA co-sponsored the Coalition for Jobs and Health Care Rally and March in April. Local activists have been doing voter registration at the Panorama City social welfare office.

Sacramento DSA is working with the local health care coalition and Jobs With Justice to pressure the state legislature to pass state-wide single-payer health care.

DSA Vice Chair Bogdan Denitch visited Los Angeles DSA in May. The local is organizing a health care tour to Canada for health care organizers. A committee is working to develop a critical response to the rebuilding process in South-Central L.A.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

DC/MD/NoVA DSA was one of the leading members of the coalition that secured passage of a domestic partnership bill in the District of Columbia. They are now working to secure approval of the bill by the U.S. Congress. The local has been sponsoring monthly labor commission meetings.

GEORGIA

Atlanta DSA, having recently restarted their local, is now producing a monthly newsletter and sponsoring regular meetings. They are organizing around national health care.

ILLINOIS

Chicago DSA members are working on the Carol Moseley Braun campaign for U.S. Senate. The local held a successful annual dinner that honored DSA members Sue Purrington and Quentin Young. The keynote speaker was José LaLuz, member of the DSA National Political Committee. The emcee was Michael Lighty, DSA National Director. The local's health care task force is continuing to build support for an Illinois universal health care bill.

INDIANA

Indiana DSA has received approval from the Debs Foundation to pursue an enshrinement for Michael Harrington at the Eugene V. Debs Home/Museum in Terre

Haute, Indiana. Indiana DSA needs to raise about \$600 for a bronze plaque of Harrington and to cover costs. DSAers are encouraged to contribute. Checks made payable to Indiana DSA should be sent to: Indiana DSA, P.O. Box 1631, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1631. Include name, address, and phone number with contribution. The local is also organizing for national health care.

KENTUCKY

Central Kentucky DSA is helping to organize a women's coffeehouse and is working on national health care.

NEW JERSEY

Members of Central Jersey DSA are organizing a new local in northern New Jersey and are helping a fledgling youth section chapter at Drew University.

NEW MEXICO

Albuquerque DSA, a budding local which just started this year, has met in January, March, April, and May with about twelve members at each meeting. They have discussed issues around the local and national political situations.

NEW YORK

Nassua DSA held a Saturday seminar in May entitled "Contained Depression?" Dr. Sean Gervasi, economist, writer, and former professor at the Sorbonne in Paris, lectured on the recession and discussed measures that would genuinely transform the American economy.

Ithaca DSA has been concentrating on local issues of immediate concern. They have been working on a campaign to write letters to local media and politicians, focus-

National Board Meets To Plan Local Electoral Activity

ing especially on tax equity, and rental housing. In addition they organized a campaign of union support, particularly support of the UAW in its contract negotiations with Cornell University. On July 4, they held a successful fundraising dinner.

New York City DSA held its third annual Progressive Policy Conference. The NYC DSA Health Care Task Force participated in a successful effort to get the New York State Assembly to pass a single-payer health care bill. The local honored DSA member and President of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) Jack Sheinkman at its annual bash.

OHIO

Columbus DSA'ers helped Bob Fittrakis, chair of the Columbus local, win his Democratic primary for U.S. Congress. The local also helped to organize a demonstration in response to the Rodney King verdict.

PENNSYLVANIA

Philadelphia DSA sponsored an outreach event with DSA member and economist Jay Mandle. The local's feminist issues group continues to meet. DSA activists are organizing for single-payer health care with a Philadelphia health care coalition. The local is working on the re-election campaign of DSA member and State Representative Babette Josephs.

Pittsburgh DSA has joined a women's coalition for reproductive rights and has been doing labor solidarity work.

VIRGINIA

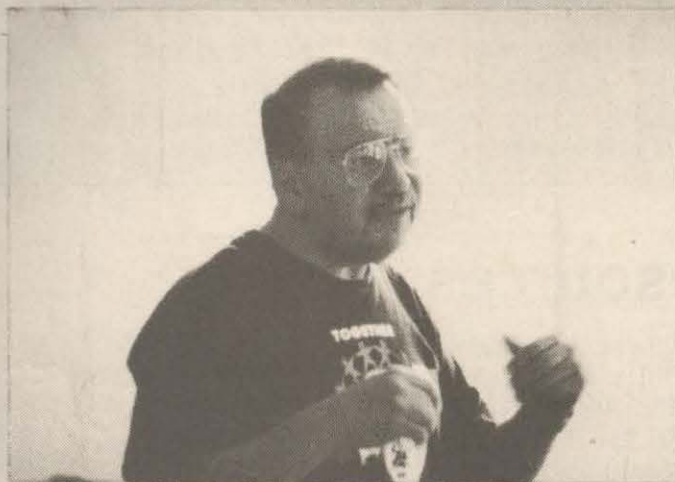
DSA members in **Charlottesville** are organizing a local there. DSA'er Richard Rorty spoke at their first meeting.

The 1992 National Board meeting in Washington, DC, was kicked off by a public outreach event with Barbara Ehrenreich, DSA Honorary Chair; Hilda Mason, member of the Council of the District of Columbia and DSA Vice Chair; Dorothy Healey, DSA Vice Chair; and Jo-Ann Mort, member of the DSA National Political Committee. Panelists discussed the current state of politics in the U.S., the presidential campaign, labor's role in the campaign, and prospects for a third party.

The Board opened with a plenary on the state of DSA organizing, with staff and local reports. The general sense of those reports was that organizing activity is growing at the local level.

Later, participants attended training and organizing workshops on topics including local electoral activity, the urban crisis and multiracial organizing, health care organizing, and building a DSA local.

Commission meetings filled the rest of Saturday, with meetings of the following commissions: African American, Anti-Racism, Feminist, Labor,



Albert Rojas, delegate from Sacramento, speaks at the Board.

Latino, and Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual. The Feminist Commission discussed a retreat planned for January 1993 and ways to increase membership. The African American, Anti-Racism, and Latino Commissions developed plans for a speaking tour by prominent DSA members of color. The commissions hope to use this tour to reach out to communities of color.

On Sunday morning, participants discussed electoral organizing strategies and tactics with Bob Fittrakis, DSA member and candidate for U.S. Congress; Mary Jo Kilroy, DSA member and Columbus school board member; Paul Pinsky, representative of the New Party; and Howard Croft, member of the DSA National Political Committee.

The Board also voted on resolutions to refer to the National Political Committee. Those included the following recommendations: to endorse the 1993 march on Washington for lesbian and gay civil rights; to endorse a Latino Commission delegation to Mexico to observe elections there; to establish a committee to liaison with independent party activity; and to set up a computer bulletin board for local organizers.

There was also plenty of socialist socializing, including a picnic, volleyball, and a softball game. The board was held at the northwest campus of Gallaudet University, July 12-14.

Rethinking Columbus

◆ *Rethinking Columbus: Teaching About the 500th Anniversary of Columbus' Arrival in the Americas*. 96 pages; ages high school to adult; Send \$4.00 + \$2.00 postage to Rethinking Schools, 1001 East Keefe Avenue, Milwaukee WI 53212. For information about bulk orders at a discount, call (414)964-9646.

◆ *Conquest and Capitalism: 1492-1992*, by Steve Brouwer. Send \$10.00 + \$2.00 postage to Big Picture Books, P.O. Box 909, Carlisle PA 17013. Call (717)249-2763 for more information.

California DSA Statewide Meeting

"California: We Will Fight Back"

August 2, 1992 9:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Stanford University Women's Center Firehouse Building
contact Duane Campbell 916-372-9072 or Mike Pincus 415-695-9532

Resources

◆ The following new items are available from the DSA National Office, 15 Dutch Street, #500, New York, NY 10038. Call for information about bulk discounts, 212-962-0390.

-- *Organize! For Progressive Electoral Action*, a new DSA newsletter, produced by the Electoral Action Task Force and edited by James Chapin. The inaugural issue includes articles on the Perot phenomenon, DSA'ers running for office, and a profile of Oregon State Senator and DSA member, Beverly Stein. *Organize!* is a must-read for all socialist electoral organizers. Please send \$.50 for postage for one, or order 50 for \$5.00, 100 for \$10.00. Use it to table and distribute.

-- *DSA T-shirts*, sizes L and XL, \$10.00 + \$2.00 postage

-- *The Activist*, magazine of the DSA Youth Section, special issue on the environment, send \$1.00 for postage.

-- *Reproductive Freedom Lobby Kit*, prepared by the Feminist Commission. Contains lobbying hints, talking points, and legislation updates. Comprehensive and essential. \$5

-- The latest issue of *Our Struggle/Nuestra Lucha*, newsletter of the African American, Latino, and Anti-Racism Commissions. Single issue: free. Bulk copies: 100 for \$10.

-- *Progressive Platform/Rodney King Resolution* literature piece, essential for urban crisis organizing. Single copy: free. Bulk copies: 100 for \$10.

-- *Democratic Vistas*, a statement for the democratic left, signed by Irving Howe, Susan Sontag, Cornel West, Ed Asner, and Frances Fox Piven, among many others. \$1

Organizing

◆ U.S. Representative Pat Schroeder (D-CO) introduced a bill in Congress in May that will prohibit discrimination by the armed forces on the basis of sexual orientation (HR 5208, the Military Freedom Act of 1992). Urge your representative to co-sponsor HR 5208. Call the House switchboard at 202-225-3121.

◆ Was your shirt made by Guatemalan women earning \$2 a day? The worst human rights violator in the hemisphere, Guatemala, is now home to 250 factories producing clothing for brand-name U.S. companies including Levi's and the Gap. Now there is a union drive at two factories owned by the Phillips-Van Heusen Corporation (PVH), a U.S. company. Workers say PVH has responded to the union effort with firings, demotions, bribery, and threats to close the factory. Help the PVH workers by writing, (1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104) phoning (212-468-7100) or faxing (212-468-7398) PVH a message: urge Larry S. Phillips, CEO, to recognize and negotiate with the union. To join the PVH Campaign write: U.S./Guatemala Labor Education Project, 333 S. Ashland, Chicago, IL 60607.

Summer Youth Conference

August 6 - 9, 1992

Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio

Registration begins at 6 p.m. on Thursday.

The fee is a sliding scale from \$40 - 80 based on your financial situation.

This year's summer conference is more activist oriented than ever. It is designed to prepare you for an academic year of *action*. We will have workshops on direct action organizing and advice on sustaining a DSA chapter and coalition building. For more information please call Tom Ellett at 212-962-0390.

DSA'ers Run For Office

BY ROBERT MARINOVIC

Two DSA local organizers will run for office in November: Bob Fitrakis, chair of Columbus DSA, will run for U.S. Congress in the 12th District in Ohio; and Rachel Dewey, member of the Los Angeles DSA executive committee, will run for California State Senate.

Fitrakis is running a campaign largely influenced by the DSA progressive platform. An outspoken, grassroots radical, Fitrakis conducted an aggressive primary campaign concentrating on critical issues of economic renewal and social reform which the district and the nation as a whole must face. Fitrakis's experience as a professor of Political Science at Columbus State Community College has kept him at the forefront of issues such as industrial policy, the environment, criminal justice, reproductive rights, welfare policy, and peace issues. He also co-hosts a public access cable television program called the "Fitrakis/Erney Report."

His district includes rural and suburban areas that are heavily populated by whites and urban areas that are primarily African American. Fitrakis received over 80 percent of his primary votes from the inner city community and had a respectable turnout in the re-

mainder of the district.

Though this is the first time Fitrakis has run for office, he is no stranger to the process. Among others, he managed the 1990 Tom Erney for Congress campaign in Ohio on a budget of

\$16,000 and won 41 percent of the vote against a twenty-four-year incumbent.

When asked if Fitrakis was hindered by running openly as a democratic socialist, he explained that people liked the message, and weren't turned away by the messenger being a socialist. "If people ask, I tell them 'Yeah, I'm a socialist.'" He said the public appears to be responding favorably to his message of social reform.

In November, Fitrakis will face the Republican incumbent, John Kasich. He vows to run "the most progressive campaign ever in Central Ohio."

Dewey ran unopposed in the Democratic primary and faces a long shot in the general. She hopes, however, that anti-incumbent fever and the broad-based success of women candidates will help her.

"I hope Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein have long coats-tails!" she said, referring to candidates for U.S. Senate in California.



Congressional candidate Bob Fitrakis.

Dewey is running a campaign that attempts to educate people about progressive positions on issues such as education, health care and reproductive freedom. "People in my district think that only tax cuts hurt people. I want to show them that cuts in service hurt people as well," she said. "I also want to show them that government can have a positive impact on their day-to-day lives."

Dewey's district includes urban and suburban areas in L.A., Pasadena, Burbank, and Glendale.

As a long-time DSA and Democratic Party activist, Dewey says she is excited about the opportunity to run for office. "After years of stuffing envelopes and leafletting, it's interesting to actually help shape the Democratic Party's agenda and influence policy decisions."

Robert Marinovic, a student at Hamilton College, is a summer intern at DSA.

Why Americans Hate Cities

BY JAMES B. CHAPIN

The relative hostility of most Americans to cities is an inheritance from the political culture of Great Britain. Most continental European societies, and those settled by continental Europeans, like to live in cities. Indeed, in cities as varied as Paris and Rio de Janeiro, the rich live inside the central cities while the poor cluster outside. But, as early as the seventeenth century, Britons who made their money in urban business spent it on rural estates. By the nineteenth century, the first suburbs were springing up outside London to satisfy the desires of the new English bourgeoisie for a rural lifestyle. And, British-settled Australia, although it is one of the most urban countries in the world, is dominated psychologically by the

image of an outback in which almost no Australians actually live.

In the United States, cities have been seen as the havens of the rich and poor -- both of whose existence seem to endanger the self-reliant individualist center of the American culture. Thomas Jefferson was only the first of a long line of American writers and politicians who followed the British in decrying the rootless mobs and the gilded rich of the great cities.

By the 19th century, self-reliant individualism was assigned a geographical location -- the Western frontier. In fact, the greatest growth in the U.S. during the 1800s was in urban areas (that was true even in the West), but this growth found few lyrical writers to praise it. In the twentieth century, lacking a frontier, the



F. M. Kearney/Impact Visuals



small towns (and now by extension the suburbs) have come to seem the bastions of the middling classes. Given a choice, white middle class Americans (indeed, almost all Americans) migrated into suburbs, areas which seemed to combine city incomes and rural ambiance.

The turnover in urban population was often linked to factors of ethnicity and class, as older populations fled from arriving populations with different mores and lower class status. But it was also linked to desires for a better lifestyle. Samuel Lubell wrote of the "tenement trail" that took immigrants from the Lower East Side of New York to the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, and eventually to Queens or further into the suburbs of Westchester and Long Island, and finally, into Florida or California. In recent years, selective migration (and discrimination in housing in the suburbs) has helped to resegregate America.

In the past, the departing people have been replaced by new populations seeking new economic opportunities. In recent years these opportunities have been declining. Both race and class motives have led corporation executives (whether native or foreign) to place their factories in small town and rural areas with white nonunionized work forces. Corporations have moved their headquarters to the suburbs (one study showed that the best predictor of a new location was the residence of the corporation president!)

Meanwhile, the dispersed and fragmented American governmental system has allowed whole classes to escape paying their fair share by shrugging off general social responsibilities and geographically isolating "problem" areas. That can be true at the state level, as "low-tax" Connecticut and New Hampshire residents avoid paying for the support of Boston and New York -- cities which provide upper-income jobs for many of the residents of surrounding states. Within states, the incredible disparities in school funding and local amenities uncovered by Jonathan Kozol are widespread.

The rhetoric of "community" has become a cover for class motives. Most people in a modern suburb don't know much about their neighbors across the fence, except that they are of the same race and class. Governments -- national and state -- have engaged in large-scale social support of programs that subsidize the automobile economy and move the population out of central cities, while at the same time fail to reward cities for their very real economic advantages, such as energy efficiency. The major burden of dealing with poor people and with both younger and older parts of the population has been shifted to the local level.

The unwillingness of Americans to settle important questions through public means has fostered the development of "edge cities" and "the mall." In recent years the triumph of conservative economics has multiplied the num-

bers of the poor and the homeless, while the triumph of ACLU-style liberal individualism has restricted the ability of government to control behavior in public space. As a result, public space increasingly becomes abandoned to bureaucrats and criminals. The mall reintroduces controlled "public" space (controlled because it is private).

Political analyst William Schneider has suggested that the 1992 presidential election will be the first to be dominated by suburban voters. He argues that while urban areas want broad based taxes and narrowly targeted expenditures, the suburbs want narrowly based taxes spent broadly. He goes on to suggest that the cities today are in the same political position as rural areas were a century ago, and just as unlikely to see their policy preferences carried into law.

In a recent multi-author study, *Changing New York City Politics*, the four authors point out that attitudes on basic ideological questions vary according to residence.

"A national candidate who had chosen to make the role of government in ensuring jobs and a good standard of living a central issue in the 1988 campaign, and who stressed that government has a primary responsibility for these matters, would (if votes hinged solely on this issue) have thus gained two votes for each vote lost in New York City in 1988. At the same time, that candidate, nationwide, would have lost 1.8 votes for each vote gained.

"To place these data in proper political perspective, note that the top eleven central cities contain approximately 8.6 percent of the voting age population of the United States. If

these central cities have values and policy preferences distinct from those of the rest of the country... their feeling of isolation may not be entirely illusory."

Many, probably most, Americans do not accept that the prosperity of their country depends upon the prosperity of its cities. Nothing in their own life experiences demonstrates that. Any majoritarian coalition to solve urban problems cannot simply assert the importance of cities, it must be prepared to demonstrate it.

The U.S. is missing out on a great deal by neglecting its cities. Cities remain a crucial location for national identification. The Jessica Mitford expression about Oakland, "there's no there there," would be true of an America made up only of "slurbs." Cities are psychologically important; that's why most nations treat their great cities as treasures, not as dumping grounds.

Many Americans choose to blame the problems of the vast inequalities of American life on the cities in which these inequalities are most clearly visible. But it doesn't serve the interest even of a capitalist society to allow the collapse of infrastructure, the impaired raising of children, and the continued localization of social and economic issues that leads to a cacophony of geographic interests set against each other. And, as rising crime, pollution, and tax burdens in the suburbs demonstrate, there is no real escape from the larger world into a suburban utopia.

James Chapin, a DSA Vice Chair, is chairman of the board of World Hunger Year, and editor of the DSA newsletter, Organize!



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Opposing the War On Drugs

While Rescuing Our Communities and Curing Drug Abuse

BY CLARENCE LUSANE

The dreams of thousands of African Americans are rapidly going up in smoke. The twisted curls of smoke emanating from pipes filled with crack, heroin, PCP, ice, and other deadly substances symbolize the blurred nightmares that are strangling community after community. While Blacks and other people of color in the United States comprise less than 15 percent of all drug users, the damage and havoc caused by substance abuse and by the destructive impact of the federal government's drug war is felt much more deeply in those communities. An FBI study notes the fact that while Blacks represent only 12 percent of all illegal drug users, Blacks are 41 percent of all those arrested on cocaine and heroin charges.

From the jungles of Bolivia to the high plains of Laos, from the dingy and rank basements of the inner cities and rural U.S. to the executive suites of the largest U.S. corporations, from the White House and beyond, the drug crisis has linked tens of millions across the globe.

Masking Brutality

The national and international illegal drug crisis is both rooted in and the expression of deeply troubled economic, political, and social relations. As this crisis of race, class, and global politics unfolds, the battle against illegal drugs has taken on a character not unlike the religious crusades of medieval Europe.

The U.S. government's "war on drugs," at best, obscures all of these relationships and, at worst, perpetuates them. The potential long-term harm of the drug war is not that it won't



Paul ShouImpact Visuals

end illegal and deadly drug trafficking and abuse. The real danger is that it will mask the brutal social realities that must be addressed if suffering and destruction caused by the drug crisis is to stop.

The government, in engaging its drug war at home and abroad, has aimed its weapons overwhelmingly at people of color. Despite the fact the whites are the majority of users and traffickers, Blacks, Latinos, and third world people are suffering the worst excesses of a program that violates civil rights, human rights, and national sovereignty.

At the same time, there is an urgent need to address the harm caused by the explosion of drug trafficking and abuse, particularly in communities of color. The drug crisis and its under-

lying causes are very real indeed. As the National Urban League wrote in *The State of Black America 1989*, "Substance abuse is the single major leading social, economic, and health problem confronting the African-American community."

The economic and political policies of the U.S., particularly during Ronald Reagan's presidency, fettered the opportunities for advancement for millions around the world and in the U.S. Reagan was determined to halt the development of progressive governments in Nicaragua and Grenada with anti-communist, pro-militarist foreign policy initiatives. His program was funded by the shift of federal dollars from sorely needed social programs to the military budget, and perhaps more disastrous, by massive unprecedented deficit spending.

Covering Up Collusion

The U.S. government uses the drug war to obscure the collusion of U.S. intelligence agencies with major international trafficking networks. In the past, anti-communist foreign policy aims have served as justification to the CIA

Has the CIA escalated the drug crisis by assisting drug traffickers?

and other agencies to knowingly allow traffickers to import illegal drugs into the U.S. One critical question that has been conspicuously avoided by the Bush administration and the media monopolies is: "Has the CIA escalated the drug crisis in the U.S. by assisting the efforts of known drug traffickers?"

The end of the Cold War has meant a shift in foreign policy rhetoric. The new international enemy of humankind has been transformed from a communist to a drug dealer/terrorist or "narco-terrorist." Although new enemy images are being created, the ends have remained the same. Opening up and protecting markets for U.S. corporations and waging low-intensity/high-death military and political

campaigns against third world liberation movements continue to be the real reasons for U.S. intervention abroad. This is perhaps nowhere as clear as in the Persian Gulf conflict. What Iraq did to Kuwait in 1990 with tanks and guns, the U.S. is doing to the rest of the world with dollars, computers, and mass media (along with tanks and guns).

In this milieu of economic destruction, public corruption, ideological dogmatism, international aggression, and shameless discrimination, it's easy to see why social disintegration is escalating. Concern for values of community that only a few years ago would have prevented or limited the invasion of drugs into many Black, Latino and poor neighborhoods has been increasingly replaced by survival-driven individualism and materialism.

Rather than initiate a desperately needed "Marshall Plan" to eliminate poverty, the Bush administration has continued to escalate the U.S. war on "drugs." Bush's declaration of war on users and dealers threatens their civil liberties and has had virtually no impact on the roots of the drug problem, either internationally or domestically. Mass waves of police actions against street sales into inner city communities have moved drug markets indoors. Drug sales and use in the suites and board rooms of America's large and small corporations have remained effectively untouched. The decline in casual use has been matched by a larger and more intractable addiction population disproportionately located in communities of color.

A Community Deteriorates

"How did we get into this situation?" the Black community commonly asks itself. As the hurricane-like force of the drug epidemic and the abuses of the drug war rage the Black community, they signal a more acute and deadly social crisis: the poverty-driven marginalization and elimination of the Black poor.

The battle over drug policy, despite administration denials, is being waged on a terrain fraught with racial conflict. The disproportionate impact of the drug crisis on people of color has raised old questions about just how much progress has been achieved by Blacks and other people of color in the U.S.

Meanwhile, in spite of the best efforts and most militant rhetoric of today's Black leadership, the deterioration of the Black community continues at breakneck speed. By every index available, Black America is crashing. The Black

community is suffering record rates of homicide, infant mortality, school dropout, AIDS infection, hunger, and homelessness. More than anything, the economy of the Black community is in a shambles. Even the briefest glimpse of poverty in the U.S., which disproportionately impacts the Black community, is thoroughly heartbreaking.

The Real-Life Impact

The Black infant mortality rate is twice that of whites, and, at the other end, Black life expectancy is falling. Between the cradle and the grave, things do not get much better. Black unemployment continues to be twice that of whites, and a white high school dropout will have a better chance of finding work than a Black college graduate.

Although two-thirds of America's poor are white, four out of every nine Blacks are living in poverty. Poverty rates for the African American community are the highest in the nation at about 31.6 percent. Half of the Black children born in America are born poor. More than 56 percent of families headed by single Black women are in deep poverty. For Latina women in the same situation, the figure is 59 percent.

These statistics have been depressingly consistent for more than a decade. The real-life impact of these numbers has meant a life of denial of basic material and social needs for millions, along with the intense rejection and stifling alienation that accompanies poverty. At this level of deprivation, as one study points out, "serious family needs -- such as food, clothing, medicine, early learning assistance, and housing -- are not being met."

Who Shall Solve the Drug Crisis?

● The have-nots of the third world must be given the resources to go (and grow) in new directions. Egalitarian economic development, social opportunity and political reform must be created in the third world.

● The CIA's role in narcotics trafficking must be exposed. Since its creation more than forty years ago, the CIA has collaborated with major drug traffickers around the globe.

● End the mass criminalization of black youth, particularly black males. Local communities can develop and implement alternative sentencing options for non-violent youth offenders, including community service, day-report-

ing centers, intensive short-term incarceration, and residential prohibition. Incarcerating young teenagers with hardened career criminals is unjustified and serves only to further alienate those who can be saved from a life as repeat offenders.

● Establish new approaches to policing and law enforcement. The Community-Oriented Policing System (COPS) approach emphasizes police cooperation and partnership with community groups and is focused on prevention rather than reaction to crime.

*By every index
available,
Black America
is crashing.*

● Recognize drug abuse as a health crisis similar to that of smoking or drunk driving.

● Provide accessible, quality treatment that incorporates the sensitivities and respect that are the foundation for Black addicts coming to grips with the source of their problem: low self-esteem that leads to destructive, compulsive and addictive behavior.

● Institute National Clean Needle exchange programs, which many other nations have instituted with great success.

● Launch a massive nationwide literacy program.

In the long run, economic development, social equality and the elimination of poverty are the "magic bullets" to end drug trafficking and abuse in poor communities and communities of color. DL

Clarence Lusane, an author, activist, lecturer, and free-lance journalist, is chairman of the board of the National Alliance of Third World Journalists, and edits the newsletter, Black Political Agenda '92.

This article was excerpted from Pipe Dream Blues: Racism and the War on Drugs (South End Press, October 1991).

Poor Visibility

BY MAURICE ISSERMAN

THE VISIBLE POOR: HOMELESSNESS IN THE UNITED STATES. by Joel Blau
Oxford University Press, 1992, 235 pp., \$22.95.

Consider what a different world it was when Michael Harrington published *The Other America* thirty years ago. Americans, including President John F. Kennedy, were appalled to read that forty to fifty million of their fellow citizens were living in poverty. Harrington's eloquent description of the suffering of the poor helped spark a federal "war on poverty" which -- for all of its shortcomings -- measurably improved the lives of millions of Americans.

The poor in those long-gone days were, in Harrington's words, "invisible." No more. According to a *New York Times* poll cited in Joel Blau's new book *The Visible Poor: Homelessness in the United States*, 54 percent of Americans nationwide (68 percent of urban Americans) see homeless people in the course of a day's routine. More appalling still, a *New York Times* poll taken in January 1992 revealed that 55 percent of respondents eighteen to twenty-nine years old agreed with the statement "most people have gotten so used to seeing the homeless that they don't feel upset by them." By contrast, only 30 percent of those sixty-five or older agreed. In other words, young adults who came of age in the 1980s were far more likely to accept the existence of homelessness as a normal part of the social landscape -- perhaps regrettable, distasteful, unsightly, but inevitable -- than those who reached adulthood in the years of the New Deal or its immediate aftermath.

Joel Blau, a professor of social work at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, has written a thoughtful study of homelessness that serves as powerful indictment of the poli-

cies that have brought us this brave new world of shantytowns and shelters. I doubt his book will have the impact of *The Other America* -- it certainly won't get as sympathetic a reading in the White House -- but that is the fault of the times we live in and the men who rule over us, not of Blau's abilities as social analyst.

Virtually nothing can be said about homelessness without generating controversy. Estimates of the homeless population range from the few hundred thousand cited by government agencies and conservative analysts to the millions claimed by homeless advocacy groups. Definitions and semantics account for much of the disparity; are the homeless only those who can be found and counted by census enumerators in shelters and on street corners? Or do they include the episodically housed, the precariously housed, the doubled-up, battered women hiding out from abusive partners, runaway children, and others who fear the shelters and avoid the authorities? One thing is clear: the old stereotype of a homeless population consisting of aging, white, male, Skid-Row alcoholics is obsolete. The homeless population today is considerably younger, and includes a much higher proportion of minorities, women and children.

Where did the new homeless population come from? Blau systematically reviews the explanations offered by researchers, politicians and pundits, from the deinstitutionalization of mental patients in the 1960s to the gentrification of urban neighborhoods in the 1970s to the evisceration of federal spending on social welfare in the 1980s. The study of homelessness, it hardly needs saying, is not an abstract science. Causes imply culpability. President Reagan suggested in 1986, in that casually misinformed style which voters for some reason found so endearing: "What we have found in this country, and we're more aware of it now, is one



Shia photo/Impact Visuals

problem that we've had, even in the best of times, and this is the people who are sleeping on the grates, the homeless who are homeless, you might say, by choice." The sub-text ("Hey! Don't blame me! And don't ask for money!") is not difficult to decipher.

Blau comes to a different conclusion. Imagine, he asks in his introduction:

the United States today with housing costs and income distribution unchanged, but without drugs, mental illness, or "bad decisions" -- the personal factors often cited as the true causes of homelessness. Does homelessness decline under these circumstances? Yes, but not by much. . . . Now imagine another set of circumstances. This time, instead of eliminating the drugs, the mental illness, and the "bad decisions," make sure that there are comprehensive social services, a generous supply of affordable housing, and no one earns less than \$25,000 a year. A miraculous development occurs. Not only does homelessness decline sharply, but the so-called personal factors that have come to be associated with it also experience a significant drop. Whatever problems

people in the United States have, nothing exacerbates them faster than the lack of money, food, and housing.

While not totally discounting mental illness, substance abuse, and similar explanations for homelessness, Blau emphasizes a number of other factors that combined to create the crisis of homelessness in the 1980s, including deindustrialization (which, as William Julius Wilson and others have argued, has had a particularly severe economic impact on urban minority communities); the contraction of social welfare (including cutbacks in spending for AFDC, Social Security, food stamps, and unemployment insurance); declining investment at public housing (by the end of the Reagan administration only 25,000 units were added annually, at a time when the waiting list for public housing in New York City alone had grown to nearly 200,000); and the replacement of private urban low income housing stock, such as Single-Room-Occupancy hotels, with luxury condominiums, cooperatives, and office buildings (a transformation often encouraged by tax breaks to owners and developers.)

Humanitarian concerns and political concerns combine to make homelessness a critical issue for the Left to come to grips with. The

temptation among the public to "blame the victim" is growing stronger every year. "Visible poverty disrupts the ordinary rhythms of public life," Blau notes.

It undermines the rules governing the use of public space . . . If one encounter with a homeless person is awkward, the cumulative effect of many such encounters is discordant. Some people are generous and do not mind occasional requests for money. Too many requests, though, soon exhaust their charity. Losing their capacity to engage in single charitable acts, they are increasingly inclined to see homelessness as a disfigurement of the landscape, and begging as a personal assault. After a while, public opinion sours, and demands intensify to get the homeless off the street.

The backlash against homelessness represents a potent threat to the future of progressive movements and politicians. The defeat of San Francisco's incumbent mayor Art Agnos last year apparently hinged on the perception that he was reluctant to crack down on an encampment of homeless people in front of City Hall. Challengers to liberal incumbents in New York City and elsewhere no doubt took note.

But homelessness, properly understood, is the Left's issue, not the Right's. The "visible poor" are the visible price we have paid as a nation for the nostrums and illusions of the past dozen years. Reagan's Morning in America has in many communities come to bear a close resemblance to Evening in Calcutta. The existence of homelessness is, or should be, an af-

front to the value of neighborliness, egalitarianism, and common decency that most Americans espouse, and some actually believe in. Advocacy groups like the National Coalition for the Homeless, social service organizations like the Community Service Society, and the direct action-oriented Community for Creative Non-Violence have all done admirable work in helping dramatize and demystify the issue of homelessness. Democratic socialists have their own contribution to make. As Blau concludes in *The Visible Poor*:

People need housing, and they cannot get it. They need day care, and it is not accessible. They need a universally available health program, and while some partial reforms may be enacted, no such federal program is in sight. Resourceful organizing could link these needs and forge a coalition powerful enough to redefine the terms under which business operates. The Progressive Era, the New Deal, the Great Society; it has happened before, and in the next generation, it will happen again.

The Visible Poor is a book written in the tradition of *The Other America*. It deserves our attention. DL

Maurice Isserman teaches history at Hamilton College. He is writing a biography of Michael Harrington, and is co-author with Rick Fantasia of The Encyclopedia of Homelessness (Facts on File, forthcoming.)

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LETTERS to the EDITOR

Democratic Left welcomes letters that respond to articles or ideas we publish. The editors reserve the right to edit letters. We particularly appreciate letters of fewer than 250 words. Due to the volume of letters we receive, we cannot publish nor respond to each.

True Socialism

To the editor:

In the report on DSA's reception at the March For Women's Lives, there is a reference to "Soviet and Eastern European socialism" (May/June 1992). *Democratic Left* seems to have fallen into the same trap as many U.S. journalists, especially those working at the *New York Times*. With rare exceptions, the writers and editorial staff of *The Times* have uniformly referred to the Soviet Union and other communist nations as socialist and Marxist, and to the decline and destruction of this form of society as demonstrations of the failure of socialism and Marxism. Thus, a *Times* editorial of December 26th attributed the fall of Gorbachev to the fact that "He believed too deeply in socialism."

This practice of *The Times* is flagrantly contrary to the facts, and *Democratic Left* should know better. We, as members of DSA, should be continually reminding people that there is no relationship between socialism which is committed to a democratic, progressive society, and the venal bloody dictatorship of a communist state. No group has fought harder against communism or exposed its crimes of state more aggressively than the democratic socialist movement; and no group has hailed the destruction of the communist states with greater enthusiasm than the socialist movement.

The democratic institutions of the European socialist and social

democratic parties is the clearest demonstration of the absurdity of characterizing the communist dictatorships as socialist or Marxist.

Socialist parties are dedicated to expanding the political democracy of the present order to include economic, cultural and social democracy, and to eliminate every form of discrimination and inequality. Soviet communism, on the other hand, has deliberately destroyed every democratic institution.

As *Democratic Left* often provides an appropriate antidote to "conventional wisdom," it should in this case debunk what *The Times* accurately reflects as the prevailing attitude of the "experts" and the media generally.

The progress of socialist thought and action will undoubtedly survive *The Times'* and other media's naive adoption of the communists' tortured terminology. It is to be hoped that the media will, on reflection, abandon its disregard of historical reality. To expose the dangerous inaccuracies of the media, *Democratic Left* should follow its own principles without exception.

Robert Delson
New York City

Religion & Socialism

To the editor:

I wish to commend you for the focus on "Religion and Socialism" in the January/February, 1992 issue. The statements by various religious socialists indicate that religion can play a strong role with regard to socialist ideals.

Many people profess to be religious today. We must make them aware of the sharp contradictions between religious values and the realities of capitalism. We must stress that, in the words of a 1934 pronouncement of the Rabbinical Assembly of America, "...an individualistic, profit-inspired economy [is] in direct conflict with the ideals of religion... We hold that only a cooperative economy, only one which has for its objective the enrichment of all rather than profit for a few--only such an economy can be moral, can elevate [people] and can function successfully."

It is essential that people become aware that religious values of compassion, sharing justice, and peace, and biblical concepts such as the sabbatical and jubilee years, and the mandate to leave the corners of the fields and the gleanings of harvests for the poor, are incompatible with capitalism. Nothing less than global survival is at stake.

Richard Schwartz
DSA Religion & Socialism Commission

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Jimmy Higgins Reports



JOB OFFERINGS

If you're looking for work and aren't having any luck, maybe you're looking in the wrong place. Forget about those attractive management positions or those well-paying manufacturing jobs. They're a thing of the past. Today, the real work is to be found in low-end service. For each new computer-programming job created in 1991, eleven were formed for clerks, eight for food-service workers and six for janitors, says demographer Harold Hodgkinson at the Institute for Educational Leadership. Three cheers for capitalism.

MORE JOB OFFERINGS

It seems that women are still underrepresented; this time not in Congress, but in the boardroom. By research group Catalyst's count, only 519 of the top 1,000 employers have female directors. Among industrial companies, only 44 percent have women on their boards. Some 133 "progressive" companies have more than one woman director. Mutual of America and US West each have five.

RADICAL, DUDE

The artists who draw the popular "Simpsons" TV show have been denied tens of thousands of dollars in over-time pay by Klasky-Csupo, a subcontractor of the show's producers, Gracie Films. The animators have begun an organizing campaign to which Gary Csupo, partial owner of the firm, has responded: "I'll lay them off and take the work to Hungary." "Isn't it ironic that the TV show that plays to working class values is illegally depriving its own workers of wages and the right to organize," says Steve Huelett of the cartoonists' union. Angry fans can write to James Brooks at Gracie Films and David Robinson at Fox TV, both at 10201 W. Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90035.

GAY RIGHTS IN RUSSIA

In Russia, gay rights are still unrealized. Still considered a crime under Article 121, homosexuality has meant incarceration and persecution in prison in the form of beatings and gang rapes. But gay rights activists are hopeful and are campaigning for public tolerance. They are encouraged by the Yeltsin administration, which has unveiled a draft criminal code that would abolish Article 121.

Democratic Left Labor Day Issue 1992

The Labor Day issue of *Democratic Left* will once again be dedicated to coverage of the American and international labor struggle. Our annual Labor Day ad campaign is the principle fundraiser for *Democratic Left*. It provides an excellent opportunity for you to join with trade unions, progressive organizations, and DSA members to show your support for DSA and *Democratic Left*. We welcome advertisements and personal greetings from individuals, DSA locals, organizations and progressive businesses. We must receive ad copy by August 20, 1992. Make checks payable to DSA, or pay by credit card.

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