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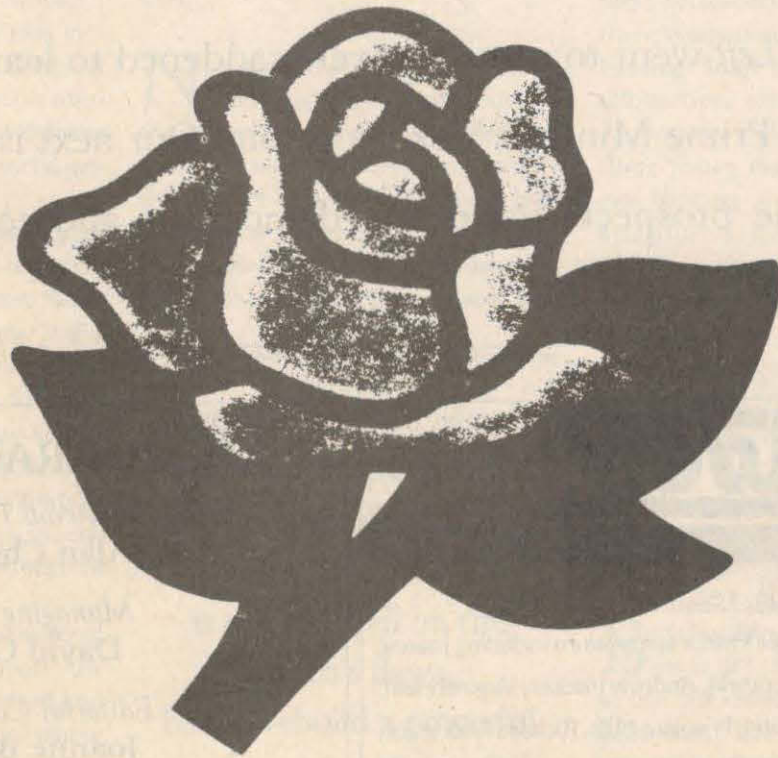
DEMOCRATIC Left



November/December 1995

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Turning Points for the Left

New Priorities for the Labor Movement

The Million Man March

Facing the Era of Economic Insecurity

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As *Democratic Left* went to press, we were saddened to learn of the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Our next issue will include an analysis of the prospects for peace, democracy, and social justice in the Middle East.



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In the Fall 1995 issue, read:

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The Million Man March: Where Do We Go from Here?

BY MAJOR OWENS

In my activist bones there is something that makes me always yearn to support a demonstration or a march. Certainly, in today's climate, I feel an urge to applaud any non-violent action that makes the Gingrich high-tech barbarians a target. A massive march on Washington in defense of democracy, freedom, and social justice would be long overdue.

But the Million Man March held on October 16 was not such a march. Its agenda was shrouded in contradictions and conflicting messages. It did not consistently focus on the current outrages of the Washington Republican majority. It did not draw a clear link between the realities of African American suffering and the billions of dollars that have been cut from federal housing, job training, and education programs.

As a leader and elected member of Congress, I could not support the march. I could not agree to blind and unconditional unity with those whose slogans and platforms have consistently been reckless and divisive. I could not support a major statement by a group—the Nation of Islam—whose continuing separatism and bigotry pose a long-term threat to the survival of the African American community.

The march's theme of "atonement" played directly into the hands of the Republican attacks on the black community. For if the sins of black men are the central problem, then 232 years of slavery and a hundred years of brutal oppression after slavery are not part of the problem. If the collective

sins of black men are the primary problem, then there is no need to fight for jobs, health care, and public education.

Not sin, but public policies, laws, rules, and regulations must be the primary concern of elected officials and other secular leaders. True, no one should ever underestimate the role of personal morality in human affairs. We know that individuals are ultimately the masters of their own fates.

**The Million Man March
played into the hands
of the Republican right.
Our task today
is not to dwell on the
march's flaws,
but to rebuild a powerful
multiracial coalition for
progressive change.**

But it is the duty of government to facilitate human development. Government and public policies must always strive to remove as many obstacles to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" as possible. The Nation of Islam should not oversimplify the problems of our complex society and allow those in power to wash their hands and forget the problems they have created.

This is not to denounce or discourage those who attended the march. I spoke with dozens of young men beforehand, and I know that there were many motivations for attending. Some men sought a religious affirmation, others an experience of community solidarity. My advice to these young men was to carry their *own* banners and to bring their *own* literature, to make clear exactly why they were there.

Ultimately, Minister Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam passed up a golden opportunity to send a powerful message to America by following the example of Nelson Mandela and denouncing all racism, sexism, anti-Semitism and other religious bigotry, prejudice, immigrant-bashing, and oppression of the poor.

But dwelling on the actions of others is not the most effective way to use our resources. The task of the democratic left today is to rebuild a powerful multiracial coalition for change. That coalition could begin its work by organizing around the Congressional Black Caucus's 1995-1996 agenda:

» to fight aggressive racist attacks in all forms: the attacks on affirmative action, school desegregation, set-asides, and the Voting Rights Act. Fight government and unofficial acts that encourage sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, immigrant persecution or denial of basic rights for any group.

» fight for education as a national priority. The CBC Alternative Budget

—continued on page 13

Wages and the Global Economy

A Cautionary Note to the Left

BY DAVID GORDON

What does the global economy mean for working people in the United States? Many radicals—including several contributors to *Democratic Left*—have recently argued that the left should place the highest priority on responding to the increasing international mobility of capital and production. The issues of globalization are indeed important, but I believe the U.S. left often exaggerates or misunderstands their implications for our economy. These mistakes, in turn, make us myopic or much too fatalistic about urgent organizing opportunities on the home front.

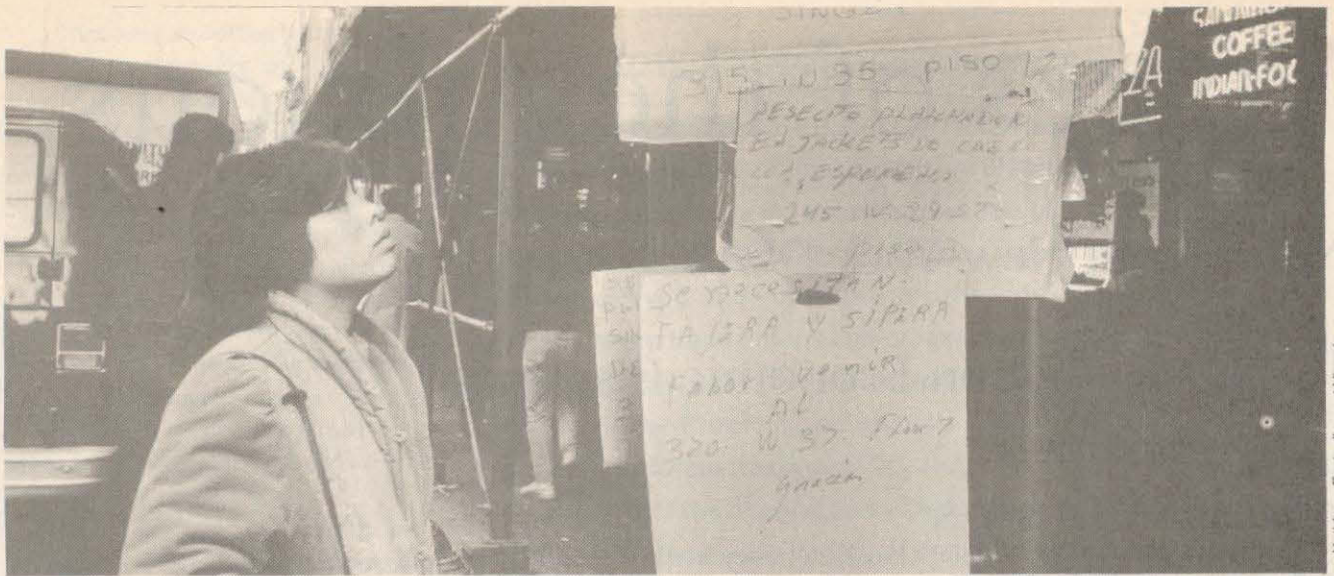
Let's look at the "wage squeeze" in the United States. Using the measure that Samuel Bowles, Thomas Weisskopf, and I have developed, real spendable hourly earnings for the bottom 80 percent of U.S. workers have not only declined by 11 percent since 1973, they have actually fallen back to a level last reached in 1965. This wage squeeze is arguably the most urgent problem facing working people and the left.

It appears, especially if you work in manufacturing, that our economy is being assaulted by import competition from low-wage developing countries. I joined with many others in opposing NAFTA as it was formulated on the grounds that the accord would quite likely result in a net reduction of wages and employment for U.S. workers. But, in fact, the effects were likely to

be quite small. Global competition is *not* the major culprit behind the wage squeeze. It accounts for a very small proportion of the decline over the last twenty years. There are two reasons for this. First, substantial competition tends to affect primarily those industries, such as manufacturing, which themselves are heavily engaged in trade. But the decline in wages in the *service* sector, which accounts for a vastly larger share of U.S. employment, has been equally severe. It's very difficult to attribute the pressure on wages in the service sector to global competition.

Second, economists, including most mainstream economists, have accumulated evidence that points to the decline of unionism and the real value of the minimum wage—and, more generally, the increasing power of corporations in their relationships with workers—as far more important contributing factors behind the wage squeeze. Of course we could argue that the decline in union power has been due to global import competition, but I think the underlying problem is the shift in power in the private sector between corporations and workers. Globalization accounts for relatively little of this shift.

Now let's consider the question of mobility. Capital and production are not as mobile as some on the left and right would have us believe. They paint a picture that suggests the roadrunner buzzing around the globe, stopping in one place to invest, then noticing, aha! wages are



Kathleen Foster/Impact Visuals

Looking at job notices in New York City.

lower somewhere else, and off he goes to invest there. But global capital—at least so far—has *not* been continuously fluid, searching for the lowest available wages.

Most studies over the last ten years suggest that wage costs have relatively little influence on where global capital locates. The institutional and political stability of a nation's environment has a much greater influence. By far the largest portion of U.S. foreign direct investment still goes to Canada and Europe. It's not going to Paraguay. Indeed, it's not going to Mexico. Moreover, the portion of U.S. foreign direct investment that *has* been going to developing countries has been concentrated in a few sites—just seven or eight countries out of the multitude of nations in which investment opportunities are available. Once again, those seven or eight countries do not offer the lowest wages among the developing countries. They offer instead particular kinds of political and institutional advantages—for example, arrangements to ensure the stability of exchange rates.

Here's a final factor to keep in mind about globalization: if globalization were the main culprit behind the wage squeeze, we could expect physically and economically large countries like the United States to suffer less than nations with fewer resources and smaller internal markets. But the evidence is just the opposite. The United States has suffered far *more* of a wage decline than, for instance, Germany, a country that is smaller, has fewer natural resources, and is much more exposed to the global economy. Income inequality in the 1980s increased sharply in the United States, but actually declined in Ger-

many. If we compare wage movements in twelve of the leading national economies, we see a flat line in the United States during the past twenty years. But the other eleven countries show average annual increases in real wages of 2.5 percent. That's as high a rate as we enjoyed during the boom years from 1948 to 1966.

Some analysts respond to these numbers by arguing that the other advanced countries have traded high wages for high unemployment. Yet this is not the case across the board. Japan has experienced the same 2.5 percent average real wage growth over that period, but their unemployment rates remain below 3 percent. Austria and Sweden enjoyed very ample real wage growth, and their unemployment rates remained quite low for most of that period. We should draw two important conclusions from this discussion. First, we can, in fact, live in a globalizing world economy and *not* pay the price that U.S. workers are now paying. And second, we should devote at least as high a priority to countering the power of corporations at home as we do to worrying about the lower wages of workers abroad. **DL**

*David Gordon teaches economics at the New School for Social Research in New York City. He is the author of the forthcoming *Fat and Mean: Corporate Bloat, The Wage Squeeze, and the Stagnation of Our Conflictual Economy* (Martin Kessler Books at the Free Press, 1996).*

This essay is based on an edited transcript of a talk given at the Socialist Scholars Conference on April 8, 1995.

Voices of the Anxious

Notes from New York DSA's

Town Meeting on Economic Insecurity

BY MIRIAM BENSMAN

Henrietta Gerald worked for Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx for 25 years, until she accepted a buyout offer last year from the City of New York intended to reduce the public payroll. "I was afraid if I didn't take the offer I would lose my job anyway," Henrietta explains. But she soon found out it isn't easy for a displaced hospital worker to get another job, no matter how long and steady her work history. On July 9, Gerald's unemployment insurance ran out. On August 27, she applied for welfare—and was turned down. By the end of October, she testified, "I don't know where to turn."

Idelfonso Cordero has been there for ten long and difficult years since he lost his job as a sheet metal mechanic. Despite occasional jobs as a trucker and a taxi driver, Cordero has sometimes been reduced to staying in homeless shelters; he now squeaks by with the help of Section 8 subsidized housing and a welfare grant. "I can't afford coffee or newspapers. Sometimes I have to sell my food stamps to get clothes or cover the phone bill," the UAW member says.

"I'm not here to complain. I think of myself as a survivor," Cordero says. "But it's very hard—and my youngest son is in an identical situation. He's in computers and can't get a job."

Stories like these give the lie to reports of a Great Economic Recovery—and to the idea that the free

market, unfettered by government regulations and handouts, will bring prosperity to all. Gerald and Cordero offered these testimonials during New York DSA's People's Hearing on Economic Insecurity on October 28. They put a human face on our society's growing pain. Policy experts, service providers, and organizers then attacked the Republican agenda and offered glimmers of an alternative program.

The hearing, chaired by Congressmembers Major Owens and Jerrold Nadler, was the second of twelve planned by DSA locals during the next year. With Republicans controlling both Houses of Congress, progressive legislation such as Ron Dellums' Living Wage/Jobs for All Act and Bernie Sanders' Corporate Responsibility Act can't get a hearing these days. Congressman Ron Dellums thus asked DSA to organize town meetings around the country that could begin to refocus the public debate and unite poor, working and middle-class people around a program for economic justice and growth.

"Nothing in the Republican program will stop poverty rates from rising and jobs and wages from declining," testified Mark Levinson, chief economist for District Council 37, American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees. "One thing that unites Giuliani and Gingrich is the belief that getting rid

of government will improve the state of the economy. There's one problem: There's no evidence it will work."

"It's shocking to me that no one is questioning whether the conservative way is the best way to promote growth," agreed Congressman Nadler. "Many economists show that putting more money in the hands of the poor and middle class is more effective, and that one dollar spent by the government has greater impact on the economy than one dollar spent by the private sector."

We have to put an end to the sterile debate, Nadler added, between conservatives who argue for growth through removing regulatory fetters and putting more money in the hands of the rich by reducing taxes, and liberals who argue for redistribution. "We need growth *with* fairness and equity, an industrial policy and investment in infrastructure and human capital."

Cutting welfare won't do it, noted Bianca Vela, mother of two, AFDC recipient and Dean's list student at Hunter College. "With the new workfare requirements in place, I see students forced to choose between getting an education or being forced to work in parks or sanitation at very low pay." Such rules may force Vela to give up the education that is offering her an escape from poverty, boosts her self-esteem and lets her help her own daughter with math.

"Are we committed to cultivating our human resources and harvesting them?" demanded Maureen Lane, a former drug abuser who also defies stereotypes by making Hunter's honors roll.

Just one day before the hearing, the Senate had approved a welfare bill that would eliminate AFDC as an entitlement for all poor children. "Farmers aren't means-tested for subsidies," thundered Congressman Owens. "When there's a flood or a hurricane, there's an entitlement. But for poor children, it's gone!"

Not that existing welfare programs are satisfactory. "Not until a head of household has an hourly wage of \$12, for 35 hours, can they meet the basic expenses needed for a family of four to survive in New York," testified Liz Krueger of the Community Food Resource Center. "The AFDC grant of \$684 is \$726 below what's needed for basic needs."

After all, added Keith Brooks, of the New York Unemployment Committee and the New York Committee for Jobs and Economic Justice, the official unemployment rate for New York City is 12 percent—and the unofficial rate is double that.

Workfare isn't a solution and it isn't work, Krueger added. "We are displacing decently paid workers with unpaid workers on welfare. And no matter how well you work on workfare, you can't get a raise or a promotion—and there are fewer jobs available because workfare took them."

Job training, too, isn't enough, added Deborah D'Amico. She should know: As deputy director of the Consortium for Worker Education, she says, "My job is to carry out worker education in the context of a jobless economy." Just a few years ago, people thought health care would provide jobs, she notes, but with health care facilities suffering devastating cuts, "we're not training people for jobs in health care, but trying to retrain dis-

DSA's town meetings project

As we've reported in the last two issues of *Democratic Left*, DSA locals throughout the country are planning town meetings on declining wages and the broader question of economic insecurity. The goals of this project are to bring the voices of the unemployed, underemployed, and uninsured into the public debate; to forge new links between trade unions and progressive social movements; and to focus on new policy proposals from the left, especially legislation like the House Progressive Caucus's Jobs for All/Living Wage Bill and the Corporate Responsibility Act.

The first of the hearings was held in Washington on September 27, and featured a wide variety of community activists, as well as a powerful speech by Congressman Bernie Sanders (I-VT).

The second hearing, held in New York on October 28, is described in the accompanying article by Miriam Bensman. The third was held in San Francisco on November 11; details of that meeting will be published in the next issue of DL. On January 28, Boston DSA will hold a hearing that has been co-sponsored by ACORN, the Immigrant Workers Resource Center, CWA District One, and many other organizations.

placed health care workers." "I worked with people from the Ronzoni factory in Queens that closed. I dealt with the people laid off from Alexander's Department Store. This Monday, I sat with laid off workers from the U.S. Accounting Office, who had Ph.Ds in economics. No matter what they do, there isn't much for them.

"I'd like to tell them we live in a society that values hard work and meritocracy, that they can do what I did—go to a free university," D'Amico added. "But the reality is people are working harder for less, in a society that is hostile to official action and unions and where minorities and women come last."

Times like these make it hard to believe there's a silver lining in the clouds, Nadler concluded morosely. But perhaps it's there, he added: "Maybe it's necessary every 75 or 100 years to remind the American people

what it's like to live in a capitalist society without a safety net or powerful trade unions. Working class and poor people are angry and looking for solutions."

"In America, socialists can't create mass movements," Marsha Borenstein, chair of New York DSA, commented after the hearing. "But we can help to shape—and build—movements that arise." With hearings like this, DSA hopes to help shape a new movement for economic security, growth and fairness. New York DSA plans to air a tape of the hearing on public access television and to organize at least one other hearing, in a different neighborhood, and with more emphasis on progressive policy alternatives. **DL**

Miriam Bensman is a writer and editor in New York City and a long-time DSA member.

A New Day for Labor

Next Steps After the Sweeney Slate's Victory

BY JEFF LACHER

Union members, brace yourselves. The AFL-CIO is about to do something extraordinary. Thanks to John Sweeney's successful insurgent campaign for the presidency of the AFL-CIO, labor leaders are talking seriously about organizing. The next era in American labor may see an emphasis on organizing not known since before the 1955 merger between the AFL and the CIO.

An exaggeration? Perhaps. But organizing has become so much of a buzzword around the federation that it has even caught the attention of corporate America.

"Management consultants" (read: union busters) have begun advertising conferences on "How to Stay Union-Free into the Twenty-First Century." It seems the high cost of hiring union-busting law firms has "forced" businesses to seek cheaper ways to keep unions out. So training schemes such as the one mentioned above have been developed.

Who better to do this training than those very same high-priced union-busting law firms? The firm of Jackson, Lewis, Schnitzler & Krupman has demonstrated that it is not beneath them to drum up business by creating conferences such as this.

The cost of the day-and-a-half conference is a cool \$995 per person, not including hotel accommodations. The organization that sponsors the program boasts five hundred conferences on a variety of anti-worker topics each year. When you consider that

they have had over 500,000 attendees since they began, you quickly realize that union-busting is itself big business. In fact, according to Martin Jay Levitt, author of *Confessions of a Union Buster*, it's a \$1 billion-plus industry.

The pamphlet advertising the conference uses scare tactics (a skill mastered by every union buster worth his or her salt) to get employers to attend.

Now we must concentrate on making sure that the Sweeney slate's promises are kept. The new thrust on organizing has been a long time coming—we can't afford to lose now.

The pamphlet implies that employers should prepare for battle because John Sweeney has pledged to train "1,000 new union organizers at the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute who, along with 1,000 volunteer college students, will participate in a massive organizing blitz next summer." Is corporate America afraid of a few thousand young organizers and college students?

Yes, but it's not that simple. Business is not so much afraid of the organizers themselves, or the amount of money spent; rather, they are afraid of the effect those people will have on

their workers.

Bosses know their workers are tired, frustrated, and often quite angry. They know that every organizer and every dollar devoted to organizing will help more workers stand up and demand decent working conditions. They know that every organizer and every dollar used for organizing will strip management of its ability to repress, oppress, and suppress their workers. They know that organizing creates change in the relationship between themselves and their workers.

Labor activists across the country deserve the credit for bringing organizing to the front of the AFL-CIO's agenda. Sweeney and other national labor leaders were by no means the first people to embrace this commitment. Now we must concentrate on making sure that the Sweeney slate's pledges are kept. Without a major organizing push, we'll give business a chance to fight us further with the skills taught by firms like Jackson, Lewis, Schnitzler & Krupman. This new thrust toward organizing has been a long time coming—we can't afford to lose now. **DL**

Jeff Lacher is an organizer with the Communications Workers of America.

This essay also appears in the November/December issue of the Labor Activist, the publication of the DSA Youth Section Labor Solidarity Committee. To subscribe to the Labor Activist, send a request to the national office.

"A Movement That Can Change Workers' Lives":

Excerpts from Resolutions Presented by the Sweeney Slate at the AFL-CIO Convention, October 23

Never have American working people and their unions been under greater assault. While we must always struggle to protect the jobs and security of our members, we cannot continue to fight—even successfully—only defensive battles. We must re-create the power to improve the lives of working people. Our members need to see a labor movement that is a powerful voice on behalf of their interests, and unorganized workers need to see a movement that can make their lives better. The Federation must be the fulcrum of a vibrant social movement, not simply a Federation of constituent organizations. It must facilitate greater inter-union solidarity and provide high-level, decisive sustenance to unions in need.

We must construct a labor movement that can change workers' lives. To do this we need to:

» **Create a Center for Strategic Campaigns** to coordinate all national contract campaign efforts by affiliates and the trade departments. Such a center would make use of resources in the national unions and the trade departments. It would also coordinate a national network of other resources outside the labor movement to support both bargaining and organizing campaigns, provide leadership to strategic campaigns, and train union officers and staff at all levels of the labor movement to build our capacity to conduct such campaigns.

» **Create a Strategic Campaign**

Fund that could provide grants to unions in important and difficult contract fights. It would be overseen by the Strategic Approaches Committee of the Executive Council which would prioritize and make recommendations for the use of the fund.

» **Create a Strike Support Team** of top leaders and staff from affiliations who can be deployed into important strikes in their early hours (even before a strike begins) as well as assist local leaders who have long running strikes invigorate their efforts with fresh talent and fresh tactics.

» **Create a Transnational Corporate Monitoring Project** which would coordinate and assist the efforts of the national union affiliates, their trade secretariats, and other groups, in their fights to protect American workers. This project would create one central resource for information on global corporate organizations. Such a project would help focus and support the efforts of American unions and coordinate these efforts with those of other national labor centers as well as developing multinational trade union efforts in Europe, Scandinavia, Latin America and elsewhere. This project would not be simply a research effort, but an active participant in support of every effort to achieve international solidarity on behalf of American workers.

In order simply to stop the decline of the labor movement, we need to gain more than a quarter of a million members every year — yet until re-

cently the labor movement has been losing about 100,000 members every year, and despite modest membership gains in the past two years, we are still declining as a portion of the workforce. If we are to regain our position of strength, representing one worker in three, we must add a million members a year for the next two decades.

More than anything else we do, we must find more resources for organizing and deploy those resources as effectively and strategically as possible. We need to:

» **Develop an Emergency Budget for the AFL-CIO** that moves substantial resources (at least \$20 million) into organizing over a short period of time.

» **Increase the funding to the Organizing Institute.** Ensure that the Institute has the ability to train organizers for all industries and occupations. Increase the organizing training focus of the Meany Center. Set a goal of training and deploying 1,000 new union organizers, with a special emphasis on women and minorities, by the next AFL-CIO Convention.

» **Develop a program to expand the concept of Member-Organizing,** training and motivating rank-and-file workers to organize the unorganized. Provide support to local coalition-building efforts with community, religious, civil rights and other organizations. Develop a network of local organizing centers to support union organizing drives. DL

Student Politics in the Age of Distrust

BY DAVID GLENN

If you're a long-time student activist, you'll probably cringe at the idea of a grand survey of campus politics with a title like *Generation at the Crossroads*. One of my darkest nightmares is that someone will publish a book-length version of the flat-footed "Return of the Sixties" articles *Time* and *Newsweek* publish every three or four years, whenever the student left catches their eye. These condescending reports—along with their only slightly less obtuse cousins in *The Nation* and *The Progressive*—usually reveal more about their authors' nostalgia than about actual challenges facing actual campus activists.

But this book isn't a bit condescending: Paul Rogat Loeb, a writer (and DSA member) whose activism began, yes, during the sixties, deftly avoids the traps of pop sociology and vacuous intergenerational comparisons. He places the diverse voices of contemporary student activists in the foreground of *Generation at the Crossroads*—almost a quarter of the text is composed of quotations from the subjects of Loeb's eight-year study of the student left. In the course of the book we hear from, among many others, the farm activist group FACTS, par-

ticipants in the City University of New York's ferocious access-to-education battles of 1989-90, and the University of Michigan's "Greeks for Peace." Only after presenting and reviewing the complex evidence of students' own voices does Loeb ever at-

REVIEWED IN THIS ESSAY

Generation
at the Crossroads:
Apathy and Action on the
American Campus

by Paul Rogat Loeb.
Rutgers University Press.

tempt to draw broad conclusions.

Loeb's humility and his evident skills as an interviewer make the book refreshing and smart on many different levels. When he explores the ways in which students' financial anxieties have drawn them away from campus activism—an argument that's often advanced simplistically and clumsily in both the mainstream and the left

press—his interviews provide a rare amount of complexity and nuance. Yes, there are a few stereotypical moral idiots out there ("I want a Mercedes 450SL someday. . . I have the uneasy feeling that if there is too much justice and equality in the world, the good life won't be there for me in the future"). But, as Loeb subtly demonstrates, most students' insularity and career-mindedness don't spring from anything as simple as pure greed or fear; instead, they're intimately tied to a sense that public attempts to expand freedom and justice are foolish or doomed to failure, that nobility exists only on the level of our private lives. As one quietly liberal law student explains her revulsion toward activism: "Maybe politics is just too messy for me. I don't like groups and what they do, don't like being part of the messy way they act."

Tens of thousands of students are not so despairing, and have devoted untold energies to building feminist, anti-racist, environmentalist, and socialist groups on campus. Loeb's book provides a wealth of stories that demonstrate these students' courage and hard work (although he also doesn't flinch from exploring the student

left's habits of arrogance, moralism, and insularity). The book will someday be a fine source for historians searching for the texture of the student movements against apartheid, contra aid, and the Gulf War.

Generation at the Crossroads ends with an excellent discussion of the personal traits and historical accidents that lead students—sometimes a few, sometimes many more—to adopt a commitment to personal responsibility and ethical engagement with the world. Student activists of the 1990s have tended to channel these commitments into small-scale, community-based projects that de-emphasize demands on the state. (The Student Environmental Action Coalition, the decade's most successful radical student group, embodies this style.) This pragmatic mode of politics has many virtues, of course—but, as Loeb suggests (see the sidebar quotation), it also has limitations. The young activist L.A. Kauffman has noted that student leftists today have a deep streak of anti-statism, and that our politics are different from those of our left ancestors in ways we don't always recognize. When trust—in the democratic state, and also in most other forms of human organization—is a low ebb, what motivates young people to try to expand the realms of freedom and justice? Those of us who devote our lives to building an organization with dreams as large as DSA's need to think seriously about this question. Paul Rogat Loeb's book is a good place to begin.

David Glenn is the Communications Coordinator of DSA and an editorial assistant at Dissent magazine. This essay originally appeared in the Summer 1995 issue of The Activist, the magazine of the DSA Youth Section. To subscribe to The Activist, contact Carmen Mitchell or Margie Burns at the DSA National Office.



Carolina Kroon/Impact Visuals

From Generation at the Crossroads:

A focus on the immediate tends to make active students pragmatic, to leave them placing less stress on grand ultimate visions than on the consequences of specific actions or choices. . . [Pragmatism] provides a check on abstract rhetorical politics with no links to complex social realities. It allows activists to work from what is, and to discover what ought to be through specific concrete successes. Those of us who want to change America would do well to remember the words of the priest who founded Spain's 21,000-member Mondragon worker co-op: "We build the road as we travel."

Pragmatism also cautions against trying to make social movements meet their participants' every personal need, and against an excess of righteousness. As political theorist Harry Boyte points out, it's dangerous to load politics up with needs for love, family, and a chorus of agreement on every issue. . .

Yet those who want to change this society should not accept a limiting of their dreams. They should accept neither the judgment of distant men of power that the routine indignities and needless tragedies of ordinary citizens are inevitable, nor the more subtle cultural dampening that breeds resignation even in the comfortable. The students need to be willing. . . to speak out even when it seems their words and actions do little apparent good. Activists need the practical, step-by-step march, but they also need to explore the deepest roots of particular ills—what the late Michael Harrington called "visionary gradualism." They need to ask what kind of society would do best do justice to human dignity and allow its members to live sustainably on the earth. They need then to ask how best to create it.

Breaking Bread in Colorado

BY WILLIAM J. MCIVER, JR.

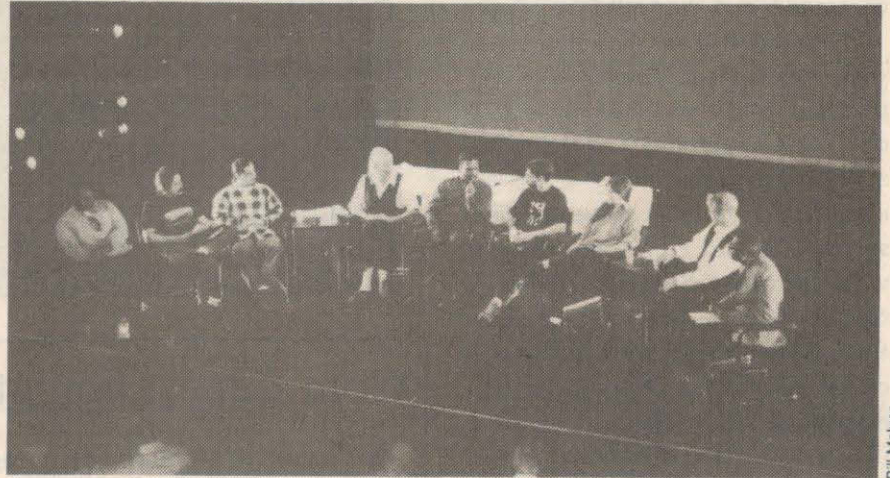
There was a time when folks saw the major movement force coming out of the Black community. Then the hottest thing became the Native Americans and the next, students' rights and the next, the anti-war movement or whatever. The movement force just rolled around, hitting various issues. Now, there were a few people who kept up with many of those issues.... They hold the key to turning the century with our principles and ideals intact. They can teach you how to cross cultures and not kill yourself....

— Bernice Reagon Johnson, *Coalition Politics: Turning the Century*, 1981

Colorado DSA initiated its Breaking Bread Project in the Summer of 1994. The goal of this project is to build a framework for dialogue that will help people and organizations in Colorado struggling for social justice to find common ground. Helping people and organizations to develop an understanding of the diverse perspectives surrounding various issues will facilitate more effective coalition building. Historically, the absence of this type of understanding has left coalitions fragile, subject to dissolution over the slightest miscommunication; and, it has left communities ill-prepared to mobilize support from other communities to confront political threats.

In January 1995, a small group of activists formed the Colorado Breaking Bread Project as an independent, non-profit organization, registered with the state of Colorado.

On October 8, the Colorado Breaking Bread Project held its first major dialogue project event. We invited several highly experienced activists from various organizations and communities within Colorado to partici-



Bill McIver

pate in this first dialogue. Our hope was that this event would catalyze an ongoing dialogue among all of the day's participants.

The event was held at the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Theatre in Denver and was sponsored by Colorado DSA with support from the Chinook Fund. The participants were: Mark Cohen of Colorado New Jewish Agenda; Don Holstrom of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union and Colorado Coalition for Single Payer; Arturo Jimenez of Todos Unidos Contra La 187; Greg Johnson, American Friends Service Committee; Judith Mohling of Colorado Peace Mission & Boulder Progressive Coalition; Leslie Moody of Jobs with Justice; Greg Rowley of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Resource Center; and Chet Whye, Jr. of National Rainbow Coalition of Colorado. The moderator was urban folk poet Wardell Montgomery, Jr.

During two sessions, the dialogue focused on forms and strategies for cooperative activism used by the panelists and their organizations. Topics included the need to "create one radical at a time," through personal interaction; sectarianism in the trade

union movement; the importance of recognizing the full range of political opinions among people of color; and how to interact with organizations and groups with whom we don't feel immediately comfortable.

Midway through the program, several artistic performances were given. Urban folk poet Wardell Montgomery, Jr. offered the audience several social commentaries through poetry. A politically charged rap music performance was given by Denver-based artist Jeannie Madrid. Finally, the Rev. Marjory Williams-Cooper gave a dramatic reading based on oral histories of the African-American slave experience.

Participation and feedback from participants were overwhelmingly positive. Our major immediate follow-up project will be the Breaking Bread Media Project, which will produce monthly one-hour television programs and also provide local organizations with technical assistance in creating their own broadcasts.

For more information about the Colorado Breaking Bread Project, write P.O. Box 102464, Denver, Colorado 80250-2464, or call 303/666-5064. **DL**

Commission Notes

DSA Latino Commission Builds New Bridges in Sacramento

The DSA Latino Commission has been extremely active in Sacramento, California during the past several months. In the face of new policy attacks on immigrants and people of color in California, the commission has been aggressively forging relationships with civil rights groups, trade unions, and other organizations. Under the umbrella of the Sacramento Civil Rights Network, the Sacramento Valley left is more united and vocal than it has been in several years.

On July 21, DSA Honorary Chair Dolores Huerta and DSA Latino Commission Chair Eric Vega testi-

fied in defense of affirmative action programs at a meeting of the Regents of the University of California.

Early in the fall semester, the commission and the Committees of Correspondence co-sponsored a day-long "Freedom School" at California State-Sacramento. Over twenty students attended the event, which led to the founding of a DSA Youth Section chapter.

The commission later initiated an enormous teach-in on Indigenous People's Day. Over 300 people attended this event, which was also devoted to affirmative action questions.

OWENS

—continued from page 3

demands a 25 percent increase in funding for education. The Republicans have voted zero for next year's Summer Youth Employment Programs.

» Fight to stop all cuts in Medicaid as well as Medicare. The nation still needs a National Health Insurance program with universal coverage.

» Fight to end the monstrous cuts in HUD programs for low-income housing. More than seven billion dollars have already been cut. That is already too much taken from the poorest families in the nation, especially the homeless.

» Fight to support the retention of adequate wages and pension for the military, federal workers, and other public service workers.

» Fight to increase the minimum wage, to guarantee the right to organize unions, to end striker replacement, and to maintain safe and healthy conditions in the workplace.

» Fight to balance the nation's tax burden, lowering taxes on families and individuals while forcing corporations to pay their fair share. At present corporations cover only 11 percent of the tax burden, while individuals and families shoulder 44 percent of the tax load.

» Fight for cuts in defense that downsize the CIA, the overseas bases, and wasteful weapons.

» Fight for an increase in funding for youth crime prevention programs and for a decrease in the billions being voted to build prisons.

» Fight for an increase in foreign aid to Africa, the Caribbean, Haiti, and other third world nations to assist with vital health and education needs.

Rep. Major Owens has been a member of Congress since 1984. He represents eastern and central Brooklyn, New York. This essay is adapted from a statement he released on October 16.

The next issue of Democratic Left will include additional perspectives on the Million Man March and the future of anti-racist politics.

Directory of DSA Commissions

❖ African

American Commission

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

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

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

❖ Anti-Racism Commission

Duane Campbell, *chair*

newsletter:
Our Struggle/Nuestra Lucha
(see above)

❖ Commission on Socialism & Environment

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

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

❖ Feminist Commission

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

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

❖ Latino Commission

Eric Vega, *chair*

newsletter:
Our Struggle/Nuestra Lucha
(see above)

❖ Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Commission

(in transition; new convenors will be elected soon)

❖ Commission on Religion and Socialism

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

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

On the Left

by Harry Fleischman

Illinois

University of Chicago DSA is organizing in solidarity with the locked-out workers at the A.E. Staley plant in Decatur. DSAers are leading the campus campaign to force Pepsico, one of Staley's major customers, to stop buying corn sweetener from them until the Decatur union's rights have been respected. (Pepsico also happens to be the corporate parent of the University's food service.) The campus campaign has involved petitions, demonstrations, and informational meetings. (For information about doing Staley support activism in your community, call 217/872-2209. Also, please call Pepsi at 800/433-2652 and ask them to drop Staley as a supplier.)

The U of C chapter is also planning Chicago's town meeting on economic insecurity (see page 6) and laying the ground for action at the 1996 Democratic National Convention, which will be held in Chicago.

Massachusetts

Boston DSA has hired Elliot Ratzman, an experienced Harvard/Radcliffe DSA activist, as a part-time organizer. Sixty members of the local met for a retreat and barbeque in August to plan strategy for the coming year. Their major activity for the next several months will be organizing a town meeting on economic insecurity (see page 6).

On November 16, the local sponsored a forum entitled "Is Corporate America History's '24-Hour Bug'?" Speakers included Chuck Collins of the Share the Wealth Campaign and Richard Grossman of the

Program on Corporations, Law, and Democracy.

In the spring of 1996, the local will offer a course on "Rethinking Socialism and the Left." The course will examine different facets of our heritage and explore which should be maintained, which should be jettisoned, and which new elements should be absorbed to help resolve the current crisis of the left.

And let's not forget to congratulate Boston DSA's legendary softball team, the DSOX, for their accomplishments in 1995. Their regular-season record of 11-3 was the best in their league, and they won a tough semifinal game against Peace Action. Sadly, though, they lost the next week's finals to Rhythm and Blues by a score of 13-6. As Marx wrote, "Today's production of a certain mass of yarn, coal, etc., is not necessarily followed by tomorrow's production of yarn, coal, etc."

Minnesota

University of Minnesota DSA is inviting students, trade union activists, staff, and teachers to come together to discuss support for workers at the university, who are facing a wage freeze. The chapter has also been working with the Twin Cities New Party in support of the St. Paul Jobs Initiative. Finally, the chapter will be hosting the *Nationmobile*, *The Nation's* traveling caravan, as it wings its way across the Twin Cities. *Nationmobilers* will meet with U of Minn. DSAers to discuss the state of the media.

New Hampshire

New Hampshire DSA, our newest local, organized during the summer and now has a membership of just over sixty. Two DSA members sit in New Hampshire's Republican-controlled state legislature. The local produces a bimonthly newsletter, *Progressive New Hampshire*, and is working with the American Friends Service Committee to organize a public hear-

ing on economic insecurity. The local is also developing a resource guide to help New Hampshire residents pose progressive questions during the presidential primary campaign this winter. Check out the local's site on the World Wide Web:

<http://www.mv.com/users/jgidding/DSA.html>.

Ohio

Oberlin College DSA has decided to focus its energy on labor solidarity this semester. They have traveled to the WCI steel mill in Warren, where workers have been locked out. And they are working to discourage Oberlin students from shopping at the non-union Super K-Mart store in Lorain, where the United Food and Commercial Workers has been doing informational pickets. Later in the year they will co-sponsor a week of activism and education in defense of affirmative action.

Central Ohio DSA's active membership continues to increase. Its monthly meetings average fifteen people, and during the last year it has played a prominent role in the Columbus left's rallies against the Contract With America—most recently a 500-person demonstration that shut down downtown traffic. They have resumed publication of a monthly newsletter and continue to work on the public-access television program *From the Democratic Left*.

Mahoning Valley DSA hosted DSA Field Coordinator Carmen Mitchell in early October. Carmen met with high school activists and with progressive faculty members at Youngstown State University.

Pennsylvania

New activists, especially first-year students, have been flooding into Bryn Mawr College DSA. The chapter sponsored a panel discussion on defending affirmative action early in the semester. They're also exploring campus unionization issues and planning to do voter registration work in Philadelphia later in the year.

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Religion & Socialism Commission
Religious Socialism



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Camp Hill, PA 17001-0080
717-766-2114
email: curt182@aol.com

Internet:

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

—TOGETHER—

“Institutions of power have great strength. Too often the systems humanity lives and works under are systems not of life, but of death. It is through the just distribution of power that democratic socialism claims to choose life. And only together in the spirit, in communities and movements — religious, social, political and economic— can we as religious democratic socialists, hope to choose life in its fullness.”

—CHOOSE LIFE—

“We welcome all who are committed to life, to the life that is destroyed by pollution, starvation, racism, war, nuclear holocaust, to join with us in implementing the essence of all our visions: choose life.”

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— Religion & Socialism Commission

“...to be religious there must be a compelling vision of what in our judgement ‘ought to be,’ in our case, some form of religion.”

— Theodore A. Webb

Books, Videos, Etc. Available From DSA!

Which way is left?: some essential reading

❑ **New! *The Snarling Citizen: Essays*
by Barbara Ehrenreich**

A stunning new collection of essays by a DSA Honorary Chair.
Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1995, cloth, \$20.00.

❑ ***A Critic's Notebook*
by Irving Howe**

The final book of essays by DSA's late Honorary Chair.
With an introduction by Nicholas Howe.
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1994, 364 pages, softcover, \$14.00.

❑ ***Keeping Faith*
by Cornel West**

A new collection of essays on philosophy and race. Confronts the questions surrounding identity politics, Critical Legal Studies, the legacies of the civil rights movement, and more.
Routledge Press, 1993, softcover, \$16.00.

❑ ***Ethnic Nationalism:
The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia*
by Bogdan Denitch**

Reflections on the political and social forces that led to catastrophe in the former Yugoslavia.
University of Minnesota Press, 1994, softcover, \$17.95.

❑ ***Letters from Lexington: Reflections on Propaganda*
by Noam Chomsky**

A collection of essays analyzing *The New York Times*.
Common Courage Press, 1993, 170 pages, softcover, \$10.95.

❑ ***The Worst Years of Our Lives:
Irreverent Notes From a Decade of Greed*
by Barbara Ehrenreich**

A collection of shorter pieces by DSA Honorary Chair Barbara Ehrenreich.
Serious but fun.
Harper-Collins, 1991, 275 pages, softcover, \$10.00.

❑ ***A Margin of Hope*
by Irving Howe**

The classic memoir by DSA's late Honorary Chair.
HBJ, 1982, 252 pages, softcover, \$7.00.

Left video mania

❑ ***Manufacturing Consent:
Noam Chomsky and the Media***

a film by Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick
An eye-opening exploration of Chomsky's life and thought.
Zeitgeist Films, 1993, 166 minutes, \$59.95.

❑ ***The Concert for Jobs, Peace, and Freedom*
Featuring Billy Bragg, Pete Seeger, and Gretchen Reed**

A classic evening of song and humor featuring some of the left's favorite entertainers.
DSA, 1991, \$20.00.

Tools for radicals

❑ ***Organizing for Social Change:
A Manual for Activists in the 1990s*
by Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max**

An incomparable handbook.
Seven Locks Press, 1991, 271 pages, softcover, \$20.00.

❑ ***The Activist's Almanac:
The Concerned Citizen's Guide
to the Leading Advocacy Organizations in America*
by David Walls**

A stunningly thorough and useful directory.
Simon and Schuster, 1993, 271 pages, softcover, \$18.00.

❑ ***The Quickening of America:
Rebuilding Our Nation, Remaking Our Lives*
by Paul Martin Du Bois and Frances Moore Lappé**

Strategies for building community-based democratic movements and revitalizing our public life.
Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994, 338 pages, softcover, \$15.00.

❑ ***Back Off! How to Confront and Stop
Sexual Harassment and Harassers*
by Martha J. Langelan**

Creative, non-violent techniques women can use to protect their social environments from sexist aggression.
Fireside Books, 1993, 380 pages, softcover, \$12.00.

Society pages

Battling Bias: The Struggle for Identity and Community on College Campuses

by Ruth Sidel

"Ruth Sidel brings sweet reason and objectivity to a subject best known for deranged conservative paranoia."—Barbara Ehrenreich.

Penguin, 1994, 290 pages, softcover, \$11.95.

Violent Spring

by Gary Phillips

Black private eye Ivan Monk makes his debut in this mystery novel set in post-riot L.A.

West Coast Crime, 1994, 275 pages, softcover, \$9.00.

The New American Poverty

by Michael Harrington

A challenging analysis of poverty in the context of new economic patterns.

Penguin Books, 1984, 270 pages, softcover, \$9.00.

The history corner

Socialism and America

by Irving Howe

Notes on the history of socialism in America from the time of Eugene Debs to the present.

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, 218 pages, softcover, \$7.00.

After the Flood: World Politics and Democracy in the Wake of Communism

by Bogdan Denitch

Denitch reflects on the historical implications of the demise of Leninism. Thoughtful and timely.

Wesleyan University Press, 1992, softcover, \$17.00.

The Mean Season: The Attack on the Welfare State

by Fred Block, Richard A. Cloward, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Frances Fox Piven

A healthy, historically-grounded antidote to conservative rhetoric.

Pantheon Books, 1987, 205 pages, softcover, \$9.00.

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Recent works by Cornel West

Race Matters

by Cornel West

The bestselling collection of essays by DSA Honorary Chair Cornel West. Broad, insightful, prophetic thinking.

Beacon Press, 1993, hardcover, \$15.00.

Breaking Bread:

Insurgent Black Intellectual Life

by bell hooks and Cornel West

This provocative and captivating dialogue discusses issues ranging from theology and the left to contemporary music, film and fashion.

South End Press, 1991, 271 pages, \$14.00.

Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times

by Cornel West

Reflections on the preservation of "non-market" values.

Common Courage Press, 1993, 210 pages, \$15.00

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Dear Margie

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

Dear Margie,

How well does DSA embody the "Democratic" in its name? Who exactly makes the decisions about DSA's political and organizational goals and strategies?

—Puzzled in Port Huron

Dear Puzzled,

The highest decision-making body of the organization is the DSA National Convention, a public meeting held every two years. (This year's Convention was held in Washington, D.C., during the weekend of November 10-12; look for a full report in the next issue of *Democratic Left*.) Delegates to the Convention are elected by DSA locals across the country; DSA members who live in areas where there are no locals may attend as at-large delegates. Delegates to the National Convention debate and vote on DSA's fundamental political and organizational goals. In theory, all of DSA's work for the next two years flows from the resolutions passed by the National Convention.

The volunteer body responsible for developing and supervising this work is the National Political Committee (NPC). At each National Convention, twenty-four delegates are elected to serve on this body. The DSA Constitution requires that at least half of the NPC's members must be women, and that at least one quarter of them must be people of color. One member of the NPC is elected separately by the Youth Section.

The NPC gathers three or four times each year for weekend-long meetings. (Members of the NPC also elect a six-person NPC Steering Committee, which meets monthly by conference call.) Meetings are devoted to giving flesh to DSA's political and

organizational goals, creating commissions and task forces, and setting guidelines for the national staff about how to carry out DSA's day-to-day work.

There are numerous proposals, amendments, and resolutions to be voted on, and then there are the "vision" questions to grapple with, such as: "Can a socialist movement survive without offering a tangible vision of what socialism might look like?"

It is the NPC that: evokes or revokes charters for locals; creates internal committees to deal with education, DSA's budget, local development, personnel, and *Democratic Left*.

Minutes of NPC and the NPC Steering Committee meetings are recorded by DSA staff and distributed monthly through "key list" mailings, which are sent to DSA's Honorary Chairs and Vice Chairs, locals, campus chapters, and commissions. Any DSA member is welcome to receive these key list mailings; just send us a request. These meeting minutes are also a regular feature in the back section of *Socialist Forum*, DSA's discussion bulletin.

On the national level, DSA's democratic structures are based on a traditional (some might say old-fashioned) representative model. Note, however, that DSA's locals, commissions, and Youth Section chapters are free to experiment with more innovative and participatory structures—as long as these structures remain fundamentally democratic.

The next issue of *Democratic Left* will include a full report on the 1995 National Convention, with details on the resolutions passed and profiles of the DSA members elected to serve on the 1996-97 NPC.

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B. Paid and/or requested circulation		
1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales	0	0
2. Paid or requested mail subscriptions	8,675	10,561
C. Total paid and/or requested circulation	8,675	10,561
D. Free distribution by mail (samples, complimentary, and other free)	1,013	1,031
E. Free distribution outside the mail	2,000	2,000
F. Total free distribution	3,013	3,031
G. Total distribution	11,688	13,592
H. Copies not distributed		
1. office use, left over, spoiled	1,112	908
2. return from news agents	0	0
I. Total	12,800	14,500
Percent paid and/or requested circulation	68%	73%

I certify that the statements made by me above are true and complete/John McMurria, Financial Coordinator.

It's been two years since I became DSA's National Director. This is a good vantage point from which to evaluate our recent progress and to look toward our future challenges.

In the past two years we have concentrated our efforts on (1) augmenting the administrative and political work of the national office; (2) developing a more effective fund raising capacity; (3) communicating more with our far-flung membership, and (4) strengthening our activist base in the locals and student chapters. These improvements must continue, and it is my intention to make sure that they do.

At the same time, we must start acting so that we have genuine impact in the current political crisis, and so that we help build the foundation for a broad, vibrant *next left*.

Of course, the socialist movement is a marginal force in American politics, but we do not accept this as permanent. Now, it is our central mission to achieve a political breakthrough and to take considerable risks in doing so. This month's DSA National Convention (November 10-12) signals for me the beginning of this risk-taking.

We are not alone in this new emphasis on risk-taking. The labor movement—long a bastion of immobility and institutional conservatism—has just embarked on a new course that could very well open up immense opportunities for a resurgent left. In the Labor Day issue of *Democratic Left*, Harold Meyerson argued that today, of all the social movements, the greatest progressive impetus is taking place in the house of labor. Perhaps the AFL-CIO's new spirit of risk-taking will be embraced by other social movements.

What should DSA's role be in this emerging culture of risk-taking and renewal? Obviously, we are not going

to sit back and watch events unfold. That would violate the very principles on which DSA was founded. The socialist left should be the most advanced component of a reconstituted progressive movement. We should not just be encouraging these developments; we should be in the forefront, making them happen outside and inside our ranks. If key institutions are beginning to grope toward a new strategy and program for a *next left*, we must be at least one step ahead. Our *raison d'être* is to point the way.

Indeed, there are more opportunities for the socialist left to make a difference, and for an organization like DSA to "point the way," than has been the case for at least forty years. Our customary thinking has been that the

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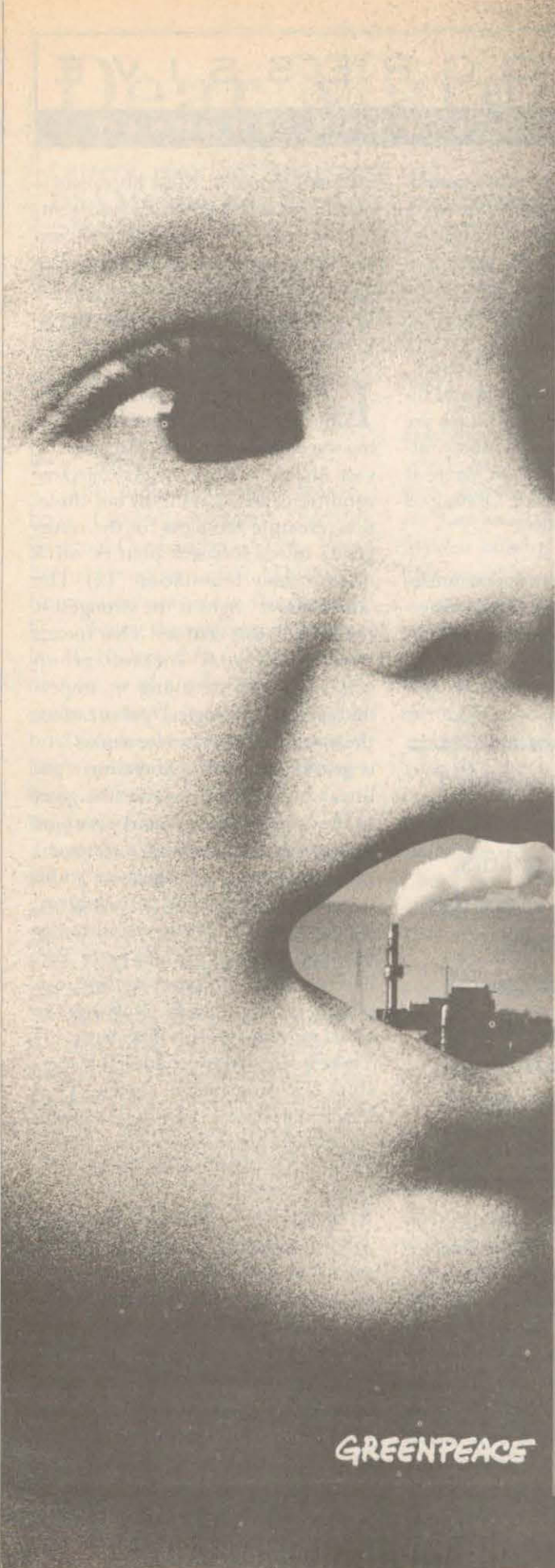
socialist movement can only thrive on the back of a great mass movement. That is, we attract and influence the "most advanced elements" of this mass movement, propelling it to the left. This was the dynamic that built the New Left, for example, on the base of the Civil Rights and anti-war movements. But this is not the only way to build the left—and it is not necessarily the best way. Today, there is a very

different dynamic. Mass liberalism is moribund and the right is resurgent. Today we face the possibility of consolidating a *next left* that itself would be an absolutely necessary condition for the emergence of new mass movements.

Let's examine this dynamic piece by piece. (1) This an era of declining wages and living standards for the vast majority. That means objective conditions are working in our direction, creating the basis for the resurgence of class-based politics on a majoritarian foundation. (2) The "free-market" right is the strongest it has been in this century. That means that traditional interest-group corporatism is declining in importance, and ideological polarization, the most fertile ground for a mass left, is growing. (3) Mass liberalism's political and institutional decline gives us an opening to carve our *next left* that can be the *center* of a resurgent progressivism. (4) Progressive social movements, despite all of their ideas, energy, and hard work, are currently less than the sum of their parts. Perhaps a revived union movement can play a central role in unifying the social movements on a class basis. (5) There is no effective national leadership for progressive forces. That means the space is there for the socialist left to provide leadership -- strategic, programmatic, and visionary leadership.

What's wrong with taking the risks to consolidate a *next left* on the remnants of mass liberalism? When the next mass upsurge occurs, socialists will not be on its left, but right in its center.

It is a bit unsettling—to be so optimistic in such a reactionary era. But I'm convinced that these opportunities are real, and that DSA is uniquely positioned to seize them.



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