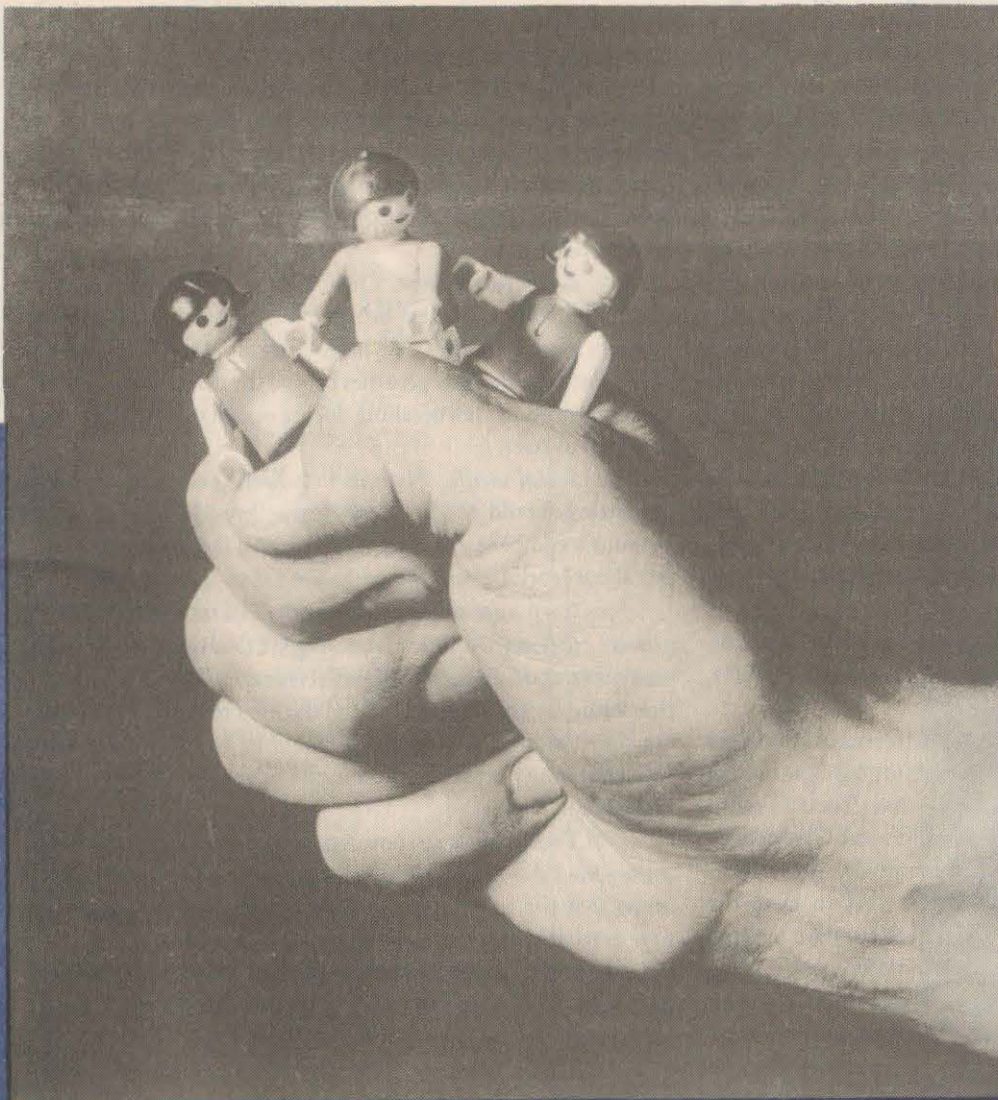


DEMOCRATIC

EFT

MAY/JUNE 1996
VOLUME XXIV NUMBER 3
\$1.50

PUBLISHED BY THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA



**Crib Sheet for the
Democrats**

**Further Reflections
on the French
Strikes**

**AND MUCH
MUCH MORE!**

**Passing the Torch:
Maxine Phillips on Democratic Parenting
& the Left's Family Values**

Crib Sheet for the Democrats

BY HAROLD MEYERSON

At first glance, the Republicans are stumbling toward summer with their two leading figures: a presidential nominee-to-be who can neither say what he would do as president nor deliver legislation on the floor of the Senate, and a House Speaker who is about as widely beloved as Louis Farrakhan. But they have more serious problems, too.

Foremost among these is that the subject has changed—the subject of American politics, that is. No longer is government the only demon that stalks the land and makes children cry in the night. It's been joined by another demon—corporate America, the Great Downsizer itself. The anti-government, neo-populism of the right, dominant these past 20 years, has at last been joined by old-style economic populism. The Republicans are dumbfounded, have nothing to say. (Gas prices up 40 cents? Uh, let's cut a four-cent gas tax hike of three years ago that had no discernible effect on gas prices at the time!)

By rights, then, this should be the moment that the Democrats rediscover their populism. Some have. Others put theirs in the attic decades ago and now can't remember where. As the debate has turned to increasing wages and empowering workers, the Democratic Leadership Council-types have fallen mute, while such recently marginal figures as Dick Gephardt, David Bonior, and Ted Kennedy, not to mention the AFL-CIO, have taken center stage.

What part Bill Clinton will play in this unfolding drama remains unclear. Consultant Dick Morris is urging Clinton that it is enough for him to be the Anti-Newt—that Clinton's status as all that stands between the nation and wall-to-wall Gingrichism will in itself hold the left and win the center this November. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin argues that to keep the economy chugging along, the Democrats need to retain the confidence of Wall Street. Besides, Clinton himself is not the guy for class warfare (except, of course, NAFTA, when he was on the other side.) He supports a good-guy list of corporate employers, but the thought of condemning an actual existing corporation is apparently way too confrontational.

But class warfare is already raging in America. A narrow stratum of shareholders prospers while the vast majority of wage earners tread water at best. What's new—and we can thank the Sweeneyization of labor and the Buchananization of the Republicans for this—is that it's become an issue.

The Democrats in general and Clinton in particular have been presented with a clear challenge. They cannot deliver for their constituents, current and potential, without changing the balance of power between working people and corporations. That means favoring policies such as:

Growth. Bob Dole argues that judicial appointments are too important to be left to the American Bar Association to rate; the Democrats should counter that the growth rate is too important to be left to bankers to set. The Federal Reserve should be wrested from bankers' control and a higher rate of real growth permitted.

Labor law reform. Once the minimum wage has been raised, the way to address broader wage stagnation is to give workers more leverage at the bargaining table and in the workplace. Putting some real penalties behind the now-symbolic strictures on corporate lawbreaking during organizing drives would be a way to start.

Social tariffs. Nations that keep their workers from organizing should not be allowed to sell products in the U.S. without a compensatory fee. It's time the Democrats got serious about levelling up.

Corporate democratization. Talk about bargaining power: corporate America is one big CEO union. They sit on each other's boards and vote themselves raises. Ending that practice would be just one small if popular step toward democratizing corporations. A larger step would be to move to worker and community representation in the boardroom equal to that of shareholders'.

These are not just positions the Democrats need to enact if they hold the White House and retake the Hill. Americans know that the balance of power between themselves and the new corporate order is profoundly out of whack. They will respond to plausible proposals to right that balance. The Democrats gain credibility from engaging that issue with a populist campaign.

This is not to say that the differences between even a non-populist Clinton and a Dole fronting for Gingrich are trivial; they are anything but. Clinton does indeed stand between us and a return to pure-bred 19th century capitalism. But he, and his party, have the option of becoming more than just the negation of reaction. There is space—and now is the time—to wage a populist campaign, to champion a more democratic nation.

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

DEMOCRATIC

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Democratic Left (ISSN 016403207) is published bimonthly at 180 Varick Street, New York, NY 10014. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY (Publication No. 0701-9602). Subscriptions: \$8 regular; \$15 institutional. Postmaster: Send address changes to 180 Varick Street, New York, NY 10014. *Democratic Left* is published by the Democratic Socialists of America, 180 Varick Street, New York, NY 10014. (212) 727-8610. Signed articles express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of the organization.

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cover: Photo by Maggie Murray/
Impact Visuals.

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Passing the Torch: The Left's Family Values

BY MAXINE PHILLIPS

The right wing may have captured the flag and the family values mantra that goes with it, but the question of values is no less important to left-wing parents. "I don't expect my children to lead DSA someday or be on the barricades," says NPC member Steve Tarzynski. "If they have our values and are happy, that's enough for me. They know that they're supposed to make the world a little bit better place in their own way." But how do leftist parents transmit values?

"Serious parents are always thinking about what they're doing, always re-working their approaches," says Ron Aronson, father of 19-year-old Nina and 27-year-old Pamela and coordinator of DSA's Center for Democratic Values. "There is no formula." He echoes what all parents learn sooner or later: you can't make children into what you want.

Approaches to childrearing among DSA parents we spoke with ranged from what one father called "traditional" (by which he meant non-authoritarian but firm) to others who spoke of empowerment and flexibility. What they had in common was a commitment to spending time with their children, modeling their values, providing opportunities for children to practice the values and discuss issues, and being connected to a larger community and tradition that would reinforce the values. Although it wasn't spelled out, all the parents assumed that we were talking about values of fairness—economic, racial, and gender equity at the very least.

The questions start early, and everyone finds their own answers. For Jay Hughes and Monica Bock, parents of Althea Adriana, age three, and Tristan James, age six months, major issues have been hospital birth vs. home birth, pacifiers, co-family sleeping, gendered clothing, and television. "Pacifiers aren't PC," says

Jay, "but we used them for our first." Although they have not dressed the children in gendered clothing, "the three-year-old is beginning to prefer girls' clothing."

Their three-year-old is similar in that regard to three-year-old Sasha, daughter of former DSA executive director Michael Lighty. What upsets Lighty, though, is "the way Disney invades our lives." Like most of the U.S. population, he has been unable to shield his child from the sexist, racist, and homophobic themes and images of the popular cartoons. Lighty, who is gay, shares parenting with his own partner and Sasha's mother and her partner.

"I think that what I'm doing as a gay man raising a child with a lesbian is reflective of a socialist commitment to an alternative society," he says. In his parenting, "I want to empower her, so I'm inclined to negotiate so that the limits I set are not unreasonable." Still, he worries that he's not doing enough to counter the materialism and sexist messages around her.

Opposition to mainstream culture is a constant motif in the lives of parents. "You learn a different kind of political patience," says long-time activist Stan Shapiro, father of Ben, 12, and Sarah, 16. "You don't want the outer culture to get a foothold in your own house, but you know you're going to have to give up some territory and then reclaim it" at a later age.

Bowen Alpern has been able to throw up more defenses for the moment. He and his wife, Robin, are homeschooling Lincoln, 8, and Julian Rose, 4, in upstate New York. Although nationally most homeschooling is done by Christian fundamentalists who are also worried about the materialist culture, there are

Opposition to mainstream culture is a constant motif in the lives of DSA parents.

progressives in the homeschooling movement, and Lincoln and Julian have other friends whose families share similar values. But Bowen has no illusions. "This is our chance to make different mistakes," he observes wryly.

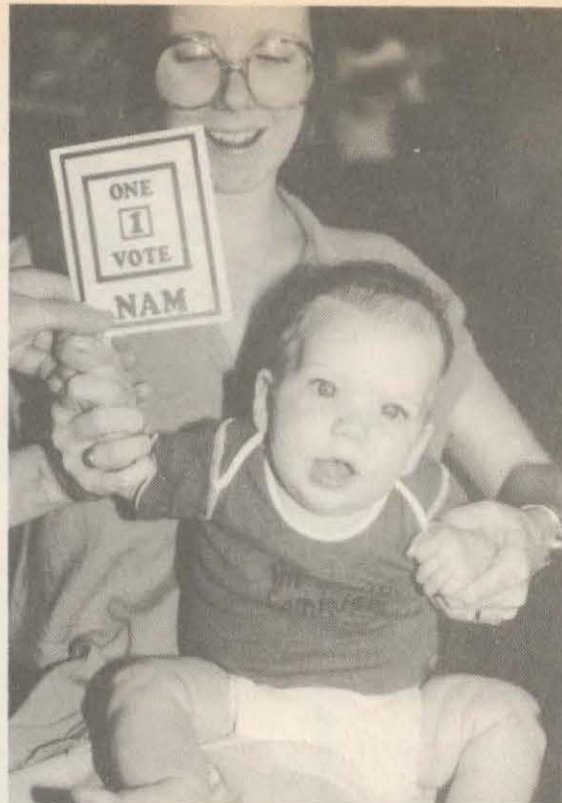
"You're trying to raise children into the world," says Aronson, "and you both want to protect them from it and help them become strong enough to live in it. The question is how much of the world you absorb for them in protecting them." For parents who question authority and the current economic and social system, there are endless decisions about how much to assert one's own authority, how much to protect children, and when to let them make their own way.

"My sister and I used to think we should have more say in things because our parents were so progressive," says 26-year-old Joanna Cagan, daughter of Steve and Beth Cagan, former DSAers and still political activists. "But they were clearly the parents." She laughed thinking of a picket line she and her sister, Shauna, had staged in the dining room to protest a parental decision. "I can't remember the issue, but I remember feeling that we could protest it."

Whether the parents set more or fewer limits, all were committed to openness and communication. "You have to be willing to take criticism if you're going to give it," says Steve Tarzynski. Kathie Sheldon, who, with Tarzynski, is parent to Ben, 10, and Mercie, 15, believes that the most important way they have integrated a progressive approach into their lives is by modeling a 50/50 split in household work. Steve and Kathie are also very aware of the importance of having a like-minded community around them. They belong to a babysitting co-op with other progressives and their children go to a progressive public school. However, "you have to be in mass organizations," says Steve, who has coached his daughter's Little League and his son's soccer team.

Because the children have been brought up to see theirs as the "normal view of the world—being connected to basic principles that support your values and give meaning to word and deed," they have had some unpleasant shocks about the persistence of injustice. When Proposition 187, the anti-immigrant legislation, was clearly winning, "our children were very upset watching the returns on television," recalls Steve. On the spur of the moment the whole family piled into the car and drove downtown to what should have been a victory rally for the anti-forces. "We hadn't planned to go, but we wanted to show them that people would keep on fighting."

Still, the Sheldon-Tarzynskis live in liberal Santa Monica, where the mayor is a DSA member. For Joanna Cagan, growing up in Cleveland, the hardest thing was "feeling alienated and so different from friends, feeling fear that my parents were choosing a harder road."



S. Tarzynski

Kathie Sheldon with daughter Mercie Sheldon-Tarzynski, voting at the 1981 NAM Convention.

Ten years ago, for a *Democratic Left* article on how DSA could be more family-friendly, the Cagans said that Joanna, who was doing anti-apartheid work at the time, felt isolated as an activist.

Looking back, Joanna asks, "What are the teen years if not isolating? Was it just because my parents were radicals?" She felt different for everything from her parents' politics to the unmatched living room furniture. "My parents explained that we had to set priorities for how we spent our money, and having money to take family trips together was more important than having new furniture."

She remembers being excited when she went to college because "I thought I could remake myself, not be under their influence any longer. But that didn't last long." And eventually, "the reasons I was feeling isolated were reasons I would come to value." Joanna has remained politically active and is currently a member of the editorial collective of *Brooklyn Metro Times*, "a 'zine for progressive Brooklyn."

Mercie Sheldon-Tarzynski appreciates learning to "voice my opinions and not stand in the shadows of others," although her brother, Ben, acknowledges that "it's hard sometimes to have socialist parents because I miss them when they have to go to meetings."

Parents' commitment to democracy in the home varied with the age of the child and the inclination of the parent, from the parent who asserted, "You can't negotiate with a two-year-old," to the one who spent 15 minutes sitting on a busy sidewalk while her two-year-old raged and cried about the indignity of having to hold her mother's hand to cross the street. Some parents were adamant about never hitting their children, others said they did when the children were young, but they had usually regretted it.

"Being a democratic socialist doesn't make me a better parent," says Stan Shapiro. "Whatever roots led me to socialism also make me the kind of parent I am."

Having children was "totally radicalizing for me," says NPC member Shoshana Bricklin. In her pre-DSA, pre-children days Bricklin co-founded *Democratic Left* • May/June 1996 • page 5

**Maxine Phillips
and daughter,
Anne Marie
Roderick, picket
with the National
Writers Union.**



Ed Hedemann

the Philadelphia Marxist School. Now, although she can't sustain the same level of political involvement she had before the arrivals of Brahm, 6, and Eugene Debs, 3, she is passionate about the need to create a fairer society in which all children will have the privileges hers enjoy. For her, as for several others, religious traditions help to create the sense of community that nurtures the alternative values. "We make sure that Friday night is a separate space. It's time that's not owned by the employer, by the wider culture."

The religious traditions can provide an opportunity to counter the materialist culture. "Hanukkah was becoming the big receiving season, not a giving time, says Stan Shapiro. So he and his wife, Margaret Lenzi, save mail solicitations from charities and social action groups for a month, then go through them one evening during Hanukkah with the children. "They are always amazed to find out the needs, and it's important for them to see that people are doing something about the problem." The children donate some of their own money. The practice hasn't completely curbed consumerism, but it has helped temper it.

This year, my daughters, Emma Rose, 11, and Anne Marie, 8, helped our church Sunday School hold a bake sale to help defray some of the expenses of going to the Stand for Children March in Washington on June 1.

Do socialists, who spend a lot of time in meetings, duplicate them at home? "We only have meetings in crisis situations," says Tarzynski, "but we insist that we eat together almost every night, and a lot happens over dinner that would normally be part of a meeting." Recently, frustrated by sibling fights, Steve and Kathie decided not to just dock allowances but urged Ben and Mercie at a meeting to draw up their own contract. The Lenzi-Shapiro household schedules a family night that is part meeting and part education—often a movie like *Norma Rae* or *The Milagro Beanfield War*—that teaches solidarity and struggle.

In our family, we try semi-successfully to hold regular meetings as well as a weekly Family Support Group, in which each member gets equal time (at least five minutes) of undivided attention from the others while she or he does what comes to mind. This has been as varied as a game of family tag to dancing to a boom box.

If the lines of communication are kept open, how do socialist families fare on the tough issues of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll? Well, we didn't ask about rock 'n' roll, although we sure heard a lot about

television. Responses ranged from outright bans to limits to watching with the children and providing political commentary.

"Television shows you that there are normal people and then people you can make fun of," says Stan Shapiro. "It's the 'normal' people of this world who've destroyed so much." To counter the messages of television, Stan asks what's wrong with the behavior of the dorks. "I tell them that I was a dork."

As for sex and drugs, although their own sexual experimentation may have started in their teens, drugs for these parents came later and were never a major part of their lives. They are grateful for the heavy doses of anti-drug education in the schools and aware of the tremendous peer pressures on their children.

"You have to trust them to make the right choices," said one father. "After a certain point you can't control what they're doing." Another parent, whose child seemed to be entering into dependency on alcohol and perhaps marijuana, did assert control. "When we found out what was going on, we grounded her and insisted that she get help individually or go with us as a family into therapy. We felt we were in a battle for her life." It's been a few years and the anger is still there at the parents' actions, but alcohol and

marijuana are no longer issues and the parents and child are becoming close.

Although all the children of the parents we spoke with have gone to DSA events, they have no sense of connection to the larger organization, undoubtedly because DSA is still not truly intergenerational and perhaps because of an ambivalence about being involved in an arena where their parents play major roles. Parents of young children would like to see DSA offer more activities to which parents could bring their children, and in the Philadelphia area DSAers are planning a weekend retreat that will involve children's activities. Were the organization more diverse, not only racially but age-wise, believes Lynne Engelskirchen, it would be more vibrant and might have appealed to her daughter, Kandia, now 20, and to other teenagers. When Kandia participated in the African Youth Congress, Lynne expressed concern that the group had too nationalistic a perspective. "She said I should have faith in her judgment. She was right." Although Kandia's main focus remains student politics—she is a leader in the African-American students' organization at UCLA—she has recently begun to show more interest in DSA.

But membership in DSA is not the only criterion for "success" as a left-wing parent. Ron Aronson re-

flects that his older daughter is overtly intellectual—her senior thesis on feminism and Marxism changed some of his own ideas—and the other daughter is a dancer. The younger one has chosen to go to school in Chicago, to an open admissions college, although she started at an elite college. It was a choice similar to one he made in his youth, and he believes it is evidence that she has "absorbed our values in a deep way. She wants to be engaged in the city, with lots of different people."

"Who knows how things will come out?" asks Shoshana Bricklin. "My parents are liberal and here I am, and my sister has a master's in business administration."

What's hard about being a socialist parent? "Trying to stay positive when I think things are going to hell in a handbasket," says Steve Tarzynski. "There have been times when the only thing that kept me going was the fact that I had children. I couldn't give up for their sake."

What's good? "It's an unbelievable thing to have these little people in your life," says Bricklin. She compares parenting to her first union organizing drive. "I was a liberal democrat when I started, but after going through a drive I learned what I couldn't from a book. Having kids is like that."

Being willing to raise children is an act of faith, she believes. "You have to work to make this the kind of world you want them to grow up in."

RESOURCES

The listing below is not comprehensive, but provides a few suggestions for countercultural childrearing information. Jay Hughes has volunteered to start a web site for socialist parents on which he will post information he has collected. The address is left parent <http://www.dsausa.org/Docs/Parents.html>.

Mothering, a monthly publication that proclaims itself a "fierce advocate of the needs of children and a gentle supporter of the parents, as we strive to empower decision-making that will embrace and consider the needs of all members of the family." \$18.95 per year. Subscriptions office: 1-800-984-8116.

Our Children, Ourselves, a newsletter put out twice per year by the Philadelphia Community School and available for \$10 for two years from 919 Farragut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19143. It contains articles from parents around the country who discuss issues of childrearing and the internal issues parents face as they deal with them. Back issues are \$2.50 each.

Parenting for Peace and Justice: Ten Years Later, by Kathleen and James McGinnis (Orbis Books, 1990). An update of their earlier book by the same title, it covers concepts of simple living, helping children deal with violence, multiculturalizing family life, sex-role stereotyping, family involvement in social action, and spirituality. Although written from a Catholic perspective, the information is useful to everyone. Through their Institute for Peace and Justice the McGinnises publish the *Parenting for Peace and Justice Newsletter*, each issue of which looks at a topic in depth. Membership in the Institute is \$25 and includes the six-times-per-year newsletter. Write to the Institute for Peace & Justice, 4144 Lindell Blvd. #408, St. Louis, MO 63108. The Institute sponsors workshops and publishes curriculum material.

Setting Limits With Children, by Patty Wipfler (Parents Leadership Institute, P. O. Box 50492, Palo Alto, CA 94303. Phone: 415-424-8687). \$2 plus postage. This small pamphlet provides guidelines for a non-punitive approach to limit-setting. The Institute publishes other material, including a manual for establishing a parent support group.

Thoughts on Democratic Parenting

Before I had children, I used to argue with relatives about discipline (I was against corporal punishment and isolation) and other childrearing issues. The arguments always ended with, "Wait till you have your own children. You'll see."

It's true that I abandoned some fantasies early on—the one, for example, about working in the DSA office while the baby gurgled happily in a crib nearby, but the core idea—that I could strive for a family life free of physical coercion—has prevailed and been the linchpin for a philosophy I will call democratic parenting.

What are the precepts of democratic parenting? The first is that young people are intelligent human beings who don't have as much experience or information as we do, but who deserve respect. The home, then, can be seen as a hierarchical collective. Yes, it's an oxymoron, but it reflects the reality of the imbalance of power and experience. Adults do pay all the bills and can make more educated guesses about the results of certain courses of action, and therefore they do have special rights and responsibilities concerning resources and safety.

Democratic parenting differs from "permissive" parenting in that it is not laissez-faire. It is close to "progressive" parenting, but goes a step further in examining the assumptions we carry within us about young people as a class. Herewith some thoughts from the field.

Democracy in the home often seems as unattainable as socialism in one country. Most of us didn't grow up with any models for it, and we're making it up as we go along. Without rewards or punishment, our leverage is confined to discussion and moral au-

thority, sometimes backed up by physical force, as in separating fighting siblings or barring a stormy exit from the apartment. (The latter comes back to haunt us, of course. Recently, during a tense negotiation in her room, my eight-year-old planted herself in front of her door and announced, "I'm not going to dinner, and neither are you." We came to a resolution without calling the hostage squad, but I knew the days of physical presence as a deterrent were numbered.) In addition to having to think through almost every decision we make, we have had to fight against our own previously unexamined attitudes toward children.

Take this quiz.

- ◆ The last time you were with a child in the company of other adults, did you interrupt the child when she was speaking or ignore her in order to listen to the adult?
- ◆ Have you touched a child without his permission—hugging hello or good-bye, patting on the head, tickling, wiping a nose, wiping food off a cheek, even after he has said no?
- ◆ Have you indicated in front of a child that her opinion was not as valuable as an adult's?
- ◆ Have you told a child what to feel? "Don't cry." "It's not important." "You'll change your mind." "You don't know what you're talking about."
- ◆ Have you hit a child or sent him out of the room for a "time out"?

Chances are you've answered "yes" to some questions. You may even be asking what's wrong with tickling, and isn't this carrying political correctness too far? And many people who would never strike a frustrating co-worker or spouse don't see the illogic of hitting someone small, weak, and inexperienced in order to "teach" a lesson.

The vestiges of children-as-property are hard to shake. As leftists, we try to be aware of our insensitivity to others, and we would recognize racism, sexism, or several other *isms* in interactions with adults of the type described above. If we acted this way toward our lovers, our lovers, at least, would think the relationship was in trouble.

This least-talked about *ism*, adultism, covers almost every adult interaction with children, even the most well-intentioned, and seeps into children's interactions with each other. Look at any playground.

If you think children don't mind this type of treatment, ask them. Or look back at your own childhood. No matter how good it was, chances are that you never felt fully respected by most of the adults in your life. When a parent or teacher did treat you as fully human, it stands out across the years.

How many of us spent our childhoods eager to grow up so that we could have some power over our lives? How much more powerful and able to bring about social change would we be if we had had more power as young people?

And because we never had that power, it's extremely hard to share it with our own children. We've all heard variations on "My parents hit me but I turned out ok and so will my children," or "I hated school, but I did the work and they have to buckle down and study, too, not spend a lot of time on frills." It's true that young people are incredibly resilient. But it's also true that if we were honest with ourselves about our own childhoods, no matter how good they were, we would remember that at one time we vowed we would make things different for our children.

How do you chart a new course? In DSA we used to say that we were the left wing of the possible in the Democratic party. The same principle applies in the home. Test the limits of the possible. When a child asks why you've laid down a rule or insisted on certain behavior, take the question seriously. The answer may still be "Because I said so," but the discipline of thinking fresh in each situation will be good for your mind and soul.

When a child pushes your buttons, it's a sure clue to an episode or conflict from your own childhood that now affects your treatment of your child. Did you and your siblings fight a lot? How did your parents handle the conflict, or not handle it?

Again, reflection rather than unconsidered action can help. Talking to a friend who will listen instead of offering advice or being part of a parents' support group gives parents the time to think things through and come to their own decisions about parenting. The endless market for parenting books, many of which are fine, shows us how much parental thinking is also devalued. Like workers who begin to see that their work situation is not a result of personal failing by talking with their comrades, parents also need to be with others who appreciate and affirm their work.

And if you don't have children? Congratulations for reading this far. Your support to parents and children is vital, both on the left and in the wide world. Do you want parents to participate in your DSA chapter? Then ask what would make it possible and help organize it. Often parents are too exhausted to even think about the next steps, or they're doing their political work in the school or community or religious organization that allows them to bring their children with them or do work at odd hours.

On a personal level, when was the last time you offered your place in line at the grocery store to a harried parent in back of you or volunteered to give a friend or sibling a night out by watching their children? In this age of scandals involving children, adults who show an interest in children may feel suspect or unwelcome. Yet children need to be with people who can model another lifestyle for them and who can relate to them in a different way than their parents. This is not *noblesse oblige* on your part. Being with children gives you a chance to re-examine your assumptions and reconnect with playful and creative aspects of yourself that will benefit you in other parts of your life.

It's been a long time since I've gone to a discussion group on Marx or market socialism. But questions of censorship (can a child spend his own money on CDs with lyrics that any feminist would abhor?), economics (should an allowance be tied to chores or is it an entitlement that comes from being part of the family?), equity (should people of different ages have different bedtimes even though both seem to get along fine with little sleep?), and myriad others occupy my mothers' group and other friends. Theory and practice. Unlike socialism, we'll probably be able to see some results in our lifetime. They're worth working for.

Maxine Phillips, a former executive director of DSA, is currently the managing editor of Dissent.

Partisan Reviews

Further reflections on the French strikes

Last December, massive strikes by French public workers against the Juppé plan—proposed “reforms” of the social security system—successfully forced the conservative government to postpone indefinitely the implementation of these “reforms.”

The strikes were hailed by many as the first successful resistance to neo-liberal cutbacks in the welfare state in any advanced industrial nation. Since the Juppé plan was promoted as a way to adjust government finances downward to conform to the requirements of the proposed European monetary union, the strikes were also viewed as a blow against “structural adjustment”: the policy of slashing public services in order to promote international economic integration.

There is no question that the issues raised by the strikers resonated throughout French society. All news reports indicated that a majority of the French people supported the strikers and that they believed the strikers were fighting for the interests of working people as a whole.

The political picture was complicated, however, by the fact that the union most closely associated with the French Communist Party—

the CGT—and the union with the greatest tradition of anti-Communism—the FO—were united in leading the strike. Meanwhile, the CDFT—the union most closely associated with the French Socialist Party—stayed aloof from the mass mobilizations.

In the United States many socialists, unionists, and progressives followed the events in France with intense interest. Did this massive strike signal the beginning of an offensive against the global economic integration designed by the transnational corporations and conservative governments? Or was it merely a courageous, but defensive, upsurge harking back to the past—and offering nothing new?

In the following pages an optimistic view is offered by Gerard Alezard, Director of the Institute for the Study of Social and Economic Conflict of the CGT. It is drawn from a presentation he made at New York University in April. By contrast, Dick Howard, Professor of Philosophy at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, makes a more cautious assessment.

—Alan Charney

Alan Charney is the National Director of DSA.

The Great Awakening

BY GERARD ALEZARD

France today finds herself still living in the social "moment" defined by the movements of December 1995. The "December events" still mark our national consciousness, and place all major social forces on notice that we are in a new period.

While we should avoid idealizing these events, we need not downplay them, either. The history of this "West Strike Story" remains to be written, but even if there exist many uncertainties, there also exist certain facts which are obvious and indisputable. This moment represents a clear expression of a kind of awakening of French society which requires that we abandon old analytic categories in order to grasp its significance. The strike was in all likelihood the largest social mobilization in repudiation of government policy in more than thirty years. At the same time, it presents us with a strong demand for the creation of an alternative agenda of social and economic policies.

One can say this movement was simultaneously very diverse, very pluralistic, and yet very solidaristic. The concern with defending particular interests did not come at the expense of a vision of the general interest of the emergence of new social solidarities at the grassroots.

I would like to establish some benchmarks which point to those aspects of the movement which are new and very important, and to some

limitations which are not insignificant.

During several weeks there were between 800,000 to 900,000 striking workers and probably over three million participants in street protests and rallies which resulted in a complete stoppage of transport, especially the national rail network, and the trains,

buses, and subways of the Paris region. This mobilization was in opposition to the conservative government's proposed reform of the social security system which specifically put into question the current retirement system of civil servants, and the government's contractual obligations to the workers of the French National Rail System. These social struggles therefore contested the principle and the consequences of neo-liberal economic policies, which the French call "*la pensée unique*" or "economically correct," and its methods of managing unemployment and "job flexibility."

We should recall that President Jacques Chirac built his electoral victory in the spring of 1994 around the defense of "social cohesion" and the fight against unemployment. Alain Juppé, his prime minister, proposed seven jobs programs in the space of eight months. Neither Chirac nor Juppé were very convincing on these issues. Rather, they steadily lost credibility.

By November 1995, feelings of general discontent were being expressed through a variety of protest activities, culminating in a general explo-

The movement was inspired by an insistence on the need for dignity and social justice and above all by the need for democracy and democratic practice.

sion in December. This explosion had several essential characteristics as well as distinct limits.

First, this social movement was inspired by a strong insistence on the need for dignity and social justice, and, above all by the need for democracy and democratic practice by the strikers themselves: democracy in the articulation of demands, in the conduct of the struggle and in the follow-through. This represented an extremely important experiment in how to learn and practice a sort of "social citizenship" which calls into question the role of established institutions like government, management, and particularly, the unions' role in social struggles.

Second, this movement pointed the way toward greater unity of workers with the unions, such as how to achieve more effective solidarity among the various occupational groups on strike, and how to deal with the divisions among the competing trade union confederations.

A third very important characteristic was the degree of understanding and support shown by the general population for the strikers despite the real and lasting hardships created by the lack of public transportation. A new conviviality and solidarity was expressed by the riders, both among themselves and toward the striking workers.

The strikes did lead to real victories, particularly the protection of the retirement system of state employees and railroad workers. The strike also tarnished the public image of the Juppé government. After a display of contempt and intransigence, the government was forced to negotiate and retreat before the movement's strength.

Finally, the movement's impact was felt throughout Europe and in the United States. A message of support from AFL-CIO President John Sweeney—the first ever from an AFL-CIO president to the CGT—was received very positively and highlighted our common concerns and hopes for the future.

For all of these advances, one cannot pass over the movement's shortcomings. For example, there was very little participation from workers in the private sector—workers who are confronted with much higher rates of unemployment than those in the public sec-

tor. The movement was also locked in a posture of "refusal," without the ability to articulate and mobilize around an alternative program. There was great difficulty in combining a defense of the welfare state with the construction of an alternative to the current plan for European economic integration.

Today, we are all challenged by this movement—the government, management, political parties, but especially the unions. What is our place in relation to this movement? What is the responsibility of each one of us now that enormous expectations have been raised concerning employment, problems of daily life and the issue of France's relationship to the construction of a more united Europe? We can no longer avoid addressing these broad social questions. In the aftermath of the strikes, each one of us is obliged to propose concrete, effective alternatives.

So, the unions find themselves at a crossroads. They must both preserve their mission as the defender of the interests of workers, and, at the same time, find the means for achieving this mission in an economic and social world which is deeply destabilized and in which the very nature of work and the workplace is being transformed.

The unions are forced to confront serious problems of identity, credibility, and effectiveness. In order to find solutions, the unions must be more receptive and open to the voices of the workers themselves. This is absolutely essential if we are to make gains and advance toward a necessary social transformation. This means that the unions must put forward an independent social program. The December struggles have revealed that this program must include both new rights for employees and unions to intervene in the management of specific enterprises and the economy as a whole, as well as the development and implementation of specific policy options.

The unions must invent a new role for themselves in society. For this to happen, unity is an essential condition of success.

Gerard Alezard is Director of the Institute for the Study of Social and Economic Conflict of the CGT. Professor John Mason assisted in the translation of this article.

DSA Youth Section Summer Congress

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Let's Not Mistake Resistance for Revolution

BY DICK HOWARD

To avoid useless polemics, let's agree that the Juppé plan was socially regressive and the strikes that forced him to back down were supported by a large popular majority. Let's add that Juppé's proposals resulted from the pressures of economic globalization, deregulation, and the constraints of the Maastricht treaty. So, global capital and the dictatorship of the market were successfully challenged.

That is well and good, but what now? We can all feel comfortable with a return of the "good old" class struggle. But where are we going? The strikes rejected an undesirable future but a return to the past is no future. It is useless to deny demography: the universal social coverage for which we envy the French cannot be maintained, and it is vain to think that the crisis is only cyclical, and that prosperity is just around the corner.

More to the point, the recent strikes were a response to a unique, very French political heritage. Three factors help to explain this uniqueness.

First, what Americans call entitlements are known in France as "*droits acquis*," acquired rights won by workers demanding a decent life today and a fair retirement tomorrow. The *droits acquis* are the contemporary translation of 1789's *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*. These acquired rights are not just individual; they were won in a class struggle. The social security system is run by the unions in the name of the workers. That is the first reason for the massive strike wave and public sympathy for it. The government was attacking what had been dearly won.

Second, the French have a different understanding of the relation of the individual to the state. French liberty was won when royal power was seized and the state was used to destroy the privileges of aristocracy. The French state is thus the protector of the individual against arbitrariness by others. We Americans demand protection from the state (at the risk of

being taken advantage of by others); they assume the state will protect them. That is why the French "Etat-Provence" is larger than our welfare state. It explains why Juppé thought he could impose his reforms to do for individuals what they could not do alone. Why, then, the revolt?

A third element of French political culture completes the picture and explains why the striking French workers received such broad support. French reliance on the state for social protection appears to leave the individual undefended against intrusions from a government bureaucracy. To avoid this, the French developed the idea of the "service public." State services must benefit all citizens equally and universally, and those aspects of social life which concern all citizens are the responsibility of the state. Juppé's proposed cuts in railroad services and his tacit support of private health insurance and retirement plans struck at the symbolic foundation of French public life. His plan was a threat to "civilization," at least its republican French version. But can that republic be maintained in the twentieth century?

It is easy to see why French intellectuals, for example, supported the strikers, on grounds of social justice or the republican tradition. In fact, the left-leaning journal *Esprit* published a petition signed by several intellectuals suggesting that Juppé's politicization of social security made possible a new, offensive politics: In the global economy, corporatist control by the unions could be replaced by a public political confrontation about the challenges facing society as a whole. This would be particularly true for the question of health care reform.

The Etat-Provence was based on a model of social insurance whose premise is that each of us is equally liable, at some time, to become ill, lose our job, need protection. It is funded by a contribution from workers and employers and is administered by them. But in post-industrial society, with its lean and mean firms, there are not enough workers to pay for a universal system: hence the gov-

ernment deficit which was one motivation for the Juppé plan.

The model of insurance for people equally liable to be injured doesn't work in dualized societies. Juppé proposed that the social security system be financed from general tax revenues, but in exchange the Parliament, not the unions, would control its administration. This threatened those unions whose finances depend on their administrative control of the old system. Claiming to act in the interest of the workers, they were protecting their own *droits acquis*.

It is also important to understand precisely why the CFDT union did not participate in the strikes. Since globalized economies create a dual society, the question for the CFDT was, how to include the excluded? That is why financing social security from general revenues had been a demand of the union for some time. It meant social protection would be offered to the citizen, not simply to those workers able

to contribute. Hence, the CFDT gave critical support to this aspect of the Juppé plan. To do so fit well with its self-conception as a "unionism of propositions" rather than simply the voice of those already in the streets.

Second, the CFDT saw the need to fight against the dualization of society by decreasing the length of the work week in order to create jobs. Its premise was that the global economy is here. Looking reality in the eye, how could one better the lot of all citizens? Radical opposition is gratifying, but it is not politics.

The challenge for the Left is to combine the *Esprit* attempt to move beyond a conception of politics as the simple opposition of society and state with the CFDT attempt to create a unionism that is not simply a defense of established positions and which does not ignore the actually-existing world market. It is this aspect of the French movement, and not the pyrrhic victory over a class-biased government, that opens the challenge we have to confront.

Dick Howard teaches philosophy at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Attention Educators:

The DSA Youth Section needs your help!

We are looking for adults willing to work with our members to carry out activist projects and start new Youth Section chapters at schools and colleges across the country. If you would like to get involved, please contact Kevin Pranis at the DSA national office, 180 Varick Street Floor 12, New York, NY 10014. 212.727.8610x23. dsa@igc.apc.org

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DSA Hires Midwest Organizer...

DSA extends a warm welcome to Mike Heffron, our newly-appointed Midwest Organizer. A recent graduate of Ohio University, Heffron was highly active in his campus chapter of DSA, working on everything from Campus Labor Institutes to city council elections and demonstrations in support of reproductive freedom.

His most recent efforts have focused on forging links between DSA and the AFL-CIO's Union Summer campaign by having DSAers conduct intensive Campus Labor Institutes for Union Summer participants. "Campus Labor Institutes are tools to educate youth about the new, energized labor movement. They're an opportunity to bring youth face-to-face with labor—to dispel a lot of myths about unions and to show the significant im-

provements unions bring to the lives of working people," he explains.

As DSA's Midwest Organizer Heffron will provide support to existing DSA locals and youth section chapters and assist new locals and chapters in getting started. Although he'll be based primarily in Columbus, OH and Chicago, IL, expect him to make many pilgrimages to outlying areas—his territory covers Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Oh, and if anyone wishes to adopt a charming leftist cat named Luscious, be sure to let Mike know—the demands of being Midwest Organizer have made it impossible for him to support dependents.

...and New Youth Section Field Coordinator

Kevin Pranis comes to us from Minnesota by way of the University of Chicago, where he recently completed a B.A. in Latin American Studies and an M.A. in Social Sciences. Before taking the position of Youth Section Field Coordinator he was a caseworker for a public defender service in Harlem. He has also worked in various Latin American countries coordinating volunteer health care projects.

Pranis has three primary objectives as YS Field Coordinator: first, to improve internal education and communication; second, to strengthen ties with other progressive organizations; third, to work with YS members to develop a national activist campaign. He is currently working—with the help of interns Tara McDonnell and Andrew Fein—to prepare for three Youth Section events: a Socialist Summer Institute (July 11-13), a YS Congress (Aug 24-26), and a progressive student convention (tentatively scheduled for October 12-14).

Other dirt uncovered during Kevin's background check:

Last film seen: *Barb Wire*. "The film's outrageous heroine out-bogarts Bogart, using her wit, charm, and awe-inspiring arsenal to defeat the good ol' boys—the evil 'congressional' bear more than a casual resemblance to the Republican Congress—and smuggle a revolutionary doctor from a fascist America into the land of 'single-payer' freedom."

Last book read: Michael Harrington's *Socialism: Past and Future*. "Pretty much like *Barb Wire*, except that the forces of good haven't won yet."

Heroes and Heroines: Adrienne Rich, Samuel Delany, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, Abbie Hoffman, Jean Genet, Jackie Chan, and Rigoberta Menchu.

Greatest ambition: To help make the Youth Section the base for a reinvigorated progressive student movement and to make the first queer socialist kung fu film.

Turn-ons: Green tea ice cream, drag kings and queens, Hong Kong cinema, any dance music (especially salsa), Paul Wellstone, feminist theory, cooking, and good meeting process.

Cross-National Debates on Neo-Liberalism at the Socialist Scholars Conference

For the fourteenth consecutive year the City University of New York Academic Section of DSA organized the Socialist Scholars Conference at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, April 12-15. Over fifteen hundred students, academics, and community and union activists attended.

This year it became clear that the international visibility and importance of the conference has grown. The Socialist Scholars Conference is in the process of becoming a clearing-house for contacts between activists and intellectuals from Eastern and Western Europe and North and South America who represent socialist and former and existing communist parties—that is, parties of the Left that are both within and without the official family of the Socialist International.

This April's conference saw a major presence by members of the Sao Paulo Forum, an association of Latin American parties and social movements which has been meeting since 1992. DSA held joint panels at the SSC with participants from our sister party from Mexico, El Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD); El Salvador's FLN, and Lula's Workers' Party from Brazil, among others. The conference also featured numerous representatives from Western Europe—including panels organized by Chris Jones, Jill Gross, and David Morgan of the United States branch of the British Labor Party; as well as participation in other panels by Petra Blaes and Evelyn Widdich of Germany's Party of Democratic Socialism; Pap Ndalye of the French Socialist Party, Daniel Cirera and Lysanne Alezard of the French Communist Party and Gerard Alezard of the CGT. Boris Kargilitsky and Alexander Buzgalin came from Moscow, as did Ivan Vitani of the Hungarian Socialist Party. As in past conferences, representatives of the Canadian left such as Elaine Bernard and Leo Panitch played highly visible roles in our discussions.

What seemed to draw these parties to New York was the opportunity to pursue "irregular contacts" which cut across the positions and divisions on the left created in response to Stalinist Russia and the Cold War-historical references which are losing their relevance as anchors for organizational identity in a post-Cold War world increasingly polarized between North and South rather than East and West. At the same time, what appeared to unite the disparate parties is a willingness to question "*la pensée unique*," the singular mindset which would have us believe that the new global economy leaves no room for resisting the dominance of private market forces, or no alternative but to apply domestic policies of neo-liberal austerity and deregulation.

It is worth noting that all these actors shared a common concern with the erosion of national polities and the decomposition of societies and cultures under the pressures created by global economic and cultural forces which are feeding the growth of nationalist and fundamentalist movements. It remains to be seen at next year's conference whether these disparate parties and social movements can move beyond the recognition of a shared "dissidence" contesting privatization to a discussion of cross-national strategies for enlarging and democratizing the emerging system of global politics—a system of intergovernmental bodies such as the European Union and United Nations which parallels but does not yet compete in influence with the global market and media networks. Enlarging our common agenda and the number of participating parties will be central to DSA's discussions at the upcoming Socialist International World Congress to be held in New York, September 9-11, and to efforts to organize a "conference after the conference" following next year's Socialist Scholars Conference.

--John Mason

John Mason is Assistant Professor of Political Science at William Paterson College of New Jersey and a vice-chair of the Socialist Scholars Conference.



by Harry Fleishman

CALIFORNIA

Bay Area DSA members have been active in efforts to gather signatures to place three measures on the ballot this autumn. The "Local Control and Fiscal Responsibility Act," is a measure intended to halt the "sunsetting" of California's top two tax brackets which would cost the state approximately \$800 million in revenue.

A second initiative, the "Patient Care Protection Act" would require that patients be physically examined by a licensed caregiver before any decision is made to deny referrals to specialists or to restrict tests or special treatments. It would prohibit gag rules, which prevent caregivers from passing on important information—including treatment options—to patients. In addition, the Patient Care Protection Act would establish an independent consumer watchdog agency to assist and advocate for patients.

The third initiative, the "Living Wage Act", an attempt to raise the minimum wage in California to \$5.00 per hour in 1997 and to \$5.75 per hour in 1998, is being promoted by progressive activists and DSA locals across the state.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

DC/MD/VA DSA participated in a rally to save rent control in late April. The local leads a coalition of progressive activists which grew out of the "People's Hearing on Economic Insecurity" held last September.

FLORIDA

The North Central Florida DSA OC is developing a literacy program for Alachua County as well as workshops on the privatization of jobs. A study group on "What is Capitalism?" is in the works. Individual members are also involved in an effort seeking official United States recognition of the 30th Anniversary of the My Lai Massacre.

ILLINOIS

Over 400 people attended the 38th Annual Debs/Thomas/Harrington Awards Dinner sponsored by Chicago DSA. This year's honorees were Maxie Hill and Deborah Meier. Hill is the President of Local 1 of the Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco Workers Union, Vice President of the Illinois State AFL-CIO, and Secretary Treasurer of the Chicago Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. Meier, the President of the Center for Collaborative Education in New York, is widely known as an innovative educational leader.

In conjunction with the Chicago Chapter of the Committees of Correspondence, the University of Chicago DSA hosted a panel discussion on "African Americans and the 1996 Elections." Panelists included Danny Davis, Cook County Commissioner and Democratic Party nominee for Illinois' 7th Congressional District, Barbara Ransby, Chair of the Center for African American Research at DePaul University, and Salim Muwakkil, columnist for *In These Times* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Long-time political activist Timuel Black moderated.

NEW JERSEY

Northern NJ DSA members are busy protesting the anti-labor policies of Farm-land Dairy of Wallington, NJ and supporting the strike at Bridgestone/Firestone. Local members also participated in a massive demonstration against the death penalty outside of the state prison in Trenton in late April.

NEW YORK

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine was the site of New York City DSA's May Day bash. New York City Councilmember Guillermo Linares received the Paul Dubrul award for community action and leadership while UAW Region 9A Director Phil Wheeler garnered the Debs/Thomas award. Barbara Ehrenreich, a DSA founder and honorary chair, was the recipient of a special award honoring her for her contributions as a leading feminist, cultural critic, and political satirist. Over 150 people joined in the celebration, including special guests Dolores Huerta of the United Farm Workers, DSA Vice Chair Jose LaLuz, Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger, and Connecticut Secretary of State Miles Rappaport.

New York City DSA has joined Citizen Action of New York to press key legislators to support the Stringer/Leichter bill. If passed, the bill would postpone last year's tax cuts for the wealthy and would plug certain corporate tax loopholes, raising \$1 billion badly needed to close the state budget gap.

OHIO

DSA of Central Ohio (DSCO) has kicked off a major campaign to measure compliance with the National Voter Registration Act ("Motor Voter"). DSCO is interviewing public assistance recipients to determine if public agencies are offering recipients the opportunity to register. The chapter is also working with other groups to build a voter registration & education campaign which supports community organizing around three progressive state ballot initiatives.

On April 30th the AFL-CIO held its third "America Needs A Raise" town meeting at Columbus City Hall. DSCO members assisted the AFL-CIO by reaching out to community groups and by identifying speakers. The goal is to build a coalition that will hold additional hearings on economic insecurity. To get involved contact George Boas at 614/297-0710.

Capital University DSA hosted Youth Section organizer Carmen Mitchell and celebrated International Women's Day with an event honoring "herstory."

PENNSYLVANIA

Reading Berks Democratic Socialists recently hosted a series of workshops on the theme of "Re-building A Community." Topics covered included Healthy Community Development, Socialist Visions & Values, and Building Socialist Participation in Our Community.

WISCONSIN

Madison Area DSA OC hosted a discussion on "Corporate Power" with Ben Menski. Recently, members have protested the short-comings of W2, Wisconsin's vicious version of welfare reform. And as part of the Coalition for Wisconsin Health, plans are being made to hold an autumn event on "The Corporatization of Health Care" in Milwaukee. For further information contact George Robson at 608/592-5437.

In Memory of Herman Rosenstein (1915-1996)

Herman "Gabby" Rosenstein died this past April. In a front page headline obituary the *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* explained that Herman "earned his nickname as a young man fighting fascism during the Spanish Civil War. To calm his nerves before battle, Rosenstein talked nonstop. But once the firing started, he was cool under pressure. Rosenstein would spend his life talking and fighting for what he believed in."

I first met Herman, or "Gabby," as he was then known, in 1975. Years later he said he and his wife, Millie, had quietly helped pay for the air fare to my first New American Movement (NAM) national convention because

he thought I was "a young kid who had some potential." Herman was a very strong advocate of the merger between NAM and DSOC which formed DSA. He was also one of the first American leftists I knew who strongly supported the principles of Eurocommunism and the centrality of democracy to a modern socialist movement. He quit the Communist Party after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and joined NAM a few years later, being one of the handful of oldtimers who served as important teachers and role models for us.

Herman was also highly active in the Democratic Party and local politics, as well as national and international issues over an activist life spanning more than sixty years. He was a founding member and long-time activist in Santa Monicans for Renters Rights (SMRR) which has virtually dominated city politics for the past fifteen years, turning our fair city into the "People's Republic of Santa Monica," one of the most progressive cities in America. I remember him once sharing with me his concern that SMRR would sweep every seat in a city council election back in the 1980s. He felt this was wrong because right-wing voters also needed to have at least one voice in city government. Herman was indeed a true democrat.

Over these many decades he also maintained a close bond with his former comrades-in-arms as a member of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. The memorial service celebrating his life was packed with over two hundred people he had touched in his long and active life. Present were many state and local elected officials, including our Democratic Congressman and even a right-wing member of the Santa Monica City Council. Both the California State Assembly and Senate adjourned in his memory.

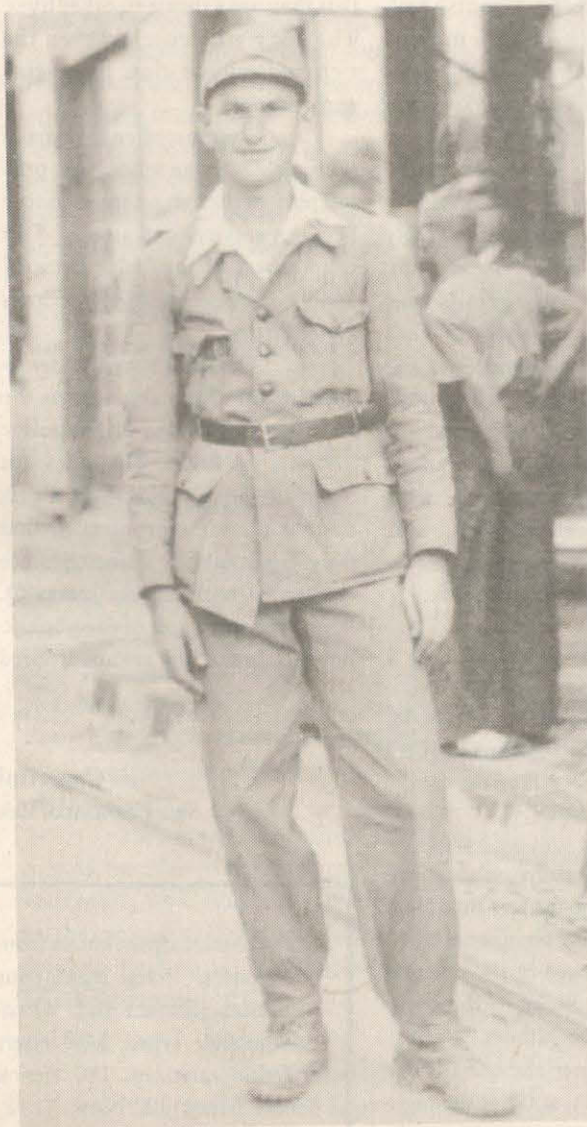
Herman, a native New Yorker with a heavy Queens accent, an electrician and union member of long standing, was a feisty and energetic person who read voraciously. He was never afraid to question the conventional left wisdom and move on when it was time to do so. It seemed he was always a step ahead of the rest of us. With the exception of serving as the Political Commissar of his company in Spain, Herman never sought a leadership position in the many organizations of which he was a member. Yet he never took a back seat, either. He was the consummate rank-and-filer who was always there to pitch in and to tell you exactly what he thought.

Herman is survived by his wife Millie, daughter Frances, and son Paul who is the mayor of Santa Monica and a DSA member. He is also survived by the many of us whose lives he touched and inspired. ¡Viva Herman! ¡No pasaran!

—Steve Tarzynski

Steve Tarzynski is a member of DSA's National Political Committee.

Left: Rosenstein in Madrid in 1937 as a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Photo courtesy of S. Tarzynski.





Crime & Punishment USA

I found the article, "Rage and Retribution" (*DL* January/February) nauseating to read. The whole argument about making the criminal the victim crossed the line of sheer stupidity. As a DSA member who works in a juvenile detention center, I can tell you first hand that we get children who are in need of psychological help. They do get some help. On the other hand, there are juveniles who enjoy, yes, enjoy assaulting people, stealing, or shooting someone. We presently have a child who is proud that he raped a woman and almost killed her by trying to set her on fire. He also raped my friend's daughter. Furthermore, his mother has hired (he comes from a financially well-off family) the most expensive lawyer money can buy. This piece of garbage is confident that he will go home and nothing will happen to him. I will not pat him on the head and call him a victim of the economic or social system. Feeling anger toward him is normal, but I'm professional enough not to let it interfere with my job. I personally feel he should have his sex organs removed.

The whole article was against people who felt angry with those who have committed violent crimes. Anger against those who commit heinous crimes is normal. Retribution is also a normal response from people. I do agree that there is scapegoating toward the poor and people of color. However, crimes do happen between them and it has to be dealt with by the law.

As a youth worker for Ashtabula County, I have found two types of juvenile offenders: one group is crying out for help because of mental or emotional problems caused by a poor home environment; the second

group are those who think it is fun to commit crimes against people. Both groups can be found among gangs in the area; the second group tends to be the leaders or what is called O.G.—"original gangsta"—who could be white, black, or Hispanic. Often these children follow adults who give orders as to where and when to commit crimes. The rewards are money, drugs, and sex. Gangs are run like a business and a paramilitary group. I do feel that the first group should have priority in getting help. The second group should be locked up for a long time.

On the other hand, I do agree that the United States should not invest in prisons but should invest in public schools. I don't think it is going to happen unless the left gets off its behind and presents a real vision that will appeal to the masses. That is why I joined the New Party—to put left politics back into action.

I know this letter may have offended many readers who subscribe to *Democratic Left* but I don't make any apologies. Teaching sociology (I have a degree in Human Services) in the classroom is one thing, but to experience the real world of criminal offenders is another. I am not coming off like those on the radical right. All I am saying is that we on the left should know the difference between those who need help and rehabilitation and those who need to be put away to keep our homes and streets safe.

John Trimboth, Jr.
Conneaut, OH

The article on "Crime Hysteria" marked the first time I was embarrassed to be a member of DSA. The "relative" cited in the opening paragraph was closer to the truth than either of the authors.

Whatever the latest crime statistics, the U.S. still has the highest rate of violent crime in the de-

veloped world. Has it ever occurred to the authors that a government of whatever kind is supposed to protect its own citizens and that violent crime falls most heavily on the poor, workers and non-white?

The authors offer no proof of any "popular identification" with a Ted Bundy or Jeffrey Dahmer and I think there is some reason for doubting that "identification" of any kind plays a part in public concern about crime. As for the death penalty: how many progressives protested the execution of Eichmann by a democratic socialist state? With this question in mind I think the authors should consider the role of the death penalty as a self-defense mechanism against criminals who have proven that they are a threat to other lives. The last time I checked even the rich and middle class had rights and feelings.

The most offensive part of the article was the schools vs. prisons part—as though we must choose between services and safety. This is an aspect of the "false choices" vividly described in *Why Americans Hate Politics*.

The right's vicious demagoguery on crime arises from the fact that any serious crime policy means a tax hike. This does not mean the left should pretend that there is no crime problem or that only frightened reactionaries are concerned with it. As James Q. Wilson noted: most of the poor do not rob, do not kill, are not arrested

Neil Copertini
San Francisco, CA

DL welcomes signed letters from our readers. Please make your responses succinct and, whenever possible, typed. Mail letters to *Democratic Left*, 180 Varick Street Floor 12, New York, NY 10014.

The Authors Respond:

Ironically, the letters of Neil Copertini and John Trimbath, Jr. illustrate several points we were trying to make in our article excerpted in Democratic Left. The first is that the right has managed to "win" on the issue of crime even more than on other substantive matters. By successfully setting the terms of the debate the right has made it almost taboo to discuss social causes of crime, or to deplore the influence of class and race discrimination which greatly affect the disproportionate commission and victimization rates in the United States. As politicians know only too well, calling attention to the social structural aspects of America's crime problem in the 1980s and '90s means risking becoming the object of hostility oneself.

Indeed, the fact that our brief article was described as "nauseating to read" and made Copertini "embarrassed to be a member of DSA" testifies to the unusually strong emotional reactions aimed back at anyone who questions the current direction of criminal justice policy and the tenor of popular discourse about crime. Nonetheless, intellectual and

analytic distance is needed precisely because we care about the high levels of violence and fear characteristic of U.S. society.

*Thus we assumed that most readers share the view that it is possible to ask critical questions about the politics-conscious and unconscious-of-crime without drawing the bizarre, but all too common accusation of having "sympathy" for the criminals. Many interesting writers and activists before us (for instance, Elliott Currie in *Confronting Crime*) have asked whether the current drift of crime and punishment policy has actually made us safer, whether it makes sense to rely on incarceration for non-violent offenders as much as we do, whether current drug policies are working and whether the death penalty is a deterrent and fairly meted out. We can all agree that it is "illogical" to favor jails over schools, but we should be willing to ask why this is happening. Our purpose was not to move "thinking about crime" backward, but to move beyond the point where the left (including Currie) left off before its incipient analysis of crime became yet another casualty of conservatism.*

Lynn Chancer
Pamela Donovan

Where Credit Is Due...

Tom Gallagher, in his piece in the March/April issue of *DL*, "Eyes on the Economy," called last November's public event on economic insecurity held in San Francisco "the first among equals of all the DSA-initiated hearings" on this issue.

However, Tom must've missed the November/December issue of *DL*, which included a report on the successful DSA economic insecurity hearing in Washington, DC—held September 27.

Bill Mosley
DC/MD/NOVA DSA

Our Cheeks Are Red

Some words were inadvertently dropped from Ron Aronson's article "Detroit, American Acropolis?" which appeared in the last issue. The first sentence of the first column on page 15 should have read as follows: "Let us be clear, even if fewer and fewer are listening today."

Democratic Left
deeply regrets the error.

—Eds.

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PRESENT PROGRESSIVE

BY DSA NATIONAL DIRECTOR ALAN CHARNEY

Every four years DSA faces the same dilemma. We clearly see the political inadequacy of the Democratic candidate for President, but we always measure this candidate against the greater political inadequacy of the Republican candidate for President. So, explicitly or implicitly, DSA winds up supporting the Democratic candidate.

Yes, President Clinton is the lesser of two evils, but if Dole is elected and a Republican majority is returned to the House and Senate, then this nation is really headed for "the dark ages." The reactionary Republicans are dangerous to the well being of working people, women, people of color, etc. But this "choice" still leaves us rather forlorn. Will a day ever come when there is a presidential candidate whom DSA can support with enthusiasm?

Of course, there is one easy answer to this question. We always have the choice of supporting a minor party candidate for President. This year Ralph Nader is the name most frequently mentioned. Unfortunately, support for a progressive minor party candidate always symbolizes the politics of refusal. That's because minor party candidates never run from a social base broad enough, or an organizational base strong enough, to sustain a movement for a genuine electoral alternative. It would be wonderful to proclaim, for once, that we were supporting a minor party candidate because we were building for the future. But, we are never in a position to say this. So, we reluctantly, very reluctantly, urge a vote for Clinton.

Over time, this dilemma breeds cynicism. After all, if we "fake" enthusiasm about the Democratic candidate, then we are dishonest. Or, if we "hype" enthusiasm about a minor party candidate, then we are also being dishonest. So, we tell the truth and promote cynicism.

Now, the one thing socialists should never be is cynical. We have to stand for something...for some alternative.

We must explain now how electoral politics at the national level can change so that, down the road, there can be a Presidential candidate who is progressive and can win.

Today, the accepted wisdom is that only a moderate white Democrat from the South can win a Presidential election. Just look at Carter and Clinton, the only Democratic victors in 25 years and the only southerners who were the standard bearers. This may be the case now, but we have to start articulating and acting on a national electoral strategy that will change this situation. And the place to start is by building a countervailing

*We're building a
countervailing electoral
force to the presidency so
no matter who wins we
can more effectively
advance a progressive
agenda.*

force to the Presidency, whether it be in the hands of a Democrat or a Republican

This countervailing force must be a progressive bloc in Congress. We need to start building a "parliamentary" progressive party now—a "party" that can be the national electoral expression of our social movements and organizations, and that can represent and advance the key bridge issues—such as economic insecurity—uniting our diverse constituencies. Right now, the Progressive Caucus in Congress has begun to play this role. It consists of 52 Democratic Congressmembers, Bernie Sanders and one Senator—Paul Wellstone. In fact, Sanders—the lone independent—has been instrumental in initiating and promoting this caucus. Indeed, what holds

the Progressive Caucus together are issues and ideology, not party affiliation.

Obviously, if the Democrats regain control of the House in 1996, the Progressive Caucus can have more influence than if the Republicans retain control. But, a Democratic majority is only a sideshow to the more important goal of strengthening the progressive voice in Congress by electing more progressives and by focusing the political work of our movements and organizations on a program that these progressive members actively promote.

That's exactly what we're doing. Our Washington, D.C.-based Political Director, Chris Riddiough, has brought together key national organizations with the Progressive Caucus to begin to implement this strategy. DSA has been working with the Progressive Caucus over the past year in holding economic insecurity hearings around the country. Economic insecurity is clearly the pivotal bridge issue at this time. We have set in motion a dialogue about the issues that should be a focus for political work, both in Congress and at the grassroots, for 1997 and 1998. Along with many other organizations, we are targeting marginal Congressional races so that more progressives can be elected to the House.

So, we do have a positive, forward looking response to the 1996 Presidential election. We're building a countervailing electoral force to the presidency so that no matter who wins we can more effectively advance a progressive agenda. But, we prefer Clinton because his electoral strength will actually help more progressives to be elected to Congress and because we can bring greater pressure on a Democratic Administration.

URPE SUMMER CONFERENCE

The Union for Radical Political Economics invites you to attend its annual summer conference for 1996.

From Saturday, August 24 through Tuesday August 27, academics and activists interested in a left-oriented analysis of economic issues and political topics will meet at one of the nicest summer camps in western Connecticut, **Camp Chinqueka** in Bantam, Connecticut.

This year's conference theme is **The New Class Warfare** and there will be three plenary sessions: The Right on the Rampage, What's Left of Liberalism, and People Under Siege and in Struggle. Speakers include **Jane D'Arista** (EPI), **Elaine Barnard** (Harvard Trade Union Program), **Allen Charney** (DSA Director), **Harry Magdoff** (Monthly Review), **Mike Albert** (Z Magazine), **Jerome Scott** (Project South), and others.

There will be many other daytime workshop sessions, ranging from formal presentations of academic papers, through panel discussions by activists and interested laypersons. Please contact Dawn Saunders, (dsaunders@moose.uvm.edu) Dept. of Economics 475 Main St., University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405 if you would like to present material or organize a session.

A special series of sessions, featuring Sam Bowles (UMass) among others, will discuss the impact of the work of **David Gordon** (1944-1996), a prominent radical economist and a co-founder of URPE.

Social events will follow each evening session, and camp activities (swimming hiking, volleyball) are available during the day for kids and adults. Rates include a bunk in a camp cabin (or tent space), and food in the camp mess hall.

For further details, contact the URPE National Office at One Summer Street, Somerville MA 02143, (617) 776-5888
Email: urpe@igc.apc.org

URPE SUMMER CONFERENCE