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# The Southern California Grocery Strike

By Herbert Shore

For twenty weeks, from mid-October 2003 to early March 2004, sixty thousand grocery workers walked picket lines in Southern California. Up for renewal were the labor contracts between the United Food and Commercial Workers' Union (UFCW) and the three major supermarket chains, Vons, Ralphs, and Albertsons. Management demanded large employee contributions to health care coverage, reduction in pension benefits, and a two-tiered system in which new employees would have lower salaries and benefits than existing employees. In brief, unionized supermarket clerking would over time be converted from a middle class occupation to a "working poor" occupation. The union went on strike only at Vons, but immediately management at the two other chains locked out their employees.

Since at least 1978, relations between UFCW, management and workers had been quite good and salaries and benefits permitted grocery workers some middle class privileges. However, during the contract negotiations that led up to the strike, it became clear that the chains did not intend the status quo to remain. Management justified their hardened approach by citing the impending entry of Wal-Mart into the California retail grocery business. The grocery chain owners claimed that the only way for them to meet the competitive pressure of Wal-Mart's low-wage, low-benefits business model would be to adopt it. Thus, as the negotiations deadlocked, it became clear that this labor dispute had a critical importance well beyond the Southern California region.

The strike started out with high worker morale and strong community support. Even in San Diego, where union penetration is minimal, most of the stores were nearly empty and one could hear the sound of honking cars as drivers passed the picket lines in front of each store. However, in retrospect, there are lessons to be learned that could be applied for future rounds in the labor struggle against the onslaught of corporate America's low-wage vision of economic development. UFCW is a decentralized union. Each local on strike was essentially fighting the battle on its own, and a large part of its energy was involved in administering strike benefits to its picketing members. The chains, on the other hand, are subdivisions of large national cor-

porations. As the strike wore on, it became clear that the chains were willing to suffer large local losses and endure a long strike/lockout.

At least in San Diego, UFCW was very concerned with not alienating customers and the general public. Picketers were instructed to be polite and non-confrontational. This concern was strengthened in late October when disastrous fires throughout Southern California destroyed thousands of homes. In response to this disaster, and also in an attempt to exert additional pressure on Vons and Albertsons, the union called off its picketing at Ralphs. This strategy lost its effectiveness when Ralphs entered into a possibly illegal profit sharing agreement with the other two chains; the agreement meant that the increased business at picket-free Ralphs benefited all three chains.

The strike dragged on with the chains losing several billion dollars in sales and UFCW running short of strike funds. Without the Wal-Mart factor, the



PHOTO COURTESY OF UFCW

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Democratic Socialists of America share a vision of a humane international social order based on equitable distribution of resources, meaningful work, a healthy environment, sustainable growth, gender and racial equality, and non-oppressive relationships. Equality, solidarity, and democracy can only be achieved through international political and social cooperation aimed at ensuring that economic institutions benefit all people. We are dedicated to building truly international social movements - of unionists, environmentalists, feminists, and people of color - which together can elevate global justice over brutalizing global competition.

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# OPINION

## The Spanish Elections

Conservatives, right-wingers and pro-war pundits have lamented the victory of our sister party the PSOE in the Spanish elections as appeasement, capitulation to terrorism and a political tragedy of the first order. Several have suggested that the election should not have been held. Others are but a millisecond away from claiming that anything but a Bush landslide in November will be a victory for al-Qaeda.

All of this hand wringing stems from the fact that the pre-election polls predicted that the conservatives would be reelected. Pundits always need to be reminded that the polls don't determine the outcome of elections; voters do. Ask Howard Dean!

What this is really about is democracy and the fear that it could happen here, too. The Spanish government's support of the War in Iraq was vastly unpopular with all segments of the electorate, including conservative voters. The monstrous bombings were carried out by Islamic fundamentalists, not Basque separatists as the government tried to claim. The government lost the election because it withheld for political purposes information the people had a right to know and because the people punished the conservatives for implementing policies they were opposed to. That is what democracy is all about.

No group of voters suddenly changed their minds because of the bombings. The bombings did motivate some voters opposed to the government, particularly young people, to vote that had not intended to vote, resulting in a very high turnout (something which always makes the polls inaccurate). Civic participation in Spain, the same kind of democratic participation that brought more than ten million to the streets in demonstrations against the terrorist bombing, is to be commended and even emulated, not condemned.

Americans need to be concerned about the right's tendency to dismiss democratic electoral outcomes that they don't agree with. The upcoming election may well be the closest in history and closer than the 2000 election. If the fabled "October Surprise" is not to their liking, these same pundits might decide that our election should be put off. Having gotten away with stealing one election, is there any doubt that the right would steal another?

The victory of the PSOE is a challenge to every American activist who says that elections don't matter. It is a challenge to us to register and motivate voters and not give in to political despair.

Most of all it is a challenge to turn our protests into effective political action.

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## DSA Midwest Regional Conference October 9, 2004 – Minneapolis

The next DSA Regional Conference has been scheduled for October 9, 2004, in Minneapolis. The conference will include a special session focused on foreign policy issues. More details will be available as we get closer to the event; but please save the date.

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Cover photo: "The World Still Says No To War" march in New York City marking the one-year anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Photograph by Michael Hirsch.

# Capturing the Middle Way

By Mark Seddon

One of *Tribune's* more famous editors, George Orwell, wrote a particularly prescient book that is even more relevant in these dark times. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* depicted a future totalitarian world, where citizens were routinely spied on and all dissent was ruthlessly suppressed. Britain had been re-named "Airstrip One," and it is from "Airstrip One" - or the "colonies" as we like to describe it now, that I come. I wish I could bring greetings to the Socialist Scholars Conference from Tony Blair - but I suspect that he has forgotten what socialism is, if ever he knew what it was in the first place.

There has been much talk post-9/11, in Britain at least, of the "Special Relationship" between our countries. Those most keen to latch onto this phrase are in reality referring to the political and military relationship that has Britain very much as a junior partner. If truth be told, the relationship between Tony Blair and George Bush is a dysfunctional one, an abusive relationship if you like, and one that neither can escape from because they know of nothing better.

But there *is* a special relationship between the ordinary people of my country and yours. There is a very special relationship that has grown in recent years between British trade unionists, *Tribune* and the left, with the Democratic Socialists of America, many of your union locals and all of you here. And it is to you we look to begin the process of radical change that can begin to restore liberty, equality and fraternity in a fractured world.

This week marks the anniversary of the beginning of the illegal



**For too long we have allowed the right to march roughshod all over us**

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and immoral war on Iraq. The title of this SSC Conference is "The World is Not For Sale." Well, last year in Baghdad, even before the estate agent's sign went up - or more precisely before Hans Blix and his weapons inspectors could complete their job - U.S. and British marines went in. Last year's SSC took place on the brink of the war - and there is little point in rehearsing all of the arguments made in this hall then, because most of you will remember them and just how sadly right many of our predictions were. However, we shouldn't allow some people to forget what they said then as they dissemble now.

Who, for instance, said: "Those who say we haven't found the banned manufacturing devices or banned weapons - they're wrong. We found them!" Well, it was Tony Blair, talking about vehicles that turned out to be for the production of hydrogen for weather balloons that had been exported by Britain.

And who said, "Our conservative estimate is that Iraq today has a

stockpile of between 100 and 500 tons of chemical weapons agent. That is enough to fill 16,000 battlefield rockets"? Well, that was Colin Powell. And what about this one: "This is still a dangerous world. It's a world of madmen and uncertainty and potential mental losses"? You guessed it! It's Dubya!

Last year I went to Iraq. I went to see Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz. There was no doubt in my mind that the regime he represented was evil and despot-ic. The question in my mind was how best to deal with it. Military containment had worked; the weapons inspections were working - and according to Aziz, Iraq "had no weapons of mass destruction." "Tell your Mr. Blair," he said, "he is welcome to send anyone he likes to see if we have WMD." When I told Tony Blair of this at our Labour Party National Executive Committee meeting, I also told him that it was easier to get a cup of tea with the Iraqi Foreign Minister than it was with him.

A former American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles once said - and I paraphrase - "In order for a people to carry a heavy burden it is important to create the idea of a threat." This threat now is international terrorism, a threat magnified by the folly that was the Iraq War. This threat is being used to clamp down on our civil liberties, restrict movement and, most perniciously of all, to advance an argument now familiar to us - that of the need for pre-emptive military action when circumstances dictate. The attacks on the WTC and the bombings in

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# Kerry or Nader: Does It Make Any Difference? Or, It's the Social Movements, Stupid

By Michael Hirsch

Voting is a bitch. John Kerry will get my vote in the November elections, and I'll give it with the same grudging, wintry discontent that I did in the last two presidential elections, when I backed Ralph Nader. In those races, I made statements. Now I want to beat Bush

But that's not what this piece is about. It's not why a vote for Kerry is inevitable in a year when Bush is vulnerable. It's about how liberals and leftists on both sides of the Kerry-Nader divide get rabidly exercised about other people's campaign choices, when they both know that power does not come out of an election booth. It comes out of economic and social movements poised to hold officeholders accountable. It's about never forgetting that the Left - the only hope for humanity (florid, but do I exaggerate?) - isn't built by electoral struggle but by building the social movements, before, during and after elections. It is the weakness of the social movements that forces such unappetizing choices on us.

Beyond the facility of corporate Democrats to co-opt movement leaders into precinct captains or the fecklessness of radicals to form lasting electoral alternatives, a corporate Democrat is sadly our last best shot for ending the White House occupation because no social movements are strong enough to move the country leftward.

That hasn't stopped sides from forming up for color war, with the loudest drumming from the punditry. When Nader announced his

third run, the usually measured Michael Tomasky, for one, counseled Democrat candidates to "attack Nader right now, and with



Lupine ferocity." He told *The American Prospect* readers how Nader was "a megalomaniac whose tenuous purchase on present-day reality threatens to cancel out every good thing he's done in his life," which, if true, would be a cancellation on the order of the original *Star Trek*.

There was more passion on view in Tomasky's tough love for Nader than in his eight years of covering Rudy Giuliani, the race-baiting, city-service privatizing, real-estate creature and poster boy for megalomania whom he characterized in *New York* magazine as someone who ran for office "to the right of how he ruled."

Making the case for Kerry is no slam-dunk. Problems with the Washington fixture are palpable and can be lined up and bowled over like candlepins. But even if Kerry were the political bastard his leftist detractors say he is, he is - as FDR said of the senior Somoza - our bastard, at least until Nov. 4. Until then, the anti-Bush effort is well worth building in its own right, if only as *realpolitik*. It needn't be dressed up by pounding the iron necessity of beating Bush into a tin-plated virtue. We don't *have* to say the ridiculous or the indefensible on Kerry's behalf.

Of course, some critics of the Democratic candidate do offer a real-world model for Tomasky's ravaging beasts. John Pilger's *New Statesman* screed (March 4), widely clipped and distributed over the Internet and on Web sites including ZNet, came illustrated in the original London version with a split screen of Bush and Kerry melded into one face, sharing a lipless sneer. Same man and same agenda.

Pilger says pointing to differences between Bush and Kerry is "a big lie," that distinctions between the two do not "go beyond the use of euphemisms," and that the real objection to Bush by Democrats is to his outspokenness, to his administration's "crude honesty," and not to any policy differences. "The Democratic Party has left a longer trail of blood, theft and subjugation than the Republicans [which] is heresy to the liberal crusaders, whose murderous history always requires, it seems, a noble mantle. What reader of *Democratic Left* doubts that the trail was blazed in a fit of bipartisanship, along with opposition throughout ever sector of society, including the two parties?

What does any of Pilger's biliousness tell us about politics and political choices? Or even about Kerry, who was a genuine antiwar hero back in the day? Nothing. It's catharsis. Much of the same runs in *Counterpunch*, where Alex Cockburn and friends equate Kerry bashing with political comment, or in one small left-wing paper that

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# Southern California Grocery Strike

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chains' bargaining position made no sense economically; the income lost would take years to make up even if the union gave in. Steven Burd, the head of Safeway, was reported to have said he would take the stores into bankruptcy rather than renew the previous contract. By mid-December, the importance of this conflict for the entire U.S. labor movement became clear to all. In San Diego, the Central Labor Council took on the task of involving other unions and the community in strike support. The Teamsters refused to deliver merchandise to the stores; unions and community organizations would "adopt" a store by joining the picket lines and providing food and drinks for picketers. The Labor Council organized a number of large rallies to keep the strike in front of the public's mind and to keep up the morale of the grocery workers. San Diego DSA played a significant role in organizing community participation on the picket lines and rallies. In the latter stages of the strike, the AFL-CIO played an increasing role and organized a national boycott of Safeway stores. Through our web site, DSA spread the word about the boycott and urged our members and supporters to participate.

An agreement to end the strike/lockout was reached in early March 2004. The proposed contract was ratified by about eighty per cent of UFCW members. The workers would no longer get a fully paid health plan, but the employee contribution would not kick in for two years and would be less than management's original demand. But the unions did accede to the grocery chains' desire to implement a two-tiered wage and benefit system, leaving future unionized grocery workers without the middle-strata level of wages and benefits achieved by prior generations.

The fact that the UFCW members stuck it out and didn't cross their own lines to return to work is itself a victory and a testament to the enduring strength of the U.S. labor movement. The union survived and is here to fight another day. But the trade union movement is not yet strong enough to turn back the Walmartization of the United States working class.

The most important lesson we can learn from this strike may be that we have to take the threat of Wal-Mart as seriously as do the grocery chains. The ultimate defense of the living standards of the grocery clerks requires the unionization of Wal-Mart workers. That would have a domino effect on the entire U.S. low-wage economy. A campaign to unionize Wal-Mart would require cooperation between the progressive public and the labor movement on the scale of the United Farm Workers grape boycott. That would mean the revitalization of a broad progressive coalition that sees the rights of working people as playing a central role in the fight for social justice. Can such a campaign be organized? That is the challenge that DSA and the broad labor-left must take on.

More immediately, more grocery contracts around the country will expire in the coming year. It is important that the terms of the Southern California settlement not be regarded as the pattern to be followed for the others. Instead, the experience here should be regarded as the first battle in a long struggle. Future battles do not have to follow the pattern of the one just past. The entire U.S. labor movement should join in and make the strike a national issue from the first

day of the strike, instead of the slowly escalating involvement that actually occurred. The time to start educating the public about Safeway and Kroger is now, months before a strike begins. The progressive movement should be lobbying national religious and political leaders to support a boycott of the stores



PHOTO COURTESY OF UFCW

*Rally in Washington, DC, to support the striking grocery workers in Southern California*

should a strike occur. Given the national character of the chains and their newfound intransigence, it seems clear that the key to achieving real success is to nationalize the struggle from the beginning.

The Southern California grocery strike demonstrates that, even in conservative San Diego, public opinion will side with union members in a labor struggle if the issues are clearly explained. With that support we can be optimistic that there will be victories to come.

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*Herb Shore is a member of DSA's National Political Committee who lives in San Diego, CA.*

# Kerry or Nader

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urges readers to “get off the Democratic Party train now,” in order to “fight for a new political party,” presumably one devoid of those pesky misleaders who seem to muck things up. This without explaining how a second Bush administration could possibly bring that goal of better trains and better leaders nearer.

At least the Greens bring some humor to the table, as when St. Louis Green Party organizer Don Fitz turns the question around, asking, “Should the Democrats Run a Candidate for President in 2004?” and says, with some justification, “If the Democrats were against the Bush program, why would they wait for the election to fight it?”

Let’s shovel away the accumulated sludge. Nader’s take on corporate power is terrific, as far as it goes. *Crashing the Party*, his account of the 2000 race, is a good statement of first principles as well as a fair treatment of how hard it is to raise political issues in a national campaign, especially absent a social movement running interference for you. Nader also has every right to run for president, and leftists who know that defeating Bush is all-important have every right to make a compelling political argument that concludes with “Ralph, Don’t Run (Please).” But we have no right to chant “unclean, unclean” or vilify his supporters

The problem I have with Nader’s run is not bad faith on his part or assuming he believes in the worse, the better. Such people exist, but they aren’t Ralph. It’s how his brand of anti-corporatism won’t mesh with a political campaign. While he can be expected to run a brilliant position-paper operation

that spotlights big business domination of political and economic life, don’t assume he will target the real dissatisfaction voters have with the Iraq occupation, even its corporate analog, or offer voters an alternative.

Everything Nader says will resonate as a critique of a bought-and-paid-for two party system, not a bash at Bush or even a synthetic

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## Everything Nader says will resonate as a critique of a bought-and-paid-for two party system, not a bash at Bush

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look at what got bought. If he were instead to frame Bush as an acknowledged corporate tool, he’d play a hero’s role in bringing Bush down. But that would detract from building a third party, his acknowledged goal. Now, I want a left-of-center political party, too, one that can harness and represent working class politics in a way the Democratic Party in its big tent, corporate-dominated incarnation cannot. Or one that doesn’t shy away from social issues, something Nader’s past campaigns were notorious for doing. But the time and place to build that party or that coalition isn’t eight months from November and on the national level, especially when you don’t have 50-state ballot access or even a skeletal Green Party apparatus to run with.

If the pro-Kerry folk tend to be unreflective or even somnolent about how bad the situation is – that in 2004, amid war, joblessness and poverty, we soldier on and hopefully elect another centrist Democrat – then the self-styled revolutionary Left’s sin is to act like lemmings, as though the sea were not instant death and Bush or Kerry do not matter. The candidate of one socialist groupuscule says he is run-

ning as “a voice for the international working class in the 2004 US elections.” Even bullfrogs don’t puff themselves up that much.

Differences like these won’t get resolved by talking or fighting from now until November. Instead of an arctic night of long knives, I’d rather DSA activists work our own sides of the street. That could mean stumping for Kerry, or insisting – as

DSA does – that the social movements have an independent voice and face in the campaign and room to grow. It could mean running the ground war in markets where the emphasis by the party pros will be on

television saturation in the 17 battleground states. It could mean focusing on local races, where a few hardcore campaigners can make a difference in swinging control of state houses or Congress. In New York City, for example, that means working in the long-shot Frank Barbaro campaign in Brooklyn-Staten Island against a hard-core right-winger who holds office in a district that boasts the highest union-household density in the nation. Or it could mean backing independent candidates with a chance of winning and who deserve to win, such as Matt Gonzalez in San Francisco last year

After November, leftists are going to need each other, unmaimed. If nothing else, we can at least dial it down and get to work.

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*Michael Hirsch is a member of DSA’s National Political Committee and an editor of New Politics and Democratic Left. He ran as a Dennis Kucinich delegate in the March primary, outpolling the Ohio congressman in New York’s 14th C.D. by some 200 votes. “Dennis ran on my coat-tails,” Hirsch says.*



# Life After Bush: Youth Magnet

By Lucas Shapiro

“Life After Bush: Youth Activism & the Fight for Our Future,” the recent YDS national conference at New York’s City University, attracted over 300 young activists from across the country. Participants came from as far away as California, Arizona, Texas and Minnesota, with a hefty showing from the northeast. Turnout far exceeded expectations, and feedback from the diverse crowd of high school, college, and graduate students was overwhelmingly positive.

## Learning

“Life After Bush” addressed the challenges of the 2004 elections, prospects for building the youth and student wing of the Dump Bush movement, and long-term strategies for progressive change. Eighteen workshops and major plenary sessions covered a wide range of pressing economic, social and ideological matters together with foreign and public policy options.

Rutgers professor Stephen Eric Bronner led a well-received presentation on democratic socialism. Patterson University professor and London *Tribune* columnist John Mason offered alternatives to the U.S.-led occupation, observing that the “bring the troops home now” slogan is insufficient, given the dangers of civil war, Islamic fundamentalism and pervasive insecurity in Iraq. A series of well-attended workshops, led by veteran campaigners from trade unions and the NY DSA-affiliated Working Families Party, detailed the nuts-and-bolts of electoral activism. Other topics included gay marriage and LGBTQ rights, student-labor solidarity, civil liberties, the global justice movement, campus anti-war activism, high school organizing, and a slideshow presentation on the economy.

“Beating the Bush Agenda,” was

the topic of the opening plenary, with CUNY professor and DSA Honorary Chair Frances Fox Piven, Temple professor and DSA Steering Committee Chair Joseph Schwartz, along with United for Peace and Justice National Coordinator Leslie Cagan. They commented on various facets of the Bush administration’s regressive “achievements,” deficits in the Democratic Party “opposition,” and the need to build a broad base of social forces capable of ensuring regime change in November and channeling anti-Bush crusades into an increasingly influential leftist national presence.

“The Future of Radical Democracy,” brought together Steve Max of the Midwest Academy, Princeton professor and DSA Honorary Chair Cornel West, and Bertha Lewis, Executive Director of New York ACORN and co-chair of the Working Families Party. Max opened with a humorous tale of past ultra-leftist follies,

then contrasted how the Right in the U.S. had largely succeeded in propagating a clear anti-government, unifying vision – bridging the values of cultural conservatives and the economic elite. He said what remains of the Left lacks a coherent set of ideals and programmatic alternatives of its own. For Max, and many other speakers throughout the weekend, democratic socialism provided such an alternative. Bertha Lewis addressed the large crowd by regaling them with her experiences as a grassroots organizer working on day-to-day struggles and winnable electoral battles. Cornel West told us of the intellectual, ethical, and humanistic requisites for a life-long commitment to social change.

## Plugging In

“Life After Bush” also provided an excellent opportunity for young

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*The National Youth & Student Peace Coalition, of which YDS is a member, marching in the protests in New York marking the one-year anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.*



## Focus on Locals: Sacramento “Sunday Voter Matinee”

Since 1994, Sacramento DSA has fought against negative, race-based propositions on the California ballot and for some positive propositions (see [www.dsausa.org/antiracism](http://www.dsausa.org/antiracism)). The focus on ballot questions allows us to participate in the electoral arena without being tied to Democratic Party candidates.

This year, the local cosponsored a Sunday Voter Matinee on February 22, at California State University-Sacramento. Edward Asner hosted the event and proudly identified himself as a DSA member. The event drew some 120 people and received regional media coverage.

The opening presentation by Jim Shoch, former national director of DSA, was a tour de force on George Bush and the dangers of a consolidated Bush regime. There was unanimity among the speakers about the need to defeat Bush in November.

Presentations dealt with the major controversial propositions on California's March ballot: Prop. 55 (school bonds); Prop. 56 (the labor-supported Budget Accountability Act); and Props. 57 and 58 (Schwarzenegger's bond issues). The speakers almost unanimously supported Prop. 56. Governor Schwarzenegger's current budget disaster and his Props. 57 and 58 were examined from several viewpoints.

The Matinee also featured a panel of candidates from a hotly contested Assembly district race, including that race's labor-backed victor.

Student speaker John Kincaid described how severe were the cuts to public higher education in the Schwarzenegger proposals. The dramatic decline in the last decade of California's once-respected system of public higher education illustrates the extent of the problem and the shortcomings of the Republican anti-tax approach.

(In the subsequent March 2 primary, the balloting was the reverse of the opinions of our audience: Prop. 55 barely passed with 50.6% statewide, Labor's proposition 56 failed with

65.9% against, and the Schwarzenegger propositions 57 and 58 passed by 63% and 71% respectively. Students soon after organized a walkout in protest of their skyrocketing tuition fees.)

Sacramento DSA PAC got involved in organizing the event with two goals; helping to organize for campaign work (specifically for Dennis Kucinich); and building cadre for DSA. When planning for the event began, the cosponsors agreed that one facet of the meeting would be to do some organizing for the Kucinich campaign. However, after the candidate announced that he could not attend, that focus “evolved out” of the program (in spite of the fact that campaign representatives volunteered to fill in). For that reason, both the local DSA PAC and the Kucinich campaign felt that the event was less successful than it could have been.

In reviewing the event, Sacramento DSA has concluded it should go into planning programs with clear goals and reflect on those goals throughout the process to make sure to address them. Similarly, when working in coalitions, we need to insist on our agenda as programs develop and change.

While it is good to have events with an educational focus, they also need to recruit new people to political activism and participation in campaigns. And we need to recruit new people to DSA locals.

—Duane Campbell  
Sacramento DSA



PHOTO BY DUANE CAMPBELL, SACRAMENTO DSA

*Sacramento DSA members took part in this student rally at the California state capitol protesting budget cuts that denied 10,000 students admission to community colleges. Here State Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez addresses the crowd.*



PHOTO BY LISA SPINDLER, DETROIT

# Unsung Heroine: Millie Jeffrey

By Harold Meyerson

Behind every successful man, the old saying used to go, stands a supportive woman. No one has come up with an adage identifying who, exactly, stands behind a successful woman, so let me make a modest suggestion: Millie Jeffrey.

Mildred McWilliams Jeffrey, who died last week at a Detroit nursing home at age 93, was – among many other things – the great, behind-the-scenes strategist of modern American feminism. In the early '70s, during her final years on the staff of the United Auto Workers, she helped found the National Women's Political Caucus and launched a decade-long campaign to have Democratic National Convention delegate slots divided equally between men and women. As Millie saw it, equal division wasn't just, or even primarily, an end in itself, recalls Joan McClain, a politics professor at Ohio Wesleyan, who made a documentary film on Jeffrey's life. "If the convention was divided 50-50," McClain recalls Jeffrey arguing, "that would percolate down to having more experienced women ready to run for office."

From her perch on several Democratic Party commissions, and using the contacts she'd acquired in 40 years of liberal activism, Millie built enough support for this wild-eyed notion that it was adopted by the 1980 convention. Millie then became "the unelected leader," in the words of her co-conspirator Joanne Howes, of a committee of seven Democratic women promoting the idea of a female vice presidential candidate on the 1984 ticket. "By the fall of 1983," recalls Howes, "we came to the conclusion that the right person was Gerry Ferraro" – then an obscure member of Congress from Queens. That required augmenting Ferraro's visibility and bona fides, and as a result of "Millie's strategic thinking," says Howes, the group successfully pressured the party and Walter Mondale to make Ferraro chair of the convention platform committee. The rest is herstory.

When Millie died last week, both Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm and Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) told the media that they would not be in their current positions without the decades of work that Millie had put in on behalf of equal opportunities for women. That work began in the 1930s, when Millie, a fiery young socialist, organized clothing workers in the South. In 1944, she became the first director of the UAW's Women's Bureau, working to secure child care and transportation for the quarter-million Riveting Rosies who had swelled the UAW's ranks – and teaching the women the parliamentary and bureaucratic skills they needed to have a role in their union.

By the end of World War II, Millie had become one of a number of extraordinarily talented staffers whom Walter Reuther hired to help him mold the auto workers into the greatest force for social democracy that America has ever known. Under Reuther, the UAW became the anchor tenant in the house of postwar liberalism. Its contracts, and those of the steelworkers, set the standard for the entire manufacturing sector, and for the three decades after World War II, working-class living standards in the United States rose just as steeply as upper-middle class living standards – an equality of economic opportunity that America has experienced only during this period of union strength.

More than that, though, the Reutherites saw it as their duty to bolster newer movements for social equality. They provided political and material assistance to the civil rights movement (it was the UAW that paid for the signs and sound system at the great 1963 March on Washington), for Cesar Chavez's farm workers, for the campus left in the early '60s, for start-up feminist organizations and the first Earth Day.

And for several decades, Walter Reuther's emissary to these groups was Millie Jeffrey.

And so it was that Millie trained activists from the National Council of Churches to lobby for civil rights, introduced the young Jack Kennedy to NAACP leaders, secured UAW support for inner-city community organizing, and obtained the UAW's campground at Port Huron for the founding meeting of Students for a Democratic Society. In the years before the New Left descended to ultra-left wackiness, there was no better emissary between the generations of '30s and '60s leftists. In the '70s, when many New Leftists began to re-engage reality, Millie was there to ease their reentry. "It was typical of Millie to bring skills from one movement to the next," McClain says.

Her energy was the stuff of legend. Determined to attend the inauguration of Madeleine Kunin as governor of Vermont, which occurred in the middle of the 1981 air traffic controllers' strike, the then 70-year-old Millie traveled from Detroit to Montpelier by bus. Two years ago, at age 91, she bused down from Detroit to Cleveland to witness Joan Campbell's swearing in as mayor. Not without some misgivings, McClain dropped her at the Cleveland bus station for the return trip. "I'll be fine," Millie said. "See ya."

"I'll retire when I die," Millie frequently said. Somehow, I don't entirely believe that.

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*Harold Meyerson is The American Prospect's editor-at-large. This column originally appeared in The Washington Post.*

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## Life After Bush

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people to plug into various activist campaigns and mobilizations, including the "Books Not Bombs" day of action spearheaded by the National Youth and Student Peace Coalition (YDS is an active member), where high school and college-aged activists across the country rallied against the domestic effects of Bushism: massive tuition increases, an expansion of working-class targeted military recruitment, curtailment of civil liberties, fewer prospects for securing meaningful employment, and the continued collusion between some university departments, the Pentagon and private weapon manufacturers.

Several other mass mobilizations were highlighted over the course of the weekend. Leslie Cagan encouraged attendees to organize "The World Still Says No to War" international day of action marking the one-year anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Workshop presenter Zenaida Mendez, the National Organization of Women's (NOW) Director of Racial Diversity Programs, and tablers from Planned Parenthood promoted the "March for Women's Lives" demonstration in Washington, DC. Representatives from the grassroots organizations FURY, Still We Rise, Racial Justice 9-11 and NYC Summer detailed plans for the Republican National Convention protests taking place in New York City from late August to early September.

### Planning ahead

The success of "Life After Bush" is one manifestation of the widespread desire among young activists to meet the challenges of this critical election year. With the stakes set tremendously high, there is a real sense that our collective efforts may indeed change the course of history and send Dubya packing to Crawford, Texas.

The goal of the Young Democratic Socialists in these coming months is to help organize this anti-Bush current into various grassroots initiatives around the country, registering voters, doing issue education on campuses and in local communities, articulating our approach to electoral politics, and making the case that regime change in Washington is only the first step in a sustained effort to radically improve America in the interests of peace, democracy and social justice.

To this end, YDS is organizing a Summer Activist Institute in NYC this summer for students and youth who want to plug into the extensive ongoing mobilizations, as well as spend time with other democratic socialists to design campaigns, discuss theory/practice and have a great time.

We welcome your ideas and support in developing this initiative. YDS organizers are also visiting campuses, speaking at teach-ins on the Dump Bush movement and the 2004 elections. Please contact me to arrange a visit in your area.

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*Lucas Shapiro, the National Organizer of Young Democratic Socialists, DSA's Youth Section, can be reached at [lucasa@dsausa.org](mailto:lucasa@dsausa.org) or (212) 727-8610 ext. 24.*



# Talking Points for the Left

By Bill Mosley

Al Franken. *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right*. Dutton. 377 pp. \$24.95.

Jim Hightower. *Thieves in High Places: They've Stolen Our Country and It's Time to Take It Back*. Viking. 270 pp. \$24.95.

Molly Ivins and Lou Dubose. *Bushwhacked: Life in George W. Bush's America*. Random House. 308 pp. \$24.95

Michael Moore. *Dude, Where's My Country?* Warner Books. 217 pages. \$24.95.

It feels as though commercial media have been dominated forever by voices of the Right - Rush Limbaugh, Ann Coulter, Matt Drudge, Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly - while progressive voices are banished to a few small independent media. According to *The American Prospect*, the 44 highest-rated talk radio stations carry 312 hours of conservative programs compared to only five hours from the liberal-left.

While there's no sign of a wholesale progressive takeover of the media, liberal-left voices have lately been more successful in finding mass audiences. Air America Radio, the nation's only commercial talk radio network with a liberal-progressive slant, debuts this spring. In addition, books with left-of-center slants lately have been sprouting like mushrooms - and some have been finding a wide readership. The books reviewed here are only a sampling of left-liberal offerings in bookstores.

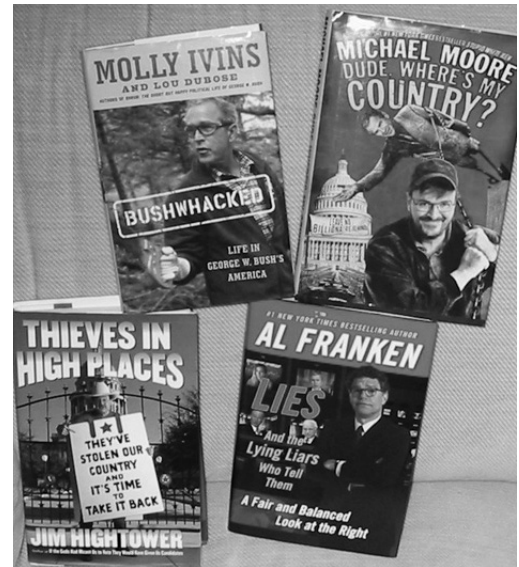
The new offerings by Al Franken, Jim Hightower, Molly Ivins/Lou Dubose and Michael Moore all can be viewed as providing ammunition to the Left to fight back against the Bush administration and its toadies at Fox News, MSNBC and the conservative journals.

What kind of "talking points" do these books offer us?

One refreshing feature of these books is their directness, plain-spokenness and lack of equivocation. One strength of right-wing commentators is that they portray everything as black and white.

These books answer in kind by taking strong points of view and stating them in plain, direct language. One will find no academese in these books. And since the authors come from different (but all satirical) backgrounds, all four books employ humor in different ways, breaking out of the tendency of left-leaning literature to be all grim earnestness.

Of the four books, Hightower's contains the most focused, sustained critique of what's wrong with America and what to do about it. Hightower shows how America has become a "kleptocrat nation" - a government ruled by corporate thieves and the government that they have come to dominate through campaign contributions and the government-industry revolving door. Nevertheless, he remains optimistic over the prospect of a turnaround in American politics, for he sees most Americans as fundamentally progressive. Yet the change will come not from establishment politicians but from campuses, churches, union halls and kitchens. He holds no faith in Democratic officeholders, calling them "Wobblycrats" who caved in to Bush on the PATRIOT Act, homeland security pro-corporate globalization initiatives such as NAFTA - noting that the Bush tax cuts wouldn't have passed without 12 turncoat Democratic senators. No, if America is to be reclaimed,



the people will have to do it themselves. Fortunately, the grassroots revolution is already underway, mostly in small ways - but, as Hightower reminds us, "even the smallest dog can lift its leg on the tallest building." He writes of citizens of Stevens County, Washington, rallying to save their public libraries; Glendale, Arizona, telling Wal-Mart to get lost (and noting that 170 American towns and cities "have beaten a big-box store at least once"); and the visionary Los Angeles garment shot "TeamX" that is unionized, worker-owned, operated on a "solidarity ratio" (no executive can earn more than eight times the salary of a production worker) - and profitable. Hightower ends his book with an eight-page listing of progressive organizations readers can contact

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# Getting Back on Track

By Jason Schulman

James Weinstein. *The Long Detour: The History and Future of the American Left*. Westview Press, 2003. 286 pp. \$26.00

James Weinstein has not given up on American socialism. His admitted “pathological optimism” appears to have little diminished from the days twenty-eight years past when he founded the still-running biweekly newsmagazine *In These Times*, or even from thirty-five years ago when he founded the journal *Socialist Revolution* (later *Socialist Review*, and today, *Radical Society*). He still sees our country as “tending inexorably, if fitfully, towards a more inclusive democracy.” And, just as he angered some on the Left when he confirmed that Julius Rosenberg did in fact pass on information to the Soviet Union, he will doubtless anger yet more with his strategic advice.

Much of the history that Weinstein covers in *The Long Detour* will be familiar territory to many DSA members. Here again is the story of the rise and fall of the Socialist Party of Eugene Debs, Morris Hillquit, Victor Berger and Big Bill Haywood, and its forerunners in utopian colonies and the Socialist Labor Party. Not much is new here - though Weinstein’s representation of Marx’s critique of anarchism for its denigration of workers’ “spontaneous” fight for the right to vote and to organize unions is appreciated, as is his point that “when the left fails to create viable movements that offer a place in which to act on the left’s own behalf, anarchist ideas and groups have had a lingering appeal, especially to newly radicalized young people.” (Contemporary radicalism offers proof positive of this statement.) Weinstein’s main aim in telling the story of the SP once more is to stress that the reforms

offered in the party’s program eventually became part of mainstream political discourse, even as the party itself declined. Also notable is the struggle of the SP to distinguish itself from Progressive Era reformers without marginalizing itself.

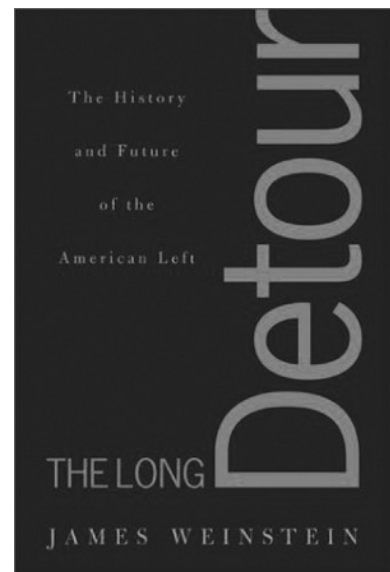
In his chapters on the Russian Revolution and its aftermath, Weinstein again revisits a well-documented history, one that veteran leftist readers probably already know and which newcomers may not find particularly relevant or

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**It is refreshing to read an author who understands that humanity’s long-run alternatives are, indeed, socialism or barbarism**

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even interesting. But even today it’s worthwhile to explode Stalinism’s socialist pretensions, and perhaps nothing does it better than Weinstein’s example of how the Russian city of Magnitogorsk - in the 1930s the very model of a “socialist” city - was modeled after Gary, Indiana’s giant US Steel plant. The USSR was, in Weinstein’s words, “an amalgam of the worst aspects of feudalism, the harshest practices of capitalism, and social protections associated with socialism” - and indeed, it “put the finishing touches on the American left” by distorting socialism’s very meaning, even as the Communist Party USA became a real presence in American life. He critiques the CPUSA for, ironically, bequeathing an “aversion to universal principles” to the New Left via its operation through - and submersion into



- single-issue movements. He makes a fair point. And he is not far off when he discusses how, in the 1970s, the post-New Left’s “attacks on traditional institutions - grossly exaggerated by right-wing media - helped create a large working-class constituency of ‘Reagan Democrats.’”

Weinstein goes awry, however, in his criticism of mandatory busing to achieve school integration of black and white children. He claims it accomplished nothing except segregation within schools in the place of segregation between them. This may be, in fact, what happened, but his discussion fails to engage with the history of the Black Freedom Movement around public education, particularly in Boston, where it was determined that the School Committee engaged in *intentional* segregation and hence desegregation was necessary. Weinstein makes it sound as if busing was an arbitrary decision made in the 1970s; he fails to mention that black parents were effectively agitating for it as early as 1950. That is, as Ruth Batson said at the time, black parents simply wanted to get their children “to

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## Talking Points

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to get involved.

Moore's book dwells heavily on the post-9/11/01 obsession with security and the destruction this has wrought on America's civic life and civil liberties. "They call it a war on 'terror.' How do you conduct war on a noun?" Moore asks rhetorically. The Bush administration has exploited terrorism to advance its pre-9/11 goal of world domination, he argues; the Bushites "know that *real* Americans are not into dominating anyone, so they have to sell it to us in fancy packaging - and that package is FEAR." He draws a link between the war on terror and corporate America's war on most Americans: while the nation is distracted by real or imagined terror threats, "American businesses . . . have wrecked our economy." He takes on the "talking points" issue directly in a chapter entitled "How to Talk to Your Conservative Brother-in-Law," in which he lays out the argument that progressive policy - providing universal health insurance, cleaning the air and water, improving public schools - will actually put money in the pocket of said relative. It's a good effort, but it won't convince *my* brother-in-law.

While the better part of Franken's book is a liberal's counterattack against the right-wing media, the volume also meanders through the eclectic garden of Franken's obsessions. He and his son visit Bob Jones University, the latter in the guise of prospective enrollee - a stunt that would have made a great bit for Moore's late program *TV Nation* but that falls a bit flat for Franken - as does his reprise of *Big Fat Idiot's* "Operation Chickenhawk."

But when Franken sticks to rubbing the right-wing media's collective nose in its own biases and

contradictions, he scores big. Two entire chapters catalogue Ann Coulter's lies, distortions and just plain nuttiness, including her false claim that *Newsweek's* Evan Thomas is a son of Norman Thomas. He spares no ammunition against right-wing Fox News, which he depicts as an expensive tool for owner Rupert Murdoch to promote his financial interests. Oddly enough for a comedian, he's

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### Engage in political struggle as if you expect to win. And never, never lose your sense of humor

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less effective when trying to be funny than when spewing righteous anger. And, in sharp contrast to Hightower, he willingly mounts the Democratic donkey. To him, Bill Clinton could do no wrong, especially in fighting terrorism: he touts "Clinton's far-reaching plan to eliminate al Qaeda," his thwarting of various domestic terror plots, and so on. No doubt when John Kerry (portrayed heroically in "Chickenhawk") becomes president, Franken will become a fixture at White House dinners.

Ivins and Dubose, in a series of essays featuring strong reportage, put a human face on the abuses and failings of the Bush administration. They show how corporate greed and the policies of Dubya - himself a practitioner of corporate shenanigans in his days at Harken Energy - have given big business a free hand in its war against average Americans. Story after story show parents desperately seeking work while facing expiration of their unemployment benefits, neighborhoods suffering from toxic pollutants, and workers suffering repetitive-motion injuries - all while corporate fat cats take their tax cuts to the bank. As the pages turn, the accumulated rage - both the authors' and reader's - hits the boil-

ing point. And through it all, Ivins and Dubose employ enough sarcasm and folksy turns of phrase to make Hightower proud - such as "Heckfire and brimpebbles were the best GeeBubya could manage as he wagged his fingers a Wall Street's corporate criminals," and noting that Texas is "the state that gave you tort reform, H. Ross Perot and penis-enlargement options on executive health plans." Ivins and

Dubose's policy solutions - public campaign financing, increasing voter turnout, cracking down on corporate criminals - are sensible but seemingly insufficient after the litany of abuse they catalogue. Revolution would be more like it.

So, how can this new crop of books help the Left organize? Collectively, they contain sage advice: Speak the language of the people. Take no prisoners when attacking the lies and distortions of the Right. Don't forget that most Americans agree with us on most things. Engage in political struggle as if you expect to win. And never, never lose your sense of humor.

We could do worse.

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*Bill Mosley is a member of the DL editorial committee. Contact him at [billmosley@verizon.net](mailto:billmosley@verizon.net).*

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**Democratic Left welcomes letters from its readers. To have the best chance of being published in full, letters should be kept to a maximum of 150 words.**

**Send your letters to 198 Broadway, Suite 700, New York, NY 10038, or email them to [letters@dsausa.org](mailto:letters@dsausa.org).**

## Middle Way

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Madrid and elsewhere mean that the threat in Dulles' words is not being "created." But here in New York and back home in London and across the globe, people are well aware of the bigger threats that face us. Poverty, HIV-AIDS Aids, global warming and coming resource wars are much more serious than the random, if highly destructive, bombings of groups that could be isolated if we took a holistic attitude to the Middle East.

Perhaps it is time after all to borrow something from the political wasteland of Tony Blair's Britain. Let's capture the Middle Way - a Middle Way between the extremes of the market fundamentalists of the West and the religious fundamentalists of the Middle East. That Middle Way is our democratic socialism - surely the best antidote to the arid uncertainties of the new world order. And let's go on the offensive again. For too long we have allowed the right to march roughshod all over us, compromising, retreating and then surrendering. Our democratic socialism must encompass the liberal values of tolerance and respect. We have to reinvent socialism for the common good. And let's be populist too - the right is all of the time. "Jobs not bombs," "free healthcare for all," "free education for all," "peace not war," - all of these slogans carry real meaning for people all over the world who now see nothing but insecurity and the prospect of poverty and war.

Let's get out of the bunker - and fight for regime change here and abroad. In the next few months - in the run-up to the presidential elections - you will have to show us the way.

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*Mark Seddon is editor of Tribune, a progressive UK journal, and a member of the UK Labour Party's National Executive Committee.*

## Getting on Track

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schools where there were the best resources for education growth."

Premonitions of Weinstein's final chapter, where he discusses What Is To Be Done, appear in his discussions of populist and socialist Democrats such as Upton Sinclair, Floyd Olson and Huey Long, and particularly in his discussion of the Non-Partisan League of North Dakota. Throughout the 1910s, the Socialist Party tried to organize farmers across North Dakota, and failed. In 1915, the same year that North Dakota switched to an open primary, Socialist organizer A.C. Townley founded the NPL. Since the Democratic Party was a nonentity, the NPL ran candidates as Republicans. But NPL candidates didn't join the GOP or become a part of the party structure. In 1916, it swept its way into office, taking control of the North Dakota House of Representatives and elected a governor. By 1918, it completely controlled the government of North Dakota, an accomplishment that far surpassed the Socialist Party's electoral fortunes - and yet the SP and the NPL had the very same platform.

It isn't surprising, then, that Weinstein argues against efforts to build an independent leftist party in the US and is in favor of running leftists in Democratic Party primaries, of doing to the Democrats what the Christian Coalition did to the Republicans. Of course, he is arguing for more than just electoralism; rightly, he says we should emulate the New Right in "establishing institutions devoted to winning the battle of ideas by relating to our natural bases among the American people in terms that they understand and around issues that most concern wider constituencies at any given period." But his critique of Ralph Nader's run for president in 2000 and Green Party strategy in general will not endear him to

many contemporary leftists. The problem, however, is that there has yet to be a credible third-party strategy for overcoming the barriers that our non-parliamentary, single-member-district, gerrymandered electoral system. Furthermore, given the complete absence of party discipline in the Democratic and Republican parties, it makes little sense to denounce leftists who run (or even, heaven forefend, get elected) on those ballot lines as corporate sellouts.

That said, Weinstein runs the risk of becoming the mirror image of his third-party critics. Was Bernie Sanders wrong in running for Congress as an independent? Is the Vermont Progressive Party wrong not to be a Democratic caucus? I'd hardly say so. It would seem to be best for leftists to reject an either-or approach to electoral coalition building, focused solely on building a new party or on realignment within the Democratic Party. Where third party candidates are able to mobilize progressive coalitions of a significant size, there is no good reason to not support them.

*The Long Detour* may not be essential reading for long-time leftists. But it is essential reading for those new to the Left; I can think of no other book in recent memory that packs so much history and analysis into so few pages. And it is refreshing to read an author with a sense of realpolitik who nevertheless understands that humanity's long-run alternatives are, indeed, socialism or barbarism.

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*Jason Schulman is active in the NYC local of DSA and is a doctoral candidate in the political science program at the City University of New York Graduate Center. He has written for New Politics, Science & Society, Logos, and Radical Society.*

# DSA has Moved!

## Cache of DSA T-shirts Discovered

DSA has moved to a new location. The national office is now located at 198 Broadway, Suite 700, New York, N.Y. 10038. The telephone number remains the same 212-727-8610; however, we have a new fax line, 212-806-6955. The web address remains the same, [www.dsausa.org](http://www.dsausa.org).

The office is located one block from the World Trade Center site in lower Manhattan (Broadway between Fulton and John Streets) and is readily accessible by public transit.

First class mail is being forwarded from our old address, so the business reply envelopes with the old address will continue to be valid for contributions and renewals for the rest of this year.

Please enter our new address in your records promptly. In sending mail to the new address it is very important that the suite number (700) be included in the address. The post office is implementing a system where all mail is sorted by computer and distributed to drop-off points along the route for the carrier to deliver. The carrier will no longer be in a position to catch incomplete addresses and deliver them anyway. Mail can be addressed to our major programs - *Democratic Left*, YDS, DSA Fund, the *Activist*, and *Socialist Forum* - at the Broadway address, but it must have the suite number (700).

We would be foolish not to expect some errors. If by chance mail is returned to you from either the old address or the new one, please resend it (making sure Suite 700 is in the address) so we can bring it to the attention of the post office.

We have signed a five and one-half year lease; however, there is a possibility that we will have to move again before the lease is up because of the Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Plan. In the course of packing we discovered (after ten years some things do get lost) a small quantity of medium size (38-40) 100% cotton DSA T-shirts with the fist and rose logo. They are available on a first-come-first-served basis for \$9 each, 2 for \$15 plus \$3 postage and handling. Additionally there is a small quantity of a 9 x12 DSA black canvas, zippered document bags available for \$10 plus \$3 postage and handling. To order either item write the DSA office (at the new address). Payment must accompany your order. No phone, fax, or email orders will be accepted.

- Yes, I want to join the Democratic Socialists of America. Enclosed are my dues (includes a subscription to *Democratic Left*) of:  
 \$50 Sustainer     \$35 Regular     \$15 Low-Income/Student
- Yes, I want to renew my membership in DSA. Enclosed are my renewal dues of:  
 \$60 Sustainer     \$45 Regular     \$20 Low-Income/Student
- Enclosed is an extra contribution of:  \$50  \$100  \$25 to help DSA in its work.
- Please send me more information about DSA and democratic socialism.

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