



## **Snapshots of a Sunken City**

**Big Bucks  
and Swift Boats  
Invade Vermont**



# YDS: Turn the Tide Towards Freedom!

By Maria Svart

The Young Democratic Socialists' winter conference, co-sponsored by the Columbia University Working Families Party chapter, was held February 17-19 in New York City. Entitled *Turning the Tide Towards Freedom: Building the Youth and Student Movement for Justice*, it was a resounding success.

Students came from as far away as Arkansas and Nevada to learn from notable speakers and fellow activists. Attendees discussed organizing against Wal-Mart in the Deep South, defending the right to higher education, our relations with campus Democrats, fighting for reproductive rights on campuses, protesting racist detention centers in students' communities, and doing political education to inform their activism with a democratic socialist analysis of oppressive social structures. DSA's own Joe Schwartz was joined by such speakers as Bill Fletcher, Jr., Christian Parenti, Gayatri Spivak, and Damu Smith, who gave us the "big picture," described and explained structural injustice at home and abroad, and got us fired up to continue and intensify the fight for a better world.

An integral element to the conference was the opportunity for YDSers from far and wide to get to know each other and exchange ideas about activism. The conference opened with a group welcome and Activist Bingo as an icebreaker activity to get people talking to each other. We continued with a review of YDS discussion guidelines to ensure that normally unheard voices would be involved in as much respectful dialog as those of us who were more comfortable speaking out. Throughout the weekend, we consciously made space for discussion, and we closed the conference with a "go-around" for folks to express their feelings and thoughts about the intense experience we had just created together.

Once YDS leaders and our organizer, Elizabeth Rothschild, slept off some of our sleep deprivation and headed back into the office to analyze feedback, we were humbled

by the overwhelmingly positive remarks from folks about their conference experience. A quick sample: "everyone, including speakers, were approachable...everyone wants to hear from each other," "superb speakers once again," "Awesome! Wish it could have been longer." Attendees commented on the high quality of intellectual exchanges as much as the strong attention to group learning.

Finally, the plenary sessions at the conference were filmed, and edited copies will eventually be available for distribution. As this report goes to press, the YDS organizer and other leaders are out speaking on campuses with new YDSers inspired by the conference, and we're already planning our summer retreat



Panelists (left to right) Irene Schwoeffermann, Anna Kamenetz, Jay Woodson and DSA NPC member Corey Walker lead plenary discussion.

for August 11-14.

Young people today face an ever darker future, with the Bush administration openly violating the law and the Right consolidating its control over all three branches of government. We face a potentially never-ending "war on terror"; drastic cuts to social programs affecting young people, such as education and affordable housing; growing threats to reproductive and sexual freedom; increasing government suppression of dissent; and blatantly racist and xenophobic responses to—and exacerbation of—rising economic uncertainty. But as socialist youth, we can draw on our own energy, creativity and idealism and combine that with the wisdom of our predecessors to build a better future. The conference reminded us of our history and reinvigorated us for the struggle.

Thank you again to all the DSAers who helped make this conference a success. Without your financial and hands-on volunteer support, we definitely couldn't have pulled it off. Stay tuned!

*Maria Svart is a Service Employees International Union organizer and co-chair of the Young Democratic Socialists.*

# DSA PAC ESTABLISHED

DSA has formed a Political Action Committee—Democratic Socialists of America PAC (DSA PAC), which will raise funds to enable activity that supports or opposes candidates for federal office. By law, DSA is not permitted to expend its resources in support of or against candidates in partisan elections; however, DSA is permitted to form a PAC for this purpose. The creation of the PAC is one of the steps the organization is taking to implement the priorities resolutions (see Winter 2006 *Democratic Left*) passed at the last convention.

The PAC is a separate legal entity that will file reports of its activity with the Federal Election Commission. For an organization like ours, complying with the regulations creates a host of new complications. We have to take care, for example, not to create additional expenses for ourselves. *Democratic Left* provides a good illustration; we have to take care that analytical articles are just that; if they stray into advocacy, the PAC would have to pick up the cost of the issues distributed to non-members. Sometimes we will want to do that, but usually those resources should be used for campaign work as the PAC is governed by the contribution limits set by law.

Only DSA members in good standing may contribute to the PAC. Because the law is so specific, all contributions are carefully screened to make sure that they are from members. Most PACs simply give money to favored candidates running for office. However, that is not the plan for DSA PAC. Instead of making large donations, DSA PAC will organize different forms of grassroots support for candidates, particularly when DSA members are actively supporting a candidate.

Fundraising for the PAC has already begun. We will be reaching out to individual members over the course of the next few months through the mail, providing detailed descriptions of the PAC program. The first goal of the PAC will be to establish itself as a “multi-candidate committee,” a status that increases the value of support the PAC may offer candidates. The PAC will be headquartered at the DSA national offices—198 Broadway, Suite 700, New York, NY 10038.

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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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# Swift Boat Veterans, Big Money Politics Invade Vermont

by Frank Llewellyn

An infrequent political commodity—an open seat in the United States Senate—may transform Vermont's political traditions. Vermont, like the other small New England states, prides itself on small “d” democratic politics in which town meetings, neighborhood discussions, and personal knowledge of the candidates, rather than big money politics, negative ads, and the politics of division, determines the outcome.

All that may change in Vermont's 2006 Senate race. Jim Jeffords, the Republican whose switch to Independent briefly cost the Republicans the Senate majority, is not seeking re-election. Republicans seem determined to win the seat back.

Two Republicans, Greg Parke and Richard Tarrant, are battling for the Republican nomination in a primary election that will be held in September. Parke is a retired military officer who recently gained the support of the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth founder John O'Neill. Parke's web site highlights increasing defense spending, the war on terror and support for President Bush's immigration legislation. Tarrant cofounded IDX Systems, a computer business focused on the health care industry that made millions when he sold the company to GE. He seems determined to spend whatever it takes to win the election. Through mid-March 2006, Tarrant had spent \$2.1 million. Parke's year end report for 2005 shows spending of almost \$600,000. Tarrant's web site focuses on cutting government spending, reducing health care costs, and a business like approach to government and the issues.

The race between Parke and Tarrant for the Republican nomination will be interesting in its own right. Parke is clearly running to the right and closely aligns himself with Bush, while Tarrant seems to be more distant from the President and positioning himself as more moderate. On health care, for example, Tarrant advocates making Medicare available to small businesses.

Representative Bernie Sanders, a self-identified democratic socialist, has represented Vermont in the House of Representatives for eight terms and is running as an independent for the Senate seat. Sanders first caught the public eye when he was elected Mayor of Burlington. First elected to Congress in 1990, he organized the Progressive Caucus and served

as its first Chair. On issues he emphasizes his opposition to the War in Iraq and the Patriot Act, and is a strong advocate of economic justice.

The Democratic Party is not mounting a serious challenge, although a candidate may occupy the Democratic line. A number of prominent Democrats, including Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy and Illinois Senator Barack Obama, already have campaigned with Sanders.

The race really revolves around Sanders. A sixteen-year incumbent—the longest serving independent in the history of the House of Representatives—Sanders is very popular in Vermont, and, of course, as Vermont's only member of the House, he has already been elected state wide eight times. It is no wonder that polls and pundits rate Sanders the favorite.

At this point in the campaign, Sanders is expected to be in front, as his opponents are not well known and the official candidate is still to be determined. But Sanders has never had to face the kind of money that his opponents are likely to spend. Tarrant has enormous personal resources at his disposal and is spending money at a record clip. Swift Boat's O'Neill just sent out a national fundraising letter on Parke's behalf labeling Sanders “the most dangerous liberal in America.” Sanders, who has never raised one million dollars for a House campaign, is seeking to raise \$5 million for the Senate race.

If the Swift Boat Veterans repeat the kind of negative campaign they waged against John Kerry's presidential campaign, Vermont's Senate race could set a new record for political vitriol as well as for spending. That would add a touch of irony to the campaign, since in the House Sanders has managed to form coalitions on issues like trade with Republican members of the House more frequently than most Democrats seem to do.

The Vermont race has serious national implications. It is hard to see how the Democrats could take control of the Senate if the Republicans win the seat. That's one reason why the Democrats aren't mounting a real challenge.

Pundits aside, a race with national implications that features a never-in-the-closet socialist targeted by the right wing, big money, and deep pockets won't be decided until election night is over.

*Frank Llewellyn is the National Director of DSA*



# Snapshots of a Sunken City

By Richard McCarthy

A group of women paraded down Bourbon Street bearing the banner “New Orleans needs strong dikes”; family men dressed as women chaperoned their kids through the Vieux Carré (French Quarter). Brass bands paraded through neighborhoods; and self-proclaimed grill masters transformed grand avenues into gigantic, ad-hoc barbeque dens. Mardi Gras was back.

But, approximately half of our citizens remain displaced; our most vulnerable citizens remain in exile and at the whim of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for temporary housing.

Wandering through the ruins of the city, one can't help but notice that it is a place jam-packed with baggage, trash and questions. Questions persist: What happened to the government? How is it that immediately following the storm, “bayou boys” entered into the city with pirogues (shallow boats) to rescue people, while federal, state and local officials busied themselves with press conferences and high-profile arguments over whom should shoulder blame? Why does it take so long to get a FEMA trailer? And once you've got one, why does it take so long to get its electrical and plumbing hooked up? In a city divided by elevation, race and class, one view is universal: too little is happening too slowly.

Money is dribbling into the local economy as time, decay and market forces drain families' savings. The disaster (stretching eastward to Alabama and westward to Texas) provides us all with a domestic example of what's wrong with foreign aid. No need to travel to dangerous parts to observe who benefits. Very few of the men with trucks sport Louisiana plates in New Orleans. Almost every roofing, engineering, and disaster catering truck on the road is out of state. These federal dollars will not remain long in our economy. Only restaurants, strip clubs, and Home Depot will benefit.

Mardi Gras was an important day, an important civic ritual. For those who have spent the past six months commuting great distances in order to clean out their homes, it was a welcome escape. For those who had not returned to their neighborhoods,

it was their first chance to observe the damage and assess the prospects for return. And for all present and in exile, it was a day to pay homage to a sense of place, to thriving neighborhoods that incubate creativity. It also showcased both the divisions of, and bridges between, race and class in this peculiar post-colonial city. This Mardi Gras—and there were many who opposed it—was a promise that New Orleans would be back, but it remains to be seen which New Orleans they are talking about.

Despite the rhetorical promises there has been little real progress. The commercial fishing docks are largely closed, and without access to capital (grants, loans) and lacking a sense that they have a future, the already suffering owner-operated fishing fleets may perish. With nowhere to purchase ice, fuel, bait, the commercial fishers are caught in a political limbo even as the approaching brown shrimp season approaches. New Orleans is now a frontier town.

The downtown's medical corridor was devastated. With Charity Hospital no more, gone is the city's first-rate trauma unit and most access to healthcare. The message is clear: *be careful at all times. You don't want to have to visit a doctor.* Health Management Organizations like Blue Cross exist in limbo awaiting the demographic shake-up; no one knows who will be working and what benefits the new private sector will offer. Nearly all of the pre-Katrina era public schools are still shuttered. Prior to the storm, the parents, teachers, administration, and school board were at each other's throats over Magnet schools, equity, and performance. From my family's



*Homeowners in Chalmette—the white ethnic suburb known for fishing, farming and tradesmen—express their frustrations with a spray can on their own property.*

standpoint, we often attended the Parent Teacher Organization meetings at our daughter's magnet school only to return home exhausted by the accusations, rumors, and threats that pitted largely middle class magnet schools against the largely working (and not quite working) class neighborhood schools. With the neighborhood schools awaiting the return of neighborhoods, the magnet schools have given way to a new wave of charter schools.

For those who rent, the situation is dire. Flooded apartments mean that for those who return, there is an extreme shortage of affordable apartments. In the high ground, landlords jacked up rent so as to seize upon the scramble for housing. Meanwhile, most public housing remains shuttered as officials squabble over whether residents should be allowed to return or whether the housing stock should be converted to "mixed income" developments—a codeword for privatization.

Until last month, trash service was provided not by the city but by the US Army Corps of Engineers. In the wealthier neighborhoods, trash pickup has been at best once a week. On the poor blocks, trash pickup is less frequent. In today's New Orleans little old ladies drag their garbage down the street to the wealthier block for pick-up. Mail service is so erratic that I have begun to cure myself of an addiction to political weeklies as my mail winds up in postal purgatory.

The situation with regard to shopping remains difficult. Many stores are not yet open. If the first six months reminded older citizens of life in the 1950s, when groceries closed at 5 pm, then life in this next period may remind Midwesterners of Detroit: pockets of light, life, and commerce surrounded by swathes of inactivity and decay. While it may be difficult to pretend that life is anything like pre-Katrina New Orleans, you can carry on your restaurant-and-grocery-store-hopping without venturing into the sunken city.

Regardless of the patchwork of grocery chains and local stores (which, by the way, opened sooner than the chains), the farmers market I run continues to be the premiere showcase for the local food system, with farmers and fishers and other family food businesses selling the fruits of their labor directly to urban consumers and chefs on designated parking lots in the city. The decade-old institution is housed at Loyola University. The quest for food and public spaces helps to corral the region's indigenous talents and desire for social integration in public spaces.

There's plenty of work—demolition, renovation, etc. Returned exiles can find work, but nowhere to reside. A largely Latino population of migrant laborers has filled in the demand for roofers, and other forms of skilled manual labor, but finds itself camping or bunking in with others in overpriced intimate quarters.



*A glimpse of everyday life in post-Katrina New Orleans: National Guardsmen shopping at the Crescent City Farmers Market with automatic weapons in tow.*

A port town comfortable with the economy of hustle, violence and the quick take, New Orleans leaders never mustered the energy or will to seriously address the concerns of the majority of its citizens. They have always been denied proper health, education, and housing. While some developers today may be itching to take full control of a gentrified, ethnically cleansed city for their own dreams of "new urbanism," by and large the city elite is experiencing extreme depression. Gone are the old, familiar ways from which they benefited. No one is enjoying this new adventure, including the elites. The storm and its aftermath have created so much stress and disruption, as the disaster has peeled away the veneer that has kept a lid on the patchwork of race and class.

The city is rife with rumors. Is this purposeful ethnic cleansing? (The levees did not "fail," they were sabotaged, and so forth.) You can feel the rage in various quarters; much of it is also giving way to exhaustion. Just ask residents of the largely white, working class neighborhoods of Chalmette (down river from the African American Lower Ninth Ward) how they're faring. You will hear the similar sounds of rage from both of these sunken neighborhoods about the real estate games being played by developers and insurance companies, and about government buy-out schemes. People are tired of living with so many uncertainties and without a fixed abode.

To interpret the state of empathy you must navigate the city's complex web of race and class relations—never easy in ordinary times, and especially difficult now. Are residents in the un-flooded Uptown neighborhoods concerned for the plight of those in Broadmoor, Lakefront, Gentilly, and so forth who have lost homes, neighborhoods, loved ones? Yes, they are; however, their empathy is also giving way to frustration. They're frustrated that their lives are not normal, that their problems are paramount. And while their private hell (of loss of income, rental properties, etc.) is real, their trauma is insu-

lating them from the rage that those less fortunate are feeling—especially as much of it remains out of town, in the Diaspora communities

First there was the chaos and desperation of Katrina and the flooding. Soon after, the military forced nearly all of the remaining residents out to the un-flooded suburbs and beyond. Over the next few months, as residents returned in small numbers they found a city not functioning. City Hall, a once sprawling complex of offices across from the Superdome, squeezed its operations into meeting rooms in a downtown hotel. City Council members rarely saw Mayor C. Ray Nagin and were not included in shaping policy. Repopulation and development plans seemed to emerge and fade from public view frequently.

Months later, and we still appear to be on our own. Whether it's the home owner waiting to learn if their home is about to become someone else's drainage ditch, a newly unemployed office worker, a senior exiled to a relative's home in Houston, Baton Rouge or Atlanta, the refugee still trapped

### **One Family's Odessey**

Richard McCarthy and his family spent their last night together in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina, hosting a sleepover birthday party for their eight-year-old daughter. She had just completed her first week of school after the summer holidays. As the weather reports on Friday, August 26, 2005, indicated that a little tropical storm that had just popped into the Gulf of Mexico, concern built quickly. They began to organize for what would be their first full evacuation. In recent years, the talks of the "perfect storm" that would push water from Lake Pontchartrain into the city (i.e., the bowl effect) had begun to intimidate even the most stoic of locals.

After riding the storm out in a hotel in Baton Rouge (90 miles northwest of the city), it became clear over the next few days that they could not return home anytime soon. After unsuccessfully scouring the tight, crisis-driven rental market in Baton Rouge, they headed to Houston—a mega city with the space, infrastructure and desire to host many, many Katrina refugees. With grandparents and pets, they rented a townhouse; secured school for their daughter; and did their best to keep their professional lives afloat, seek out direct assistance, begin the part-time job of negotiating with insurance companies and contractors (to fix their wind-damaged home in New Orleans) and plotting their return home—something that didn't take shape until four months later.

in the Diaspora—no one is finding the helping hand of the government to ease the pain.

The epicenter of radical, antigovernment agitation takes place in the electrical aisle at Lowe's. In a scene repeated in hardware stores uptown, downtown, and back of town little groups of retirees from Lakeview (a primarily middle-class, flooded neighborhood) are scribbling down notes during informal seminars led by the staff on how to hook up your house to the electrical grid. The city has yet to provide a workable plan for electrical or other construction inspections, leaving homeowners fed up with the City's permitting process—one that is overwhelmed by unprecedented demand for inspections—little choice but to ignore the law.

This April 22, New Orleans will hold municipal elections. We have developed an acute understanding of the importance of public investment in basic infrastructure. It is no longer taboo to question the Bush Administration's wisdom in destroying Iraq's infrastructure, then rebuilding it, even as Washington continues to underfund coastal and levee protections here at home. Both citizens and elected officials are calling for comprehensive public investment in infrastructure (i.e., Category 5 levee protection). But it's not at all clear that elections will produce the kind of leadership we need. Just holding the elections presents a major challenge and the outcome may be determined by how many in the Diaspora get the chance to vote. Despite the demand for public investment and the fact that we have a huge field—there are 23 vying for the Mayor's job—not one "sewer socialist" is on the ballot.

Incumbent Mayor Nagin is business casual. He's an off-the-cuff African-American Democrat who has governed as a reform mayor with the white elite as his primary base of support. His handling of the crisis, combined with his colorful and at times painfully honest remarks—like his "chocolate city" refrain on MLK Day—have alienated this base. His opponents refer to him as "Ray Reagan" for his coddling of business at the expense of the poor majority.

With the Nagin love affair winding down, the elite in turn have begun to rally around "zookeeper" Ron Forman. His track record as director of the huge, successful and quasi-governmental Audubon Institute (and zoo) position him as a can-do fixer-upper—something the city sorely needs.

Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu (brother of U. S. Senator Mary Landrieu and son of the last white Mayor, Moon Landrieu) is the candidate of the middle-class liberal left. A consensus builder, Mitch is also known to "play it safe." A convert to Richard Florida's ideas about the creative class, he has made waves in Baton Rouge. He embraces our cultural assets as key ingredients to grow a sustainable economy and is often nipping at Governor Kathleen Blanco's heels.

Mayoral candidate and African-American minister Tom Watson is demonstrating an acute ear for the suffering and mourning in the black community. Controversial elected official Kimberly Williams-Butler (recently jailed for going AWOL) has reinvented her persona as the “Li'l Kim” in the race for Mayor. Her semi-outsider, wrongly-accused personal narrative may provide African-American women a campaign with which to align themselves.

Six weeks to go and nobody knows who will emerge as the political leaders of a city desperate for leadership. There are some bright spots: organizations like ACORN and Common Ground are rushing in to attend to those that have been left behind. But effective organizing for this election may be too much to hope for.

*Richard McCarthy is a DSA member in New Orleans. He is executive director of marketumbrella.org and can be reached via email at Richard@marketumbrella.org*

## **Eminent Domain Strikes DSA National Office**

New York's Metropolitan Transportation Agency (MTA) has initiated legal proceedings to condemn the building that houses DSA's National Office. As part of a renovation project, the MTA plans to condemn all five buildings on the east side of Broadway between Fulton and John Streets. The MTA plans to demolish the five buildings, except for one with landmark status whose shell will be preserved, and replace with them with a grand subway entrance surrounded by a multi-story urban mall. More than 100 small businesses, retail stores and non-profit organizations will be forced to relocate, including many like DSA that moved into the area after the 9/11 attacks. The subway entrance is part of a project to renovate the three-block long subway station located under the buildings.

“This condemnation has nothing to do with renovating the subway station,” said Frank Llewellyn, DSA's National Director. “It is all about providing the MTA with an income stream at the expense of the small business and other organizations located in these buildings.”

The MTA is expected to take possession of the five buildings by the end of March of this year. DSA has joined other tenants seeking adequate compensation for the forced relocation.

Members should continue to write to DSA at 198 Broadway, Suite 700, New York, NY 10038 until they are notified of our new location.

## **Should I visit New Orleans?**

Yes. If you've been searching for adventure but couldn't muster the courage to travel to Iraq, we've got it all: the weakest link in an empire ailing from neglect; contractors; devastation; a few military personnel; and some of the nation's finest restaurants—all in a day's tour. Moreover, there are opportunities for volunteerism. We could use the help, we could use the cash, and we promise to entertain.

Useful links:

<http://www.hurricanearchive.org/>

<http://www.nolahopeandheritage.org/nola/index.cfm>

<http://www.chinmusicpress.com/books/doyouknow/voices/index.html>

<http://www.nolafugees.com/>

<http://neworleansnetwork.org/tracker>

<http://neworleans.indymedia.org>

## **Labor Blogs**

*continued from back page*

principles and practices of democratic trade unionism. Noted labor historian Nelson Lichtenstein praises the impact on thousands of unionists of Benson's “passion, advocacy, and agitation.”

The movement for justice at Wal-mart has generated Wal-mart Watch ([walmartwatch.com/blog](http://walmartwatch.com/blog)) and Wake Up Walmart ([blog.wakeupwalmart.com](http://blog.wakeupwalmart.com)). Blogs are used by their organizations, along with other web tools, to generate public pressure on Wal-Mart.

Eric Lee, founder of the indispensable site LabourStart, the international labor news site, has a blog ([www.ericlee.info](http://www.ericlee.info)) with essays and think pieces that are well worth reading.

Labor Blog ([www.nathannewman.org/laborblog](http://www.nathannewman.org/laborblog)) features Nathan Newman, a former union organizer, leader in the 2004 Florida referendum that raised the minimum wage there, and present policy director for PLAN.

Workers Comp Insider ([www.workerscompinsider.com](http://www.workerscompinsider.com)) is from a company that does workers comp consulting. It looks like good source of information.

Union Label Weblog ([unionlabel.redrag.net/members.html](http://unionlabel.redrag.net/members.html)) has a listing of blogs by union members and friends of labor.

## **Your favorite labor blog not mentioned?**

Email us the site and your very brief review to [letters@dsausa.org](mailto:letters@dsausa.org); DL will publish a follow up article in the fall and/or post responses on our web site.

*Stuart Elliot, a member of the APWU, is the webmaster for the Wichita/Hutchinson Labor Federation.*



# Right Wing Attack on DSA Refuted IRS Ends Investigation

**R**eports of illegal partisan political activity caused the Internal Revenue Service to examine the tax returns of nonprofit organizations during the fall of 2004. This IRS project might never have come to public attention except for the loud public protest of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People when it learned that the content of a speech at the organization's convention by its chair, Julian Bond, had prompted the review.

The non-partisan voter registration drive organized by the Democratic Socialists of America Fund in Minnesota during their fall 2002 Senate race was included in the IRS investigation. Both DSA and the DSA Fund received letters that indicated their tax-exempt status might be threatened. A finding that either organization had engaged in improper partisan activity could have led to fines and penalties that could have included loss of our tax-exempt status.

In our case, the right-wing Minnesota Tax Payers League charged that the small non-partisan voter registration drive we organized actually consisted of an attempt to bring out-of-state students to Minnesota to illegally vote for Democratic Senate candidate Paul Wellstone. *The Drudge Report* ran with the charge, and Fox News spread it further, even though the Tax Payers League backed away from that ludicrous charge two days after they made the allegation. Other right-wingers then tried to stir up more controversy, charging that we organized an illegal partisan voter registration drive.

DSA members around the country contributed thousands of dollars to defray the legal expenses incurred in defending the organization from these charges. We retained the firm of Harmon, Curren, Spielberg & Eisenberg, a Washington, DC firm that specializes in this area of the law.

After more than a year of filing, responding and waiting, we finally have received our closure letters. The IRS has accepted our 2002 returns and our explanation of the voter registration project. They also said formally that our tax-exempt status was not in jeopardy.

We are very grateful to our attorneys, and to all the DSA members and friends who responded in our time of need. We would also like to thank the civil-service IRS employees who conducted the professional, non-partisan, and fair review that we expect of our civil servants.

The IRS already has announced that it is conducting a second wave of inquiries, even though it found most activity it deemed improper to be inadvertent. Out of 80 organizations included in the project, the IRS is seeking to revoke the exempt status of only three. The inspector general of the IRS has said there was no ideological bias in the project—but confidentiality laws will prevent our ever knowing the dimensions of the project. It is the job of the IRS to ensure that nonprofits operate according to the rules and we believe that those rules are for the most part fair. Many believe that the IRS initiated this project in response to right-wing political pressure; others, including our attorneys, believe that the IRS was merely doing its job in a climate when organizations on the left and the right are routinely filing charges against their ideological opponents—sometimes justifiably.

What is clear is that the filing of charges is now a routine political tactic designed to force organizations and campaigns to use up resources in administrative and legal processes rather than applying those resources to implementing their program. Regardless, DSA will not be dissuaded from future electoral activity; the stakes are too high. We are proud to have been in the company of the NAACP and many of our friends on the left that faced similar inquiries.

Tax-deductible contributions to enable the organization to pay legal bills should be mailed to the national office, 198 Broadway, Suite 700 New York, NY 10038. Checks should be payable to the DSA Fund, with the notation "legal defense" on the memo line of your check.

## Coming Attractions!

The summer issue of  
*Democratic Left* to be published this

June will feature:

**Saskia Sassen** on  
*Progressives and Immigration*

and

**Joseph Schwartz** on  
*Is Socialism Passé?*

# A Movement Against Wal-Mart?

by Glen Ford and Peter Gamble

**H**ow does one describe—much less defeat—the phenomenon that is Wal-Mart? A “Death Star” that destroys all other economic activity in its path? A tsunami that permanently alters the social and physical landscape of every region it washes upon? The lead horseman in an apocalyptic world-wide Race to the Bottom?

Wal-Mart is all of that, and more—but powerful metaphors cannot substitute for analysis, and absent an understanding of how and where Wal-Mart fits in the deepening national and global crisis, there can be no coherent strategy to resist the juggernaut.

Unfortunately, as with the contentless language of “branding” that is a hallmark of ever-consolidating capitalism, the rhetoric of resistance as often as not papers over reality in search of a “marketable” package. Activists and recruits *feel* good to be part of a “movement” that promises to increase humanity’s chances of survival. Maintaining high morale among the troops is vital to successful activism. But if baseless “movement” talk is allowed to substitute for real movement-building, then no actual Movement will emerge.

In the same vein, the more hydra-headed the beast—in this case, the Wal-Mart behemoth—the more complex are its effects on various sectors of society. Who must be “moving” before one can declare a Movement to have been born? How can the multitudinous social sectors that are injured by Wal-Mart’s loathsome presence be set in motion, in some semblance of a common direction?

If one has already unilaterally declared the existence of a “movement,” then these questions will never be answered. The mirage of a Movement will fade and disappear, amid general demoralization.

Just as importantly, activists must be very careful to place the beast within its proper species and family. Wal-Mart is not St. George’s Dragon, the last of its kind. It would be wonderful if Wal-Mart’s proprietors, the Walton family, could be quarantined or made extinct in political-economic terms. However, the entire late-capitalist jungle is encroaching, and Wal-Martosaurus Rex is just the biggest predator on the prowl. Humanity is still subject to be eaten by the somewhat smaller, but equally vicious raptors.



## Sam Walton: The Godfather

For those who seek to build mass movements, myopia is an always-fatal disease. History has shown this to be especially true in a white male dominated society like the United States. An all-day symposium titled “Wal-Mart, Race & Gender: Local Controversies, Global Process,” on January 21st at the University of Chicago, was an opportunity to put the many-faceted struggle against Wal-Mart—and the nature of the corporation itself—into context.

Organized by the university’s Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture and the Center for Gender Studies, the symposium drew about 250 people into a mostly sober discussion of the Wal-Mart menace, and the particularities of how it impacts the various groups it seeks to crush or co-opt—the kind of conversation that is sorely needed by all who claim to be “movement” people.

The first panel started at the beginning: the business model developed by Wal-Mart’s founding father, the late Sam Walton. Young Sam built his first stores in what he considered the “magic circle” centered in Arkansas, Oklahoma and Missouri, according to University of California at Santa Barbara professor Nelson Lichtenstein. Walton exploited the pools of “surplus labor” that resulted from corporate agricultural consolidation and the ravages of the Thirties dustbowl. Desperate to keep their land, surviving small farmers—and their wives—turned to wage labor.

“An early employee remembers Walton could praise employees,” Lichtenstein recounted, “but always reminded them that they could be replaced.” From the establishment of Walton’s first store in 1945, employment insecurity was central to his business philosophy.

Walton’s workers were overwhelmingly white, drawn from one of “the most exclusively white regions of the nation”—the Ozarks. There, Walton capitalized on the patriar-



*An overflow crowd jams a San Diego event for new DSA members that featured a showing of Robert Greenwald's *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*. An unexpected bonus was a call-in question-and-answer session with the filmmaker.*

chal, small farmer mentality of his customers and employees, most of whom preferred to swallow the potion, that they were “family” rather than objects in Walton’s expanding empire.

The civil rights movement all but passed Walton’s “magic circle” by. “He just didn’t have to deal with it,” said Professor Lichtenstein, and was able to “develop this white, rural southern culture” within his business.

Many hundreds of billions of dollars later, the corporate culture headquartered in Bentonville, Arkansas began to clash with inner city sensibilities. “When you reach LA and Chicago, a lot of this doesn’t work,” said Lichtenstein, who directs the Center for Work, Labor and Democracy. “But it will take more than a Blue State denunciation to defeat this Wal-Mart institution.”

### **Big and Bad is Best**

Wal-Mart is not some unique product of the Ozarks. Rather, it is the end result of a long history of retailers seeking ever-increasing shares of the market and dominance over the companies that actually make the products. “Wal-Mart is not unusual in basing cheap goods on low wages,” explained Susan Strasser, a professor of history at the University of Delaware. Nor is its fabled inventory management system something new under the sun. Since the late 19th Century, Woolworth, Sears, A&P and others “established mechanized systems... among thousands of manufacturers and millions of customers.”

“Ironically, unions welcomed the mega stores, opposing anti-chain legislation,” said Strasser, because they preferred to organize big chains rather than thousands of small stores.

Strasser noted that Wal-Mart now accounts for two percent of U.S. Gross Domestic Product. The question is relevant

to labor debates today: Do unions become more powerful by hitching their fortunes to bigger and bigger companies; are mega-corporations in the interest of workers?

“Never before,” said Strasser, “has one retailer so dominated retailing and manufacturing in such a wide variety of goods.”

Does not such consolidation lead inexorably to corporate domination of society as a whole? If Wal-Mart is the logical result of late-capitalist development—which seems obvious to *Black Commentator (BC)*—then any “movement” must seek to set in motion forces that will resist the encroachments of capital on society, period. Hyper-aggressive and ideologically driven Wal-Mart will, for the foreseeable future, be the biggest blip on screen, but there is nothing that intrinsically sets Sam Walton’s legacy apart from the others.

### **Oppressive by design**

The University of Chicago’s Mae Ngai, also a professor of history, explored the notion that “if Wal-Mart raised the price of every item by just one cent, it could provide good health care for all employees.” This seems to be an “argument” raised by lots of union folks, and others. But is it an argument at all, or just rhetoric that diverts attention from the true nature of the beast (which can never be a good thing to do with one’s fellow strugglers)?

Professor Ngai explained that Wal-Mart’s business plan calls for high turnover in both goods and people. “If Wal-Mart increased wages [and benefits] workers would consider employment there as a career.” But “Wal-Mart *wants* high turnover, so people won’t become attached to the company, and make demands on it”—demands like quality health insurance, real workplace mobility, a living wage, and the effective right to organize.

This is the business “model” that Wal-Mart represents. It is the late-capitalist model, not peculiar to Walton’s heirs.

One might as well preach vegetarianism to a cannibal.

Yet Wal-Mart, properly put in context, can illuminate the general environment in which we live, by virtue of its shameless, brutish, almost caricaturish behavior. The truth is, there can never be an anti-Wal-Mart “movement” that is not at its core a Movement to defang corporations. Everything depends on how activists play the cards we have been dealt. If they are only wedded to getting a contract—any kind of contract—with the beast, then failure is embedded in the plan, and the effort will be, by definition, irrelevant to vast sectors of the public.

## A “bad jobs” problem

Annette Bernhardt’s New York-based Brennan Center for Justice “does a lot of Wal-Mart work,” she told the crowd. Wal-Mart has “crystallized the problem for the public”—the problem being working people remaining in poverty—but, “It’s a mistake to collapse all of this just to Wal-Mart, both analytically and strategically.”

Wal-Mart, in its determination to oppress *everyone*, has also earned the largest class action suit in U.S. history, brought by female employees. Bernhardt predicts a slew of African American suits against the corporation, soon, but cautions that, “Even if Wal-Mart and others never discriminate on the basis of race and gender [this model] would hurt women and people of color” because they are *bad jobs*.

The retail industry as a whole “shows clear segregation based on race and gender.” That is, the whole sector is a ghetto. Bernhardt points out that no matter the management retail “big boxes” do not bring good jobs or economic development to communities.

The issue “goes beyond whether Wal-Mart is a good or bad employer,” said Steven Pitts, a labor specialist with the University of California at Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education. There is a “crisis in the Black community.... We need a movement for *quality jobs*.”

Pitts is one of the authors of the study, “Beyond Wal-Mart: The Need for Quality Jobs in Black America.” “There is a crisis of unemployment, but equally important, there is a crisis of bad jobs in the Black community.” Pitts had earlier distributed charts showing the disproportionate distribution of “bad” jobs among Blacks in the Bay Area and Chicago

However, Pitts once again injected the notion that the problem could be substantially ameliorated, if not solved, if Wal-Mart would simply increase prices by two percent. “Stuff that costs a dollar would cost \$1.02. I think we can handle that” as consumers.

But of course, Wal-Mart would not be Wal-Mart if it did that, and the Wal-Mart “model” is now the globalizing corporate model. Besides, Wal-Mart does not *want* to make its workplace a career destination, an incubator of families. Retention of longtime employees is in diametric opposition to its core business plan.

In other words, Wal-Mart has no intention of being a “good corporate citizen.”

Pitts: “I’m not saying ‘Wal-Mart out.’ I’m saying come in correct.”

### **Ease of corporate penetration**

The “community discussion” segment of the symposium zeroed in on the actual battle to keep Wal-Mart out of Chi-

cago, a year and a half ago, which resulted in one of two stores—the West Side outlet—being approved by a generally corrupt and/or confused City Council. Alderman Howard Brookins, of the South Side 21st Ward, denied that he was “pro-Wal-Mart,” although he voted to let the company in because he thought it best for his ward. “We have not had adequate shopping choices in the South Side,” said the young alderman, claiming that Chicagoans spend \$500 million a year in Wal-Marts located just across city lines. It turns out these are Wal-Mart supplied figures—but certainly the South Side has greatly diminished “shopping choices,” and many Chicagoans do spend their money at suburban Wal-Marts.

Margaret Garner, a youthful-looking CEO of the Black construction firm chosen to build Wal-Mart’s West Side store, spoke to the question of “Why Wal-Mart is Good for Black and Female Owned Companies.” Graciously and diplomatically, Garner thanked critics for “making Wal-Mart a better corporation.... By holding Wal-Mart accountable you are affecting change within that corporate structure.”

A one-time contracting innovation in the heat of an urban battle, perhaps, but a significant deviation from the core corporate business plan? No.

The dialogue, which was in the main civil and reasoned, clearly demonstrated that the particularities of the Black in-

## **Wal-Mart—the Movie**

Robert Greenwald’s *Wal-Mart: the High Cost of Low Price* (see Fall 2005 *Democratic Left*) has been shown all over the country, with thousands of screenings organized by activists during its premiere week in November 2005—including a special screening for the delegates at DSA’s National Convention in Los Angeles that included members of the production team. Since the Convention, DSAers have continued to organize screenings that have drawn new viewers and people interested in learning more about Wal-Mart and the issues that the movie poses.

San Diego DSA has shown the film twice, once at the public library and more recently at an event for new members, who got a rare treat when filmmaker Robert Greenwald phoned in to the meeting to take questions. In Indianapolis, the screening generated indignation over Wal-Mart’s treatment of its workers. Boston DSA organized a screening on March 26 that featured a discussion led by economist Ellen Frank and Massachusetts Neighbor to Neighbor Director Harris Gruman.

Other DSA locals are planning additional screenings in the near future.

ner city condition—utter desperation among the poor, pent-up but unused capabilities among the upwardly mobile—provide Wal-Mart with plenty of openings to penetrate African American political structures. If the debate is limited to the virtues of a politically powerless urban desert versus a politically prostrate jurisdiction that at least has a big, cheap store, the Waltons will eventually win. If they need only distribute a few contracts here and there in a community in which the public has no real role in overall planning, then Wal-Mart will triumph by default—just as its corporate brethren do every day of the year.

One symposium participant pointed out that the Inglewood, California, battle against Wal-Mart penetration was successful in 2004, despite the corporation's massive bribes and advertising budget, because the organizers were able to frame the discussion in terms of people's power and the necessity of "respect" for citizens—terms that resonate among African Americans

"Wal-Mart uses people as a pimp does," said Rev. Reginald Williams, of Trinity United Church of Christ, to enthusiastic applause. "We want jobs that will add to the life of the community." It is the beginning of a general demand that requires a whole community be addressed as citizens. The logic of such a demand can only be satisfied through a campaign for institutional community empowerment—a much broader concept of democracy.

Rev. Williams: "Price over Principle equals Prostitution." From the faith-based perspective of the social gospel, Wal-Mart is bad for the West Side, said Rev. Elce Redmond, of the South Austin Community Coalition. Wal-Mart is lying to the people—*disrespecting* them—with its promises to hire convicted felons and young people from the immediate neighborhood. "Hire young people? Not the ones hanging on the corner, not those kids."

Rev. Williams said Wal-Mart had poisoned the discussion by painting "all unions as bad, racist, based on the records of the building trades."

It is true that the building trades are a heavy cross to bear. Maybe too heavy.

"We allowed Wal-Mart to frame the issue as Wal-Mart versus the unions, rather than Wal-Mart versus the community," said James Thindwa, of Chicago Jobs With Justice. "They spent a lot of money to break up our coalition. We had not anticipated that Wal-Mart would use its clout...and pay off the opposition. Frankly, we didn't realize the depth of the leadership crisis in the Black community."

Sixth Ward Alderwoman Freddrena Lyle, a longtime activist, won't be turned around by Wal-Mart lies and blandishments. "We have to get back in the game. We have to push

our legislators."

The "game" must be played on the court of elemental citizens rights. Black people—having been property—understand full well that citizens' rights *must* trump property rights; we are the one group for whom the alternative is obvious.

## Towards a Movement for Democratic Development

*The following remarks were prepared by symposium participant and BC Editor-in-Chief Glen Ford.*

Almost two years ago, I was invited to Chicago to speak to the Wal-Mart issue. The question for me was, How do we create the conditions in which citizens can effectively determine who can do what in their city?—a larger subject than just Wal-Mart's attempt to invade Chicago. We at BC had decided that this larger question led logically to the creation of a Movement to allow people to determine how their cities are developed.

Since we're at the end of Martin Luther King week, it's proper to discuss Wal-Mart in the context of the Black Movement.

Unfortunately, there is no Black Movement.

I'd like to talk about Wal-Mart in the context of the U.S. Labor Movement.

Unfortunately, there is no U.S. Labor Movement at this time, worthy of the name.

Instead, there are various *campaigns* undertaken by Blacks and by labor—and sometimes jointly by Blacks and labor. But campaigns are not Movements.

Campaigns have beginnings and ends. Victory is declared when limited objectives are achieved. Campaigns are not self-regenerating. When one is over, another has to be kickstarted into existence.

Campaigns *can* become Movements. The campaigns against Wal-Mart have that potential, if they can be linked in the public imagination to life-transforming objectives.

The Katrina catastrophe has great potential to give birth to a Movement. There are literally thousands of Katrina-related projects operating throughout Black America. But they are not connected to one another, either through coordination, or by a shared vision of what the political response to Katrina should be. Beyond horror and outrage, what does the Katrina experience call upon us to do, other than help the evacuees?

It is good and necessary to help the evacuees. But that's a campaign, not a Movement.

It is also good and necessary to resist every effort to plant Wal-Marts in Chicago, or to tailor specific legislation

that impedes Wal-Mart from invading New York City, or to rein in its abuse of employees and taxpayers in Maryland.

These are worthy campaigns.

But they do not directly confront growing corporate hegemony over all aspects of American life. The campaigns point out that Wal-Mart is the worst of a bad crowd. But they do not place the entire crowd in context, so that large numbers of people will see “Wal-Mart” in a whole range of corporate behaviors.

Once *that* type of vision takes hold, people who have little or no contact with anti-Wal-Mart organizers begin to contemplate anti-corporate actions on their own, in sectors unrelated to retail.

At that point, you have the makings of a Movement.

I’ll give an example from the Civil Rights Movement. The original idea for the Montgomery bus boycott was for a short action with very limited goals. More conservative elements of the local NAACP envisioned a brief demonstration boycott. The goal was to tweak Jim Crow so as to allow Blacks to fill up the bus from the back, while whites filled it up from the front. The two groups would meet somewhere in the middle, depending on ridership—but there would be no empty seats reserved for whites while Blacks stood.

If that was the way things had worked out, we would not recognize the Montgomery bus boycott as the beginning of the modern Civil Rights Movement.

Instead, the Black people of Montgomery decided that, if they were going to do all that walking and risk losing their jobs, it *better* be for total desegregation of the busses. And suddenly, there emerged a mass vision of the total destruction of Jim Crow, rather than a gradual easing of its more savage aspects.

Eight years later, there were 10,000 separate civil rights related actions in 1963 alone. The SCLC couldn’t do that. CORE couldn’t do that. SNCC couldn’t do that. And the NAACP *wouldn’t* do that.

The people were investing in a Movement that would fundamentally change their lives. The “civil rights” agenda was essentially completed in a little over one decade. The last important civil rights legislation, the Fair Housing Act, was passed in 1968.

So, what’s that got to do with Wal-Mart, 2006, you say? Why is Glen going off-subject? I’m trying to paint a broad picture here.

I’m talking about how we got to this dark and scary point in history, and why we need a real Movement—what we at *Black Commentator* call a Movement for Democratic Development.

But we still have to go back to 1968. Dr. King had al-

ready written his book, *Where Do We Go From Here?* What he meant was, “Where do we take the Mass Movement, from here?” King had no intention of shutting down the Mass Movement. Rather, he would direct it against the Triple Evils: Racism, Militarism, and Economic Exploitation.

King played a huge role in getting southern Blacks the right to vote—but he didn’t believe that electoral politics was sufficient for real social transformation.

King supported Blacks who climbed up the corporate ladder, or made lots of money in business. But that doesn’t put much of a dent in the Triple Evils.

King didn’t get far in his redirection of the Mass Movement before he was shot down. And, almost immediately, the aspiring Black office holders and corporate actors seized the stage and proceeded to shut the Movement down. Some of these players came from King’s own ranks.

For many of those seeking political office, the Black masses are only useful on election day. The rest of the time, they are nuisances. And Black business types don’t want mass action unless it is in support of *them* getting a contract.

These elements were as responsible as COINTELPRO for the demise of the Movement.

Black politicians gained control or great influence in cities *with no plan at all* except to give contracts to Black businesses. Their only idea for coping with corporate divestment of the cities was to auction off, give away, and even *pay* corporations to take city assets.

The cure for what ailed the cities, they thought, was the return of capital, and the return of whites.

When the cycle of divestment finally exhausted and reversed itself, these electoral leaders continued to give the city jewels away—including tax revenues for a generation into the future.

This political class is more than useless—it is bankrupt and must be replaced. They have made careers selling off the assets of the people. They will ultimately sell out any progressive popular initiative. Getting rid of them will require a Movement.

At the center of any Movement is a principle that is popularly understood. For the Movement for Democratic Development, that principle must be: No project can be called “development” unless it benefits the existing population of the city. Not new populations, but the existing population. Otherwise, it is *destruction*—not development.

We are now speaking of the context in which Wal-Mart should be evaluated, here in Chicago and anywhere else. Yes, we know that Wal-Mart is a Death Star that destroys jobs and all economic activity *but its own* within a wide radius of the store. But what about all the other corporate players? Why

just Wal-Mart? What is the best Grand Plan for the city, one that serves the existing population? And how are the people's aspirations—their dreams for their neighborhoods—made central to the larger scheme?

If the focus is Wal-Mart, then we are engaged in a campaign. If the goal is to empower the people to fight Wal-Mart and any other corporate predator—to democratize planning and development—then we are talking about building a Mass Movement, one that can regenerate itself. Because *the people never run out of dreams*.

To create a Movement for Democratic Development we need more than general loathing, disgust and anger over Wal-Mart, although that's a good start.

We need *information* on every aspect of the city. We need information so that people can develop their own plans for the city.

Corporations know everything they need to know before they target a city—indefinitely more than the city officials with whom they “negotiate,” if you can call it negotiation. The actual process is more like corporate bullying and extortion.

Activists seeking to build a Movement must know as much as the corporations about the city's assets: public and private, infrastructure and installations, vistas and brownfields. A basic task is to do an audit of the city's assets, as the basis for people-oriented planning, and to bargain competently with corporations. This requires assembling teams of experts from many disciplines—civil engineers, architects, progressive city planners, educators—people who collectively understand what makes a city tick. Plus organizers, organizers, organizers.

The task doesn't require a large group, or prohibitive amounts of money. SNCC damn near changed our part of the world with relatively small numbers and almost no money. Today, Black progressives and their allies are represented in all the necessary disciplines—and I am confident they are willing to work—*cheap*.

The consequences of not having a plan for your city were made horrifically clear in New Orleans, recently. The American Institute of Architects and the Urban Land Institute had collaborated with big capital to devise a “plan” for the *new* New Orleans—half the size of the old New Orleans and missing most of its Black population. It was a detailed plan, adopted by the Mayor's Commission and released as if it were the product of a governmental process.

New Orleans activists held their own conference. It featured a handful of experts, none of whom had done a real study of the city: an urban expert from Sydney, Australia; an MIT guy who used to be New York Mayor David Dinkins' housing aide; and a brother who helped rebuild the small town

of Princeville, North Carolina, after a flood in the Nineties.

It was a very uneven match.

The window that slammed suddenly shut on Black New Orleans is incrementally closing on Black and brown populations in many other cities. Gentrification accomplishes over years what Katrina did in days. When the window closes—when there is no longer sufficient critical mass of Black people in the cities—the Great Game of this epoch will be over, and we will have lost.

And we will have lost no matter how much frustration we may have caused Wal-Mart before the window closed.

We only win in the long run when we inspire masses of people to think of the struggle as their own. A Movement for Democratic Development would place Wal-Mart in the context of the full range of capital's destructive activities in urban America. It would come to grips with gentrification, the phenomenon that impacts each inner city household and the political and geographic destiny of the whole people. Such a Movement would aim to seize control of city and county governments, so that the people would have the tools to transform their entire city—to make it a decent place for the *existing* population.

That's something folks can get their teeth into. If we are consciously pursuing such a goal, we might just get ourselves a real Movement—one that will spawn a whole new political leadership.

Amidst these disjointed campaigns orbiting Wal-Mart, Katrina and other struggles, there is the stuff of a Movement out there—the stuff of *human inspiration*.

To paraphrase Dr. King, I envision a situation in which the activist engages the citizen and says: “YOU have a dream. Let's get to work on it.”

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# Labor Blogs—Getting the Unions' Message Out

By Stuart Elliot

Blogs, short for web logs, have been the rage over the last couple of years. Blogs are web sites that are frequently updated and include commentary on selected topics reflecting the opinions of either an individual author or a group of authors. They also contain links to other web sites worth checking out. Political blogs such as Daily Kos and MyDD are credited with helping to elect Howard Dean chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

Now a number of unions and pro-union people are turning to blogging to spread labor's message, too.

The AFL-CIO launched its blog (blog.aflcio.org) in mid-February, and it's worth checking out. It features channels on the states, organizing, Bush and company, corporate abuses, and the like, with new posts added throughout the day and a handy archive. An especially nice



feature of the blog is "Daily Clips," which features links to stories about unions and workers from newspapers and news outlets across the country. The blog placed ads on a number of leading progressive blogs during its first weeks. The idea is to make the AFL-CIO blog a regular source of reliable and interesting news for the blogosphere, as well as to attract viewers. If you like it, you can sign up for email updates.

Here are some other labor blogs that you might like.

Andy Stern, President of the Service Employees International Union blogs on the site of the SEIU-linked Purple Ocean (www.purpleocean.org/blog/42). Borrowing a technique from DailyKos and other progressive blogs, they let readers start their own online journal at PurpleOcean.org. You can share your own stories, complain, or comment on other journals.

Jordan Barab, a former staffer for AFSCME, maintains Confined Space (spewingforth.blogspot.com), the blog on workplace safety and health.

Edwize (www.edwize.com) is a group blog on education and union issues from the United Federation of Teachers in New York City.

Jonathan Tasini set up Working Life (workinglife.typepad.com/daily\_blog). He is a strategist, organizer, activist, commentator, and writer, primarily focusing his energies on the topics of work, labor, and the economy. A former president of the National Writers Union, he is challenging Hillary Clinton in the Democratic Senate primary election.

Techies should like Communicate or Die (www.communicateordie.com), a blog with a mission "to build a network of passionate individuals who are serious about discussing and developing solutions that allow unions to realize the full potential of Internet technology."

Bensonsudblog.blogspot.com (Benson's Union Democracy Blog) is from Herman Benson, founder and now secretary of the Association for Union Democracy, a pro-labor, non-profit organization dedicated to advancing the

*continued on page 8*

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