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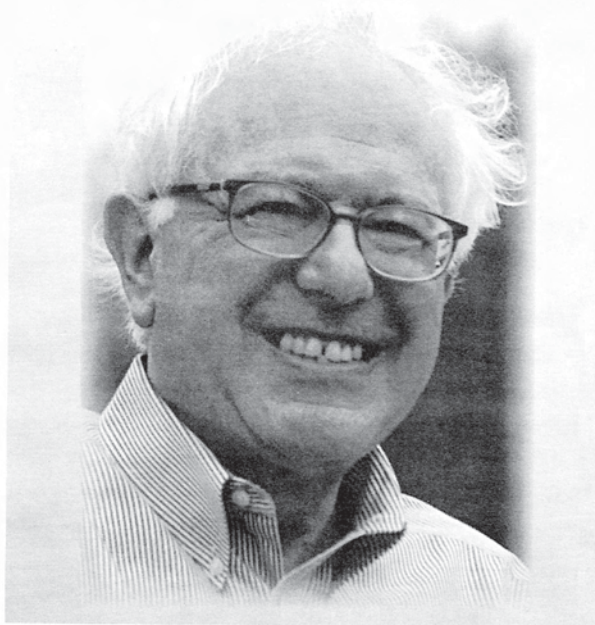
the magazine of the
**Democratic
Socialists of
America**



**Mid-Term Elections:
A Time for Hope?**

**Latin America:
Challenges to Neo-Liberalism**

We did it!



Thank you.

*Thanks so much for
all of your help during
this campaign.
It is much appreciated.*

Bert Sundt

Sanders Elected to U.S. Senate in Historic Victory

By Frank Llewellyn

“We did it!” proclaimed Bernie Sanders in a “thank you” card to DSA PAC. For the first time in American history, a self-declared socialist has won a seat in the United States Senate. Sanders beat his Republican opponent, Richard Tarrant, by a 2-to-1 margin. Tarrant, a wealthy businessman, set a new record in campaign spending on a per-vote basis in replicating the vicious smear campaign that had been waged against Sanders by previous right-wing opponents. Through October 18, Tarrant had raised \$6,688,243 – of which 98.3 percent, or \$6,575,000, came directly out of his pocket.

More than a year ago, DSA members determined to help Bernie win despite our relatively small membership in Vermont. We decided that the most effective way for us to help was to organize a grassroots fundraising campaign on Bernie’s behalf to help him overcome Tarrant’s vast personal wealth. Given the complex regulation of campaign financing, this was not a simple operation. First, we had to organize a political action committee and register with the Federal Election Commission (FEC). Then we had to convince DSA members to contribute to the PAC so it could pay for the costs of the grassroots campaign.

If we had simply written a check to the Sanders campaign, we would have been limited by campaign finance regulations to a total of \$10,000. Instead, we solicited volunteers to organize house parties around the country (*see Theresa Alt’s article, page 4*) that resulted in at least \$56,000 in contributions made directly to Sanders’ campaign. And those are just the contributions that we know about. Sanders, through October 27, had raised \$6,172,633. If you do the math and assume that there were some contributions that were made to Sanders that we motivated but were made independently of the grassroots campaign, it’s clear that we raised very close to 1 percent of his total campaign contributions. That is a major accomplishment in which we can take great pride.

We can also take great pride in the scope of our effort. The house parties were organized almost completely by volunteers. More than 500 members contributed to DSA’s PAC. Those contributions enabled us to produce an organizing manual to guide volunteers through the process, to pay the attorneys who made sure we organized a campaign that complied with the FEC regulations – some of our financial reports were more than 200 pages – and pay for the actual costs of the grassroots campaign. At least 700 more people attended house parties or responded to the house-party campaign with a contribution.

The house-party campaign represents a high-water mark in coordinated grassroots activity for our organization. It is very important that we build on it, and Sanders’ victory provides an opportunity for us to do just that. One of our hopes in supporting Bernie was that the platform the U.S. Senate provides would generate greater visibility and credibility for socialist values and programs. Sanders has already said he will focus public attention on the enormous problems created by the concentration of wealth and power in this country – a project that dovetails perfectly with our agenda. One thing that we will do is help guarantee that Sanders’ voice and message is echoed across the country.

That will fit right in with the other part of our political work for 2007: pushing the Democrats to fulfill their promises – to increase the minimum wage, to increase access to health care, to change course in Iraq, to restore economic security to working and middle class families, and to restore a sense of ethical behavior to Congress. The political circumstances will make it difficult for them – the Republicans have a veto in the Senate, as well as Bush’s veto, but we can’t let them off the hook just because of that. It is critically important that they use the opportunity presented by their majorities to press for progressive reforms and to educate the public on critical issues such as progressive taxation, national health care, and a democratic foreign policy that supports sustainable development and bottom-up economic development instead of maximizing corporate wealth.

Both parties plan to use the bulk of the next two years to shape the politics of the 2008 presidential election. It is entirely possible that the Democrats will take up “Rubinomics” and other centrist policies pushed by power brokers, corporate lobbyists and think tanks on the Democratic side of national politics such as Democratic Leadership Council and the Hamilton Project.

In the coming period, it is vital that we use our newly gained grassroots network, and our ties to truly progressive Democrats and Bernie Sanders, to promote both a progressive agenda and progressive organizing during the next two years.

Frank Llewellyn is National Director of DSA and Treasurer of DSA’s PAC.

DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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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 of brutalizing global competition.

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DSA House Parties Help Send Sanders to Senate

Compiled by Theresa Alt

During the summer and fall of 2006 Democratic Socialists of America Political Action Committee helped DSA activists around the country, “from San Diego up to Maine” (to quote David Knuttunen, in turn quoting the folk song “Joe Hill”) to host house parties to raise funds that helped Bernie Sanders become the sole Socialist in the U.S. Senate.

The **Bostonians** were the pioneers. David Knuttunen and Mike Pattberg spent long hours revising the letter. Invitations bearing the fist and rose logo went out to the Boston DSA newsletter list of over 1200 plus some. On June 13, nearly fifty people gathered at the Somerset home of Dick and Roberta Bauer for featured speakers state representative and long-time ally Denise Provost, union leader Rand Wilson of IUE-CWA 201, and Levi Sanders, Bernie’s son, who works with DSAer Dick Bauer for Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services. The emphasis was on domestic economic justice issues from health care to trade. Boston DSA Chair Mike Pattberg says, “I saw some old DSAers we hadn’t seen in years, and even more people we had never seen before – but now they’re on our mailing list.”

Detroit’s fundraiser on June 25 was the big one, held at the UAW Local 909 union hall in Warren MI, with 140 attending and over \$12,200 in donations. Hosts for the event included former U.S. Representative and former House Minority Whip David Bonior, U.S. Representative John Conyers, Jr., UAW Vice-President Richard Shoemaker, and Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO President Sandra Williams. Bernie Sanders attended and spoke, with a telephone link to the simultaneous fundraiser in Atlanta (see *Democratic Left* XXXIV, no. 2 Fall 2006). Detroit DSA Chair David Green took Bernie Sanders to tour Stan Ovshinsky’s United Solar Ovonics plant in Auburn Hills northwest of Detroit. The plant makes successful, cost-efficient solar panels and is pioneering the hydrogen fuel cell. Ovshinsky says this technology, too, is available and cost-effective. Sanders test-drove a hydrogen-fueled car and was impressed.

July 4 saw two parties. In **Portland**, Maine DSAer Harlan Baker and AFL-CIO officer Burt Wartell co-hosted a backyard veggie burger cookout that drew participants from the local

Democrats. The guests took turns reading aloud the Declaration of Independence. **Boulder**, Colorado guests braved a downpour to attend the party at the home of Leslie Lomas and hear a talk about giving money by economics professor and socialist Tracy Mott. Then, after dark, they went outside to watch the fireworks at the Colorado University stadium.

Greg Goodlander of Columbus, Ohio is a French teacher, so he picked July 14 Bastille Day to host the **Central Ohio** party with a sandwich platter and wine in his back yard. Orator Bob Fittrakis gave the pitch.

In **Central Indiana**, DSA PAC joined with the Socialist Party and the local Democratic Party at a noodle restaurant on July 23.

The summer grew hotter. **Ithaca** had the one party that featured swimming. Over 30 activists came together July 30 at the lakeside home of former mayor Ben Nichols and Judith Van Allen. In addition to enjoying good food and wine, good company, and a chance to watch a video of Sanders, some of us took a dip in Cayuga Lake. The gathering brought together DSA members, Progressive Democrats

of America (PDA) members, left Democrats and media activists.

On the same day, in **Twin Cities**, a dozen of DSA’s regulars came together in the party room of a high rise for good left conversation.

Fall brought Sanders himself to DSA’s urban parties. The **New York City** event was on September 19 at the home of Gene and Laurel Eisner on the Upper West Side. New York City DSA Chair Kenny Schaeffer reports that it was very successful and brought in a lot of old faces he hadn’t been seeing in a while – and new faces as well. Sensing the possibility of real changes, people engaged in lively discussion. The questions and comments actually had to be cut off to let Bernie get to the plane.

He flew to Washington and the next day attended the **Washington, D.C.**, DSA PAC party at the home of Stewart Mott. Not only did Bernie Sanders speak; so did members of Congress Neil Abercrombie (HI) and Dennis Kucinich (OH). Christine Riddiough, former DSA National Director, served as host/moderator.



Detroit DSA chair David Green and Bernie Sanders at the Detroit event.

DSAer Ed Collins of **Springfield**, Massachusetts, where there is no local, got co-sponsorship from the Boston comrades and the Pioneer Valley Central Labor Council AFL/CIO for one of the most financially successful of all our fundraisers. The attendees were mostly union activists and members of Jobs with Justice. Most were very familiar with Bernie, but only a few knew that he was a Congressman from Vermont and did not realize until they heard him on the telephone call-in just how progressive he is and what a firm grasp he has on workers' issues.

The 25 party-goers on September 30 in **San Diego** were thrilled by a fabulous phone call from Sanders, as well as impressed by

the work of his staff to make it a technical success. The people at the party felt their contributions were really worthwhile, sending someone to Washington who, though from the other side of the country, would represent them.

Finally, on October 8, Jeff Cox of DSA and Karen Kubby of the Socialist Party teamed up to hold a house party in **Iowa City**. Jeff reports, "We had about 20, including a number of old DSA ex-members and labor activists that I hadn't seen for a long time.... Those in attendance were grateful for the opportunity to do this." Socialism plays pretty close to Peoria.

The 2006 Democratic Congressional Victory: An Opportunity for the Left?

By Joseph M. Schwartz

Only a long history of Democrats pulling defeat from the jaws of victory led pundits and even progressives to evince surprise at the recent Democratic Congressional victory. Historically, second-term presidents who confront a military quagmire abroad and low-approval ratings at home suffer major Congressional losses (e.g., Lyndon Johnson and the Democrats in 1966 and the Republicans in 1974). With President George W. Bush's approval ratings in the low 30s and a war more than 60 percent of the population opposes (to one extent or another), serious Republican electoral losses resulted. And the hypocrisy of the party of "moral values" beset by corruption and scandal helped keep some fundamentalists at home, enabling the Democrats to pick up out of their gain of 31 seats at least five seats in solid Republican territory (seats which will be hard to keep in 2008). These Democratic gains may force some adjustment in military policy in Iraq (but don't underestimate Bush's commitment to an ineluctable "victory").

But unless the Democratic Party national leadership abandons its neo-liberal commitment to balancing the budget and preserving a massive defense budget, the nation is unlikely to see Congressional proposals to create universal health care and fund other human needs. Only social movement pressure from below could shake mainstream Democrats from their loyalty to wealthy contributors, corporate donors, and the "liberal" wing of K street corporate lobbyists.

Yet there remain certain victories that progressives should celebrate. In the Senate, Sherrod Brown and Bernie Sanders immediately will become two of the chamber's most left voices, and populist anti-corporate sentiment helped fuel the Senate victories of Jon Tester in Montana and James Webb in Virginia.

The Democrats also picked up numerous governor's mansions and state houses. If the Democrats can hold these through the 2008 presidential elections, it could help with Congressional redistricting in 2010. In Ohio and Indiana, the devastation that unfair trade agreements have visited upon industrial production carried to victory "fair trade" Democrats. The Democrats also gained three House seats in deindustrialized, traditionally Republican upstate New York. Finally, continuing political realignment in New England led to Democratic House triumphs in Connecticut and New Hampshire. While some Democratic partisans dream of the Republicans being confined to their core base in the deep South, the Republicans remain competitive in the Southwest, Mountain States, and the Midwest. Absent the war and economic recession in the industrial Midwest, the Republicans might have held on to both chambers.

Crucial to the presidential race in 2008 will be whether Democrats can maintain the small, but key gains they made among white Catholic working class voters (moving from 45-55 per cent Democrat-Republican in 2004 to 50-50 in 2006) and among Latino voters (moving from 60-40 per cent Democrat-Republican in 2004 to 72-28 in 2006). This will depend on whether the Democrats address the plight of deindustrialized workers and advance a progressive immigration policy that provides a clear road to citizenship for those who labor daily to feed, clothe, and care for Americans.

The election may have checked the administration's ability to commit even more troops to the disastrous quagmire in Iraq, and Democrats may also end Republican hopes of further gutting domestic social programs and re-jiggering the tax system even more in favor of the rich. Republican talk of "privatizing" part

of Social Security revenues is probably dead, although only pressure from below will keep the Democratic leadership from toying with “bi-partisan” Social Security reform to raise the retirement age and/or lower the real value of benefits (rather than lift the cap on income taxed by Social Security, let alone make the payroll tax more progressive). And while the Democratic leadership is unlikely to advance “fair trade” alternatives to the administration’s proposals for extending “free trade” agreements in the Americas, pro-labor and environmental riders stand a better chance of getting into these agreements.

With all this, the Democrats remain a socially and ideologically divided party. Its electoral base includes a progressive wing made up of communities of color, trade union members, and white-collar workers in the caring professions who support progressive economic and social policies. It also includes a centrist wing of upper-middle class social liberals (and wealthy and corporate donors) who are at best economically moderate. The party’s national elites go where the money is, both because it’s the accustomed method of financing campaigns and because as social liberals they share those centrist economic values and interests. Thus, they embrace balancing the budget, accede to the massive erosion of progressive taxation, and oppose any major domestic spending programs and any serious cuts in wasteful and irrational defense spending.

The Republican Party is also an overly stretched tent. Absent the unifying ideological force of the Cold War, the Republican base is pulled between its socially conservative, but more economically populist white lower-middle and upper working class wing and its economically libertarian (read: tax cuts for the wealthy and privatization of the public sector) and socially liberal upper-middle class suburban base. But Republicans still set the ideological terrain on “taxing and spending” (abetted by Clinton’s fiscal moderation). If politics is essentially about “who gets what from whom,” Democratic refusal to discuss raising taxes on corporations and the rich to support universal health care and other forms of social provision means the upper-middle class remain the “who” who are getting “the what” from the “whom” of the bottom two-thirds of American society. This

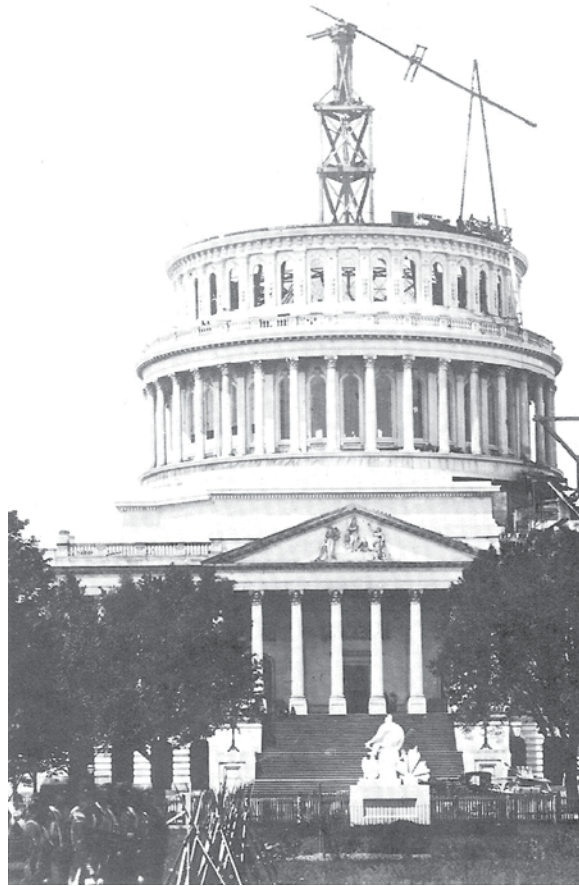
upwardly redistributive politics also reflects the reality that restrictive voter registration laws and the absence of election day as a holiday (or weekend) mean the top 50 percent of income earners constitute some 75 percent of the electorate.

Thus, the immediate Democratic congressional agenda is limited to raising the minimum wage to a (still horrendously low) \$7.25 an hour; pay-as-you-go budgeting on any spending initiatives (a fiscally conservative measure); government bargaining with pharmaceutical companies to lower Medicaid prescription drug prices; and eliminating outrageous tax benefits

for domestic oil drilling. Labor law reform is no gimme, and it will take all the leadership skills of the Democratic caucus to keep Blue Dog and New Democratic caucus members from abandoning modest efforts to clamp down on the drug manufacturers and oil companies.

The tragic reality is that 30 years of conservative political dominance has eliminated from mainstream public discourse the twin progressive tools for curtailing capitalist inequality: progressive taxation and high-quality universal public provision of basic needs. Even among the left Democratic elected officials, how many remind the public that if we restored corporate taxation and marginal income tax rates to the levels of the Carter administration, the federal government would garner more than \$600 billion a year in revenue (allowing for 30 per cent expansion of the federal budget, even without a prudent cutting of the defense

budget)? And what mainstream Democratic politician queries whether it makes any sense for the United States to spend hundreds of billions on a next generation of fighter jets when the Soviet Union no longer exists and American defense expenditure exceeds the combined military expenditure of the next ten military powers? Most importantly, will Democrat leaders risk any political capital to keep conservative Democrats on board when and if “card check” union election reform gets to the House floor? Unions now form the core of Democratic get-out-the-vote efforts; voters from union families constituted close to 25 cent of the congressional vote, with close to 70 per cent of those voters pulling the Democratic lever. Yet what will the unions get from the Democratic leadership?



Can the donkeys reconstruct it from within?

Some pundits proclaimed during this election round that Clinton's support of welfare reform and his refusal to relax punitive federal sentencing guidelines had defanged the "race card" of Republican law-and-order politics. But this has come at the price of the Democrats abandoning our inner cities and those pushed off the welfare rolls (who have not been able to find jobs that pay enough to replace the child care and Medicaid they lost). While Clinton did preserve national affirmative action programs and raised the Earned Income Tax Credit, the failure of the party to discuss persistent racial inequality means that anti-affirmative action initiatives in California, Washington and now Michigan won easy victories.

Yet, "pessimism of the intellect" should not be interpreted as Cassandra-like realism. With no incumbent running, the room for policy debate in the upcoming presidential primary season

will be considerable. In four crucial arenas: *foreign, trade, immigration policy, and health care and pensions policy*, the left will have a chance to challenge both Republican and Democratic neo-liberal political hegemony.

While the impulse of the Democratic leadership may be to side with the Baker-Hamilton commission's recommendation to keep more than 70,000 U.S. military trainers, "security forces" (to defend the trainers) and logistics units in Iraq for the long term, a massive turn-out for this January 27th's anti-war rally and visible support for anti-war candidates in the Democratic presidential primaries could hasten the withdrawal time table. Senator Russ Feingold's decision not to run for President leaves Congressman Dennis Kucinich as the only declared anti-war candidate, though Senator Barack Obama (or John Edwards), if they run, might well be pressured into a visible anti-war role.

It also creates a constituency for backing European and United States diplomatic efforts to engage Iran and the Arab states in supporting a unified, peaceful Iraq as the United States government fulfills its moral obligation to help reconstruct Iraq – not by funding corrupt "no-show" American corporate contractors who took the \$20 billion and ran, but by funding multilateral aid organizations that cooperate with legitimate Iraqi institutions. A U.S. peace movement pressing a Democratic Congress could also result in pressuring the Israeli government to negotiate a peace settlement with non-rejectionist Palestinians.

The Democratic leadership fears making the case for withdrawal within the framework of an alternative, multilateral American foreign and military strategy. Yet the United States cannot solve the problems of nuclear proliferation or

Trade Issues Impact Ohio Elections

By Simone Morgen

Although the 2006 election had been, at least initially, characterized as a referendum on Iraq and GOP scandals, trade policy was in many ways the sleeper issue. This was especially true in Ohio, where economic anxiety over the trade-related loss of manufacturing jobs and economic growth rankings at or near the bottom nationwide, fueled a near landslide, or as close as gerrymandered districts would allow. (Congressional votes in Ohio for Democrats accounted for 53% of those cast, although only 39% of Ohioans will be represented by Democrats in Congress.)

Former Representative, now Senator Sherrod Brown is the most visible symbol of this change, although other candidates such as incoming Representative Zack Space, who beat Joy Padgett for the 18th district (the former Ney seat), and Governor-elect Ted Strickland had also made trade an issue. A longtime critic of "free trade" agreements, frequently characterized as far left and out of the mainstream, Brown handily defeated the relatively moderate but free-trade proponent Mike DeWine. He has vowed to press forward with an agenda to re-configure trade agreements for the benefit of ordinary workers, whose experience in their daily lives does not reflect the often upbeat growth data on the macro level.

Trade was also an issue in the narrow loss of Mary Jo Kilroy to Deborah Pryce. Local DSAers worked in both the Brown and Kilroy campaigns. In Ted Strickland's former district, Charlie Wilson ran against Chuck Blasdel with trade-related ads. In Indiana, there were more fair trade victories, as Joe Donnelly beat Chris Chocoma in the 2nd district, and in Iowa's 1st district, Bruce Braley defeated Mike Whalen for an open seat, and Dave Loebsack defeated incumbent Jim Leach in the 2nd district. Hovering as the unspoken context in these races was the growing, uneasy awareness of class differences and different lifetime opportunities. Jim Webb, the Senator-elect from Virginia, made "economic fairness" a central element of his campaign. In an unusually frank *Wall Street Journal* editorial on November 15, 2006, entitled "Class Struggle," he warns that "this bifurcation of opportunities and advantages along class lines has the potential to bring a period of political unrest," especially as workers understand that there are alternatives to the policies that have limited their options. Political unrest, of course, can produce needed change, and a clearer understanding that the label of "protectionism" frequently depends on who expects to be protected.

Simone Morgen is the chair of Central Ohio DSA and a member of DSA's NPC.

global warming unilaterally. It cannot condemn nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea while selling nuclear technology to India. Refusing to engage in serious negotiations with Iran and North Korea about their security concerns guarantees their effort to develop a nuclear deterrent. Meanwhile the U.S. continues to “modernize” its nuclear force and fails to negotiate further warhead cuts with Russia. We daily pay the price for not pressing for planned nuclear disarmament after the end of the Cold War. Nor has the domestic economy been weaned from its \$25 billion share of a global arms market of well over \$150 billion, a market which fuels civil wars around the globe.

With outspoken progressives Brown and Sanders in the Senate, a trade union and immigrant rights activists program of democratic fair trade and immigration policy would have champions saying in a national venue that if one labors for the good of our society, one must have the rights of citizens. They would also be in a position to confront the “push” and “pull” factors behind immigration – the destruction of small-scale agriculture throughout the developing world by so-called free trade’s facilitating the export of U.S. agribusiness products combined with unenforced American labor laws that allow for the proliferation of sweatshops in the United States.

More challenges face the new Congress. The end of the housing bubble will likely increase recessionary pressures on the United States economy. This will only further erode the extent and quality of private health insurance coverage. In addition, state and municipal budget troubles will increase pressures to cut public pensions. More than 50 percent of current American workers have no pension benefits, and another quarter has only minimal pension coverage. Dealing with these twin social provision crises means securing single-payer health insurance

and public initiatives to strengthen Social Security; establishing federal guarantees of private and public pension schemes; and supporting labor law reform empowering unions to grow strong enough to garner decent pension benefits for more workers.

Obviously, the corporate-dominated media will immediately ask any politician who favors such initiatives: how will you pay for them? In order to answer this question, activists must work to revive as popular concepts progressive taxation and a fiscally-responsible, prudent defense budget. This will necessitate public pressure on the Democratic national leadership to abandon their dogmatic commitment to balance-the-budget “Rubinomics.” One means of doing so would be to pressure for Congressional hearings and local town meetings around the progressive policy agenda being developed by the Economic Policy Institute (aimed at influencing the 2008 Democratic presidential primary debate). DSA is developing a project to involve progressive Senators and House members, as well as the labor movement and community groups, in a series of “economic justice” town meetings during the 2008 presidential primaries.

Elections merely reflect public opinion. It will take grassroots organizing from below to keep the progressive promise of the 2006 Congressional elections by extending and transforming the ideological parameters that guide national political elites, be they Democrat or Republican.

Joseph M. Schwartz teaches political theory and American politics at Temple University. He is a member of the DSA National Political Committee and the author of The Permanence of the Political and of The Future of Democratic Equality: Reconstructing Social Solidarity in a Fragmented United States (Routledge, forthcoming, January 2007).

For too long, the U.S. has treated Latin America as a playground or a puppet. Today, the area is home to some of the most vibrant democratic progressive and socialist politics in the world. DSA recognizes that and wants to bring it more clearly into the American consciousness. The following section is the beginning of Democratic Left’s coverage of the region and its politics.

Will the Democrats Cut and Run from Bush’s Deeply Flawed Latin American Policy?

By Larry Birns

Will there be a Democratic Party Latin American policy distinct from the farrago of ineptitude of the Bush administration? Bush remains in a Cold War mold, with a personal enemies list that includes Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez and, of course, Fidel Castro. But Bush’s hemispheric strategy doesn’t differ much from the

opportunism and meretricious initiatives of the Clinton administration and its all-encompassing pursuit of free trade. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) predictably led to a sharp cleavage over policy both within the Democratic and Republican parties as well as between them.

The Clinton Record

To pass the NAFTA in 1994, Bill Clinton's operatives had to depend upon a higher percentage of Republican than Democratic legislators to achieve a narrow victory. A heavy majority of Democratic legislators mobilized against the pending bill while the Republicans overwhelmingly supported it. The same political division is likely to once again occur if the hemisphere-inclusive Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) bill ever reaches the floor of Congress.

Upon taking office, the Clinton administration envisaged a strictly defined, trade-dominated agenda towards Latin America. Looking back on his largely failed regional policy, one can see that the limited nature of its focus on trade and more trade was the key ingredient of its relative lack of success. If there was any exception to the Clinton administration's mainly languorous interest in the region, it was its Jacobin orientation toward Cuba-related issues. In the first Clinton campaign, the Democratic candidate moved to the right to outflank the first President Bush by taking a more bellicose stand on Havana, as he relentlessly socked away at Castro so as to obtain campaign donations from – and tap into the political clout of – Miami's Cuban-American community. Clinton apparently found no problem in sacrificing a balanced Cuba policy in favor of shrill invective, if it meant winning over Florida's vital Electoral College votes. The Clinton administration soon revealed that there were a great number of dark spots in its snapshot of the region.

From Clinton to Bush

The new George W. Bush administration embodied a right-wing Republican absorption of Clinton's thirst for trade deals. To this mix, however, was added a potent brew of negativity from a dramatically radicalizing State Department Bureau of Western Hemispheric Affairs, which was rendered even more extremist by the strident orientation of its first Assistant Secretary of State, Otto Reich, and his equally rabid successor, Roger Noriega. For these envenomed regional players, trade matters could be left to the Treasury and the White House's Trade Office, while they could get on with their main obsession, which was to bring down the Castro regime and anything that vaguely resembled it. This would be the test applied to every major regional policymaking initiative and the yardstick used to evaluate every Latin American government: where it stood on Castro and what it was doing to isolate Hugo Chávez (in addition to whether or not it would join the "coalition of the willing" in Iraq). What happened at the beginning of the Bush administration was that intense ideological posturing was added to the pro-free trade docket, with anti-Castro diatribes intensified to new extremes of hardness.

While such a game-plan was good enough for affluent Latin Americans led by their local captains of industry, along with the

professionals who were able to feast handsomely off of expanding commerce, it turned out to be pretty thin gruel for the chronically poor, the indigenous, and the millions of a given population who were part of the rural and urban unemployed and underemployed. For the tens of millions of ordinary Latin Americans seeking even a slightly improved standard of living and a portal into a better life, the contrast was embittering.

The Bush administration's paramount mistake has been that, in its concentrated quest for orthodox trade models that adhere to traditional right-wing ideals and the raw ideology that at least sounded like it was targeted at some Latin American leftist bullseye, it has acted as if it has found the globe's most potent drink. This was reflected in its militant proselytizing for the full implementation of the "Washington Consensus" trade model, first devised under Clinton. But the model's backers were nursing an illusion. Like Hitler's Third Reich, Washington's game plan for expunging a radical strain from anywhere in the hemisphere would not last for a thousand years, but scarcely a decade.

Selective Indignation

Of course, a policy based upon the pursuit of social justice and the respect for authentic sovereignty would be the antithesis of what the Bush Latin American policy was seeking on the ground. The role played by its questionable certification process, for example – which invoked patently spurious evidence and cooked data regarding Venezuela's supposedly objectionable performance in such areas as drugs, terrorism, and human trafficking – ended up by being self-discrediting. Consider intelligence czar John Negroponte setting up a special Cuban-Venezuelan unit. The implications were clear, as the only other such units were those designated for dealing with North Korea, Iran and Syria. Moreover, as ambassador to Honduras in the early 1980s, Negroponte was deeply involved in covering up Contra death squad activities against Honduran anti-Contras opposed to U.S. policy in Nicaragua. This helped to destabilize that country's frail democratic processes, yet Negroponte got away with it by claiming amnesia before his confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Yet after repeated bashings of Venezuela and denying that Caracas was worthy of being certified for its cooperation in Washington's anti-drug war, current U.S. Ambassador Brownfield now carefully works his language, after Chávez's presidential victory, to argue that Washington and Caracas do have things to talk about because of...past cooperation.

What Needs to Happen

Were the U.S. to become a true friend of the hemisphere, it would commit itself to a policy in which each constituent nation was allowed to go in its own direction and generate its own autonomous policies to service its own aspirations. This means

that it should not be automatic that every nation, every time, will be responsive to the White House's hypertrophied passion for control and definition. Washington's regional policy today is one frozen in time, concretized in a non-stop effort to defame and marginalize Cuba and Venezuela, as well as to try to tarnish individuals throughout the continent whose mortal offenses range from rejecting the thesis that what is private is intrinsically superior to what is public, and that the private corporation is equal to the state in its legal personality. This is not so much a policy as it is a self-indulgent gamble that has little appeal to either Latin American leaders or their publics.

To initiate a policy of relevance that is hallmarked by *gravitas*, while reaching out for opportunities for constructive engagement with Latin American nations that previously have been classified as rogue powers, Washington would have to first honestly address its differences with Cuba and Venezuela. This must be carried out not through imposing some Republican-authored diktat, but through the convergence of a mature application of traditional diplomatic skills. The result of such efforts should, in turn be fused to a balanced policy based on addressing some of the main economic, political and social issues plaguing the entire hemisphere. Some of the latter could involve debt burdens or the shortage of investment capital, or the snares of a debate over immigration. This trajectory could at least provide U.S. negotiators and those speaking for an increasingly united Latin America some basis of hope for a successful resolution of some of the most long-lived differences existing today between Washington and its two Caribbean basin foes. If this can be dismissed as a pipe dream, nevertheless, it still remains critically important that the debilitating impact on the hemisphere resulting from a series of destructive State Department policies must be revoked.

The Democratic Alternative?

U.S.-Latin American relations under Clinton were barely distinguishable from the harshly politicized bad patches of the Bush era. It is this seamless fusion that is so disturbing, as well as the conviction that little is likely to change in the near future from those who will continue to control the White House until early 2009. Reason enough to treasure the few instances where Democrats showed something more than random spunk and some less vitriolic insights into the complexities of the triangular relations between the U.S., Cuba and Venezuela.

The Democratic leadership has mainly trivialized the Latin American factor. Meanwhile, other Democrats, typifying this lowest common denominator approach, have smoothly turned to the combative rhetoric borrowed from the Republican lexicon. For example, presidential contender John Kerry, during his last presidential race, found that Hugo Chávez's "close relationship with Fidel Castro has raised serious questions about his

commitment to leading a truly democratic government." Could they not say the same about Kazakhstan's relationship? This relatively unlettered remark may have been one of the few occasions that Kerry referred to the region at all.

In general, mainstream Democratic speechmakers have consistently used dismissive language regarding Chávez. Rants against Chávez peaked with his recent "devil" speech delivered at the UN on the occasion of the duel between the U.S. and Venezuela over which country would fill the two-year Latin American seat on the UN's Security Council. Incoming Democratic Speaker Nancy Pelosi was quick to observe that "Hugo Chávez fancies himself a modern day Simon Bolivar but all he is [is] an everyday thug," while the venerable House Democrat and senior congressman and Black Caucus leader, New York's Charles Rangel, contributed the shameless piece of puffery that "You don't come into my country; you don't come into my congressional district and you don't condemn my president."

The issues of immigration, terrorism, drugs, energy questions and incipient rivalries with China over resources and new investments in Cuba should afford a lively time for U.S.-Latin America relations even though they are likely to generate more heat than light. In fact, one might hardly notice this; rather, it is not too much to say that the incoming Democratic leadership remains sadly ill-equipped to coherently debate a range of serious issues that deserve to be ventilated beyond sound bites and canned quips. When it comes to regional ties, the entire Congress is all but functionally illiterate, and distinguishing between the relative sophistication of the two political parties would be a thankless task. It would not be too much to say that when it comes to hemispheric relations, the Democratic leadership is hardly more conversant with the issues, the pressing points and the goals and the major trends that can be readily discerned than their Republican counterparts. If this is in any way to improve, it must be as a result of more than happenstance. An array of important hemispheric issues must be made the subject of a constructive debate that would serve the common interests of the entire hemisphere. A process must begin that reflects a spirit of flexibility, mutual respect, and a recognition that no one nation, not even the U.S., has a monopoly on good thinking or on gracious vision.

Larry Birns is the director of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (www.coha.org), a nonprofit, tax-exempt independent research and information organization founded in 1975 to promote the common interests of the hemisphere, raise the visibility of regional affairs and increase the importance of the inter-American relationship, as well as encourage the formulation of rational and constructive U.S. policies toward Latin America. It has been described on the Senate floor as being "one of the nation's most respected bodies of scholars and policy makers."

Ecuador: A New Opportunity

By Cyril Mychalejko

When Ecuadorians went to the polls on Nov. 26 they collectively said no to neoliberalism when they voted overwhelmingly for maverick candidate Rafael Correa over billionaire banana tycoon Alvaro Noboa. This election undoubtedly makes Washington uneasy as yet another country in Latin America elected a left-of-center candidate.

The choice between Noboa and Correa was a choice between the past and the future. Noboa represented Latin America's



Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa

oligarchic past. The man who owns the fourth largest banana company in the world and who amassed his wealth off the backs of children and by violently confronting striking workers and unionists expectedly promoted free market policies to "save" the country from its pervasive poverty. He promised to sign a free trade deal with Washington and even suggested that he would invite Occidental Petroleum Corporation back into the country (it had been expelled in March for violating Ecuadorian law). Yet, despite his anti-union, child-labor past, the U.S. press consistently described Noboa as a "populist."

While Noboa represented the hopes and dreams of Washington and Wall Street, Correa's campaign was essentially shaped by the social movements: he owes them his presidency and ultimately they will determine whether he lasts a full term. (Ecuador hasn't had a president last a full term in over ten years.)

His policy positions reflected demands that Ecuadorians were vocalizing through protests in March which essentially shut down the country. Led by social movements such as CONAIE, the protestors demanded that outgoing President Alfredo Palacio end negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA) with the United States and demanded the government expel U.S. oil company Occidental from the country, as well as start spending more on social programs and infrastructure projects.

In turn, Correa has consistently said that he would oppose free trade with the U.S., renegotiate contracts with foreign companies

in the extractive industries, and restructure debt repayment to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) so that the government can spend that money more appropriately on social programs that would raise the standard of living.

"The world is recognizing that the [International] Monetary Fund and World Bank have not been a part of the solution, but rather the problem," said Correa. "Life and national commitments come first, before the pockets of creditors and supposed international commitments."

On December 10, Correa, while visiting Peru's free trade-friendly president Alan Garcia, told Peru's Radioprogramas radio that he would not sign a free trade agreement with the U.S. because it would be "tremendously harmful" to Ecuador.

Correa's evaluation mirrors that of a 2005 report by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which states,

The Ecuadorian agricultural sector loses in any scenario. This includes the improbable case in which the U.S. eliminates subsidies, supports and maintains its tariffs at zero. The net effect is marginally negative, but will impact especially subsistence and medium size producers in rice, corn (white and hard), meat and some dairy products.

By decimating the country's agricultural sector, the FTA would subsequently damage indigenous culture.

Correa has also said he will cancel a lease for the U.S.'s Manta military base on Ecuador's Pacific Coast when the agreement expires in 2009. The base is allegedly used for Washington's "war on drugs," though a UN investigation recently reported that a private security firm was using the base to recruit and interview potential "mercenaries" to be sent to Iraq.

These policy positions, should Correa follow through with them, will undoubtedly put this proud friend of Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez in Washington's crosshairs. His opposition to capitalist globalization promoted through free trade and the World Bank and the IMF make him a national security threat. A National Intelligence Estimate from April, entitled "Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States," parts of which were declassified and released to the public this year, states,

Anti-U.S. and anti-globalization sentiment is on the rise and fueling other radical ideologies. This could prompt some leftist, nationalist, or separatist groups to adopt terrorist methods to attack U.S. interests.

But in addition to potential interference from Washington, Correa will have his hands full in Quito. Not coming from a traditional political party, which was part of his appeal for many voters, he has no political base in Congress. This will make it difficult for him to push through progressive legislation, unless of course he is able to hold a special assembly to rewrite the country's constitution, something he called for during his campaign. This will undoubtedly meet outright opposition in Congress because it could effectively dissolve the governing body. What Correa has to hope for is that civil society will back him up – in the streets if necessary – and demand that Congress bend to its will.

Ecuadorians could take a lesson from Bolivians, who in November marched on La Paz to demand land reform legislation.

This essentially gave Bolivian president Evo Morales a mandate to push legislation through the Senate, even as opposition party members boycotted the November 28 vote.

Correa recently remarked after his victory, “We are just instruments of the power of the people. This is a clear message that the people want change.”

If Ecuadorians truly want change, they have to be guiding it, not just on Election Day or to overthrow an unworthy president, but every day.

Cyril Mychalejko is an assistant editor at www.UpsideDownWorld.org, an online magazine uncovering activism and politics in Latin America. He spent six months this year in Ecuador as a human rights observer.

The Hope and Chaos of Mexico's Elections: Democratic Left Interviews Enrique Dávalos

The protracted and contentious Mexican presidential election officially concluded in December with the inauguration of the right wing PAN party's Felipe Calderón. But the political and social upheaval that has dominated Mexico for the past year continues. Democratic Left recently sat down with Enrique Dávalos to discuss the situation. Dávalos, a Mexico City native and former professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, now lives in the U.S. and teaches at San Diego City College. He is an activist with the Tijuana Workers Information Center – Centro de Informacion para Trabajadoras y Trabajadores, which supports the struggles of maquiladora workers in northern Mexico. He also chairs the San Diego Maquiladora Workers Solidarity Network, in which San Diego DSA participates. NPC member Herb Shore conducted the interview for Democratic Left.

DL: So let's start with the election.

ED: Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the candidate of the PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática), was the center-left candidate, running on a platform different from the right wing parties in Mexico. For the first time in more than 70 years, there was the opportunity for a left candidate to be the president of Mexico. As the mayor of Mexico City, López Obrador had made some changes and got a lot of support. Many people said that they would be willing to die in support of him, and we are talking about very poor people. A party supports him, but also a popular movement outside of the party. However, while his support was greatest in central and south Mexico, it was weakest in the north.

We will never know who was the real winner. Early on, López Obrador had a clear advantage over Calderón in the polls, but in the last months the distance between him and the right-wing candidate shrank. At the very end, he still led Calderón, but when the election results came in, it was announced Calderón won with about 1 percent more votes than López Obrador. López Obrador's campaign claimed there was a disparity between the votes registered in the polls and the votes that appeared in the

central computer in Mexico City. They said that in addition to other tricks, there was a major problem with software fraud. They requested a manual recount, without the computer, to check if Calderón was the real winner. The [centrist] PRI, PAN, and the government controlled by the PAN, opposed this request. They said, “No, we won – period,” and they declared Calderón the new president. On the other hand, López Obrador said it was clear that Calderón lost, and that the vote count was a fraud. “Therefore, I am the legitimate president,” he said. It's probably true. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why the government was so adamant in refusing to recount the votes.

López Obrador said, “If you recount the votes and I lose, I recognize I was defeated. But if you don't recount the votes, I am not going to stop the social movement for democracy in Mexico.” And he was true to his words and eventually called on the people to start civil disobedience. So for example, people blockaded the Mexico City stock market several times. They also shut down the tollbooths we now have on Mexico's freeways – the people hate them because they are so expensive – and let cars go through for free. The Government was not able to

suppress these pro-Obrador demonstrations. His people occupied the center of Mexico City for weeks. These places became real experiments in democracy and popular culture. Many things happened there in terms of art, literature and poetry. Popular teach-ins were held, new businesses were formed and new relationships created.

When finally, the government said, “No, we won – period,” López Obrador organized a national assembly that declared him the head of an alternative government, which doesn’t have legal power, but has, instead, popular support. Now, we need to see what it means. Everybody says we have two presidents in Mexico.



PRD's Andrés Manuel López Obrador

negotiate with each other. But now we have two presidents. And López Obrador is starting to act like a president. He is working with the PRD faction in the Congress and some congressmen are saying, “Well, we will try to bring the initiatives of López Obrador here to the Congress.”

Right now, he is traveling around Mexico, (similar to the Zapatista Otra Campaña [the state-by-state effort by the non-electoral Zapatistas to expand into a larger non-electoral, anti-capitalist block in opposition to the traditional parties] that I am involved with) going to different places, meeting with the people, and organizing local committees for this government, which is called the Democratic National Convention, the CND. It will take some time to see just what kind of government it will be.

DL: Many in the U.S. don’t realize the extent to which there was a genuine insurrection in Oaxaca. Would you give us your sense of why this happened in Oaxaca? What is the form of political organization that arose out of the insurrection? And what’s going to happen now?

ED: It’s amazing what happened in Oaxaca. Oaxaca is a state with a lot of political experience, and political left organizations, especially teachers and indigenous organizations. Yet during the

last ten years the confrontations between different democratic and progressive organizations in Oaxaca made it almost impossible to conceive that they were going to be able to work together.

The current movement started from a very simple demand – better salaries for teachers. The government was incapable of solving, politically, this conflict. Then the fight became more complex because the government also wanted to take a new step in the privatization of the public education in Mexico – and in Oaxaca. The teachers, already mobilizing for higher wages, decided to expand the campaign to include defending public education. That deepened the conflict.

The governor of Oaxaca, who was unpopular even in his own party (PRI), got the support of the Mexican government, which unleashed La Policía Federal Preventiva (PFP, Federal Preventive Police) to repress the teachers. The PFP is a military police force used to confront and repress social movements. The intervention backfired as popular support for the teachers increased throughout the state of Oaxaca. The government failed to understand the role the teachers were playing as actual leaders in their communities. They weren’t only teachers; they were also social organizers in many Oaxacan communities.

So the people supported their teachers, and the movement changed from being a strike for salaries and local demands to a political movement for the removal of the governor of Oaxaca. Even though the Mexican government had the authority to do it, they didn’t, and for reasons that most people do not understand. The call to remove of the governor was immensely popular in Oaxaca and would have defused the immediate political crisis. The movement that they created – almost an insurrectionary movement – is called the Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (APPO) – the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca. It’s a very horizontal organization, including people from the PRI and the guerilla groups in Oaxaca; the diversity is unimaginable! However, they are able to get together to make resolutions. The teachers and indigenous groups are the backbone of this movement. Most of the people back their initiatives. They have been able to confront the government – confront the repression – functioning as a kind popular state council that was prepared to negotiate, but also to mobilize. They are an image of a kind of movement that we could have in a future Mexico. Not exactly a revolution led by a “vanguard,” but more a popular insurrection coordinated by a coalition of different organizations. We saw the military police entering the city, only to be confronted by groups of old women talking to them as if they were their children. You could see that the police are deeply moved by these women; we are going to see a lot of that in the future in Mexico if things keep going in the direction they are now.

DL: So what do you see happening in the near future?

ED: Who knows for sure, except for more poverty and dislocation? Mexican history seems to be cyclical. We had a revolution in 1810. Then we had a new revolution exactly one century later, in 1910. Now, we have four more years to go.

In two years, the Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) enters its next phase with the opening of the agricultural market. Then the U.S. will be able to export corn without any restrictions; and that is going to mean more millions of people thrown out of the economy. Inevitably that will mean more poverty and dislocation in Mexico, with many of those trying to enter the U.S.

Officially, almost two out of three voters opposed Felipe Calderón, yet he is intent on governing, despite the government

organized by Obrador. If López Obrador is put in jail, what do you think that he's going to do? The dynamics of extra-parliamentary movements like the Zapatista Otra Campaña and the social and political movements around López Obrador and the PRD are moving them in the same direction, but along different paths; and even if the leaders decided that they want to marry the movements, it would be very hard at this moment. But it doesn't mean that we have to be in open competition. We could recognize each other's movements, including our differences, know that eventually these differences will need confronting, but right now we have common enemies – neo-liberalism and the repressive government of Felipe Calderón.

Socialist Forum Discontinued

At its most recent meeting, DSA's National Political Committee confirmed that the occasional publication *Socialist Forum* would be discontinued. The publication served admirably in its time as a discussion bulletin. It provided a much needed venue for members to express views on the direction and program of the organization. That role has largely been assumed by the on-line list-serve DSAmember, which for the last two years has functioned at no cost to members and will continue to be the official outlet for such discussions.

The culture of a moderated discussion list such as DSAmember is quite different from the old style discussion bulletins that for long-time members conjure up images of volunteers cranking out copies on a battered mimeograph machine, or some even more antiquated technology. Despite its cost and bother, it also allowed for a high degree of thoughtful exchanges, something too often missing in the rapid responses allowed by the Internet. We think the solution is not to maintain an expensive and exclusive publication, or continue to promise a product that no longer meets an organizational need, but to use the more accessible list-serve better to more actively promote reasoned debate.

Instead of asking members to make a voluntary subscription to *Socialist Forum*, we will ask members (beginning with renewal mailings sent out in December 2006) to make a voluntary contribution of \$10 to fund DSA's international program. This will help cover our affiliation to the Socialist International and the Young Democratic Socialists' affiliation to the International Union of Socialist Youth, and help us bring international speakers to the United States. International work has always been underfunded. Today, globalization, and the imperial foreign policy of the Bush administration, makes international work even more important. Sadly, in the past three years the falling dollar

(another consequence of the neo-liberal trade policies of our government) has driven up our international affiliation costs by 33 percent. Additionally, we feel it is very important for us to pay much more attention to the political developments in this hemisphere. The emergence of a substantial bloc of countries looking for alternatives to the Washington consensus is one of the most exciting developments in the world.

Members with outstanding subscriptions to *Socialist Forum* will receive a special DSA CD in the spring of 2007.

To join DSAmember, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/dsamember/>.

Corrections and Clarifications

The editors would like to apologize to our readers and to David Richardson for inadvertently omitting the last three paragraphs of his article, "Bush Contracts Out Government Work," in the Fall *Democratic Left*. Interested parties can find the complete article on our website, www.dsausa.org; for printed copies, write us at Democratic Socialists of America, 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 505, New York, NY 10038 (or email dsa@dsausa.org).

We also apologize for not looking further into the source of the interview with Stephen Bronner in the same issue. Some question FARS' journalistic independence, and while we have the utmost respect for Professor Bronner and what he has to say, we would have made clear that we do not endorse the interviewing organization.

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Atlanta to Host 2007 DSA National Convention

DSA's 2007 National Convention will be held in Atlanta November 9-11, 2007. In a departure from previous conventions, the actual site of the meeting will be a union hall (IBEW) rather than a hotel.

In another departure from previous practice, several hotels, rather than a single hotel, will offer room blocks at special rates to delegates. As a result, delegates will be able to pick from a range of available room rates. We believe that these innovations will allow us to hold the line or possibly reduce Convention costs individual delegates must pay. Complete hotel information will be available on DSA's web site when the 2007 Convention page is launched early in 2007. We are very grateful to DSA's new Atlanta local for agreeing to host the Convention.

The 2007 Convention will be our first collective opportunity to evaluate the work we have engaged in since we launched the Sanders initiative and to set a course for the critical 2008 presidential elections.

The Atlanta Convention will be DSA's first national event held in the South, but we do expect to have a presence at the U.S. Social Forum that also will be held in Atlanta at the end of June. In fact, we expect that if we do a good job at the Social Forum, it will help us have an even better Convention.

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