



the magazine of the
Democratic Socialists
of America



Convention Issue!

with

speeches by

Bernie Sanders

Bill Fletcher

Convention reflections

—and more



Black and white CAN unite for a fair hiring system in construction

By Herman Benson

These comments are stimulated by Bill Fletcher's interesting piece on black labor (*Democratic Left*, Fall 2007). He wrote, "Black labor must not only speak for the black worker but black labor must be the voice speaking on behalf of all workers." This excellent principle could be put into actual practice in the construction trades where, I am convinced, black and white cooperation could lead to progressive reform for all.

I realize that this idea may seem strange because, as we all know, blacks have suffered egregious discrimination, above all in construction, and still do. Nevertheless, blacks have managed to win a secure foothold in many construction trades and should be able to count upon moral and material support from the many blacks who have already gained important points of power in the wider labor movement, in both the AFL-CIO and Change to Win.

I refer to those blacks who have already won entry into construction unions as full book members. But becoming a member of a union in construction definitely does not guarantee fair treatment in access to work. Job discrimination is widespread in construction. Unlike manufacturing, for example, where a union contract provides a measure of job security through seniority rights, construction offers no seniority protection because jobs are temporary. Even while building a road, digging a trench, or putting up a house, a construction worker wonders where the next job will come from when this one is over. At that point, he (sometimes she) must apply for work once again, to a contractor or at the hiring hall. At that point, almost all construction workers are vulnerable. At that point, black construction workers, especially black women, face the danger of discrimination most acutely; but the reality is that all construction workers face a similar danger – whites less than blacks, but they face it nevertheless. This is one of those big facts about construction that never reaches outsiders but is common coin to insiders.

Almost every construction contract, with rare exceptions, gives employers the unilateral, unchallengeable right to reject any applicant for employment without citing any reason. In the IBEW, construction contracts read bluntly, "The employer shall have the right to reject any applicant for employment."

It is illegal to discriminate openly on grounds of race, sex etc., but it is not against the union contract to discriminate, as long as no reason for refusing to hire an individual is cited. And so employers can, and do, use this provision to circumvent the law by turning away blacks and women. But employers also use their right to reject to discriminate against active union members regardless of race or sex. They don't want union builders on their projects; they don't want workers who insist that contracts be honored, that health and safety standards be obeyed. They circulate lists of so-called troublemakers and freeze them out of work. Here is an area where whites and blacks, with a common interest in combating discrimination, could find the basis for united action.

This arbitrary right to reject is a powerful weapon for employers; it is a form of anti-union discrimination that is a serious problem for construction unions. Responsible leaders of construction locals know how serious it is. At the convention of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers in 2001, delegates voted to direct their international officers to eliminate the offending clause and make rejections subject to "good cause," which would give the victims recourse through the grievance procedure. But no action was taken.

At the 2006 convention, the delegates restated that position. So far, no progress.

We can understand why international officers are reluctant to press the issue; contractors will surely resist any change; the uncontrolled right to reject gives them power over shop stewards and outspoken unionists. But delegates to IBEW conventions are the business managers, the business agents, the executive board members, and the local leaders who confront employers every day and know how deadly the right to reject can be. For black workers, who face discrimination in so many ways, this is one battle against discrimination that is in the interest of all. Here, the common cause of blacks and whites is no radical's dream but a down-to-earth necessity.

The campaign against the employers' right to reject is only half the battle. In some construction unions, incumbent officers use their control over hiring halls as a source of patronage to keep power. By parceling out the secure, long lasting, lucrative jobs to their favored supporters, they build their political machine. In such cases, a tiny minority gets the best jobs while others take whatever is left. The majority knows they are bedeviled by favoritism and discrimination. A privileged minority, maybe 5 percent, benefit. As always, blacks are the worst victims; but all – black and white, women, minorities – suffer, and a fair hiring system in the construction trades would be in their common interest.

Without a fair hiring system, members' rights will never be secure, not at work and not in the union. Unions need a campaign to end the employers' arbitrary veto power over job assignments and to strictly enforce fair referral rules in the hiring halls. Admittedly, such a campaign would not address the broader issue of discrimination against those who have never won a place in construction, but progress can come by building upon positions already won. Blacks and women are still a small minority in construction, but they have already won an important foothold. Minority though they are, they could serve as a catalyst to make fair hiring a live issue in the construction trades, precisely because it involves a principle and practice that affects race and yet transcends race.

Herman Benson, founder and secretary of the Association for Union Democracy, is the author most recently of Rebels, Reformers, and Racketeers: How Insurgents Transformed the Labor Movement (2004). He also writes Benson's Union Democracy Blog at <http://bensonsudblog.blogspot.com/>

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Stuart Elliot, John Strauss

DL welcomes Michael Baker (Chicago DSA) and Mark Schaeffer (Albany DSA) to its Editorial Committee.

Correction: in the Fall 2007 issue, "YDS Unites: Socialist Summer School and the YDS Convention (p. 11), David Duhalde reads as referring to YDS as "the sane democratic socialist voice in coalition politics." It should have read, "the democratic socialist voice in coalition politics." We apologize for the error in editing.

Economic Justice Agenda Adopted

DSA holds successful 2007 convention in the civil-rights capital of America

By Michael Hirsch

Tom Wolfe, the neo-con dandy, got it right in 1998 when he wrote that “Atlanta had never been a true Old Southern city like Savannah or Charleston or Richmond, where wealth had originated with the land. Atlanta was an offspring of the railroad business. It had been created from scratch barely 150 years ago, and people had been making money there on the hustle ever since.”

Hustling money wasn’t the only thing going on in the city named for a railroad junction. The “New South” that *Atlanta Constitution* editor Henry Grady talked about, one interested more in trade than tradition, was also a city riven by class and race. Local activists say it still is.

The three-days-long Atlanta Race Riot of 1906, which left some 40 dead and more than 70 injured – provoking eyewitness W.E.B. DuBois to write “A Litany at Atlanta,” a plea to the heavens to end mob murder – was followed by the frame-up conviction of Leo Frank, a Jewish supervisor at a factory in Atlanta accused of the rape-killing of a 13-year-old white employee. Frank was hauled out of his prison farm and lynched by some of the state’s leading lights; his death served to jump-start the new Ku Klux Klan.

Today, Atlanta, “the city too busy to hate,” home to the Martin Luther King Jr. Center and widely regarded as the nation’s civil-rights capital, is politically a progressive stronghold. Problem is, its liberal African American political leadership is jockeying for inches with an entrenched business class while stuck in a reactionary, right-to-work state. Even popular control of the city’s own social services is tenuous: witness the real possibility that Grady Memorial Hospital, the public facility serving 1 million mostly poor patients annually, may be forced to close or begin a process that will end in privatization. The hospital has a recurring mega-million-dollar deficit, and critics in the largely white business community blame the predominantly African-American appointed board, charging them with mismanagement. Its defenders insist the problem is an understandable and unavoidable hemorrhaging of resources given its large poor and uninsured patient population, combined with miserly state-government support.

(Since the convention, the board was forced to hand over day-to-day control of hospital operations to a nonprofit governing body. That switch assumes the move will facilitate corporate donations, though it’s not clear how the two are

even connected.)

And did I mention the water crisis?

That’s the town DSA held its 2007 convention in. A black, liberal, Democratic bastion in a corporate, right-to-work, Republican state was the venue for the Nov. 9-11 DSA convention, which featured – in addition to a solid turnout of elected DSA delegates – a big showing of local activists attracted to its two public events.

Best of all, the convention was hosted by a strong new local Atlanta chapter, which used the national convention to promote itself and the national organization, proving that a core of committed and competent activists can build a viable

socialist and pro-union presence, even in the South.

Unlike the 2005 convention in Los Angeles, which also went smoothly, featured excellent speakers, good discussions and helped delegates serious about charting the group’s course but could have been held in a bubble anywhere, this one gained from the presence of lifelong civil rights activists coming to hear DSAers and invited speakers. It also attracted a small delegation of South Asian socialists and gained by featuring a large contingent of YDS members, giving

the convention a multi-generational look and feel. And it was upbeat and highly charged.

A Friday night rally saw awards going to local activists and a packed meeting hall of more than 300 giving a roaring reception to Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, the first socialist elected to the United States Senate. Local coverage reported by *Atlanta Progressive News* quoted Sanders saying, “We’re not radical. You know who’s radical? George W. Bush.” And he decried the huge income and wealth gap growing between the richest one-tenth of a percent of the population and the rest of us, including the bottom half of the population, whose total income and holdings equal those hoarded by the top 300,000. Sanders called it a corporate “war against the middle class and working families [and] it’s time we raise this to the level it deserves.”

Sanders spoke at the first of what Atlanta DSA hopes will be its annual Atlanta Frederick Douglass-Eugene V. Debs Dinner; this one honored Charlie Flemming of the North Georgia Labor Council and Alice Lovelace, organizer of the U.S. Social Forum.



National Director Frank Llewellyn, YDS CC Co-Chairs Nicole Iaquinto and Maria Svart, and YDS organizer David Duhade close the convention.

A Saturday evening Rally and Speak Out for Economic and Social Justice heard Bill Fletcher, a cofounder of the Center for Labor Renewal, former top aide to AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, senior scholar at the Institute for Policy Studies and an editor of the *Black Commentator*, trace for an audience of just under 200 the damage done to working people during the last 30 years by the triumph of neoliberalism and an unchallenged global capitalism. Attendees also heard reports on efforts by Atlanta activists to secure a living wage for employees at Agnes Scott College, as well as plans to prevent the closing of Grady Memorial Hospital.

The main work of the convention was debating, amending and passing the document “Toward an Economic Justice Agenda,” which DSA will use in developing a legislative and political program that progressives and socialists in the social movements can agree on and use as common coin in lobbying and electoral efforts. These include what the document calls its “four pillars”: progressive taxation and prudent military spending cuts to provide necessary public revenue; universal social insurance programs and high-quality public goods; powerful, democratic labor and social movements capable of achieving equity in the labor market; and global institutions that advance labor and human rights and provide for a sustainable environment.

It wasn’t all talk, either. Workshops were held chockablock throughout the convention, too, dealing with how to grow the American Left in general and DSA in particular, and how to practically implement the Economic Justice Agenda.

Some 20 union-affiliated delegates held a first lunch meet-up and talked systematically, if provisionally, about better coordination and communication between the many DSAers involved in labor work. The first baby step planned by the group includes widening the net of DSAers participating in DSAlabor, the organization’s union-oriented listserv, as well as implementing a DSA labor blog that adds a democratic socialist voice to debates on labor strategy.

All that in the southern metropolis of which the African American poet James Weldon Johnson said, “When I reached Atlanta, my steadily increasing disappointment was not lessened. I found it a big, dull, red town.” DSA members didn’t find it so red; the old scarlet dirt hills are covered with high rise office complexes and modern highways that run like open wounds through the landscape. It’s said that the real Atlanta is in the neighborhoods that tourists don’t usually see. But perhaps between the convention delegates and the local progressives, we left just a little bit redder ourselves.

Worst thing about the convention? In the land where Coke is king, we couldn’t find a Pepsi anywhere.

U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders Addresses DSA National Convention

“We need a government that works for all of us, not just the wealthy and large corporations”

Senator Bernie Sanders addressed the Convention and guests at the Atlanta local’s First Annual Douglass-Debs Dinner on November 9, 2007. Below is an condensed version of his remarks.

I want to thank the DSA for the support that they gave me in the last campaign. And I want to thank DSA, not only for what they are doing today, but also for keeping alive what in my view is the most important vision that we as human beings can hold. It’s a vision that has been passed on from generation to generation, literally for thousands of years: the vision of peace, the vision of brotherhood. Nothing new; it’s in the Bible. But to remember the work, the sacrifices of people like Eugene V. Debs, Frederick Douglass, to remember Norman Thomas, Michael Harrington, and to remember a man who is buried in this city itself, one of the great Americans certainly of the 20th century, Martin Luther King Jr. And what was that vision? That radical but simple vision is solidarity. It means that all of us are in this thing called life together, that if we work together, if we share together, all of us can prosper and do well. And that when we reach out to other people, rather than to say “me, me, me,” we grow as human beings. And the vision tells us that peace is better than war, that greed should not be the dominant factor in our society today, and that

people can come together beyond race and creed and country of origin to create a very different world than the world in which we are living today.

Let me just say a few words; give you my perception of what is going on in our country today. There is a war going on. I mean not only the disastrous war in Iraq or the war in Afghanistan, but the war that does not get a whole lot of discussion, certainly not in the corporate media, certainly not on the floors of Congress. And that is a war against the middle class and the working class of this country. For the richest, the economy is doing better today than it has since the 1920s. Today in the United States, the top one tenth of one percent of income earners earns more money than the bottom fifty percent. Got that? One tenth of one percent, fifty percent. And that translates to 300,000 of the wealthiest Americans earning more income than the bottom 150 million Americans. Got that? 300,000, 150 million. And that gap is growing wider. The United States has the dubious distinction of having the most unfair distribution of wealth and income of any major

country in the entire world. And that is an issue that we have got to address.

Now while people all over this country are struggling desperately to keep their heads above water, while 5 million more Americans have slipped into poverty since Bush has been President, last year the wealthiest 400 Americans – 400, not a lot more than are sitting in this room right now – increased their incomes by \$290 billion for a total wealth of \$1.54 trillion. Can you imagine that?

The reality in the United States is that a two-income family today has less disposable income than a one-income family did 30 years ago. We're going backwards! Worker productivity is going up. Technology is exploding. And yet millions of Americans work longer hours for lower wages, while the people on top make out like bandits, and in fact many of them are bandits. But all that we are saying – I don't think that it's a terribly radical proposition – is that if you have an increase in worker productivity, if people are producing more, then the middle class should expand. Poverty should go down. But in fact what is going on in our country and in many other countries is a race to the bottom. We want the people in the developing world to move up to our standards. We don't want to go down to their standards. The reality is that we don't talk about these issues enough.

One of the roles that I want to play in the Senate is to force debate on these issues. We hear a whole lot about family values, but children living out on the streets and going hungry is not a family value. Now the Farm Bill we think is coming on to the floor of the Senate, and I will offer an amendment, and we'll see how many votes it gets, declaring that it is a national embarrassment that we have tens of millions of Americans who are hungry, and that we pledge to eliminate hunger in America within a few years. We'll see how many votes we get on that one.

Now, one of the roles that the DSA plays, and I will increasingly play that role in the Senate, is to try to educate the American people about what is going on in other countries around the world who have had democratic socialist governments. I know that in the corporate media and Fox Television and so forth socialism is considered to be a dirty word, that it is equated with authoritarian communism, but I want to tell you a funny story. A few years ago, the head of General Electric, Jeffrey Immelt said, talking to investors, "You know, when I look at the future of General Electric, I see China, China and China." In saying that he was really talking for all of corporate America, who are investing tens and tens of billions of dollars in, dare I say, an authoritarian communist country. But we hear so much about how good China is. China is a good place to do business. You know why it's a good place to do business? Because workers there make 50 cents an hour, and they go to jail if they stand up for their political rights or try to form an independent union. That's

why it's a good place to do business.

And here's something that is almost beyond comprehension. Because of the internal pressure, a year or so ago, the Chinese government decided that it was going to liberalize labor law, to give workers in China more opportunities to form independent unions. Do you know who opposed that? The U.S. Chamber of Commerce! Do you believe that? The authoritarian country is trying to loosen up so that workers have some rights, and big business in the United States says, "That's a bad idea. We like slave labor." What an embarrassment!

When we talk about democratic socialism, we look in pride at what has gone on in many European and Scandinavian countries that barely ever gets mentioned in the media. If you look at issues like education, throughout those countries, college education is virtually free, because they understand that today a college education is what a high school education was 50 years ago; they want you to get the education, not only for yourself, but for the country. They need an educated workforce.

But it's not just education. It's not just healthcare. You know, we hear a lot from our rightwing friends about family values. But in this country, when Bush's father was president, we fought for the Family Leave Act. We had to struggle, and we got it. At the end of the day what that means, and it was a huge step forward, is that if you are pregnant, or you're a father, you have a baby, and you're working at a company of modest size, not a small company, you can get three months off without pay, and you can't get fired. Whoa! And we had to fight like hell to pass *that*. Because the family values guys want to fire people who have babies. In much of Europe – different countries have different programs – when a family has a baby, they don't just get time off – they get half pay, they get full pay, and the husband can take time off as well, so that a mother and a father can in fact bond with their new baby without worrying about how they're going to pay for that. *That* is a family value!

In this country, and again we don't talk about it too often, one of the areas that all of us should be embarrassed about is that more than 18 percent of the children in this country live in poverty. Almost one in five kids lives in poverty. And amazingly enough, with the highest rate of childhood poverty, we also have the highest rate of incarceration of any country on earth. Now you don't have to be a Ph.D. in psychology to figure out that if kids who are babies don't get a fair shake in life, don't go to good schools, don't have the nurturing, don't have the nutrition, you know what? They're going to end up in jail 20 years later. So instead of taking care of our babies and children, we put them away 18 years later at \$70,000 a person. Makes more sense to me to invest in them when they are babies rather than lock them up at \$70,000 a year.

Let me talk a little bit about what I think we should be doing as a nation. It's easy enough to describe problems.

Harder to begin to deal with them. Number one, to give us a structure to begin to do this, is, we need to radically change our national priorities. That means that we have got to reverse all of Bush's tax breaks that have gone to the wealthy, and we're talking about huge sums of money, and we use that money to deal with childhood poverty, deal with the problems of people with disabilities. We use that money to make sure that every veteran has access to the health care that he or she needs. In other words, we create a society in which all of us are one, rather than a society in which some of us are living in another world.

Another issue, in addition to tax policy and changing our national priorities, that we have to address is changing our disastrous trade policies. These are policies that have been given to us by Democrats and Republicans, policies that were pushed on Congress by large multinational corporations, the so-called unfettered free trade. And the goal, which has in fact to a



significant degree been reached, was to break down trade barriers so that American corporations could throw workers out on the street in this country, go to China, pay people 50 cents an hour, and bring those products back into this country. Now, trade is a good thing if it works to benefit the vast majority of the people. It is a bad

idea when it is designed and executed to benefit the CEOs of large multinational corporations.

And it is not only American workers who are being hurt by these unfettered free trade agreements; it is people in the developing countries as well. In Mexico, as a result of NAFTA, 1.3 million small family farmers have been driven off of the land, and lo and behold, is it a great shock that some of them are now trying to get into the United States? Meanwhile, in Mexico, a poor country, as a result of NAFTA, one man, Carlos Slim Helú, who is into telecommunications, recently became the richest person in the world. And that is what unfettered free trade is about. So we are going to deal with the trade issue, and the trade issue tells you a lot about what is going on in America.

If you looked at the editorial pages of the American media, every major corporate newspaper in America told us how great unfettered free trade was, and they're telling it to us today. Now, in the last month, the front page story, *Wall Street Journal*, said that by an almost two-to-one margin, Republicans believed that free trade was not working for America. Republicans! Democrats believed it in higher

numbers. And yet we still get free trade agreements in the Congress, because of the power of corporate America. So, we are going to do our best to reform our trade agreements, and what we're going to say to these large multinationals: "Instead of investing tens of billions in China, how about investing in Vermont and Georgia and providing decent jobs for our people here?"

Now, there's another issue that I want to very briefly touch on that many people do not see as a political issue, but it certainly is, and that is the issue of media itself. How do we learn what we learn? Well, you saw it on the tube; you heard it on the radio; you read about it in the newspaper. It might be a good idea for us to examine who owns this media, and ask are they all so objective, giving us all points of view?

We have fewer and fewer media owners in America, and this handful of corporations, to a very significant degree own and control what the American people see, hear and read. When you turn on the TV you can see more than you ever wanted to see about Britney Spears and Paris Hilton; you can see football games till the cows come home, but somehow or other there's very little discussion carried about what's happening to the middle class. When's the last program you saw about the growing gap between the rich and the poor? Have you ever in your life seen a program on television talking about the benefits of trade unionism? You don't see those things. Somehow you've got 800 TV stations on the local cable, but a few companies own them all. They've got probably six companies that control almost all the media, but they think that's too diverse. They want to deregulate it even more. And we're going to stop them.

We have to focus on this issue of media, so that when you turn on the radio you can hear something other than Rush Limbaugh. So that when you turn on the television, maybe you could see some real reflection of the lives of the American people, rather than just the rich and the famous. And maybe you could see some vision of solidarity, rather than *Survivor*, where it's me against you. Maybe a program where we're in it together. But we have to take a hard look at corporate control over the media and see what we can do to have a media that focus on localism.

I want to talk about another issue of huge consequence, and that is the issue of global warming. I am on both the Senate Environmental Committee and the Senate Energy Committee, which are the two committees dealing with this issue. What the scientists now tell us is that they underestimated the problem and that in fact global warming is moving faster and more severely than they had anticipated. That's the bad news. The good news is that we know how to address this issue, and if we are smart about it, not only can we reverse global warming by moving toward energy efficiency, by getting cars that give us decent mileage per gallon, by building up the rail system, by moving to sustainable energies; if we

do all of those things, you know what we do? Not only do we save the planet, we can create millions of good-paying jobs. Just yesterday, I talked to the head of the largest electric company in America, Pacific Gas and Electric out in California. They're going to be building a 535 megawatt solar powered light plant, which will provide electricity to 400,000 homes, and that is just the beginning. There are wind turbines out there that for rural America could provide almost 50 percent of the electricity that a home needs. Now, imagine if we were producing millions of these, and the kinds of jobs that we are creating. Imagine if we rebuilt our rail system so that it was the equivalent of Europe's or Japan's instead of what it is right now. More and more jobs. So we're going to focus on global warming; we're going to save the planet; we're going to create jobs in the process.

To be very honest with you, and I believe this sincerely, and I want to say this to the young people especially, I am not unoptimistic about the future. And I think when you look at history, you have to take a rather long look. You'll see that we've made progress – in racial justice, in women's suffrage, against child labor. So, the torch that we are giving to the young people is to continue the fight for justice, continue the fight for peace, and continue the fight for solidarity. Don't ever lose the vision that we can in fact create a very very different world than we have right now.

People say it can't be done. President Bush is in the process of just vetoing legislation (in the Farm Bill we are trying to raise the amount of money we have for food stamps) for other nutrition programs. Mr. Bush says, "We can't afford it." We *can* afford 10 billion dollars a month for the war in Iraq. We *can* afford to repeal the estate tax, which applies to the richest three-tenths of one percent, give them \$1 trillion in tax breaks over a 20 -year period. We *can* do that. Now what do you think we can do with a trillion dollars in terms of building

affordable housing, in terms of rebuilding our infrastructure, in terms of putting people back to work? If anybody tells you that we cannot afford to provide health care for all, wipe out childhood poverty, provide the housing and the childcare that our people need, take care of our veterans, take care of our seniors, you look them in the eye; you tell them Bernie Sanders is on the Budget Committee, and it just ain't true.

But what we have got to do, and I'll do my job on the floor of the Senate, and you will work as hard or harder in your unions and your communities, is we have got to educate the American people; we've got to organize the American people; and I want everybody here to understand that if anybody came in here and said "Oh, democratic socialists, very radical idea" – what we're talking about is not radical. You know who the real radical is? George W. Bush. You go out on a street corner in any community in this country, and you say to people, "Mrs. Jones, do you think everybody in America should be entitled to health care for all?" Most people will say "yes." You go up to Mr. Jones and you say, "Do you think we should give tax breaks to billionaires and cut back on nutrition programs?" People will look at you like you are nuts. That is Bush's agenda. They are a radical fringe. The issue of social justice, a good trade policy, a livable wage, a national healthcare program, affordable housing, taking care of our vets, taking care of our children: that is mainstream. The difficulty is: we got the people; they got the money. So, our job is to allow and organize our people to come together to take the power that we deserve, that we need, create a government that works for all of us and not just the wealthy and large corporations, and I look forward to working with you in the years to come to make that happen.

Bernie Sanders, Independent from Vermont, is the first openly democratic socialist member of the U.S. Senate.

Overcoming 30 Years of Racism, Militarism, and Neoliberalism

By Bill Fletcher Jr.

Bill Fletcher spoke at the Convention's outreach event on Saturday, November 10, 2007. Below is the text of his speech.

Good evening. I am honored and pleased to speak with you this evening. And I am especially honored and pleased to be in a room where we can comfortably and unapologetically use the word "socialism" and proclaim ourselves to be "socialists!" It is wonderful that DSA is holding its convention in the South. The South is often painted as the bastion of reaction, but it has a long history of class struggle and the struggle of other social movements, particularly the African American movement and now the immigrant rights movement. DSA,

in holding its convention here, is making a positive statement regarding those movements and that history.

I was asked to speak about economic justice. But I do not want to simply recount the attacks that working class people are experiencing. I do not want to give you the facts and figures of the numbers of people who need healthcare. I don't even want to focus on home foreclosures. All of that is important, but what I am interested in doing this evening is telling a story.

The story, in many ways, is a simple one but it is a story that is clouded in myth. Because of this, too many of the people in the bottom 80 percent of the U.S. population don't get what is happening to them or what they can do to respond.

In response to stagnating profits in the late 1960s and early 1970s, capitalists in the U.S., Western Europe, Japan and Canada began a process of economic experimentation. Their objectives were, of course, to increase profits, but to do this they had to shatter both institutions and mindsets that had been built through class struggle and new social movements from the 1930s onwards.

The offensive against workers challenged many things. Most importantly it challenged both the idea that a decent living standard was a social right and the importance of the public sector and public space. Increasingly we were told that "we can make it if we try" and the reverse – if we do not make it, it is because of our own laziness and inaction.

On one level, this is not new. It is a variant on Calvinism, the founding philosophy of the New England colonies. What is different, however, is that the notion that society has an obligation to protect its population, and to especially look out for the downtrodden, was whittled away. In its place is a different ethos. As the character played by Michael Douglas in the film *Wall Street* proclaims, "greed is good."

In Britain and the U.S., this approach to economics – known as neoliberalism – became an almost unstoppable force. But it was only unstoppable because the social movements, most especially organized labor, never took the offensive seriously enough and did not have the tools to respond. To borrow from military jargon, organized labor kept fighting the last war; it was unprepared for the new one, a war that came with its own version of shock and awe. And the new one came in various forms, including the Prop 13 anti-tax movement in California that aimed to strangle the public sector, and eventually Reaganism.

What was so critical about Reaganism was not just the economic views of the President but the fact that he was able to convince so many people that they made sense. He was able to do this in part by shifting the public dialogue about the nature of the problems in the U.S. He appealed to white people, first and foremost, and told them what most of them wanted to hear: racist discrimination was over; there were no reasons for whites to be concerned with racism; that the only obstacle in the way of a person was the person himself or

herself. He appealed to men and suggested that the problem of their declining living standard was rooted in demands of women for full equality, and that this threatened so-called family values. He focused on the problems in the public sector – with the exception of the military – and blamed both the workers in the public sector as well as the clients. And, like all imperialist demagogues, he asserted that the U.S. had the right to lead the world and to do so by massive military expenditures, covert operations, and direct military assault.

The U.S. was not alone in pursuing this path. In its more violent form, as Naomi Klein discusses in *The Shock Doctrine: the Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, the Chilean junta under General Augusto Pinochet implemented the rawest version of neoliberalism beginning in 1973 through the suppression of mass movements and the destruction of the social benefits that the Chilean people had won over the years. Margaret

Thatcher advanced these views in Britain, eventually becoming part of the dynamic duo of Thatcher and Reagan who would go forth and influence dramatically politics and economics for the latter decades of the 20th century.

From the beginning, the attacks on working people in the U.S. have been inseparable from U.S. foreign policy and foreign objectives. The jingoism and national chauvinism so central to U.S. foreign policy was a very important component of advancing a reactionary

domestic economic agenda. In order for this agenda to succeed, masses of people needed to feel themselves to be loyal and useful members of the Empire. The misery that the U.S. was causing overseas or the increasing misery we were experiencing here at home was ignored by too many people here all in the name of a perverse interpretation of what can be an otherwise sound notion: patriotism.

Unfortunately, neoliberal globalization was adopted as the basic framework of not only the Republican Party, but of the leadership of the Democratic Party as well. This helps us to grasp the surprise on the part of organized labor when Bill Clinton was elected in '92 under the banner of "it's the economy, stupid" only to push through the North American Free Trade Agreement, welfare repeal, the original anti-terrorism act, and nearly a war with North Korea. The point is not that there are no differences between the parties, but rather that the basic economic framework for looking at the world is shared by both parties, with an obvious level of nuance given their different bases.



As the living standard for the average U.S. worker has declined over the last three decades, not only has wealth polarized to an extreme degree, largely in the upper one percent, but accompanying it has been the systematic removal of key elements of the so-called social safety net. The will to fight or to resist these attacks in too many sectors has been undermined by the strong appeal by conservatives to individualism, racism, sexism and a version of Calvinism, but it could not have succeeded so well had the attacks not first been carried out against people of color. By painting the problems of society as black or brown, it became easier to gain white support, or at least limit the scope of white resistance, to draconian efforts. If the public sector is for people of color, then eliminating it or reducing it should not really be a problem for white folks – at least until dawn breaks on Marblehead and there is a realization that what is being undermined – free school bus service, public parks, mass transit, welfare programs – is not just about people of color. Coloring the issue, so to speak, worked extremely well for the Right, and barely was there a coherent, forward-looking response on our end.

While the living standard was dropping and wealth was polarizing in the U.S., international capitalism was reorganizing itself, catalyzed by new technologies. The political elimination of trade barriers and currency restrictions made the instantaneous transfer of capital legally possible; the electronics revolution made it technically possible. For the U.S., neoliberalism meant an assertion of domination and the right to restructure the economies of other countries. The collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War made this politically possible. But it is critical that we understand that the reemergence of free trade was not simply about the U.S. imposing its will on other countries but rather the active collaboration of the ruling elites of many countries – particularly in the Global South – in their own subordination. To draw from U.S. history, the economic thinking guiding many countries in the global South is a version of the Confederate States of America and their essentially export-led view of growth and dependence on the more advanced capitalist states to the benefit of these ruling elites.

For organized labor, unfortunately, much of the story stops there with a discussion of multi-national corporations and free trade agreements. This is also true for other so-called mainstream social movements. Yet the story does not stop there. There is another side to this global reorganization of capitalism: the military side.

When Thomas Friedman wrote, “McDonalds cannot flourish without McDonnell-Douglas,” he captured the two sides of neoliberal globalization. Yet this has been true of capitalism from the beginning, and in that sense we should not act surprised. It is precisely that it is not new that makes the failure of progressive social movements in the U.S. to iden-

tify the problem and respond to it so much worse. Organized labor, for instance, out of which I come, can criticize trade agreements, but stumbled over itself when it came to taking a principled and early position against the Bush administration’s plans to attack Iraq. Were it not for the excellent work of U.S. Labor against the War, there probably would still not be a position taken by the AFL-CIO. The other federation, Change To Win, has not taken any position against the war. Unfortunately, within the AFL-CIO there remains a disconnect when it comes to linking domestic economic issues with U.S. foreign policy. The AFL-CIO seems reluctant to even talk about their position against the war, let alone make it a component of their political work.

The problem that we face here is not one of stupidity or cowardice. There is a blindspot in the U.S. when it comes to linking the domestic and the global. It is a blindspot that we have the “luxury” of experiencing largely because we find ourselves at the heart of a global empire. It is also a blindspot brought on by fear of being criticized as being unpatriotic. Too many of us resist recognizing international connections and the consequences of our actions.

Immigration is an excellent example. In Britain there is a slogan within the immigrants’ rights movement that I came across some years ago and which I am fond of repeating: “We are here because you were there!” Tell me that this does not apply to the U.S.! Yet there is very little discussion of this fact, even within the immigrant rights movement. U.S. foreign policy, and its destruction of Indochina and Central America, has had a direct relationship to immigration to the U.S. NAFTA, and its corresponding destruction of agriculture and the public sector in Mexico, has a direct relationship to the U.S. And the fact that the U.S. was constituted through the steady territorial expansion of the colonies and later states, into Indian territory and then Mexican territory, has a direct relationship to the U.S. and what we are experiencing right now.

What do we have instead? We have the blaming of yellow, brown and black immigrants for the declining living standard of the U.S. worker. Few of us stand up and link the issue of immigration to U.S. foreign policy, though many of us will correctly stand up to defend the rights of immigrants.

Let me suggest that it is for these reasons that the old slogan “think global and act local” is wrong. Yes, I know that “all politics is local,” but we live and act in a very different environment. What we need to be articulating is something like “think and act globally and locally.” When we are thinking about economic justice we must make the connections between what we are experiencing; what workers and other oppressed people are experiencing internationally; and the policies of our government overseas.

Not only is neoliberal globalization a matter of military and non-military practices, but it also involves domestic repression. We have been witnessing over, at least, the last two

decades, the steady erosion in civil liberties and democratic rights across much of the global North. In the U.S., after the revelations in the Church Commission in the U.S. Senate during the 1970s, and what felt like a breath of fresh air, we have seen a reversal and a tightening grip. We are now witnessing the emergence of a different sort of capitalist state. To borrow from Nicos Poulantzas, it is an extraordinary state that I would join with others in terming the neoliberal authoritarian state. While 9/11 provided the opportunities for the acceleration of the process of authoritarianism, it did not come out of nowhere. The ever-present threat of terrorism has been used in the global North, much like the alleged threat of communism, to pursue policies that further restrict democracy.

I believe that there is no coincidence between the fact of dramatic economic changes in the 1970s to the detriment of working people and the fact that the evolution towards authoritarianism began to take place at roughly the same time. I believe that what we are witnessing is the evolution of the capitalist state to expedite the success at the reorganization of global capitalism. This must be done through persuasion, cooptation, and force. The force is not only the force we saw with the invasion of Iraq or the threatened invasion of Iran, but the force that takes place with the disappearance of immigrants into secret detention centers after 9/11; extraordinary rendition; the Minutemen; the Patriot Act; or House Bill 1955, the "Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007," a bill so draconian that I assumed that it was a hoax.

The force I am speaking of is the force associated with eliminating opposition to the global reorganization of capitalism and in that sense is analogous to the 1973 Chilean coup, only at a larger and more sophisticated level. This form of state is a preemptive strike against popular movements where, particularly in the U.S., they have not sufficiently coalesced in order to threaten power. It is important to note the process of evolution of the democratic capitalist state toward authoritarianism, in this case, as opposed to the overthrow of the democratic capitalist state associated with fascism.

The implications of all of this are very sobering. On the one hand, our enemy is moving quickly. It reminds me of George Orwell's famous book *1984* where the Party eliminated history and substituted for it various statements of the moment. The attacks on all of the victories won from the 1930s through

the 1970s aims to eliminate the memory of even a different way of running a capitalist state and substitute for it an openly barbaric system that, to borrow from Aime Cesaire, brings practices to the center of the empire that had been carried out in the peripheries.

On the other hand, and on our side of the aisle, there are growing linkages both domestically and internationally that need to be strengthened. The Social Forum movement, as represented most recently by the U.S. Social Forum, is a critically important development. The Bamako Appeal out of Mali was almost a prototype for a global Chartist movement. Efforts are underway in Latin America toward regional unity. And here at home there is no question but that something is percolating beneath the surface, something that people like you are directly involved in heating up. Worker centers; organizations like Jobs with Justice; an energized environmental movement (given a shot in the arm, we must be fair, by Al Gore's film); an immigrant rights movement that in 2006 turned May Day into the sort of mass eruption it was meant to be; the possibilities of the re-energizing of the Black Freedom Movement; global justice activists addressing issues of trade; and an anti-war movement that I believe gets insufficient applause for helping to shift the balance in the U.S. These are all factors in what may be a dramatic change.

This dramatic change needs organization, however, and it needs vision. To put it another way, it needs socialists. It needs a thorough critique of all that exists, to borrow from Marx, but it equally needs committed activists who recognize that only through organization and sober strategy can we win, and win is what we must do. Resisting is not enough. Making a statement is not enough. Sending email blasts is not enough. We must have victory and the achievement of power in our sights or else all of this is for nothing. The other side clearly recognizes this, which is why they are using every instrument at their disposal to squash those who speak for the bottom 80 percent.

We have a world to win; a world to save. And as has become abundantly clear, failure is not an option.

Bill Fletcher Jr. is a labor and international activist and writer. He is a Senior Scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC; a founding member of the Center for Labor Renewal; and the immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum. He can be reached at papaq54@hotmail.com.

For more about the **Convention**, the **Economic Justice Agenda**, **National Priorities**, and other **Resolutions**, please visit our website, **www.dsasusa.org**

For information about **Young Democratic Socialists**, visit **www.ydsusa.org**

Metro Atlanta DSA Reflects on the Convention

By Barbara Joye

On Sunday morning, November 11, I noticed one of our Atlanta chapter members – a retired Methodist minister – attending the convention’s plenary session, following the discussion with great interest. When I asked him if he’d changed his form of worship he answered, “Oh, this is just like church. Except in church I can’t say M&%\$#@!”

I think he spoke for all of us, in his own way, when he expressed such a high comfort level. It was the first time most of us had met any DSA members from out of town other than Frank, so we really didn’t know quite what to expect. It’s not that we just fell off the turnip truck, as they say here; far from it. Most of us had been or were still active in more than one peace, civil rights, human rights or labor organization, and some had spent time in one of the “vanguard” parties that so enlivened the left in decades past. Nevertheless, our experience of the convention was for many a pleasant surprise in several respects.



At our December chapter meeting, 18 of us shared our impressions of the convention and evaluated our role in it. That 18 people showed up for a meeting that mostly focused on what we had learned from the convention, without the attraction of our usual guest speaker, shows how committed our chapter is to making our DSA membership meaningful. Thirteen or 14 members had attended the convention, most of whom also worked as volunteers at the awards dinner or in other capacities. Twelve of us had also participated in a special meeting the week before the convention to critique the Economic Justice document.

Our comments were overwhelmingly positive. We said that we were impressed by the group’s lack of dogmatism or “knee-jerk political rhetoric.” DSA members “seemed to know what they were talking about.”

Adam, who served as an alternate, commented that he found that DSA members were willing to help him when he needed it. “I don’t know if DSA has had a blind delegate or alternate before,” he said. “Most of us don’t do that sort of thing. We’re more likely to be active in organizations that focus on disability issues. When the opportunity presents itself for us to be active [in a multi-issue organization] it’s a step forward.”

He expressed the consensus of our chapter by praising the civility of the dialogue at the convention. “I was impressed

by the lack of at least outward factionalism. There wasn’t a lot of playing to the emotions of the crowd. People made their points well and we got on with the business, despite the plethora of resolutions. No one left with hard feelings.”

People who attended the workshops on recruiting and education, health care, and building locals said they were very good discussions but too short. A lot of the discussion centered around how to define “socialism” when we talk to non-members. People also talked about this at the awards dinner. “Maybe we need to re-invent socialism,” Adam said. Barbara S. said that wearing a T-shirt like Theresa’s (“Socialists do it with class”) is a good idea: “We need to be more visible, to start conversations.” Milt said one workshop talked about how to avoid burnout and “drift,” which can be significant problems. Jorge, who has conducted classes on immigration at his church, said he learned a lot in the immigration workshop, particularly about how the issue intersects with globalization and trade.

Much of our discussion centered on how we can build on our experience at the convention. Some of us took up the idea of a study group, perhaps at a local bookstore. We discussed the need to continue looking at the Economic Justice document as a tool for outreach to other groups. Charles handed out a one-page summary of the document that we agreed to refine and send on to the national DSA office so it can be shared with the membership.

We didn’t belabor the obvious, which is that both our chapter and the convention delegates were overwhelmingly white, more male than necessary, and (except for the wonderful YDS contingent) somewhat long in the tooth. We did talk about how Atlanta DSA can form more effective partnerships with other groups and attract members from more diverse backgrounds. We felt that we had to make a real commitment not only to attending other groups’ meetings, but also to joining them in acting on the issues that are high priorities for them, especially immigrant rights and issues such as discrimination against people of color in the criminal justice system. Spanish language fliers for our events would help. DSA as a national organization no doubt has the same discussion.

In addition to participating in the convention, Atlanta DSA had the opportunity to be the host local. We are proud that we were able to pull it off in our first year and that the Douglass-Debs dinner was a success. These experiences helped forge new bonds of friendship and solidarity with the national organization and with DSA delegates from all over the country.

Barbara Joye, of the Atlanta DSA local, is the newest addition to DSA’s National Political Committee.

Worth the Six-Hour Drive: A Report from the 2007 DSA National Convention

By Emahunn Campbell

Being a black democratic socialist on a predominantly white conservative campus in southwest Virginia is extremely difficult and arduous. This is why it is always a delight to meet up with other socialists from around the country, such as occurred at the recent DSA convention in Atlanta. The convention demonstrated to me the inclusiveness and receptiveness of the organization not only to the plight of workers, but specifically to people of color as well. My six hour drive from Wise, Virginia, was not in vain.

The speech given by junior United States Senator and democratic socialist Bernie Sanders on the first evening of the convention was astounding and profoundly uplifting. While many on the left have given up on the idea of ever using the American government as an instrument of progressive social change, the presence of Senator Sanders gives us hope that working people can be truly represented in Congress and that a new age of progressive reform is forthcoming. The promise that he brings not only to Congress but to our socialist movement demonstrates the viability, persistence, and relevance of DSA. Most importantly, he instilled a sense of hope in the members of the Young Democratic Socialists (YDS). Sanders' attendance and loyalty to our movement fired up DSA and YDS members; this energy was carried over into the next day's meetings.

As the anti-racism coordinator for YDS, I was interested in how YDS and DSA were going to incorporate a politics that focused on the specific needs of people of color while sustaining their efforts and focus on other categories of the marginalized and the ostracized. When resolutions for DSA were being discussed, YDS members such as Maria Svart and Nicole Iaquinto spoke about how it was essential that DSA use YDS as a means of accomplishing action on the ground

– that it is vital that DSA take into serious consideration the youth and spirit of our members. Understanding that YDS is the future of DSA, the members of DSA were extremely open to various suggestions posed by members of YDS. Not only did such receptiveness facilitate the discourse of possible actions and solutions for the future, but it created a serious bond between the two wings of our organization. For our movement to prosper, both DSA and YDS must continue to participate in grassroots efforts together while respecting each other's functions and purpose.

Members such as Flavio Hickel Jr. and Chris Hicks actively participated in the conversation on DSA's "Towards an Economic Justice Agenda" with elder DSA members. Their participation demonstrated our commitment not only to DSA but to the fight for socialist change on a cosmopolitan level. A YDS member from the University of Miami, Alyssa Cundari, addressed the need for DSA and YDS to continue to focus on grassroots politics and the labor movement. The forcefulness that she presented to both younger and elder members demonstrated the firm commitment and passion that YDS members have for socialist politics and for DSA.

Under David Duhalde's stewardship, YDS has become the harbinger of democratic socialist change for U.S. youth. This leadership showed again during a workshop that he ran with Maria Svart focusing on the relationship between DSA and YDS. While the convention primarily focused on the internal politics of DSA, this workshop provided an opportunity to strengthen relations which in the recent past had become somewhat tattered. David and Maria encouraged DSA members to share how they might pass on their expertise and wisdom to YDS members, and YDS members explained to DSA

members our intention to carry DSA into the next generation. With great respect, all participants in the workshop were able to discuss matters in a productive, comradely fashion.

If we, as socialists, are going to carry out our program of political, social, and economic change, it will require an on-the-ground connection between the work of DSA and that of YDS. The job of both is to build a mass, diverse movement. Given the continued dominance of neoliberalism and

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the reality of capitalist globalization and imperialism, we must put great efforts into making our organization grow, in both the “youth” and “adult” divisions. We must continue to support grassroots efforts for progressive reform; we must continue to support and help rebuild the labor movement; we must continue to support women and people of color in an unprecedented fashion; and we must hold firm to our belief that our agenda is the right agenda if our society is ever to become truly democratic. Although the change will not come overnight, as long as we are determined to make socialism possible, then socialism will become possible.

As DSA’s Honorary Chair Cornel West once stated, “You can not save the people unless you serve the people; and you can not lead the people unless you love the people.” Let us continue to serve and lead through our undying and poignant commitment to democracy, socialism, and the people!

Emahunn Raheem Ali Campbell, Anti-Racism Coordinator for YDS, is a student at the University of Virginia at Wise and will be attending graduate school to pursue his doctorate in English Literature. He is also the founder and president of the UVA-Wise Black Student Union.

The Fight for Single-Payer, Version 2007

By Michael Lighty

It’s another upswing in the historical cycle of debate over universal healthcare in the United States. Perhaps this time we will finally establish a publicly financed and administered system of guaranteed healthcare, known as “single-payer.” In the meantime, the leading Democratic presidential candidates argue over how effectively their healthcare reform plans force people to buy insurance in the market. And after years of minimal legislative progress and rising rolls of the uninsured following the mistakes and defeats in 1994, healthcare reformers risk surrendering in advance this historic opportunity by promoting private insurance based proposals at the state and federal level.

Rather than demanding genuine reform that actually provides comprehensive benefits, controls costs, enables complete choice of provider and ensures quality care for all, some progressive organizations, state labor federations and healthcare advocacy groups support reforms that combine “employer mandate” and “individual mandate” in order to achieve universal healthcare. As cause or effect, the three leading Democratic presidential candidates follow suit.

Yes, presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich advocates for HR 676, the national health insurance bill he co-authors that is supported by progressive doctors and nurses, grassroots activists, hundreds of unions, and 86 members of Congress. But progressive organizations in California and nationally have declared single-payer the gold standard for reform that is not politically “viable.”

In California, Governor Schwarzenegger, re-elected in 2006 as a moderate after the stinging 2005 defeat of his conservative initiatives at the hands of nurses, teachers and firefighters, introduced a plan in January that relied on the model established in Massachusetts of forcing individuals to purchase private health insurance. Knowing the Governor’s plan was in the works, the leaders of the State Senate and State Assembly struck first with plans that accepted (Senate) or softened (Assembly) the individual mandate and added a stronger requirement that employers provide health insurance or pay into a purchasing pool.

Like the plans proposed by the top three Democratic candidates, the California proposals include subsidies for low-income workers to purchase insurance, and a “public option” that would cover individuals not otherwise purchasing individual private policies or getting insurance through their employers.

The Democratic leadership proposals in California require insurers to issue policies to all individuals without regard to “pre-existing conditions” and restricts the insurers to spending 15 percent on administration and profits, but do not limit how much insurance companies can charge in premiums and allows the companies to exclude marketing from the 15 percent limit. In a highly touted but unproven approach to control costs, the reforms mandate new spending on electronic medical records and other technologies.

Along with “transparency” of quality of care data and covering the uninsured, these policies seek to make health care (really insurance) more affordable. However, there is no effort to regulate the insurers’ ability to decline coverage for specific treatments; they could still limit choice of providers and drugs, nor is there any mechanism to ensure quality of care. This suggests that whatever “savings” the reforms may generate will likely become insurance company profits.

Given that the average employer in California spends 10.4 percent if non-union and 14 percent if union on health benefits, the modest requirement that employers spend 1 - 6.5 percent of payroll on health benefits under these proposals provides a clear incentive to drop coverage and force workers into the individual market. In Massachusetts, 28 percent of employers who do not offer health benefits now have said they will reduce wages so their workers qualify for subsidies to purchase individual insurance next year. In California, the benefit packages of these plans are not specified, though at this point we know the policies would not be required to include maternity benefits.

Increasingly, national political considerations come into play as supporters of Hillary Clinton, national union leaders, and many reform advocates urge California to keep momen-

tum for healthcare reform alive by passing something. And local political factors unrelated to the actual healthcare debate further complicate the situation. Motivating the legislative leadership in California is the February 5th primary that includes a ballot measure to extend the terms of office of incumbents as part of “term limit” reform. If legislators enact “universal healthcare,” then don’t they deserve extended terms? Or so goes the thinking. And now newspapers are reporting that the governor is trying to win union support for his plan by agreeing to sign legislation he previously vetoed that would provide collective bargaining rights to 100,000 home-based daycare workers.

Bad Plans and Worse Plans

The problem in California is that these plans won’t work, and won’t go into effect until 2010, if at all. The legislature is unable to finance any coverage expansion and subsidies without voter approval slated for November 2008, if they pass a bill (not certain as of this writing, since only an Assembly vote is scheduled in December, and the Senate leader insists solving the \$14 billion budget deficit must come first).

In short, nothing proposed in California or by the major Democratic presidential candidates would adequately control rising healthcare costs, or limit premiums, co-pays, deductibles, exclusions and claim denials.

Despite these problems, much is made of the political viability of private insurance-based reform. Yet California’s largest insurer, Blue Cross, opposes even the modest market reforms of guaranteed issue and community rating and has spent \$3 million in TV ads against it. Business opposes mandates that would approach let alone match what employers who provide benefits currently pay (in California the Restaurant Association and Chamber of Commerce may yet oppose the final deal if there is one). Most unions remain skeptical, if not outright opposed to the individual mandate. None of these plans, or those of the leading Democratic candidates, improves the situations of those who already have insurance (Hillary says you get to keep what you have, lucky us!). The subsidies are inadequate; the under-insured will remain insecure, with additional mandated spending on insurance company profits and administration.

Do we really want to pay a tax in the form of an individual mandate to enrich the insurance companies and get little or nothing in return?

As limited as these proposals are, the GOP prescription of tax credits and high-deductible health plans combined with “Health Savings Accounts” (HSAs) are even worse. If the California legislative leaders and national Democratic candidates believe the market can be regulated to better meet people’s healthcare needs, then the GOP takes as gospel that individuals should be solely responsible for their healthcare subject to the dictates of “free market competition.” Not surprisingly, this competition is among private insurance companies to the benefit of their shareholders, not patients. “Consumer-directed” care is really just the latest mantra in defense of the present system.

What better way to treat patients as consumers than by creating new ways to finance health care purchases? Insurance companies are now getting into the finance business, as banks get into the healthcare business, both via HSAs. These accounts allow consumers to put pre-tax dollars into a fund that can be used to pay medical expenses. They are coupled with high-deductible health benefit plans so that the first 5,000 - \$10,000 of healthcare costs are paid by the “consumer.” The premiums are low, but the out-of-pocket expenses are huge.

Utilizing the GOP-enacted tax advantages for these programs, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association has established the Blue Healthcare Bank to administer its “consumer-directed” plan. As one consultant said, “There’s money to be made.” Banks have opened over 1,100 new health savings account programs. And a credit card follows from a bank. With 50 percent of personal bankruptcies due to medical costs, the latest innovation is charging those healthcare expenses not covered by the high-deductible plans on a credit card. The interest paid (21 percent) is more money to be earned.

Sadly for the GOP candidates, tax credits – the other pillar of their reform plans – are wholly inadequate to cover the cost of rising health insurance premiums, which have gone up by 87 percent from 2001 to 2006. The increase was higher than medical cost inflation during that period, so it is not surprising that insurance company profits were \$57.5 billion in 2006. Group insurance rates in Massachusetts are twice the maximum subsidy of \$2,400 provided under the Romney reform. Tax credits, of course, are not a direct subsidy, and require individuals to find the \$5,000 or more to pay for the insurance and then wait for the credit (in the meantime they could charge it on their new Blue credit card!). GOP candidate Rudy Guiliani in particular vilifies even modest reform as “socialized medicine,” but he and the other GOPers, including Massachusetts’ Mitt Romney, end up advocating for the same dysfunctional, profit-driven and immoral healthcare system, which leaves caring people (and most voters) cold.

No Compromise Needed

Where does that leave single-payer advocates? In the driver’s seat, surprisingly. According to numerous national polls, including the CBS/*New York Times*, 65 percent of Americans support the government guaranteeing everyone healthcare even if it means increased taxes. Recent polling by Democratic-oriented pollsters, such as Celinda Lake and Peter Hart, show majorities for expanding Medicare to cover everyone. The policy debate strongly favors single-payer reform, in particular its ability to control costs through eliminating the waste of insurance companies, establishing global budgets for hospitals, negotiating reimbursement rates with providers, and promoting effective primary and preventive care.

There’s a growing movement for single-payer universal healthcare. The movement is led by activists in Healthcare NOW, doctors in the Physicians for a National Health Program, nurses in the California Nurses Association/

National Nurses Organizing Committee, leaders in labor unions such as United Steelworkers of America and Communication Workers of America, activists in the Progressive Democrats of America, and Congressman John Conyers, with the support for HR 676 by 300 union locals, 75 Central Labor Councils, and 25 state Federations of Labor, and hundreds of clergy and faith-based organizations, as well as civil rights, women's and healthcare advocacy groups in the Leadership Conference for Guaranteed Healthcare.

The policy proposals developed by Beltway think tanks and the principles for reform adopted by the AFL-CIO confer support for single-payer while allowing for private insurance-based approaches as well. Other bills in Congress, notably sponsored by Ted Kennedy and John Dingell and "Americare" introduced by Pete Stark, seek to incrementally establish a single-payer system.

Having fought to a draw on a "bi-partisan" basis for the one reform that is truly bi-partisan – the expansion of insurance for kids through the federal SCHIP program – we see that genuine reform requires enough Democrats in Congress to build a majority for single-payer. Getting to 60 votes in the Senate requires the Democrats to pick up five or more Senate seats in 2008, strong presidential leadership, and unprecedented legislative deftness and acumen. But actually solving the healthcare crisis of rising costs, declining access, and increasing insecurity does not allow for a grand bi-partisan compromise that pleases all stakeholders.

Such an approach to a major reform is admittedly rare in U.S. politics. One barrier here is the large amount spent by the healthcare industry on lobbying. The industry, including pharmaceutical companies, HMOs, hospitals and doctors, is the top spender on lobbying nearly every year: the healthcare industry has spent \$2.2 billion in the last ten years on lobbying, and \$220 million in the first quarter of 2007, a record. Since healthcare constitutes 16 to 20 percent of U.S. GDP, the stakes are indeed high, particularly for finance capital, which in addition to banks financing consumer health spend-

ing, earns increasing revenues and profits from health-related mergers and acquisition and from loans and bonds to finance technology, equipment and construction.

Though the industry opponents of reform can try to scare people about single-payer, they have less credibility and will be defending a system that faces a much stronger challenge now than in 1992. Thanks in part to Michael Moore's scathing documentary *Sicko*, shown by a Kaiser Foundation poll this summer to have inspired 45 percent of Americans to discuss the U.S. health care system and the insurance companies' role in particular, those with insurance perceive HMOs and the insurance companies ever more negatively. After all, there are now 50 million uninsured and over 80 million underinsured.

Winning the battle for affordable national health that covers everyone requires that all of the organizations supporting single-payer on paper stick to their guns. This is not the time to compromise with the insurance companies – this is the time to build the movement for genuine reform. If all of the organizations that have come out for some kind of single-payer system fought for it exclusively we could change the political dynamic dramatically. Of course, it is possible that we will have to forge some kind of compromise in the next Congress, but the time to cross that bridge – if we have to – is when we come to it.

Let's not concede that the millions the insurance companies, HMOs and PHARMA will spend to stop any decent national health plan can stop us. Progressives have not done that on Iraq, Immigration Reform or the Employee Free Choice Act – and we shouldn't acquiescence to the corporate perspective on health care, either. Instead, let's learn the 2007 lesson from California, which tells us to demand what's morally right and fight for the single-payer solution to our health care crisis.

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