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**DEMOCRATIC**

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of America**

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# OCCUPY!



# DSA's 2011 convention: Building socialism, forming comradeship, resisting corporate domination

By Michael Hirsch

The hotel housing the convention was contemporary Americana, a blue glass multi-story pile. As architecture and location, the area was capitalism regnant, situated in a right-to-starve state where unions are under the gun and socialism is a word used to scare the horses. No one was scared this time, as Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) held its 2011 biennial convention and marked its tasks and perspectives at a time when resistance, emboldened by the Arab spring, the Wisconsin mass demonstrations and the Occupy Wall Street movement's confidence that "we are the 99 %" is on the rise.

Inside the capacious convention hall, under a scarlet banner proclaiming "Obama is No Socialist, But We Are," over 100 delegates and observers, including a far-right blogger from the misnamed Accuracy in Media, planned their fightback for the New Year. Delegates savored the impact of the Wisconsin protests that built massive resistance to the state governor's union busting, the huge outpouring of opposition to Big Oil's environmentally calamitous effort to import Canadian tar sands crude, and the full-bore effort of Ohio unions in defeating a draconian anti-labor law by an almost two-to-one margin in a high-

turnout contest just days before the convention. And then there was Occupy Wall Street's exemplary populist effort to speak for a disenfranchised majority, fan the proverbial flames of discontent and turn class war from a slur by the right into a description of a compelling left politics.

If one thing crystallized the convention consensus, it was naming and targeting criminal mismanagement by the nation's financial institutions, the laggard government response to the economic crisis, and resistance in the streets, on the job and ideologically to free-market fundamentalism and the plutocrats who benefit from it.

Had the convention thought to adopt a theme song, a fitting one would have been Chumbawamba's refrain "I get knocked down, but I get up again, you're never gonna keep me down." But this was no tub-thumping exercise.



Washington, DC.

Delegates from some 22 states came not just to celebrate victories, but to work on planning the next ones.

And work they did, in plenary sessions, workshops and widely advertised and well-attended public sessions.

First things first. Delegates entertained a resolution blasting the state of Virginia for its 1993 legislation making it just one of five states denying public employees collective bargaining rights. The organization chose a northern Virginia site only after assurances from the hotel workers' union that holding the convention there breached no boycott or compromised any organizing efforts, and comrades warmly talked union with hotel staff.

The convention held several educational workshops, including training in the DSA economic literacy project. Now known as the 'GET UP' Project – Grassroots Economics Training for Understanding and Power," it is an "each one teach one" out-of-the-box radical economics weekend training program aimed at enabling every DSA member to speak knowledgeably about the origins of and solutions to the economic crisis. The convention also formulated plans to implement its priorities resolution (see sidebar, page 4).

Delegates also passed two other resolutions. The first offered direction on how DSA should support the Occupy Wall Street movement. Delegates approved continuing to embrace the movement, as DSA members have done without hesitation nationwide, while suggesting in the spirit of solidarity a series of political demands that could

give the movement a coherent political orientation. These included a public jobs program; bank nationalization; Medicare for all; the forgiveness of student debt; an end to foreclosures; substantial investment in clean energy; a progressive income and corporate tax structure; a tax on all speculative financial transactions; and the immediate enactment of worker-friendly labor law reform legislation.

The second resolution made explicit DSA's longstanding support for the gay liberation movement and its battle for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) rights. The resolution called for federal legalization of same-sex marriages; enactment of antidiscrimination laws in housing, jobs, education, and health care, including measures prohibiting religious beliefs from being a basis for justifying bias; repealing state sodomy laws and anti-lesbian and gay restrictions, including rights to parenting and recognition; and welcoming the formation of a DSA gay rights commission.

Public events with high-profile speakers included a Friday evening forum at the magnificent St. Stephen and the Incarnation Episcopal Church, operated by a multiracial social activist congregation in Washington's Columbia Heights section. The evening featured greetings from Metropolitan D.C. Central Labor Council President and longtime DSA supporter Joslyn Williams, who said he welcomed the audience to "America's last colony," adding that "the principles of Occupy America are the principles this organization espouses...America is just now catching up to the Democratic Socialists of America."

## Democratic Left

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Michael Harrington (1928-1989)

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

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Service Employees International Union Secretary-Treasurer Eliseo Medina, a DSA Honorary Chair, told listeners “We don’t have a wealth problem; we have a problem with how wealth is distributed.”

Sarita Gupta, executive director of Jobs with Justice, spoke about “the need to be audacious, to make aspirational and transformative demands, and put forward an alternative view,” while John Nichols of *The Nation* observed that “when Mississippi votes for women’s rights, something good is happening in America.” Speaking as a seventh generation Wisconsinite, he said “if the Egyptians can get rid of Mubarak, we can get rid of [Gov.] Walker,” and said that he was sure socialism was now on the American agenda.

Saturday’s dinner featured remarks by *Washington Post* columnist and DSA Vice-Chair Harold Meyerson, who gave a synthetic and well-received talk on the inherent tension between democracy and capitalism – this while competing with roaring bhangra music from a Sweet 16 party in the adjoining ballroom. The conference dinner also honored outgoing National Director Frank Llewellyn, longtime DSA labor activist Skip Roberts, former National Director Jack Clark, and incoming National Director Maria Svart.

Workshops, which consumed the bulk of meeting time, centered on the DSA GET UP Project to fight the austerity agenda when it rears its ugly head again in the spring. Others dealt with resistance to attacks on public sector workers; countering voter suppression and the right wing’s manipulation of racism; tips on tabling and public recruiting; building strong locals; engaging in coalitions

while maintaining one’s socialist identity; planning campaigns; working with traditional and new media, and implementing the YDS Affordable and Accessible Higher Education Campaign.

Elected to serve on the National Political Committee – the leadership body described as “the engine room of the organization” – were Theresa Alt (Ithaca, NY), Stuart Elliott (Wichita, KS), Paul Garver (Boston, MA), Virginia Franco (San Diego, CA), David Green (Detroit, MI), Barbara Joye (Atlanta, GA), Frank Llewellyn (New York, NY), Dan Michniewicz (Pinckney, MI), Simone Morgen (Columbus, OH), Joseph Schwartz (Philadelphia, PA), and Peg Strobel (Chicago, IL), plus the two YDS co-chairs, Sean Monahan (Philadelphia, PA) and Jackie Sewell (Lawrence, KS).

After concluding inspirational remarks by veteran labor organizer Jose La Luz about how we must fight for an economy that “serves the needy, not the greedy,” the convention closed with arms linked and fists raised in singing the 140-year-old socialist anthem, *The Internationale*. Its words “We want no condescending saviors to rule us from their judgment hall; we workers ask not for their favor, let each consult for all,” made for a fitting convention close, anticipating as they did Occupy Wall Street’s trust in democracy. “A better world’s in birth.” ❖

*Michael Hirsch, a member of the New York local, served on DSA’s National Political Committee from 2003 to 2009. He is a member of the editorial boards of Democratic Left and New Politics.*

## **2011 Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) National Convention Priorities Resolution**

*Summary below – full 10-page resolution at [www.dsausa.org](http://www.dsausa.org)*

### **I. DSA’s Activist Agenda: Building Movements for Economic Justice**

DSA will participate in social movements and protest activities that demand jobs for all and the expansion of public funding of basic human needs through the restoration of progressive income and corporate taxation, and ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and cuts to unnecessary military hardware spending. DSA will deep-

en its already significant presence around the nation within the Occupy Wall Street movement, as we welcome it as a major form of resistance to corporate power and the neoliberal\* political class that accommodates it.

Every DSA local and YDS chapter will decide which struggles to join depending upon their

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*\* Neoliberalism is a worldview that favors the private sector over government and a policy agenda that supports privatization, deregulation, tax cuts, and union-busting.*

groups' capacity, existing activist commitments, and their analysis of local political conditions and opportunities. In general, DSA locals should work in one or more of the following priority areas:

- a. Grassroots opposition to any long-term "budget compromise" that fails to sustain vital social programs;
- b. Coalitions fighting for full employment and a massive public jobs program;
- c. Movements fighting to prevent further disastrous cutbacks in state and local budgets, particularly to public higher education; and
- d. Movements fighting corporate America's attack on the labor movement and the rights of working people, both at home and abroad, and the role the destruction of labor rights has played in causing the current global economic crisis.

## **II. Public Educational Initiatives for Economic Justice**

- a. The NPC has developed an ambitious "GET UP Project: Grassroots Economics Training for Understanding and Power" that aims to "train the trainers" (grassroots activists, including DSAers) to critique neoliberal ideology and put forth a progressive, socialist-feminist alternative economic policy.
- b. The 50th Anniversary of *The Other America* Project. The convention also endorses the NPC's efforts to create a significant educational and political project around the 50th Anniversary of The Other America and Michael Harrington's role in initiating the War on Poverty.
- c. DSA locals will continue to advocate and engage in educational work in regard to the structural problems of a capitalist economy and the potential for a full transition to a democratic socialist economy.

## **III. Electoral Work in 2012 and Beyond**

DSA locals do more social movement work and educational activities than concerted electoral work. But where they engage in electoral action, they mostly work to elect progressive Democrats (and sometimes independents) who come out of and represent grassroots struggles for social justice. We also recognize that it is crucial to work to re-elect the most progressive voices in Congress. Thus, in our PAC activity we will work to aid the re-election efforts of Senator Bernard Sanders (I-VT) and Congressman John Conyers (D-MI).

## **IV. Building Organizational Capacity One Brick at a Time**

- a. The DSA national office, NPC, and local activists will prioritize strengthening existing DSA locals and YDS chapters and building new ones.
- b. To expand our organizing capacity and achieve such growth, the DSA NPC will strengthen its Local Development and Program Committees (and recruit non-NPC members to their ranks) as well as the various DSA commissions.
- c. DSA and YDS will make a concerted effort to promote the movement of YDS activists into existing DSA locals or YDS graduates starting new DSA locals.
- d. DSA and YDS will organize DSA and YDS contingents at key national and regional gatherings of progressives.
- e. The NPC and national staff will organize a DSA Membership Drive to conclude at the 2013 national convention.
- f. DSA and YDS will act to develop their on-line capabilities, including by updating the DSA website and improving the use of social networking.
- g. Finally, this convention recognizes the need to integrate fundraising and budgeting into every level of DSA's work, including DSA locals and YDS chapters.

# The Task Before Us - Organize!

Maria Svart

**W**inter has set in. Police have dismantled the Occupy Wall Street encampment in New York and raided encampments around the country. A shiver ran through middle America, as shocking images of police violence used against unarmed students and seniors have spread across the Internet. Obviously, all this merits our condemnation, but let's not forget that state violence – not simply in the form of police brutality but also policies that cause unemployment and poverty – has always been directed at marginalized communities in the U.S. For people of color, immigrants, and the poor, these are simply facts of life. Still, they have endured, and at certain crucial moments in our history they've even won victories in the face of violence and repression.

This is what the Occupy movement must do as well. DSA and our allies need to hunker down for the winter and plan for the long haul. Now is the time to organize! Occupy must sustain its amazing energy, perhaps in a different form, and build toward a spring offensive that will take the fight straight to the 1%.

It won't be easy, but the consciousness needed to sustain the movement is there. Students on campuses around the country are rising up against tuition hikes and crushing debt; the now-infamous pepper spraying incident at University of California-Davis has only strengthened students' resolve to resist. Workers are fighting back, spurred on by the knowledge that attacks on the rights of public sector workers are intended to undermine the labor movement as a whole. Seniors are on the move, demanding the right to a retirement with dignity not just for themselves, but for their children and grandchildren.

As democratic socialists, our job is to bring these struggles together under one banner. "Occupy" has already done much of this work, but our role within the movement is to offer a coherent, radical analysis of the interlocking crises of capitalism that threaten the democratic rights and living standards of people around the globe. We need to



point the finger at the 1% and expose the political-ideological project that has given cover to three decades of unrestrained class war from above: neoliberalism. This latest phase of capitalism enriches the few through a political program of privatizing public services, deregulating finance, busting unions, and dismantling the

social safety net. Its ideological component provides justification for this program; it insists that market values should govern every aspect of our lives, even our most intimate relationships.

The results of this outcome are clear: mass unemployment and poverty, social turmoil, and the displacement of popular sovereignty by bankers and technocrats. It's little wonder that a favorite slogan of Young Democratic Socialists (YDS) at Occupy actions around the country is "No Future, No Peace!"

DSA will do its part by engaging in a number of activities in the coming months. Locals around the country will fight state and local budget cuts supported by Republicans and far too many Democrats. We will use the 50th anniversary of the publication of Michael Harrington's classic book *The Other America* to spark public conversation about the unfinished War on Poverty and the need for a massive public jobs program. We will launch a public education program on the economic crisis to arm activists with the knowledge of how the economy works and how it can and must be transformed. And YDS will host its annual youth conference in New York City on February 17-19 to bring together youth and student activists around the country struggling for an end to tuition hikes and the establishment of free public higher education. Only street heat can force public officials of any party to implement our demands; our job is to stoke it through education, agitation and organization.

It's time for us to grow our organization and build the movement. I call on every DSAer to take responsibility for recruiting at least one new member, and to participate in whatever Occupy actions might be happening in your community this winter (if there isn't one, organize it!). Educational and outreach materials can be found on our website: [dsausa.org](http://dsausa.org).

I look forward to hearing about your work! ❖

*Maria Svart is the National Director of Democratic Socialists of America.*



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# The Park Is Prologue

Chris Maisano

**W**hen I interviewed Frances Fox Piven on the Occupy Wall Street protests recently, she offered a piece of wisdom born of decades of exemplary commitment to popular struggles:

“It’s also true that when I say I think we may be on the cusp, at the beginning of another period of social protest and [Occupy Wall Street] is the sign, I don’t think that social protest works as a little explosion and gets bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger. It doesn’t happen that way. It’s much more interrupted, dispersed, there are periods of discouragement – 1959-1960 the civil rights movement people thought it was over, after 1962 in Albany, Georgia – this movement is going to be like that too.”

As mayors and police forces move in an apparently coordinated fashion against Occupy encampments in cities around the country, we would do well to keep Piven’s sage advice in the back of our minds. It would be easy to interpret the wave of evictions as a defeat, as cause for depression, demoralization, and demobilization. But such a pessimistic assessment couldn’t be more misguided.

The Zuccotti Park encampment in lower Manhattan and its offshoots around the country were enormously successful. They served their purpose, and it’s time to move on to the next phase of the struggle. In a certain sense eviction from the park may be a good thing, particularly if it forces the movement to continue and expand its community outreach efforts; take up specific demands and deepen its involvement in local struggles (particularly around foreclosures/evictions); and establish new occupations in institutional settings like college campuses or – dare we hope? – workplaces.

While the 1% and its political allies may take heart in the wave of evictions, the genie is out of the bottle and it won’t be jammed back in. The processes that began in and around the encampments will not come to a halt, especially when we consider the fact that most of the important organizing is now done by working groups operating primarily outside those specific physical spaces. If unions and community groups continue to offer activists spaces and staging areas to use over the winter, then we will almost certainly see a resurgence of the movement in the spring, when states and cities around the country will propose another round of massive cuts to education, health care, and other critical public services that will put masses of people into motion. The occupation and defense of public spaces will be complemented by the occupation and defense of public services – schools, libraries, firehouses, community centers – a turn which could have the added benefit of broadening the social composition of the movement and giving it deeper roots in local communities.

The movement remains uneven and disparate in its political orientation, with much variation within and between

each place where Occupy has taken root. Polling data in my hometown of New York City shows that a small group of radical, anti-capitalist activists operates within a much larger ideological spectrum dominated by moderates and liberals.



A certain populist and pseudo-radical orientation, exemplified by efforts to “move your money” from large banks to credit unions and the call to end corporate personhood, is prevalent. But even though a majority of protesters are liberals, Democrats even, most of them are deeply disillusioned by the Obama administration’s utter failure to adequately confront the economic crisis. This is good; we can work with this. The role of democratic socialists is not to advance the “correct line” and demand obedience to it. Our job is to draw out the anticapitalist tendencies and potentialities within the movement, and on the basis of common struggle and an effective campaign of mass political education, help those liberals and Democrats come to the understanding that the reforms they seek will never be attained in the absence of a mass movement that contests the rule of capital and, in the long run, seeks its abolition.

“Occupy” does not signify a specific encampment or even a specific tactic to be used in the course of mass struggle. Here, we should take inspiration and guidance from the writings of Rosa Luxemburg, who analyzed the nature of popular movements in *The Mass Strike*, her classic (and highly relevant) essay on the lessons of the first Russian revolution of 1905. “It is absurd to think of the mass strike as one act, one isolated action,” she writes. “The mass strike is rather the indication, the rallying idea, of a whole period of the class struggle lasting for years, perhaps for decades.”

Change the phrase “mass strike” to “occupation,” and it becomes difficult to determine whether these words were written in 1906 or 2011. The interlocking political, economic, and social dynamics that summoned the occupations into existence and fuel the movement’s grievances will not, and cannot, be solved within the parameters of the present state of affairs. The cause of the 99% is the rallying point for a generation, a movement worthy of our commitment, our struggle, and even our joy.

Our problems aren’t going away any time soon. Neither are we. ❖

*Chris Maisano is the Managing Editor of Democratic Left and chair of the New York City local of Democratic Socialists of America.*



# From Occupy Wall Street to Occupy State Capitals in Spring 2011

Joseph M. Schwartz

**T**he Occupy Wall Street movement has already succeeded in bringing to the fore long-simmering public outrage against a corporate kleptocracy that in the pursuit of short-term profit destroyed the long-term health of American society. The Occupiers also highlighted the complicit role in the economic downturn played by a government sold to the highest corporate campaign contributors and well-heeled lobbyists.

The Occupy movement forced the media talking heads to take a break from their obsessive concern with a recession-induced budget deficit to acknowledge the devastating social effects of 30 years of rampant growth in inequality. The movement also introduced a compelling anti-corporate counter-narrative to the corporate-funded Tea Party's attempt to deflect (largely white) working and middle class anger at their economic dislocation onto alleged government tax giveaways to the "undeserving" poor.

But will this shift in political focus continue? Only if DSA activists and other progressives help Occupy sustain itself over the winter. Come late winter and early spring, the fight over proposed state and local budgets will reinvigorate the disastrous elite narrative that we must "cut" our way out of the recession. In reality, both Europe and the United States can only reverse the deflationary effects of a global financial crisis through full employment policies that generate the revenues needed to sustain public services. As recent Census



reports have demonstrated, approximately one-third of Americans are living below or just above the official poverty threshold, with child poverty rates among the highest in the industrialized world. In a society where we claim to "leave no child behind," most will be if we continue to cut public funding for child care, education, and health care.

The Occupy movement implicitly laid down a general demand: politicians have no right to govern if their policies favor corporate plundering at the expense of the public good. As brute state force, combined with harsh winter weather, forces Occupy out of its public encampments, the move inside may give it time for self-reflection and to plan



a spring offensive. If Occupy is to more fully represent the 99% it claims to speak for, it must expand beyond its somewhat youthful base of those free enough from family and caring responsibilities to do politics 24/7. Youth always play a key role in social movements; they have more discretionary time and hope for a just future. Middle-strata young people today confront ever-escalating college tuition costs, burdensome student debt, and a horrible entry-level labor market (unemployment among college graduates between 21-25 runs above 15 per cent and underemployment is rampant). The core strength of Occupy is precisely this combination of youthful idealism with collective self-interest.

When Occupy marched against foreclosures or in support of union rights, it broadened out its race, class, and age composition. In the coming months, Occupy will have a unique opportunity to link up with community groups and state and local employees fighting another vicious round of budget cuts. Rising tuition costs and the resulting massive increase in student debt is a direct result of 30 years of neoliberal defunding of federal and state aid to higher education. As United for a Fair Economy's "Flip It to Fix It" report demonstrates, if the regressive high tax rates that the bottom 20 percent of state residents pay in sales, excise, and property taxes were imposed on the top 20 percent of state residents (through progressive income taxation), the \$200 billion-plus shortfall in state revenues this spring could be eliminated. And it is precisely this revenue shortage that conservative and centrist Democratic politicians use to justify cuts in public spending and to attack public sector workers' rights to job security and decent wages and benefits.

The particular interests of Occupy's youthful core constituents speak to the universal needs of the 99%, because all of society has an interest in equitably-financed public services and in government policies that create well-paying jobs that produce useful goods. A tax on speculative financial transactions could fund a public jobs program to retrofit our energy-inefficient housing stock, rebuild infrastructure, and build an alternative energy grid and a mass transit system.



And only a government program to end foreclosures can restore the economic security and consumer spending needed to reverse a long-term global depression.

Occupy has implicitly advanced another big demand: that the economy serve human needs rather than human beings serving the needs of economic elites. As federal, state, and local budgetary policies reflect the contours of power in society, if Occupy this spring joins the fight for humane state, local, and federal tax, spending, and investment policies, it will be challenging the distribution of power in our society. Already campuses in the state university and community college system of California are exploding with protest against impending state cuts and resulting tuition increases. As goes California, so goes the nation. This spring Occupy should move to the front lawns and rotundas of state capitol buildings to demand a change in state budget policies – and to demand federal government aid to states and localities. As Frederick Douglass taught us, “power concedes nothing without a demand; it never has, it never will.” ❖

*Joseph M. Schwartz teaches political theory at Temple University and is a member of DSA's National Political Committee and a Vice-Chair of DSA. His most recent book, The Future of Democratic Equality (Routledge, 2009) recently won the American Political Science Association's award for the best book in political theory.*

## The Occupy Together Movement: 5 Points for Your Consideration

Bill Fletcher, Jr.

**T**he Occupy Together (OT) Movement, starting with Occupy Wall Street, has been, in the words of an old television commercial, “simply marvelous.” This is an exciting, energizing repudiation of the politics of economic injustice. For this reason alone the movement needs the support of those of us on the left side of the aisle. Yes, there are concerns, limitations, etc., but that must be put in the context that this is an excellent moment of resistance to the neoliberal economics that have driven this world into a deep, dark hole.

As a supporter of this effort, I want to respectfully offer five points or observations for the consideration of the movement.

**Movements rise and decline, no matter how good and exciting they are:** This may seem self-evident, but when there is any sort of energized motion one can forget that there will come a point when the movement or initiative will decline. That is inevitable. The question, then, is not whether it will decline, but when and how. The decline may be a pause before a new swing upwards, or it can be a longer decline as we saw in the late 1970s. Therefore, it is critical that a movement claims the REAL victories that it has won; polices those victories; and tells its own story. The movement, in other words, needs to be able to identify for all to hear and see what

was won, the changes that have been brought about and the lessons learned. Telling and retelling that story is critical since if the movement does not do that, someone else will, usually with less noble objectives. And, when we have won victories, we need to defend them and not assume that someone else will.

**Demands are important for sustaining**

**a social movement:** Yes, I am in the minority who believes that the OT movement needs demands. I am an old Frederick Douglass man in believing that power concedes nothing without a demand. That said, I think that some people are confusing demands with legislation. Movements need demands to unite them and to give them a trajectory to which supporters can align themselves. As the saying goes, if you do not know where you are going, any road will take you



*Continued on page 12*



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there. But demands are not the details of national health care reform or the specific timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. It is what the social movement believes to be critical at this moment. Others will come up with the legislation.

**Beware of right-wing populism:** At the edges of the movement are right-wing populist elements, such as those who support Ron Paul. All too

often right-wing populism plays the role of the mocking bird within our ranks, making familiar sounds that make it appear to be something other than it is, only to advance nefarious objectives. Right-wing populism plays on conspiracy theories, racial and ethnic prejudices and fears, and misogyny. There is nothing progressive about it. And if we are not aware, it can confuse a movement to the point that it moves in a radically different direction. Therefore, we must all be clear as to the nature and danger of right-wing populism.

**Organization is key, but don't expect only one organization:** Social movements are sustained through organization. Organization advances strategies and develops education for the movement. Organization links the activists and is especially critical when there is a

decline in activity. As we see in the Arab democratic uprising, none of the movements appeared out of nowhere, and those that were best able to advance as a result of these movements were those who were the best organized. Spontaneity has its place, but if there is no on-going organization, it can all dissipate or be captured by someone who is better organized but has vastly different objectives. That said, a movement as broad as OT cannot expect or assume that it will produce one overarching organization. There will be many, and that is fine, as long as those organizations do not fall into sectarian battles.

**Energize the electoral arena:** There has been a tendency by some to counterpose electoral activism and the mass activism of the OT movement. That is a mistake. The OT movement can energize and encourage progressives to enter the electoral realm, advance demands that flow from the OT movement, and fight for people power. We cannot remain at the level of protest. Those on the left need to identify an alternative to the neoliberal madness and fight for that in the streets and at the ballot box. ❖

*Bill Fletcher, Jr. is a long-time racial justice, labor and international activist and writer. He is on the editorial board of BlackCommentator.com, a Senior Scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies, and the immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum. He is the co-author of Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and A New Path Toward Social Justice. This piece originally appeared on the Classism Exposed blog and is reprinted with the author's permission.*

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# Remembering Robert Fitch

By Jason Schulman

**N**oted labor journalist, sociologist, and New York City DSA member Robert Fitch died on March 4, 2011 at the age of 72. A one-time co-editor of the iconic magazine *Ramparts* and co-founder of the journal *Socialist Revolution* (later *Socialist Review*), Fitch became known in the late 1960s and early 1970s primarily for his writings on urban politics, economic crisis theory and the contradictions plaguing American capitalism. Over the years he wrote for the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Village Voice* and the *Nation* – even the Op-Ed section of the *New York Times*. Some of the articles which appeared in the *Voice* and the *Nation* led to the publication of *The Assassination of New York* (Verso, 1996), which described how financial and real estate elites development-planned New York City to the detriment of the working class and the poor, increasing the value of the land owned by “FIRE” (finance, insurance and real estate) by extruding low-rent workers and factories and replacing them with high-rent professionals and office buildings – turning the city into a playground for the wealthy at workers’ expense. Notable was Fitch’s depiction of the malevolent role played by “FIRE” in the NYC Democratic Party, which earned him few friends in the city’s Democratic establishment.

But Fitch was perhaps best known as a labor dissident. A teenage member of the Laborers’ union in Chicago in the 1950s, and decades later an employee of Local 802 of the American Federation of Musicians and then Communications Workers of America Local 1180, Fitch came to believe that the United States needed a wholly different type of union movement. In *Solidarity for Sale*

(Public Affairs, 2006), he argued that corruption and patronage often prevent labor leaders from supporting social democratic policies like universal health care, pointing out unions didn’t even originally support the eight-hour workday. American unions, claimed Fitch, were marred by an outdated structure that hadn’t changed since the American Federation of Labor gained prominence in the late 19th century: the “fiefdom” model of 20,000 semi-autonomous local craft unions, which fragment the workforce. In such unions low-level officials depend upon the favors of higher-level officials to control jobs within their local jurisdiction. Fragmentation creates enforcement problems, thus often leading local leaders into the arms of the mob, while lack of democratic accountability to the membership nurtures inefficiency and corruption. Embezzlement of funds and pay-offs for sell-outs to capital consequently reinforce one another at the expense of the rank and file. The result is stagnation. The alternative was continental European-style national unionism not based on exclusive jurisdictions and exclusive bargaining – but to get there in the U.S., Fitch stressed, the labor left would have to effectively start from scratch and build new unions.

Few on the U.S. left completely agreed with Fitch’s strategic line. But many appreciated his critical intelligence and his role – as Matt Noyes of the Association for Union Democracy put it – as “a gadfly to the gadflies, challenging assumptions and pushing for grander visions.” ❖

*Jason Schulman is a member of the New York local of Democratic Socialists of America, and a member of the editorial boards of Democratic Left and New Politics.*

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# SB5 Report Winter 2011

**D**SA and YDS were in the thick of things during the anti-Senate Bill 5 campaign this fall, when Ohio voters roundly rebuffed their governor's anti-union initiative. The Central Ohio Democratic Socialists and YDS chapters at Ohio University, Wooster College, Wright State University and Youngstown State University volunteered with the We Are Ohio campaign, educating, registering and turning out voters by organizing public events, tabling on campuses, canvassing and phone banking.



## Matching Fund Goal Busted!

**R**ecognizing that the perilous times we are in require bold and aggressive action, several of our members created a fund last summer to match others' individual donations to DSA. This would double the amount of each contribution, which in turn would help motivate more donors, since we do not want to depend on only a few affluent contributors. A number of Debs Club\* members joined them to create an \$8,000 pool, which we then took to the wider membership asking for support. The response has been overwhelming – members giving everything from \$10 to \$500 have helped us raise over \$11,000 from 378 donors, \$8,000 of which has been matched for a total of over \$19,000!

Since we set up the matching fund, the Occupy movement has grown to a nationwide phenomenon, with DSA and YDS members across the country participating in the protests. The closure of Occupy encampments has only meant that organizing has become more community-based. Coupling that with our Congressional supercommittee activism has dramatically increased our organizing expenses, since we need to get materials and other resources out to our locals and activists.

For this reason, we hope you will dig deep and make a year-end contribution to DSA that is as generous as possible. If you would like to contribute a substantial amount toward creating a new matching fund, please indicate that in the "memo" line of your check or on your year-end contribution form.

Thank You to the 2011 Matching Fund Founders:

Mark Alper  
Theresa Alt  
Bill Barclay  
John Peter Behrendt  
Ellen Bromberg  
Robert Burns  
Walter Clinton  
Karen Davis  
Patricia Eames  
Frederick Ehrke  
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Nina Postlethwaite  
Paul Schiehle  
Robert Schreibman  
Joseph Schwartz  
Herb Shore  
Peg Strobel  
Ron Waitt  
Gene Weinstein

*\*The Debs Club is DSA's donor recognition program. DSA members who contribute \$300 or more a year, or are lifetime members, are part of the Debs Club, and receive special perks such as a regular Debs Club newsletter from the national director and invitations to events like conference calls with notable DSA members and allies.*

Street protesters were arrested by the police while attempting to march from Manhattan to Brooklyn. Charles Nadler reports on organizing attorneys to defend arrested protesters in Denver. Barbara Joye chronicles Occupy and DSA activity in Atlanta, while David Knuttunen and Nancy Goldner report on actions in Boston. Jack Rothman details activity on Los Angeles while Lance Gold reports on Minnesota. There are presently 33 subsections of the DSA Occupy website that document our activity.

These reports put to rest the misguided notion that the movement lacks an orientation or an agenda. Housing and foreclosure have been the focus of many demonstrations, as have inequality, jobs, poverty, and war. Local Occupy movements have not been limited to street protest. DSA members have contributed to meetings and panel discussions in Memphis, New York, and Philadelphia as well as many other cities and college campuses around the country.

That being said, DSA has not limited itself to academic discussions or intellectual support. Members in Oak Park (outside of Chicago) and San Diego brought food and other supplies to local Occupy encampments. Members in New York, Philadelphia (specifically Temple University YDS), Sacramento, and other cities have been detained or arrested for standing with the Occupy movement and with the 99% in its struggle against the 1%.

In addition to local reports, the website also documents the activity of some well-known public figures associated with DSA. There is a report on DSA Honorary Chair Cornel West's testimony at the "trial of Goldman Sachs" held in New York. There is also the work of fellow Honorary Chair Frances Fox Piven, whose interview with

New York DSAer Chris Maisano has been turned into a pamphlet and distributed at many Occupy events around the country.

Our activity in the Occupy movement has generated a fair amount of media coverage, including an NBC interview with Nichole Shippen and extensive quotes from Chris Maisano on Salon.com. As is their wont, the right-wing blogosphere and extremist publications have decided that this movement is our brainchild.

Of course, the truth is that we are building this movement not because it is our project, but precisely because it is not. Every first-hand and independent journalistic account concludes that this movement is the spontaneous expression of public rage at the condition of the economy and the stagnant living standards that DSA has been talking about for more than a decade. If we can provide some support or direction to Occupy, that would certainly be good for the organization. But more importantly, the growth of this movement along with the political impact of its emergence will be good for the country and the 99%. Already we are witnessing Republican strategists warning candidates and office holders from confronting this movement head-on. Frank Luntz, perhaps the leading Republican strategist and message-meister, has actually warned his pupils against explicitly defending capitalism!

Whether they listen to Luntz or not, Republicans and far too many Democrats would be better off listening to the Occupy movement and the 99% rather than following their present dead-end course. ❖

*Frank Llewellyn, formerly DSA's National Director, was elected to DSA's National Political Committee at the November 2011 DSA National Convention.*



# Footnotes From a Movement: DSAers on Occupy's Front Lines

Frank Llewellyn

**M**y assignment for this issue was to summarize DSA's involvement in the Occupy movement without filling the entire issue with a listing of the hundreds of actions by DSA locals, YDS chapters, and individual DSA members. While not an easy task, it is entirely gratifying because there is so much material to work with. Like the Occupy movement itself, our support activity has activated members across the generations. It has invigorated veteran activists who thought that nobody would ever again stand up to the status quo, while providing new members and young activists with some sense of the energy a real social movement can provide.

As of this writing, Occupy is celebrating 60 days of existence. From the first days, DSA and YDS members and our local organizations, despite the fact that they were already busy preparing for the organization's biannual convention in November, sprang into action. Our members

immediately recognized that this is a movement that captured the public's imagination and refocused on the root causes of the economic crisis instead of the convenient scapegoats held up by the Right. Already, the section of DSA's website devoted to DSA's Occupy activities (<http://dsausa.org/occupy/index.html>) has over 30 pages of photographs and reports from Maui to Maine that include extensive details on the initial Occupy actions and first-hand accounts of marches and demonstrations. The reports cover activity from mid-September to the present. If you have photos or would like to report on your own Occupy-related activities, please email your material to [ows@dsausa.org](mailto:ows@dsausa.org) so that it can be posted to the Wall of Honor.

Nichole Shippen and Michael Hirsch report on the Battle of the Brooklyn Bridge, when 700 Occupy Wall

*Continued on page 15*

## Change the USA! Join the DSA!

Yes, I want to join the Democratic Socialists of America. Enclosed are my dues (includes a subscription to Democratic Left) of:

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Yes, I want to renew my membership in DSA. Enclosed are my renewal dues of:

\$65 Supporter     \$45 Regular     \$20 Low-Income/Student

Enclosed is an extra contribution of:  \$50  \$100  \$25 to help DSA in its work.

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