*Abortion Rights • Latin America • Memo to Bernie • Socializing Knowledge*

# DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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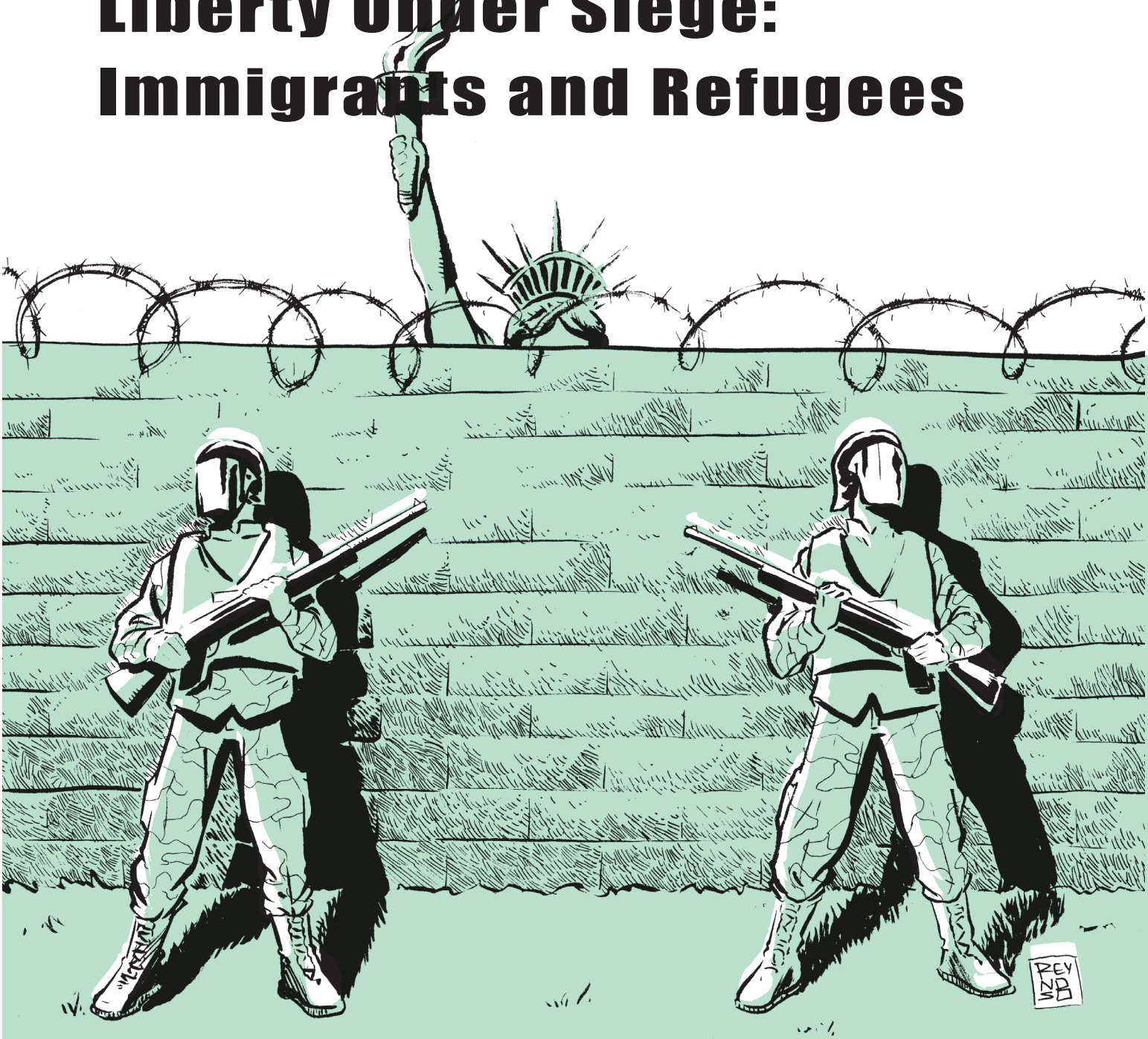
# Liberty Under Siege: Immigrants and Refugees



## From the National Director

# Good vs. Greed

*By Maria Svart*

As *Democratic Left* goes to press, the results of the South Carolina and Super Tuesday primaries are unknown. Whatever the status of Bernie Sanders's campaign, he has highlighted what is at stake in this election year for the country and precipitated major opportunities for DSA.

Articles in this issue of *Democratic Left* implicitly cover what happens when economic, environmental, and political instability put masses of people into motion, crossing borders in search of survival. Much of the instability driving these exoduses, whether through military action, trade, or other economic policies has been triggered or exacerbated by U.S. government decisions that put profit above people.

Rather than taking responsibility for the natural results of these actions (and don't they love to lecture *us* about personal responsibility?), the capitalists scapegoat Muslims, immigrants, black and brown people, poor people, union members—anyone who can be "othered."

November's election is fundamentally about who will shape our future: the forces of greed or the forces of the common good.

Members of DSA have different ideas about how best to proceed. Should we focus on building a truly independent third party? Should we focus on supporting those progressive Democrats and even some moderate ones who can help hold back the right? DSA's Socialist Strategy Project revealed that our members believe that it is a time for experimentation, but with attention to the very real danger of expanding right-wing political power.

It's clear that good people disagree on the best course of action, but we can ALL agree that all plans will fail without the muscle to carry them out.

That's why DSA's astronomical growth is so important. Just before press time, our National Political Committee recognized the petition of the Buffalo, New York, organizing committee to become a full-fledged DSA chapter. In the same week, a group of union organizers decided to join DSA *en masse*, because they want a place to strategize as open democratic socialists and they value that we foster political debate instead of stifling it. Our Young Democratic Socialists' national conference that drew from across the country, and we had to expand the number of New Member Welcome orientation sessions because so many people are joining, more than 50 in one week alone.

I want to close with a story about a member who called the office recently to find out how to get more involved. She's retiring soon and has been a member for less than two years. To paraphrase, she said "I've been reading *Democratic Left* and between that and listening to Bernie Sanders, I'm realizing that things don't have to be this way. I grew up poor and white in a black neighborhood. I always wondered why my neighbors' dads didn't get hired at the local factory, but white men from out of town did. I always felt it was unfair that my coworkers and I work so hard but are always struggling. Now I know why we have a hard time! Because the world is not set up for us. It's set up for the people with money and they try to keep us apart so we'll fight with each other instead of against them. So I want to help change things. I'll send some more money now, and when I retire I'm going to get active."

I've waited my whole adult life for a movement moment like this. We've kept the flame alive and fertilized the ground during the neoliberal era of the last 40 years. Now is the time to cultivate new leaders, of all ages, who are reaching for the sky. Let's keep them Berning long after November! ❖

## Contents



Cover art by Frank Reynoso

## DSA Union Survey

DSA is conducting a survey of our members who are in unions in order to develop new programming around the labor movement. If you are a current or retired union member, officer, or staff person, or if you know another DSAer who is, please send an email to Russ. Weissirwin@gmail.com with "Labor Survey" in the subject line.

# U.S. Policies Drive Migration from Central America

*By David Bacon*

The mass migration of children from Central America has been at the center of a political firestorm in the United States. Both migration and deportation increased again in late 2015, causing the mainstream media to run even more stories blaming families, especially mothers, for sending or bringing their children north. President Barack Obama himself lectured them, as though they were simply bad parents. "Do not send your children to the borders," he said recently.

The Tea Party and conservative Republicans are using this issue to attack Obama's executive action in 2009 deferring the deportation of young people, along with his proposal to expand it to include family members of legal residents and citizens. More broadly, the right wants to shut down any immigration reform that includes legalization and is gunning for harsher enforcement measures. Marine Corps general John Kelly, former commander of the U.S. Southern Command, calls migration a "crime-terror convergence."

This push for greater enforcement and a conflation of migrants with terrorists ignores the real reasons families leave home. Media coverage focuses on gang violence in Central America, as though it were unrelated to a history of U.S.-promoted wars and a policy of mass deportations. In fact, U.S. foreign and immigration policy is responsible for much of the pressure causing this flow of people from Central America.

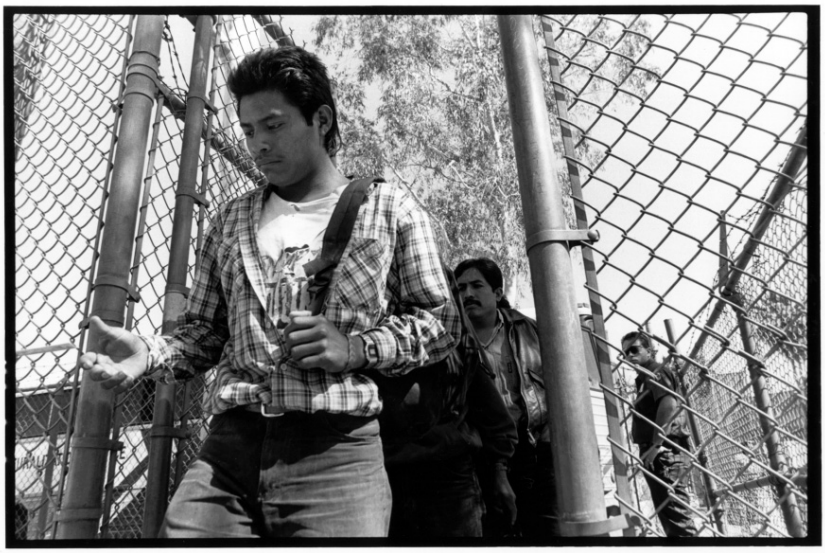
There is no "lax enforcement" on the U.S. - Mexico border. The United States spends more on immigration enforcement than on all other enforcement activities of the federal government combined. There are more than 20,000 members of the Border Patrol, the largest number in history. We have walls and a system of detention centers that didn't exist just 15 years ago. More than 350,000 people spend some time in an immigrant detention center every year. Yet the Tea Party and the Border Patrol demand increases in the budget for enforcement, and the Obama administration bends before this pressure.

The migration of children and families didn't start recently. The tide of migration from Central America goes back to wars that the United States promoted in the 1980s, in which we armed the forces most opposed to progressive social change. Two million Salvadorans alone came to the United States during the late 1970s and '80s, as did Guatemalans and Nicaraguans. Whole families migrated, but so did parts of families, leaving loved ones behind with the hope that someday they would be reunited.

The recent increase in the numbers of migrants is not just a response to gang violence, although this seems to be the only reason given in U.S. media coverage. Growing migration is a consequence of the increasing economic crisis for rural people in Central America and Mexico. People are leaving because they can't survive where they are.

The North American and Central American Free Trade Agreements and structural adjustment policies required privatization of businesses, the displacement of communities by foreign mining projects, and cuts in social budgets. Huge U.S. corporations dumped corn and other agricultural products in Mexico and Central America at low prices, forcing rural families off their lands when they could not compete.

When governments or people have resisted NAFTA and CAFTA, the United States has threatened reprisals. In 2004, Otto Reich, a virulently anticommunist Cuban refugee who was an envoy to Latin America reporting to the National Security Council,



Immigration Control and Enforcement detention center. Photo by David Bacon

threatened to cut off the flow of remittances (money sent back home from family members working in the United States) if people voted for the FMLN, the left-wing party, in the Salvadoran elections. The FMLN lost, and the following year a right-wing government signed CAFTA. In 2009, a tiny wealthy elite in Honduras overthrew President Manuel Zelaya because he raised the minimum wage, gave subsidies to small farmers, cut interest rates, and instituted free education. The Obama administration gave de facto approval to the coup regime that followed.

Gang violence in Central America has its origins in the United States. Over the past two decades, young people from Central America arrived in Los Angeles and major U.S. cities, where many were recruited into gangs. The Maratrucha Salvadoreña gang, which today's newspaper stories hold responsible for the violence driving people from El Salvador, was organized in Los Angeles, not in Central America. U.S. law enforcement and immigration authorities targeted Central American youth with a huge program of deportations. The United States has been deporting 400,000 people per year, more than any other period since the Cold War.

U.S. policy has led to the growth of gang violence in Central America. In El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, U.S. law enforcement assistance pressured local law enforcement to adopt a "*mano dura*" or hardline approach to gang members, leading to the incarceration of many young people deported from the United States almost as soon as they arrived. Prisons became schools for gang recruitment. El Salvador's current left-wing FMLN government is committed to a policy of jobs and economic development to provide an alternative to migration. But in Guatemala and Honduras, the United States is supporting very right-wing governments that employ a heavy enforcement approach.

New Jersey Democratic senator Bob Menendez calls for increasing funding for the U.S. military's Southern Command and the State Department's Central American Security Initiative. Giving millions of dollars to some of the most violent and right-wing militaries in the Western hemisphere is a step back toward the military intervention policy that set off the wave of forced migration.

The separation of families is a cause of much of the current migration of young people. Unaccompanied minors who come north are looking for those who were already displaced by war and economic crisis. Young people fleeing the violence are reacting to the consequences of policies for which the U.S. government is largely responsible.

Migration hasn't stopped, because the forces causing it are more powerful than ever. The deportation of more people back to their countries of origin will only increase joblessness and economic desperation. This desperation is the largest factor causing people to leave. Violence, which feeds on that desperation, will increase as well.

**"Migration hasn't stopped, because the forces causing it are more powerful than ever."**

President Obama has proposed increasing the enforcement budget by $3.7 billion. He has called for suspending the 2008 law that requires minors to be transferred out of detention to centers where they can locate family members to care for them. Instead, he wants to deport them more rapidly. Two new prisons have been built in Texas to hold Central American families, despite an order by U.S. District Court judge Dolly Gee to release the children.

In December 2015, the administration announced that it would begin deportations and picked up 121 Central American migrants who had arrived since May 2014 and had lost appeals before immigration judges. These measures cause more pain, violate basic rights and moral principles, and fail completely to stop migration.

Instead, the U.S. government must help families reunite, treat immigrants with respect, and change the policies in Central America, Mexico, and elsewhere that have led to massive, forced migration. The two most effective measures would be ending the administration's mass detention and deportation program and ending the free trade economic and interventionist military policies that are causing such desperation in the countries from which these children and families are fleeing. ❖

*David Bacon is an immigrant rights activist and former labor organizer. His latest book is* The Right to Stay Home *(Beacon Press, 2014).* A photo essay to accompany this article will be available online.

# Syrian Refugees: Challenge to the Left

*By Ella Wind*

As some four million refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war have entered parts of the Middle East and Europe, the Obama administration has pledged to accept a paltry 10,000. While politicians compete to see who can make the most disparaging remarks about refugees and Muslims or be the most xenophobic in denying entry to their state, the left has been slow to organize either aid or support against anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant legislation.

One little-noticed piece of discriminatory legislation, for instance, prohibits dual citizens of Syria, Sudan, Iraq, and Iran from traveling to the United States through the Visa Waiver Program. The program, which involves 38 countries, allows U.S. citizens to travel to those countries without visas and vice versa. Because people born to Syrian and Iranian fathers are automatically considered citizens of those countries, they can be denied entry to the United States even if they have never visited Syria or Iran. The legislation will likely trigger reciprocal policies from Europe, ensuring that U.S. dual nationals of these four countries no longer have the same travel rights as other U.S. citizens. The bill also affects anyone who has visited any of these countries since 2011—including aid workers, researchers, and journalists, as well as those who travel for business.

Until very recently, the burden of advocating for Syrian refugees fell largely to Syrian Americans. At the local level, these efforts have enjoyed some successes. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), a strong voice against extra screening measures, has cited the influence of local Syrian teenage activist Wadad Elaly from Chicago's Syrian Community Network. In New York and Boston, hundreds have turned out for rallies in support of accepting more than the minuscule numbers the U.S. government hopes to resettle. (For comparison, Jordan has taken in a number of Syrian refugees that is the equivalent of the entire population of Canada moving to the United States.) Thousands of dollars' worth of supplies have been sent to camps in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, especially from areas with large Syrian American communities such as Boston, Southern California, and New Jersey. In Houston, Latino anti-deportation activists have joined hands with the local Arab American community to support newly arriving refugee families, even as their congressional representative, Michael McCaul (R-Texas), raised fears of a "jihadi pipeline." Although they side with the right wing on most issues, evangelical Christian resettlement groups have called on the United States to bring more Syrian refugees, as have other mainline religious groups.

But until Syrian bodies started washing up on Europe's shores, much of the left in the United States hesitated even to talk about Syria, despite its being the single most prominent source of refugees and internally displaced people (combined) in the world and site of the bloodiest conflict of this century. For perspective, relative to the Syrian population, the refugees and internally displaced people are the equivalent of 135 million people either fleeing the United States or moving internally. Still, organizing around Syrian solidarity work has been largely restricted to those within the affected diaspora communities. Laila Abdelaziz from the Florida Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) attributes this partially to the hesitancy of refugee resettlement and advocacy groups to take on thorny political issues. "Many refugee-support NGOs [in


Metro Atlanta DSA at a welcoming refugees rally. Photo: Reid Freeman Jenkins

Florida] get a plurality or majority of their funding from the state [as opposed to federal funding or donations]. Since the state controls their funding programs, they've been hesitant to talk. . ."

Syrians in the United States, many of whom were first politicized by the Arab Spring and the subsequent uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, learned to organize among themselves and within the broader Arab and Muslim-American communities, but their attempts to reach out to other U.S. activists on the left were received at best with lukewarm interest and at worst with condescension, scorn, and rejection. It is only now, five years on, that the left is responding.

In Boston, Syrian professor and researcher Yasser Munif credits the International Socialist Organization with doing some work, but points out that "While Muslim groups in Boston were very active early on with sending blankets and aid, Aylan Kurdi's image [a three-year-old whose dead body was widely photographed] was really the origin of broader refugee organizing here." Shiyam Galyon, a young Syrian-American organizer in Texas, reported that by 2015, she had become exhausted from unsuccessful efforts at trying to motivate people. "It was really hard to get people to come out when I was talking about the barrel bombs. When I tried to organize a town hall meeting with politicians and the local Syrian community it was terrible—the politicians treated it like a superficial PR event; they weren't listening at all. I tried for a while to obtain support for a full-time organizer position in Houston for Syria, [but] no one responded until the refugee issue came into the media spotlight."

I repeatedly heard a reluctance to talk about Syria from friends in various tendencies on the left, even those who agreed with me that the Assad regime was the foremost perpetrator of violence in Syria. Many seemed to feel that if one did not call for action in the form of intervention against the regime nothing good could come out of being actively aware of what was going on. Syria was viewed as being a distraction from the more important causes of supporting Palestinian liberation and opposing U.S. clients such as Saudi Arabia. How, I countered, can internationalists rank the importance of one country's liberation over another, especially considering the cost of lives lost and uprooted in the case of Syria?

Furthermore, as many Palestinian activists have argued, the liberation of peoples across the Middle East suffering under the boots of dictatorial regimes is perfectly compatible with and can only further the cause of the Palestinian people suffering under the Israeli occupation. This insistence on looking away meant that the magnitude of the crisis was repeatedly underestimated, and many opportunities were missed to show solidarity and mobilize support.

As we saw with the cracks in the blockade of food and humanitarian aid to the Syrian town of Madaya—which had elicited minimal concern from the United Nations before it was brought into the public eye—grassroots advocacy and movement building is just as important to the future outcome of Syria as high-level diplomatic negotiations and proclamations from the executive office or international organizations. We need more such advocacy—urging our governments to pay their share into the ever-growing gap between what has been promised and what has been delivered for refugee relief funding, pushing to give Syrians work permits and the legal protections that come with them, and increasing humanitarian aid that can push past regime blockades.

The left may have ceded too much ground to the right, but it is finally realizing that Syria deserves our attention, even if its political problems pose extremely difficult puzzles. It is too late for those whose bodies lie on the beaches of Turkey and Greece, but not for those who still flee in terror or wait in despair. It's no coincidence that one of the most radical movements of our time—the fight against the borders of Fortress Europe—is being led in large part by the sons and daughters of the Syrian uprising. The left must recognize that the refugee movement and the Syrian exodus are but one phase of that long struggle. ❖

*Ella Wind is a Ph.D. student in sociology at New York University. She is the Unit Representative for the graduate student union, GSOC-UAW 2110 and organizes around refugee issues in New York City with the MENA Solidarity Network.*


YDS members gathered in New York City February 12-14 for their annual winter conference. Photo: Kayla Pace

# Solidarity Across Borders

## *Maxine Phillips talks with Fatou Camara*

When Fatou Camara was a teenage socialist in Kaolack, Senegal, the future looked good. Abdou Diouf, a socialist, was president, and the party had just given her financial aid to study economics in Quebec and get the education she wanted to be able to help her six brothers and sisters and her parents.

While she was in Quebec, Senegal devalued its currency, and her dreams of a university education crashed. She returned to Senegal, where she interned with an accounting firm before striking out for the United States in 1994. Like so many immigrants, she came with hope and the name of someone who might be able to help her. That name was Alan Charney, then national director of DSA. He'd met a friend of hers at a Socialist International meeting, and the friend thought that Alan might be able to steer her to paid work. DSA had no opening for a bookkeeper, but Charney offered her office temp work and helped her find other part-time work.

The classic immigrant story had begun. Was it different for her as a non-European, a socialist, a Muslim? "Up until September 11, 2001, I had no problems," she says.

"I've been able to help my parents and my siblings, which is what I wanted," says Camara, who has no children of her own. Because Senegal at the time required workers to retire at age 55, her father has had to support the family on a devalued pension. Her earnings helped pay for a house and for her younger siblings' education.

When DSA's full-time bookkeeper left, Camara moved into the job, leaving the full-time position only when it looked as if DSA might move to D.C. By the time the decision had been reached to stay in New York City, she was working full time elsewhere. DSA still benefits from her knowledge and long history with the organization because she squeezes time in the evenings and on Saturdays to reconcile the books.

Even in the cramped and crammed DSA space, she's been able to find a spot to say prayers. At her full-time job, she noted, where there are employees from around the globe, management has provided her and other Muslims with a separate room for daily prayers.

Still, after September 11, she became more guarded. Relatives in France and Africa urged her not to wear her headscarf outdoors. "I do it for God," she says simply, having refused to compromise in the way she appears in public. About a year ago, a street-corner encounter with a man who screamed at her and threatened her about the head covering left her shaken. A non-Muslim woman came to her defense.

Now, with Donald Trump having blurred the line between free speech, political speech, and hate speech, her faith in the United States has also been shaken. "This isn't the country I thought I knew," she says, as she tells of watching news reports of Muslims being beaten in the city.

She is furious at those who have "hijacked" her religion. "They don't represent me or anyone I know," she says of the killers of Boko Haram and Daesh. "Islam is a religion of love and peace." She shakes her head in amazement that anyone could consider them representative of the religion. "They're killing a lot of Muslims, too," she notes.

What can DSAers do in solidarity as more hate speech and hate crimes poison the atmosphere? "Recruit more Muslims to the organization," she urges. Many immigrants come as socialists already. DSA needs to start with them. After more than two decades here, she and her husband, whom she met in France, still consider themselves socialists.

"My politics haven't changed, but now, in this atmosphere, I have to be watching all the time." ❖

*Maxine Phillips is the editor of* Democratic Left. *The interview was conducted in the DSA office in New York City.*

# Is the Latin American Left in Crisis?

*By Jared Abbott*

In the pages of the mainstream press, things look dire for the Latin American left. Although left-leaning governments in a number of countries are experiencing very serious political and economic crises, they may well pull through, if they can enact some profound but nonetheless achievable political and economic reforms.

Since the late 1990s, a number of left-leaning governments have come to power in Latin America during what has been described as the continent's "left turn(s)," starting in 1998 with the election of Hugo Chávez Frías as president of Venezuela and followed by the elections of left-leaning presidents in Chile (2000), Brazil (2002), Argentina (2004), Uruguay (2004), Bolivia (2005), Chile (2005), Paraguay (2006), Ecuador (2006), Nicaragua (2006), and El Salvador (2009). Although each country has its own trajectory, it is safe to say that as a bloc these governments made impressive gains. In the economic sphere, they have decreased unemployment, the size of the informal labor sector, poverty, and inequality. A number of these countries have also taken steps to strengthen the rights of the urban poor and to enact pro-poor land-tenure legislation. Finally, a number of countries have enacted legislation to protect the rights of workers and to promote the development of worker cooperatives.

> "In the political sphere, groups outside the formal labor sector have been repoliticized."

In the social sphere, these countries have increased redistributive programs, from increased spending on education, health, social security, and housing to the expansion of pension systems and unemployment insurance. They have also advanced toward greater recognition of indigenous cultures. For instance, the new constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador enshrine the notion of plurinationality, which recognizes the legal status of a range of indigenous cultures and codifies (particularly in Bolivia) new forms of collective representation that indigenous communities use to develop their own forms of political organization.

Finally, in the political sphere, groups outside the formal labor sector have been repoliticized. These include indigenous groups, peasants, and the urban poor. One of the most exciting political developments has been widespread experimentation with direct and participatory democratic institutions that, in some cases, have increased the participation of poor citizens in political decision making.

Today, many of these successes are overshadowed by stalled economic growth, skyrocketing inflation, and increases in unemployment, poverty, and inequality. Much of this can be explained by the commodity boom of the mid-2000s and the short-sighted response of these governments. During this period the prices of many commodities, from soybeans and rice to oil and gas, reached unprecedented heights. Rather than plowing some of the revenue windfall into savings or measures to increase economic diversification, such as manufacturing, many left-led governments vastly expanded spending in other directions (often for very important social programs). When prices inevitably fell (crude oil, for instance, went from more than $140 a barrel in 2010 to around $30 today), budgets came up short, and governments had little in the way of long-term economic sustainability to show for their spending. This, combined with poor monetary planning and an increasingly valuable U.S. dollar, has produced high levels of debt and interest rates that have choked off economic growth.

Another serious problem is corruption. Perhaps the most prominent recent example is that of Brazil. Early in 2015, a huge corruption scandal erupted that involved (among others) officials from Dilma Rousseff's Workers Party (PT) and top brass from the majority-state-owned oil company (PETROBRAS), though Rousseff was not implicated. Massive protests were organized across the country. Fallout from these protests, as well as another scandal alleging that Rousseff fudged government accounting records during her reelection campaign in 2014, have caused Rousseff's approval rate to plummet. She faces impeachment charges before the Brazilian congress.

Finally, despite important gains, in many cases the gap between left-leaning governments and social movement/civil society organizations has widened. For instance, governments in countries such

Do you want to talk about this article and the current and future state of the Latin American left? Whether you know a lot about the topic or want to learn more, join Jared Abbott on the evening of April 11 for an hour-long discussion. Email Jared at jaredabbott@g.harvard.edu so that he can send you the call-in number.

as Ecuador, Brazil, and to some extent Bolivia have paid lip service to participatory democracy but have, at best, taken only partial steps toward fulfilling this goal and, at worst, have actively worked to impede it. When we look at public opinion data on political mobilization and civic engagement levels in these countries, we see that they are down significantly compared with the period prior to the rise of left-leaning governments.

Clearly, some of these governments in Latin America (particularly in Venezuela and Brazil) need to make serious changes to their political and economic strategies. That said, the many epitaphs for the Pink Tide may be premature.

The Latin American average for presidential approval is around 47.5%, while the average among left-led countries is roughly 44%, with this figure being affected significantly by the particularly low approval ratings of Rousseff in Brazil and Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela. This is hardly a dramatic gap. In fact, left-leaning presidents such as Evo Morales of Bolivia, Tabare Vázquez of Uruguay and Rafael Correa of Ecuador have among the higher approval ratings in the region.

Beyond presidential approval ratings, public opinion data on political partisanship and support for left-of-center policy positions suggest that left-leaning governments have not lost their base of support. In only one of these cases (Paraguay) do citizens report being more conservative today than in the period prior to the left-of-center government in their country. Indeed, some countries have seen quite significant shifts to the left. Citizens also express equal or higher levels of solidarity with the poor relative to the period before left governments came to power in all countries where data are available. Citizens in every country expressed higher levels of support for social security, and citizens in all countries but two (Chile and El Salvador) expressed higher levels of support for a just distribution of wealth, and the declines in those two countries were minimal. (All data come from Latinobarómetro, a public opinion research firm based in Chile.)

These data imply that in many of these countries, barring a military coup, traditional neoliberalism will not return soon. Indeed, leftward shifts in public opinion have been so significant that even most right-wing governments have increased social spending in key areas relative to the period before the Pink Tide.

Looking closely at GDP growth statistics, we can see that growth rates are not as serious a problem as some commentators have suggested. For instance, the 2014 growth rate among countries with left-led governments was slightly above 2%, which is significantly below the 3.09% average in the region (excluding the Caribbean). However, this figure is skewed by the anemic growth rates of Argentina and Brazil (0.5% and 0.1% respectively) and the negative growth of Venezuela (-4%). Bolivia and Ecuador had two of the highest growth rates in the region in 2014. Argentina and Brazil are relatively dynamic economies that are likely to return to healthy, if not impressive, rates of growth in the coming years. Nonetheless, the economic outlook for some left-led countries is still precarious, as this group is heavily overrepresented by export-dependent economies.

Is the Latin American left in trouble? Yes and no. For the most part, these governments still enjoy considerable popular support, and only a small number face serious economic and/or political crises. Even in those cases, however, crisis can be averted through more realistic fiscal and monetary policies, a focus on minimizing corruption, and a recommitment to participatory democracy.

Ultimately, these governments must push toward a radical democratization of the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres. Although countries such as Venezuela and Bolivia have engaged in interesting experiments to develop viable models of Latin American socialism for the 21st century, they have not yet developed workable solutions on a large scale. Developing such alternatives in the context of a highly interdependent and competitive capitalist global economy is a challenge faced by left-leaning governments across the globe, not just in Latin America. Whatever the ultimate solution, no such alternatives will be achievable in the absence of revitalized social movements, trade unions, left-wing political parties, and other radical actors in civil society that can pressure progressive governments to undertake transformative reforms that move their societies in the direction of a democratic socialist alternative. ❖

*Jared Abbott is a member of DSA's National Political Committee and a Ph.D. student in political science at Harvard University.*

# Books by DSA Members

Once a year, *Democratic Left* runs a list of books published by DSA members within the last three years. If we missed you last year or this, send us information. We urge our readers, if possible, to order through independent booksellers.

**Arel, Dan**, *Parenting Without God: How to raise moral, ethical and intelligent children, free from religious dogma* (Pitchstone Publishing, 2014)

**Grace, Thomas M.**, *Kent State: Death and Dissent in the Long Sixties* (UMass. Press, 2016), A history of what happened at Kent State and why, written by a historian who was there.

**Griffin, Garrett**, *Racism in Kansas City: A Short History* (October 2015), available from Amazon, tells Kansas City stories of racism and those who fought it from before the Civil War to modern-day times.

**Maggio, Mike**, *The Wizard and the White House: A socio-political satire of uncanny proportions* (Little Feather Press, 2014). Involves a president, a porter, a pastor, a Pakistani immigrant, and magic. Requests for readings and events may be sent to info@mikemaggio.net.

**Nottingham, William**, and **Harper, Charles**, *Escape from Portugal — the Church in Action: The secret flight of 60 African students to France* (Lucas Park Books, 2015). A first-person account of an event that the *Guardian* called "The Great Escape that changed Africa's Future!"

**Pelz, William A.**, *A People's History of Modern Europe* (University of Chicago Press/Pluto Press, 2016) and Wilhelm Liebknecht and German Social Democracy (Haymarket, 2016).

**Schulman, Jason**, *Neoliberal Labour Governments and the Union Response: The Politics of the End of Labourism* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015). Looks at how labor movements in New Zealand, Britain, and Australia responded to their parties' neoliberal policies in power.

**Walls, David**, *Community Organizing: Fanning the Flame of Democracy* (Polity Press, 2015). Peter Dreier call it three books in one: an analysis of components for social change, a compendium of case studies, and a "how-to" manual for activists.


The newly elected National Political Committee met in the DSA office in January. Last row, l. to r., Elizabeth Henderson, David Green, Jared Abbott, Frank Llewellyn, Joseph M. Schwartz, Hope Adair, Brandon Payton-Carrillo, José Gutierrez, Sean Monahan. Front row, l. to. R., Peg Strobel, Russ Weiss-Irwin, Simone Morgen, Theresa Alt, David Duhalde (staff). Photo by Maria Svart. Not pictured: Shelby Murphy and Jack Linares, YDS Coordinating Committee Co-chairs.

# False Protection, Real Oppression: Opposing Anti-abortion Legislation

*By Linda Gordon*

Who could have imagined in 1973 that we would still be debating abortion rights in 2016? When the Supreme Court decided *Roe v. Wade*, it was following, not breaking with, public opinion. Eighteen states had already repealed or liberalized their anti-abortion laws before *Roe*. The reasons were obvious: in our modern, post-industrial society, whenever more people are required to bring in wages to support their families, reproduction control is an economic necessity. The majority of aborting women, now and in the past, were already mothers who had as many children as they could support; the majority of abortions resulted from joint decisions by biological mothers and fathers. And bans on abortion have always hurt poor people the most.

The reason we're still mired in a debate that functions—and was designed—to move the public away from debating, say, economic inequality or foreign policy is largely political. New Right strategists decided to focus on abortion and other sex-and-gender issues as a means to break open the New Deal coalition—that is, to entice poor, working-, and middle-class citizens to vote against their economic interests.

It worked, but not completely. Conservatives have not been able to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion in the United States, or to change the public's overall opinion on abortion. In 1975, a Gallup Poll showed that 22% of registered U.S. voters wanted a ban on all abortions; in 2015, 19% did. Today, 50% label themselves "pro-choice," 44% "pro-life." This stasis has forced anti-abortion advocates to resort to incremental measures. Many state laws now severely limit access to abortion, especially in rural areas and the "red" states. At their most hysterical, anti-abortion advocates have turned to violence. According to NARAL Pro-Choice America, they have murdered eight abortion providers and clinic staff and unsuccessfully attempted seventeen more assassinations since 1973. In addition, they have committed 6,800 acts of violence—arson, bombings, assaults, threats—and more than 188,000 acts of disruption.

This does not count the November 2015 terrorist attack at the Colorado Springs Planned Parenthood clinic. This terror has driven many physicians to refuse to do abortions. The shortage of providers and clinics is especially hard for low-income women.

On March 2, the Supreme Court was scheduled to hear opening arguments in *Whole Woman's Health v. Kirk Cole*, which challenges a Texas law enacted under the pretense of protecting women. Activists are staking a lot on this attempt to stop the chipping away at abortion rights. The Texas law is the worst of several TRAP laws (Targeted Restrictions on Abortion Providers). A decision is expected in June. Some 98 *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) briefs have been filed opposing this and similar laws, and I co-wrote a brief with three other historians, which was then signed by 16 racially and sexually diverse historians who specialize in law, politics, and economics. Historians' perspectives on this case are important because we situate our arguments in the long history of the denial of equal rights to women. The historical arguments concern not just abortion but many aspects of women's lives, and thus the whole gender system.

TRAP laws share one false premise—that their purpose is to protect women. The historians' brief


Chicago DSAer Tom Broderick does clinic support while wearing his "Proud Socialist Feminist" button.

## THE COST OF TRAP LAWS

Texas's anti-abortion laws, among the worst in the nation, require abortionists to have admitting privileges at a local hospital within 30 miles of a clinic, a requirement not usually made at clinics that provide other medical services. A woman must undergo an ultrasound exam, be shown the image, and *have the image described to her*. This ultrasound must be obtained at least 24 hours in advance of the abortion, thus requiring at least two separate visits and, for many women, paying for a hotel or driving long distances. Teenagers must have parental consent. The abortion must be performed in a surgical facility. If the woman or the abortionist prefers a medical to a D&C abortion (the medical form is the usual and safer form of first-trimester abortion), the woman is to make four visits to a licensed physician. For a third-trimester abortion, the provider must certify the medical indications supporting his or her judgment. This means that a woman's choice or social or economic reasons do not meet the standard. All these provisions, of course, significantly raise the costs of abortion.

uses two aspects of legal history to show the fraudulence of that claim. First is *coverture*, the system used to deprive women of civil and political rights for centuries in the Anglo-American legal system. Under *coverture*, when a woman married, her husband became her guardian, just as her father had been, and he "represented" her in all legal matters so as to "protect" her.

Husbands controlled women's labor, property, and bodies: she could not sue or be sued and could not enter a contract. He was entitled to her services as housekeeper, mother, and sexual partner. (He could not legally rape her because he was entitled to sex on demand.) He could use corporal "punishment" against her, force her to move wherever he chose, gain exclusive custody of children in case of a (difficult to achieve) divorce, and prevent her from attending school.

By this logic, women didn't need to vote or serve on juries because husbands "represented" them. Gradually these male rights were ended by courts and state laws as a movement toward sex equality made most people realize that coverture was not protective but rather a means of depriving women of basic rights.

The second part of the brief concerns "protective" labor legislation enacted in the early 20th century as women were entering the wage-labor force in greater numbers. These state laws limited the occupations that women could enter, the hours they could work, and the locations and conditions in which they could work. The protective justification rested on women's expected reproductive function, on the assumption that exertion might interfere with it. For example, women were barred from all sorts of athletic activities. Pregnant women were expected to rest and not allowed to work. (Do I need to say that these rules were rarely enforced when it came to poor women, especially women of color?) The rules were often contradictory: for example, women were not allowed to be bartenders but were allowed to serve drinks (even though they were more vulnerable to sexual harassment than they would have been behind the bar). Rules like these systematically confined women to the lowest paid jobs, and in doing so usually garnered support from labor unions, which fought to preserve the best jobs for men.

Put simply, our point is that "protecting" women not only disadvantaged them but also rested on false assumptions, notably that women's primary destiny as mothers must be enforced by husbands and/or government; and especially that women are not capable of making their own decisions but must have government reminding them of the consequences of these decisions in a manner never applied to men.

Justice Antonin Scalia's death could lead to a 4-to-4 decision, which would leave Texas's (and other states') phony protective laws in place. The most important task for progressives is, of course, to put pressure on the Senate to approve an Obama appointee to the Court.

Whatever the Supreme Court decision—and either way, it will not end the battle over reproductive rights—it is important for the U.S. public to see through these claims of protection and identify how they actually function to maintain sex inequality. ❖

*Linda Gordon teaches history at New York University. Her most recent books are* Feminism Unfinished *and* Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits.

## Abortion Bowl-a-Thon

April is the month when many organizations that fund abortions for low-income women raise money by hosting bowl-a-thons. DSA's Feminist Working Group encourages DSA and YDS chapters to find and support such efforts through this website: http://bowlathon.blueskysweet.com/registrationlanding.asp.

# Memo to Bernie: Change the Narrative

*By Bill Fletcher, Jr.*

Every four years, hopefuls announce their presidential ambitions, and that giant sucking sound is people being pulled into different candidates' campaigns. Some leftists sit it out, others work for the lesser evil. And afterward, we don't do any electoral work for four years. We miss the midterms and local races. And at no point do we stop and say, not, "Who's going into the White House?" but "How do we take over Iowa?" This is because the left does not have a national electoral strategy.

The right wing, on the other hand, has a finely developed strategy. In the 1960s, after Barry Goldwater's defeat, the right was fragmented about what strategy to pursue. Richard Viguerie homed in on George Wallace's populist appeal. Viguerie and others on the right understood the potential for creating a reactionary populist movement nationally. And they understood it had to be done on three different levels: electoral, legal, and mass. They began a long-term process aimed at reversing the twentieth century. And they've almost succeeded.

> "Bernie Sanders lacks a story that includes all segments of society."

They concentrated on local elections that many of us thought insignificant: education boards, city councils, sheriff's departments, etc. And many on the left, like me, abstained from electoral politics, even as the right metastasized. Many of us still think that the real activism is only in the streets. We don't recognize what the right does, which is that you've got to combine these. In the 1970s, the mass movements the right energized—the anti-busing movement, the anti-abortion movement, the pro-gun movement—were successes. In building these movements they made it clear that a person could self-select one over the other. What mattered most was who was at the top directing traffic. At the top was an entire network of right-wing operatives. There is no network of left-wing operatives, nor should there be, but there is also no national strategy.

The left is in a race against time. During economic crises, right-wing populism rises. It is also emerging in response to the progressive victories that have been won over the years, as segments of the white population feel increasingly precarious. Their downward mobility makes them vulnerable to coded (and not so coded) messages that it doesn't "pay" to be white anymore. Right-wing populists say, "We have to retake America," and by "we," they mean people who they believe are being abused by . . . Pick your category: the Eastern establishment; Jews, if there is a financial crisis; black folks; women going crazy, and on and on.

Right-wing populists understand that winning people over involves creating a narrative. Their narrative is absolutely clear and comprehensive. It blames people of color, new immigrants, Muslims, Jews, etc. The left thinks that the facts make up a narrative. If people get the facts, they will understand what's happening to them. This is not true. People understand stories, and they need to see themselves in the story. Bernie Sanders lacks a story that includes all segments of society, and it is that lack of a clear, comprehensive, and true narrative that is a key problem with the Sanders campaign.

Yes, the Sanders campaign has huge potential, but contrast it with Jesse Jackson's in 1988. Unlike Sanders, Jackson created a broad narrative into which people could insert themselves. The Sanders narrative is certainly consistent: there are millionaires and now billionaires controlling everything; the political system is corrupt; there is great economic inequality; and working people are being crushed.

That's not enough to explain what's going on. Where does police violence fit in? Where does the fact that even as things get worse for the average white worker, they are far worse for those of us of color? And in the international realm, the world has changed. How does the United States become a global partner rather than a global bully? Where does its role fit into the narrative?

The left has to push Sanders to fill out the picture. At this writing, the campaign has resisted doing so. Dizzy with success, they don't believe it needs adjusting. Yes, there have been some changes, but they have not been integrated into the entire narrative.

This winter, Sanders had an exchange with Ta-

Nehisi Coates around slavery reparations in which he said basically that reparations were unrealistic and that his economic program would benefit people who were at a disadvantage because of the legacy of slavery. His response misses the point. The issue is not fundamentally about reparations, but about how white America perceives white supremacy. If I were advising the campaign, I'd say, "Senator, why not phrase it as, "The damage created by hundreds of years of slavery, segregation, and de facto segregation must be repaired. I may not agree with reparations, but I do believe that things need to be done that specifically aim at repairing the damage.'"

This may be semantical, but in such a response, he would acknowledge that there is something in how the system works that will not be resolved by the proverbial rising tide lifting all boats. The maritime metaphor for our situation is the *Titanic*, on which steerage passengers were the first to die.

That's how capitalism operates. Some of us are locked in steerage. We may be in the same boat, but people suffer from being in different locations. Some can get off safely. Others can't.

Instituting mega-economic reforms is not enough for the people in steerage. Every time we talk about a narrative of the United States, we're talking about *both* the existence of systemic racist oppression *and* about capitalist domination and exploitation. Neglecting either part of that narrative at the expense of the other is the principal weakness of the Sanders campaign. Race and gender tend to be his afterthoughts.

Contrast that to the Jackson '88 campaign. Let me give an example from my personal experience. I was asked to serve as a Jackson surrogate at a campaign rally in Jay, Maine. The audience was completely white. When I was introduced as being from the Jackson campaign, the room went wild. People said Jackson had been there a few weeks before, and he was their champion. That visceral identification with Jackson was common. He would go to Kansas and talk to white farmers, and they loved him. They saw him as their champion, too.

Jackson did not segment his narrative. Yes, he spoke to specific issues faced by various parts of the population, but his overall narrative was about what was happening to working people in the USA. He was discussing the disappearance of hope and the way that what we now call neoliberal globalization was crushing their lives. I have not come across any African American or Latino community that looks at Sanders as a champion, as *our* champion.

Sanders needs to be walking Native American reservations. He needs to be in San Juan, talking about colonialism and the economic crisis. He needs to be walking through Bedford-Stuyvesant. He needs to be sitting down and talking with community leaders.

He once said that he thought that the problem was that not enough black Americans and Latinos really knew him. The better response is, "It's my obligation to get into the communities, to meet with the leaders, to listen to what they have to say, and to unite them with the campaign." If he can't see that, it's our job to make sure he does, and to make him and his campaign uncomfortable until they understand what they have to do if they want to win. ❖

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Christopher Abilez, Alberto Aguirre, and Ashley Rodriguez hold the banner of the El Paso YDS chapter. Photo by Kayla Pace

## El Paso YDS Aids Júarez Lexmark Workers in Fight for Better Pay

When dozens of Lexmark factory workers in Ciudad Júarez, Mexico, were fired before Christmas after trying to form an independent union, El Paso YDS offered support. Workers, who make about $6 a day, were seeking a 35 cents per day increase. YDSers have helped with publicity and demonstrations, but have found that academic schedules conflict with having a continuous presence. "We want the workers to know that we're with them for the long haul," says YDSer Alberto Aguirre.

# How to Run a Socialist Reading Group

*By Neal Meyer*

Reading groups have been the backbone of socialist groups since the start of our movement. They are where new people go to connect their intuition that the world is unjust to an analysis and critique of capitalism. They are where socialist activists go to learn from the past and adapt their forebears' strategies to new conditions. Most important, reading groups are where socialists stop reading by themselves and start to socialize their knowledge.

> "Reading groups are where socialists stop reading by themselves and start to socialize their knowledge."

Every local or organizing committee of the Democratic Socialists of America should use a reading group to grow. Strong locals can use one to increase members' knowledge of current events and socialist strategy. Fledgling groups and new members find them the perfect first step for connecting with other socialists in the community.

Don't know anyone else in Butte, Montana? Put out the word that you are starting a reading group to talk about socialism (mention Bernie Sanders, too). Put up posters at your library, the community college's history and sociology departments, local coffee shops, and the bookstore. Make sure posters mention the date; time; location; contact information; and, above all, what you're reading. Email some friends who might be interested and post to Facebook community groups. Email the DSA national office for a list of DSA members in your area. The office will notify the members.

A good reading group goes for about an hour and a half. Respect everyone's time. For many people, the ideal start time is usually at 6 or 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, but it depends on your community and the shifts your target audience works. If you hope to attract people you don't know, pick a public place, such as a coffee shop or library. Choose somewhere with parking, close to public transit, and that is wheelchair accessible. In your publicity, ask whether anyone needs child care.

Start with articles from *Democratic Left*. There is also great material in *Jacobin*, *Dissent, In These Times*, *New Politics*, and *Dollars and Sense*, among others. Choose a theme for each meeting and keep the readings to two to three short articles.

Before the meeting, recruit two friends to join you. Worst-case scenario: you have a nice conversation with them. Next, prepare a few discussion questions. Make sure your questions require more than a yes or no answer. "In your personal experience, how do you feel about…?" is a good place to start.

When the meeting begins, start by going around to get names and why people are there. It's also useful to know how they found out about the group. Encourage basic questions.

During the discussion, don't let anyone dominate. A successful reading group gives everyone a chance to talk. This may mean an initial go-round for the first question or two before you have cross discussion. A reading group is an organizing tool and is only useful if everyone participates. It is important to ask people who have been silent, by name, what they think of X or Y. They may pass, but you might be surprised by what they have to offer. At some point, you might have to ask someone to step back. Be polite but firm: "Hey, Al, I really appreciate your enthusiasm, but could we let a couple of new voices jump in?" And always ask people to spell out acronyms, define complicated terms, and explain who historical figures are.

Socialism won't be built by reading groups. We need action, too. But considering our strengths at reading and talking, a reading group is a natural first step and ongoing activity. ❖

*Neal Meyer is a member of the New York City local of DSA and a staff member at* Jacobin *magazine, where he organizes* Jacobin*'s reading groups.*

For an introductory reading list to democratic socialism and DSA, look in the Basic Resources section of the official DSA website at www.dsausa.org/introductory_reading_list

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