

# Thinking Globally • Labor and the Left • Election Strategy

**DEMOCRATIC LEFT**

INTERNATIONAL  
WORKERS ORDER  
1944



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# Struggle and Victory

By Maria Svart

What does it mean that Donald Trump—a man who has built his career on stifling small businesses and his own workers, on exploiting racialized fears and pro-corporate loopholes in financial regulations—is sounding a faux populist message that combines the usual right-wing talking points about “parasitic” people of color with attacks on free trade and the declining standard of living of most of us?



It means that he sees our pain, he sees our frustration with a political system rigged by the billionaire class, and *he sees an opportunity*. Yes, it is rigged, but Trump’s policies would make it worse.

The neoliberal capitalist class, including many Democratic politicians, pushes for free trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and potentially the Trans Pacific Partnership, for example. Trump’s support comes from speaking to this reality, as well as to the racialized fears and hatred that are ingrained in the fabric of U.S. culture and reinforced by institutions.

The ability to fight against these fears is one reason why labor unions matter. Unions are the only large institutions in this country that are led by and for working people and that demand a voice in workplaces, politics, and the economy. Thus, unions can play a unique and critical role in building an antiracist, anticapitalist class consciousness. That’s why we devote the annual Labor Day issue of *Dem-*

*ocratic Left* to exploring issues facing organized workers today, and why we look forward to supporting and seeing where Labor for Bernie goes next.

But we must also discuss our role as open socialists, even outside of labor. We think systemically. We look at the world as it is, we compare it to the world we wish to create, and we develop a strategy that accounts for the true balance of power and the real barriers in our way.

Right now, we have a weak, but growing left. Some 13 million people voted for Bernie Sanders in the presidential primaries. There is a hunger for an alternative to capitalism, and he moved us several steps forward in the war of position, to use a term from theorist Antonio Gramsci.

Our job is to continue building our power.

We can not do so by fighting among ourselves. Not one of us has all the answers, and we need each other for the battles ahead. In fact, listening to each others’ stories of how we came to our different points of view can make us better organizers as well as build a stronger movement. Debate about strategy and

tactics *must* be done in a comradesly way.

We don’t need to be in unquestioned unity behind Hillary Clinton. We *do* need to be in unity behind the short-term goal of strengthening the left by defeating the far right and in distinguishing between neoliberalism and neofascism. We need to be in unity about building a grassroots army of democratic socialist organizers. We need to be in unity about winning real power, independent power, through concrete local fights. We need to be in unity about making racial justice central to our fight for economic justice and part of all the work we do, whether electoral, issue, or direct action, in the coming months and years.

People become empowered through struggle and victory, and the wounds and distrust that divide us are healed through solidarity. None of this is easy. It’s complicated. We all have lessons to learn. Our future depends on our learning those lessons together.

And we have a duty to win. ❖

“Our job is to continue building our power.”

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Cover art by Frank Reynoso

# Unions Turn to Global Campaigns

By Kate Bronfenbrenner

**W**orker actions and community and labor support remain essential in union organizing campaigns, but the success of organizing in a global economy also depends on global strategies. In 2001, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) began a drive to organize 800 workers at Brylane's Indianapolis distribution center. Brylane, an apparel and home furnishing distribution center for nine mail order catalogs, was a major subsidiary of French catalog and retail apparel giant Pinault-Printemps-Redoute (PPR). PPR also owned luxury firms Gucci, FNAC, and Conaforma, with lines by big name designers Stella McCartney and Alexander McQueen. According to Brylane's own records, in 2000, one in ten workers at the Indianapolis distribution center suffered a repetitive motion injury, a rate nearly 18 times higher than the industry-wide average. It was this issue that jumpstarted the organizing campaign.

Both Brylane management and PPR responded by intimidating and harassing employees. Faced with aggressive opposition from the employer, the union recognized that it would need to run a campaign that reached well beyond Indianapolis. Researchers at UNITE had learned that workers in the supplier countries were organizing with the Clean Clothes Campaign against sweatshop conditions in their factories that included cases of sexual harassment, child labor, and subsistence wages. Thus, the first step of the international campaign was a global customer campaign followed by a multi-country Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) complaint linking the health and safety conditions and labor law violations in the United States with the labor and human rights violations in the supplier countries.

Opening another front, Brylane workers and their global labor allies began picketing and leafletting Gucci stores and designers Stella McCartney and Alexander McQueen, asking them to tell PPR to "get in fashion—respect workers' rights." On Janu-

ary 29, 2003, the workers at Brylane won card-check neutrality (meaning that the employer agrees not to interfere with the union's efforts to form a union) and a first contract. But they did not stop within the borders of the United States. The global campaign continued until they won a code of conduct agreement with Brylane to address substandard working conditions in the sourcing factories in the Global South and Eastern Europe. The ripple effect of the campaign helped workers in other companies. When UNITE began to organize Sweden-based H&M, the possibility of a Brylane-like global OECD campaign was enough to get H&M to agree quickly to the same card-check and neutrality agreement that was won at Brylane.

Research found that there were three key elements to the Brylane victory. First, the supply chain research gave the Brylane workers a connection to workers in the

supplier factories and the retail stores that was essential both for the success of the Gucci campaign and to keep Brylane workers and their allies motivated to hold out for the code of conduct for the suppliers after the Indianapolis victory had been won. Second, the strategic shift away from catalog sales toward luxury goods gave the campaign leverage that it did not have with a catalog company, because McCartney and McQueen were public figures with a brand and an image that could be damaged with an association with sweatshop labor. Third, the Gucci investment was highly leveraged, which meant PPR had to maintain high profit margins or the lenders might call in the loans.

UNITE succeeded at Brylane because the campaign was based on in-depth, strategic research analysis of the entire corporation combined with a multifaceted, escalating campaign that built on that research. The campaign was carried out by workers and their labor and community allies locally, nationally, and internationally. This story has been repeated over and over again in organizing campaigns in the United States and around the world, whether with security guards organizing in South Africa or



Frank Reynoso

3,000 TÜMTIS members in Turkey gaining union recognition and a first contract from United Parcel Service (UPS). Unions are learning, and my research has confirmed, that these elements together—strategic corporate research, escalating multifaceted campaign, involvement of workers and allies—are key to the comprehensive campaigns necessary for unions to win in the hostile organizing climate that workers face today.

Today, 50% of all organizing campaigns (including NLRB, the National Mediation Board, public-sector, and private-sector non-board campaigns combined) involve multinational corporations, and 30% involve foreign-owned corporations. Organizers depend on researchers more than ever. But few local unions have researchers on staff, and only the top 20 organizing unions have fully staffed research departments. Even then, they are stretched thin rescuing locals that move forward on campaigns unaware of whether the parent company is a huge multinational traded on a foreign exchange or a small U.S.-based private equity firm.

Earlier corporate research was focused more on collecting as much information as possible on the company as quickly as possible from as many sources as possible both on and offline. Today's strategic corporate research follows a specific order based on corporate structure: starting with ownership, followed by operations, and then stakeholders, which then allows the researcher to develop a critique of the company that will be most useful for designing a comprehensive campaign. The most commonly used model for strategic corporate research is the one originally developed for the Cornell/AFL-CIO Strategic Corporate Research Summer School Program by the original instructors in that program. [Full disclosure: I am director of Labor Education Research at the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations.]

Part of the reason for widespread use of the model is that it was the one presented at the Global Companies, Global Unions, Global Research, Global Campaigns Conference attended by more than 700 trade unionists and labor academics in 2006 in New York City. The conference proceedings were published the following year as *Global Unions*:

**“Today, 50% of all organizing campaigns involve multinational corporations, and 30% involve foreign-owned corporations.”**



UPS Deliver Justice Not Abuse!

*Challenging Transnational Capital Through Cross-Border Campaigns* (Cornell University Press, 2007, Kate Bronfenbrenner, ed.). The other reason is that for the last 17 years, at least 30 or more students each year have been trained in strategic corporate research at the Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations Summer Program and have moved into strategic corporate research and/or strategic campaign positions in the labor movement. That does not include the students graduating from the residential programs of the University of Massachusetts and Cornell University, which include classes in the same subject.

Strategic corporate research is not easy, particularly when one is researching privately held companies and closely held publicly held companies. Much of the work is old-style detective work—going to courthouses, reading through loan agreements and deeds, and talking to workers. Unions cannot afford a researcher for every organizer. Instead of organizers, more and more unions are hiring what are now called “strategic campaigners,” staff who can do both research and organizing. They are filling those jobs.

Young people are choosing to go after strategic corporate research and strategic campaign jobs, and there are enough good jobs in both categories to keep stoking the growing interest. Even though many in the academy, media, and some in the labor movement itself are saying that labor's time is up, the new approaches feed sparks of optimism. Those sparks are good for the new blood coming in to the labor movement and for the movement. ❖

*Kate Bronfenbrenner is director of Labor Education Research and senior lecturer, Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations. To learn more about the Cornell Summer School program, visit [www.ilr.cornell.edu/worker-institute/education-training/strategic-corporate-research-summer-course/course-details](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/worker-institute/education-training/strategic-corporate-research-summer-course/course-details).*

*Footnotes are available upon request.*



# Labor, the Left, and the After-Bern

**Bob Master talks with Joseph M. Schwartz**

*Bob Master is legislative and political director of District One of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and special adviser to the CWA national president on national politics. He also serves as co-chair of the New York State Working Families Party. At 700,000 members, CWA was the largest international union to endorse Senator Bernie Sanders for president in the Democratic presidential primary. Master played a leading role in defining CWA's electoral strategy and is a leader in discussions among labor, electoral, and community activists as to how to build out of the Sanders campaign a long-term, more multiracial left trend in mainstream U.S. politics. DSA Vice-Chair Joseph Schwartz interviewed Master shortly after he addressed DSA's Socialist Caucus (attended by more than 300 people, including more than 100 Sanders delegates) at the Democratic National Convention in July.*

**JS: How would you summarize the gains for the left and U.S. politics from the Sanders campaign?**

**RM:** Bernie Sanders took the sweeping social, political, and especially economic critique that emerged from Occupy Wall Street in 2011; injected it into mainstream political discourse; and demonstrated that the hunger for transformative change extends far beyond a scruffy band of mostly white, mostly college-educated millennials burdened by a crushing load of student debt. He called the question on nearly four decades of neoliberal assault on working people, and a clear verdict was returned—the country needs a new direction—even “a political revolution.” If we build on the achievements of the Sanders campaign—and the critical gains of social movements like Black Lives Matter and the Dreamers in recent years—the potential for significant social progress may be greater than at any time in decades.

A few caveats. First, Sanders failed to build a sufficiently multiracial coalition, which is requisite to building a movement powerful enough to achieve the sweeping transformation to which the campaign aspired. The next phase of the movement

must make racial and gender justice central to its agenda. Second, the meaning of the phrase “political revolution,” while stirring to millions, is also potentially disorienting to the left. The idea of revolution connotes sudden, radical, sweeping change—a rapid, fundamental restructuring of government and politics. But the actual meaning of Sanders’s political revolution is surely less the storming of the Winter Palace—or even the mass popular uprisings that erupted across Eastern Europe in 1989 or the Middle East in 2011—than it is 1866-1870, 1933-38 or 1964-66 in the halls of Congress. Those were moments of profound legal, social, and economic non-revolutionary change within the system. And the advances achieved in those remarkable moments required huge governing majorities as well as mass movements capable of bringing irresistible pressure

to bear on legislators. Talk of “revolution” runs the risk of creating impatience or overreach, and our movement needs to understand that we’ve got a huge amount of work to do—both at the ballot box and in the streets—to create the conditions for the kind of change envisioned by the Sanders movement.

**JS: Now that Hillary Clinton is the Democratic nominee, what approach to the 2016 elections, including the presidential, do you think the left should adopt?**

**RM:** I am 100% clear that the main task for labor and the left between now and November 8 is to defeat Donald Trump, who is the most dangerous figure in mainstream American politics since George Wallace. A Trump victory would not only put an unqualified, know-nothing, narcissistic, authoritarian jerk in the White House, it would empower and invigorate the most malign tendencies in U.S. society. It would close off space for social reform and put us on defense for four years. Not to mention what it would do to the Supreme Court. In contrast, the election of Hillary Clinton, while no panacea, will enable us to build on the electoral and social-movement gains that have taken place since 2011 and keep building pressure for more fundamental

“The main task for labor and the left between now and November 8 is to defeat Donald Trump.”

change. This is truly a no-brainer.

At the same time, we need to be laying the groundwork now for the movement-building work that will be necessary to pressure a new Democratic administration on issues like reining in Wall Street, creating a health care public option, ending mass incarceration, criminal justice reform, restoration of the Voting Rights Act, and citizenship for 11 million undocumented U.S. residents. None of this will happen without mass pressure and electoral mobilization, and we need to start planning for that even as we mobilize to defeat Trump.

**JS: How can a post-Bernie progressive political trend best be built?**

**RM:** I am a proponent of the “Inside-Outside Strategy” articulated by Dan Cantor, Working Families Party national director, and Jodeen Olguín-Taylor, vice president of Demos Action, in the *Nation* magazine’s August symposium on “How to Build the Political Revolution.” Cantor and Olguín-Taylor advocate mounting a handful of ambitious national issue campaigns—taxing Wall Street to fund free public higher education, getting Big Money out of politics, restoring the Voting Rights Act are possibilities—at the scale of the 2009-2010 Health Care for America Now campaign in support of the Affordable Care Act. In this vision, a broad coalition of community, labor, netroots, racial justice, youth, immigrant, and labor organizations, including whatever new formations might emerge from the Bernie 2016 campaign, would come together around an agenda designed to sustain and advance the issues that drove the excitement of the Sanders campaign. We would work with progressive allies in Congress to make 2018 a referendum on racial and economic justice in the same way that the Tea Party made 2010 a referendum on socialized medicine, big government, and the first black president. The challenge is to nationalize an anticorporate, antiracist agenda.

**JS: Labor is always a key part of any progressive movement. What hopeful signs do you see for a revival of the U.S. labor move-**

**ment and what are the main barriers to that revival?**

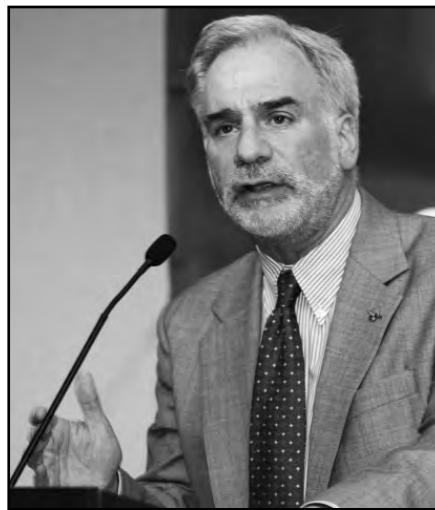
**RM:** The past 30 years have been among the most challenging in the history of the U.S. labor movement. I do not see any magic bullets for revival. But I share the analysis put forward by historians such as Nelson Lichtenstein and Steve Fraser, who have argued that the key to working-class upsurge is not primarily new organizing techniques or strategies but ideological shifts that seed the soil for working

people to reconceptualize their role in society. As Lichtenstein has written, “Trade unionism requires a compelling set of ideas and institutions, both self-made and governmental, to give labor’s cause power and legitimacy.” The Sanders campaign, with its emphasis on fighting inequality and building greater working-class political power, has been very important in that regard. I think the social movements that have gripped the nation since 2011 also contribute to an environment in which increased working-class mobilization is possible. The “Fight for \$15 and a Union” has re-introduced the relevance of unions to millions of Americans who knew almost nothing about unionism or picket lines, and SEIU (Service Employees International Union) deserves enormous credit for its commitment to this campaign. And I am encouraged by polling that shows that young people are decidedly more pro-union than older Americans, something we see reflected in a spurt of organizing among workers at digital media outlets such as the *Guardian* online and *Al-Jazeera*, where CWA overwhelmingly won union elections last year. All of these are posi-

itive signs, but the legal system remains stacked in favor of employers, and a climate of fear still pervades most organizing efforts. If progressive social and economic movements continue to grow, there is reason to hope that they will spread to workplaces as well.

**JS: Your own political origins come out of the mid-late 1970s student labor solidarity movement and the New American Movement**

“I have always felt that there was a need for a socialist current within the labor movement.”





**(one of DSA's predecessor organizations). So your own politics has socialist roots. But for the past 30 years you've not publicly identified as a socialist. Yet in your *New Labor Forum* article ("Bernie Sanders, Labor, Ideology, and the Future of American Politics," June 12, 2016) you argue that the revival of a socialist presence in U.S. politics is necessary for imagining radical alternatives to the status quo. Why might this be the moment to rebuild a strong socialist presence in mainstream progressive politics?**

I didn't publicly identify as a socialist, but I did privately. Inside the labor movement, the Sanders campaign made it much easier to "come out," so to speak, as a socialist. In fact, openness to more radical ideas among working people has grown enormously since the 2008 crash and especially since Occupy Wall Street. I have always felt that there was a need for a socialist current within the labor movement, because socialists bring a particular analysis and a particular energy to the work, which is often missing otherwise. It is an analysis that emphasizes the systemic nature of the problems we face and the fundamental opposition of class interests in society. It is hard to make sense of the crisis in which we find ourselves without understanding

these underlying dynamics. I'm not sure whether socialism exists as the description of an actual alternative organization of society or as a compelling critique of the failures of capitalism, but I am sure that socialism provides the language to express our moral and practical outrage at the vicious brutalities of the current system. It gives us the language to imagine a more humane and just alternative society. And socialist organization is essential to accomplish these aims. I can't put it better than Steve Fraser did in a recent article he wrote about the importance of the Sanders campaign in an online publication called the *Brooklyn Rail*:

Politics is always about something more than program. It is a deeply emotional arena, full of fears, prohibitions, stigmata, dreams, exaltations, utopias and dystopias, about empathy and solidarity, domination and acquiescence (along with the meat and potatoes). The Sanders campaign (together with its helpmates outside the electoral world) has made it possible again to say the unsayable, to break taboos, to reverse generations of linguistic cleansing and impoverishment of the imagination, to call the system by its right name. That is its liberation, its opening to a future.

That's something to celebrate this Labor Day. ❖

## **DSA's Labor Working Group!**

A diverse group of DSA union members, staffers, and retirees, creating educational materials for socialists at work and socialist community in your union!

Contact: Russ Weiss-Irwin, chair: russ.weissirwin@gmail.com

Thanks to LWG members: Glenn Scott, Zelig Stern, Adam Cardo, Ian Lee, Vaughn Allen Goodwin, Barbara Geiger, Roger Robinson, Andee Sunderland, Sara Castle, Adam Goldman, Eric Robertson, Carl Goldman, Mary Dooley, Danny Castle, Harrison Hiner, and Ben Speight.

Thanks to the donors who paid for this ad: Jared Abbott, Tom Ellet, Mary Dooley, Rand Wilson, Glenn Scott, Jason Schulman, Natasha Abner, and Russell Weiss-Irwin.

## **Utah Chapter in solidarity with the DSA**

Charles Nuckolls, chair  
John Sillito, vice-chair  
Neil Olsen, secretary/treasurer

**In solidarity with all those who work to build DSA**

*"An unorganized socialist is a contradiction in terms."*

Michele Rossi, Joseph Schwartz,  
Michael Migiel-Schwartz, Leah Rossi-Schwartz

**The Political Revolution is just beginning.** It will require thousands of younger Bernies and Bernices, allied with activist mass movements, winning elections at every level. That strategy can create a diverse, sustainable social democratic majority of most of the 99%, to take power from the corporate oligarchy and open the path to social transformation.

*Mark Schaeffer, Albany NY*

# Victory at Verizon Is a Victory for All

By Dan DiMaggio

The strike this past spring by 39,000 Verizon workers in the mid-Atlantic and Northeast was the largest and most significant since United Parcel Service workers struck the package giant in 1997. After decades of retreat in the face of attacks by employers and right-wing politicians, it's a hopeful sign.

Verizon infuriated landline and call-center workers from Massachusetts to Virginia with demands to outsource more jobs, cap pension contributions at 30 years of service, and force workers to live away from home for months at a time.

After 45 days on the picket lines, the unions beat back these concessions. In the end, Verizon committed to adding 1,300 more jobs in the United States, doing away with a hated disciplinary program, and phasing in 10.5% raises over four years. Although the unions still took a hit on healthcare, workers emerged feeling that they had achieved an overwhelming victory against a corporate behemoth.

What made this strike succeed, at a time when strikes are at an all-time low, with most unions hesitant to walk out for fear of suffering a crippling defeat? (There were just 12 work stoppages involving more than 1,000 workers in 2015, versus an average

of 300 a year between 1947 and 1979.)

First, skilled workers in vital infrastructure such as telecommunications still have some power. Managers and scab replacement workers proved unable to maintain Verizon's network or install FiOS. Verizon CEO Lowell McAdam was forced to admit the strike's impact on the company's bottom line, with analysts estimating that the strike cost the company \$200 million in profits.

Second, the timing was right. Bernie Sanders's campaign gave the strike more publicity, boosted strikers' confidence, and framed the strike as a clear battle against corporate greed. "We should remind ourselves never to call a strike again unless it's one week before a competitive New York state primary in which a socialist is running," joked CWA's Bob Master, a key architect of the strike, in the *Progressive*.

One hundred and fifty strikers were given front row seats to Sanders's Manhattan rally on day one of the strike, and Sanders repeatedly called out Verizon's \$1.8 billion in profits a month and McAdam's \$18 million salary. With corporate greed in the news, union members kept up relentless and public pressure on the company, picketing (and being arrested at) a shareholder meeting and organizing demon-



Members and friends of the NYC DSA Brooklyn Branch picket in solidarity with Verizon strikers. From left to right: Laura Moya, Neal Meyer, Mariah Montgomery, Dan DiMaggio, Dave Hancock, Sam Rosenthal, Ben Bennett, Rick Fudge, Chris Maisano, Chris Brooks, Katrina Forman. Photo by the picket captain.



strations against scabs and company executives.

Third, with Verizon Wireless retail workers on strike at seven stores in Brooklyn, New York, and Everett, Massachusetts, the union picketed Wireless stores across the entire United States, affecting sales and raising concerns among investors about longer-term damage to the company's brand. Workers at the struck stores—who voted to join CWA in 2014 but had been stymied by management—won their first contract and, it is hoped, paved the way toward organizing more Wireless workers in the future.

Solidarity was key. Workers told me they'd never felt such an outpouring of community support. "You don't feel like you're alone," said Dennis Dunn, chief steward with CWA Local 1108 on Long Island. "We had bagels delivered almost daily on the picket line, pizza from other unions, contributions from retirees. . . . It helps when you don't have people driving by yelling, 'Get a job! Go back to work!'"

That support included the many groups—among them many locals and organizing committees of DSA—that answered CWA's call to "adopt a Wireless store" to picket. The eagerness of DSAers to organize pickets at stores shows a solid understand-

ing of socialists' role in a struggle like this. Above all else, it's to help the strikers win.

In New York, our recently established Labor Branch formed the backbone of the Verizon Strike Solidarity Committee (alongside the International Socialist Organization). We reached out to numerous local unions and community organizations who adopted stores for picketing, in addition to the pickets organized by our Brooklyn branch.

Many of our younger members said this was their first time on a picket line. It certainly won't be their last. There's no doubt that Corporate America will continue its decades-long war on workers. But, as our strike solidarity committee T-shirts said, "A victory for one is a victory for all." The win at Verizon should boost all workers' confidence in their own power. And DSAers should be proud

that we played a part, and be ready to play an even bigger role in future struggles. ❖

*Dan DiMaggio is the assistant editor of Labor Notes and a member of the Brooklyn Branch and Labor Branch of NYC DSA. The opinions expressed here are his own. To read more of his coverage on the strike, visit [labornotes.org](http://labornotes.org) or e-mail him at [dan.dimaggio@gmail.com](mailto:dimaggio@gmail.com).*

**“Solidarity was key. Workers told me they'd never felt such an outpouring of community support.”**

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## Socialists Crowd Caucus at Democratic National Convention

A rapidly growing DSA held a coming-out party of sorts at the Democratic National Convention. More than 300 Sanders activists attended DSA's "Socialist Caucus" on July 27, of whom at least 100 were Sanders delegates. Fifty-five of those delegates were DSA members. At the caucus were Levi Sanders, the senator's son, and Larry Sanders, his brother.

The standing-room audience heard from leaders of the two largest unions that backed Sanders. Michael Lighty, political director of National Nurses United (and former DSA national director), analyzed the "transformative," anticorporate nature of Sanders's call for single-payer healthcare and a financial transactions tax to finance free public higher education. Communications Workers of America District One Legislative Director Bob Master [see interview on p. 6] argued that a post-Sanders politi-

cal trend would have to broaden its racial basis and coordinate work around several key racial and economic justice demands. DSA National Director Maria Svart, El Paso DSA activist and Sanders delegate Ashley Rodriguez, and New York City DSA Co-chair Rahel Biru outlined the role DSA locals play in multiracial coalitions and electoral campaigns to fight for immigrant rights, affordable housing, and democratic public education. José Laluz, DSA vice chair and veteran labor activist, brought down the house with an impassioned plea to end U. S. colonial rule in Puerto Rico.

Numerous participants remarked on social media that the caucus represented one of the most substantive meetings at the convention. Many joined DSA on the spot, and the DSA table rapidly sold out of its fifty bright red DSA "Continuing the Political Revolution T-shirts."

# Stronger Together

## *Bianca Cunningham talks to Russ Weiss-Irwin*

*Bianca Cunningham is a DSA member in Brooklyn, NY, and chair of the NYC DSA Labor Branch. She led her coworkers to join Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 1109 in 2014, becoming the first ever Verizon Wireless retail workers to unionize. Verizon fired her for organizing, and during the recent Verizon strike, picketers across the country chanted “Bring Back Bianca!” She now works as a staff organizer for CWA. This interview was conducted by email and phone in July, shortly before the NLRB ruled in her favor. —RW*

**RW: Why did you first decide to form a union in your Verizon Wireless store?**

**BC:** I had been dealing with bullying and sexual harassment from some of my managers to the point that I felt sick going into work almost every day. Finally, my grandfather gave me the advice to pull the

manager to the side, look her square in the eye, and tell her, “I’m not the one to be f\_\_\_ed with!”

“Well,” I told him, “You’re a businessman who owns a multimillion-dollar business: it’s easy for you to say that. But for us regular folks, that would never work.” But I kept thinking about it, and thinking of ways that I could do it. When I reached out to [CWA Local 1109], that was my subliminal f\_\_\_ you to the company!

**RW: How did it feel when Verizon fired you for organizing and suddenly Verizon workers across the country knew your name?**

**BC:** When I was fired, I was really shocked and felt betrayed. I had worked so hard for Verizon for five years. I got awards and always did what they asked of me and more. When I first got fired, I thought, “What could I have done to avoid this?” But the answer really was nothing—it wasn’t me, it was



From left: Bianca Cunningham, Sen. Bernie Sanders, CWA District 1 vice president Dennis Trainor, and former CWA president Larry Cohen. Photo courtesy of CWA.

just the movement. [Becoming nationally known] was so surreal. All the support from the union and local elected officials made me feel supported and empowered, and kept me fighting. It was amazing.

When we went on strike with Verizon landline workers, we saw such an outpouring of support—from the public, from DSA, from retail workers at AT&T who are already union, and even from Bernie Sanders! We really felt the love. And finally, after three years, Brooklyn Verizon Wireless retail workers won our first union contract.

**RW: Did you already see yourself as socialist before that experience, or only after?**

**BC:** I grew up in a Christian household. My grandparents made me read *The Negro* by W.E.B. Du Bois and listen to old speeches from Martin Luther King, Jr. There are a lot of socialist principles taught in a Southern black church: the idea of collectivity, the principle that things should come from the people themselves, ideas about race. I was able to connect the dots once I started reading more in high school and college. Even now, Martin Luther King is the best example for me of channeling Christian love and principles into socialist politics.

**RW: What made you decide to join DSA? How do you see being a socialist activist as connected to being a leader in CWA?**

**BC:** I share an office with a number of other CWA organizers; we had been part of a group called the “Project for Working Class Power.” It was good, but it was too much talk. When people started to talk about joining DSA, I asked, “Will this be about action?” We knew DSA people from the Bernie campaign—CWA endorsed Bernie—and we saw they had the same things in mind as we did. By joining DSA, we’re part of a larger network and a bigger movement.

As far as the connection with my union work, it’s important to be able to help my co-workers connect the dots between their day-to-day frustrations at work and in their personal lives to a greater movement, especially for forming leaders in communities of color.

**RW: How did the NYC Labor Branch—a group of socialist union staff and rank-and-file leaders—get started? What has it done and what do you think is next?**

**BC:** We had put so much energy into the Sanders campaign and reached out to so many people. We experienced the enthusiasm with millennials as well as the lack of enthusiasm in communities of color. We wanted to use that momentum to educate and really engage with these disenfranchised rank-and-file members who were looking for answers and looking for a way in which they could take action that can, we hope, lead to real change down the line.

We felt a labor branch was the appropriate way to go. Most of us had relationships with other folks in unions and access to members. We believe that making the connection between a union and a grander idea of socialism is important for the future of unions and for people to get a greater understanding of why unions are important, not just in the public sector.

Going forward, we all want to get behind the Black Lives Matter movement. We want to do member education and mobilize a larger rank-and-file presence behind the movement inside and outside the workplace. I hope that we will really affect our city and become a real player in this process of trying to build a socialist movement by supporting politicians who support our ideals and educating the community as a whole about socialism, starting with the workplace. ❖

“Going forward, we all want to get behind the Black Lives Matter movement. We want to do member education and mobilize a larger rank-and-file presence behind the movement inside and outside the workplace.”

Labor Day solidarity to all comrades and friends from the Central New Jersey Democratic Socialists of America Organizing Committee, Princeton Branch and New Brunswick Branch.

# Rediscovering Socialist Unionism

By Elaine Bernard

With all that is being written in the mainstream press about the 2016 election season, an important aspect of the massive turnout and public support for Bernie Sanders seems to have gone unnoticed. Among the thousands of unionists drawn to the Sanders campaign, there's new interest in talking about democratic socialism. For some, it's an exciting new inquiry—what does it mean to be a socialist and a trade unionist? For others, with sad memories of U.S. labor's cold-war red-baiting, it's an opening to reexamine our union history and reclaim the broader, transformational agenda that socialists have fought for both in their unions and in society at large.

Simply put, to be a socialist is to be for democracy, but a radical democracy that seeks to eliminate racism, sexism, and the multiple forms of chauvinism and oppression that undermine solidarity and compassionate human relations. To be a socialist is to join the struggle on the side of equity-seeking groups against the oppressive poisons that divide us and choke off the creation of a truly democratic and just society.

For socialists, democracy isn't just about the right to vote for representatives every two or four years. Democracy is about the right to participate in decisions that affect us every day, and many of these decisions are made at work. That's why socialists support building powerful organizations of producers of goods, services, and care giving—unions—that act in solidarity with customers, clients, and patients. The world of work is an important terrain where workers can challenge the power of capital and the role of markets in controlling our lives.

Socialists work to build unions that are democratic and to create a community of interest with each other and the community. Socialists also seek to expand the mission of unions, so that they are not just representing their current members. Unions must champion the solidarity philosophy of “an injury to

one is an injury to all” and promote a unionism that supports and gives aid to those who are struggling for worker rights and human rights wherever they are organizing or under threat.

Socialists advocate a union practice that reaches well beyond workplace relations and joins with people struggling in the wider community. In recent years, this type of unionism is sometimes referred to as “social unionism.” This term stands in sharp contrast to a narrower union perspective that deals only with wages and benefits and ignores the many other problems facing working people.

For socialists, bringing democracy into the economic sphere is a priority. Economic inequality condemns millions to poverty and starvation while a tiny minority dictates how the productive capacity of society will be used. Socialists, however, are interested in more than just an equitable distribution of the wealth produced by all of us. For socialists, the narrow focus on the redis-

tribution of goods after production ignores the waste, destruction, and harm done in the profit-driven production process. Under capitalism, profits, not human needs, drive production and the economy and even cloak the human decision-makers with an aura of deniability (the boss has no choice, the market dictates!).

Distribution decisions are important and worth fighting for. But until human needs, environmental justice, and sustainable development eclipse profits, we will not have a truly just and democratic society. Socialists join the fight for economic justice and equality at every opportunity, in every venue, and recognize that we will never be a democratic and just society until human priorities drive the economy. ❖

*DSA member Elaine Bernard is the executive director of the Labor & Worklife Program at Harvard Law School.*



**“For socialists, democracy isn’t just about the right to vote for representatives every two or four years. [It] is about the right to participate in decisions that affect us every day.”**

# The Socialist Party's Legacy In the U.S. Labor Movement

By Lawrence Wittner

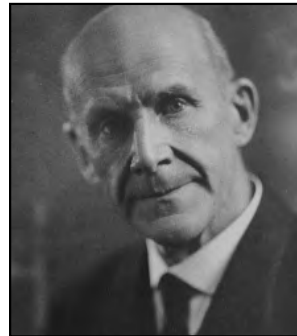
**T**he U.S. labor movement has been fueled by the passion and fire of socialists, anarchists, communists, and leftists of many types. Socialists have been active since the very beginnings of the nationally organized movement.

Probably the best-known among them is Eugene V. Debs. A moving orator and staunch union activist, Debs began his career as a leader of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and after as the founder and guiding light of the American Railway Union. During the great Pullman Strike of 1894, a powerful corporate-U.S. government alliance smashed the strike, imprisoned Debs and other union leaders, and destroyed this early industrial union. But Debs emerged from the ordeal as a popular symbol of unflinching class struggle, as well as the Socialist Party's candidate for president in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Another prominent early SP member was Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, who, with Debs, co-founded the SP's predecessor, the Social Democratic Party. Although for the most part she preferred to be independent of party labels, she was called "the most dangerous woman in America" for her success in organizing mine workers and their families to fight the mine owners. She also helped found the Industrial Workers of the World, a very radical union.

In the following decades, former SP members rose to top positions in their unions and, sometimes, in the broader labor movement. These include Walter Reuther (president, United Auto Workers and president, CIO; vice-president, AFL-CIO); his brother Victor (international director, UAW); and Sidney Hillman (president, Amalgamated Clothing Workers and vice-president, CIO). Later, prominent members of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, a predecessor to DSA, included Jerry Wurf (president, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees) and William Winpisinger (president, International Association of Machinists). As leaders of major industrial unions, they often had a significant role in Democratic Party politics, meeting with U.S. presidents and promoting important social legislation.

Walter Reuther supported the civil rights movement with union organizers and funding. He became a key backer of the National Committee for a Sane



Eugene V. Debs



Mother Jones



Walter Reuther



Sidney Hillman



William Winpisinger



Jerry Wurf



Rose Schneiderman



Fannia Cohn



Nuclear Policy (SANE) and a sharp critic of the Vietnam War. Winpisinger, a DSA honorary chair, called for economic conversion from military to civilian production and served as a co-chair of SANE.

Although the U.S. labor movement was traditionally dominated by men, socialist women broke through to the middle levels of power, particularly in the garment unions. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Fannia Cohn became a leading organizer, strike leader, and the first woman vice-president of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. Rose Schneiderman worked briefly for the ILGWU, but was even more prominent in the 1909 Uprising of the 20,000, as an agitator following the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, and as national president of the Women's Trade Union League—a post that led to her close friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt and to service in the Roosevelt administration's "Brains Trust."

Socialists were also prominent among union leaders of color. Starting in the 1920s, A. Philip Randolph organized and led the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and, in 1941, used the union's power to promote the March on Washington Movement that pressured the Roosevelt administration into creating a Fair Employment Practices Commission. In 1963, Randolph chaired the August 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, which compelled the federal government to finally enact civil rights legislation. Bayard Rustin, the great civil rights leader, joined Randolph in founding the A. Philip Randolph Institute, a constituency group within the AFL-CIO that worked to forge an alliance be-



Bayard Rustin



A. Philip Randolph

tween the racial justice movement and the labor movement. DSA member Raoul Teilhet was president of the California Federation of Teachers and a driving force behind the successful effort to legalize collective bargaining in California public education.



Raoul Teilhet

Although socialists and social democrats never produced an explicitly socialist labor movement, their influence continues as many unions look beyond "bread-and-butter" issues to social justice concerns that affect all working people. ❖

*Lawrence Wittner is professor of history emeritus at SUNY/Albany and executive secretary of the Albany County Central Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO. His latest book is a satirical novel about university corporatization and rebellion, What's Going On at UAardvark?*



### FOR FURTHER READING

- Jervis Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait*
- John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*
- Steve Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor*
- Joshua Freeman, *Working Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II*
- Ray Ginger, *The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene V. Debs*
- Elliot J. Gorn, *Mother Jones: The Most Dangerous Woman in America*
- Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*
- Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist*

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# NPC 2016 Election Statement

*Below is a condensed version of the DSA National Political Committee's statement on the fall 2016 elections, adopted August 4, 2016. The complete statement can be found online at [dsausa.org](http://dsausa.org).—Ed.*

**D**emocratic Socialists of America believes that the left must balance two crucial tasks in the November 2016 elections. On the one hand, the progressive movement must roundly defeat Donald Trump's racist, nativist, Islamophobic and misogynist presidential campaign, as well as isolate and delegitimize the far-right hate groups that his campaign has strengthened. On the other hand, the left must sustain and expand the independent electoral and social-movement capacity built by the insurgent Sanders campaign, while broadening it out in an explicitly antiracist and multiracial direction.

DSA does not normally endorse presidential candidates. We decided to encourage Bernie Sanders to run for president—and proudly participated in his movement—because he offered a political program that advanced the democratic socialist vision. Hillary Clinton's neoliberal and imperialist politics are quite different, and therefore DSA will not offer her our endorsement.

Nonetheless, DSA recognizes that a Trump “law and order” authoritarian administration would threaten the most elemental rights of immigrants, people of color, Muslims, women, workers, and the LGBTQ community—as well as bring greater repression upon #Black Lives Matter. Even bracketing the actions he could take through executive agencies and with a possibly Republican-controlled Congress, Trump's capacity to appoint at least two Supreme Court justices alone would spell disaster for many communities.

## **Dump Trump, Build a Multiracial Movement**

Many DSA chapters, particularly in swing states, will work within an emerging independent “Dump Trump” movement. Through this work, which will consist largely of registering voters in black and immigrant communities, fighting voter suppression and organizing anti-Trump rallies, DSA can increase the likelihood of a Trump defeat without working with the official Clinton campaign. While many DSA chapters in swing states will focus on Dumping Trump, many chapters in non-contested states will focus on down-ballot races that feature Bernie Democrats, as well as those of socialist candidates both within and outside of the Democratic Party. Many chapters will continue focusing on grassroots, multiracial campaigns against police

brutality, mass incarceration, and white supremacy, and for affordable housing and high quality K-12 education. Finally, while many DSAers in contested states will likely vote for Clinton, some members in non-contested states will vote for Jill Stein. DSA believes, however, that for any third party effort to be viable in the long-term, it will first focus on building the grassroots base necessary to win partisan races at the local and state level. After November 8, DSA hopes to be building left social-movement pressure on a neoliberal Clinton administration.

## **Building a Multiracial, Antiracist “Post-Bernie” Trend**

Both before and after November, DSA's more general objective will be to broaden the base of “the post-Sanders trend,” both within and outside of electoral politics, and especially beyond Sanders's largely white base. The Sanders campaign showed that millions and millions of Americans have an increasingly favorable view of the “s” word, and are ready for real, structural change. This is a base from which to build a powerful, multiracial socialist movement that fights to expand political, civil, and social rights while fighting to democratize control over the economy and social life.

Further, while it is highly unlikely that a Clinton presidency would free itself from corporate influence and champion the relatively progressive platform won by the Sanders movement, and while it is clear that the Democratic establishment remains very powerful within the party, the progressive platform fought for and won by Sanders's political revolution does provide some momentum for social movements to press for the enactment of these promises.

## **Building a Strong Socialist Left**

DSA views the November elections as just one tactical stage in a long-term effort to build an independent grassroots, antiracist, and feminist left capable of exercising political power. Given the structural biases of the federal and state electoral system in favor of two major parties, much of this activity will come through insurgent campaigns in Democratic primaries. Going forward, DSA believes that it is only by prioritizing work around issues of racial justice—broadly conceived—that the emerging Sanders trend in U.S. politics can become a multiracial, majoritarian movement. Only by legitimating antiracist and feminist democratic socialist politics and fighting for the ultimate democratization of economic and social life—what is known around the world as “democratic socialism”—can we build a society that serves the needs of the 99%.

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Big money in politics is corrupting our democracy. Big Money and greed on Wall Street has rigged our economy against working people who play by the rules.

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**COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS  
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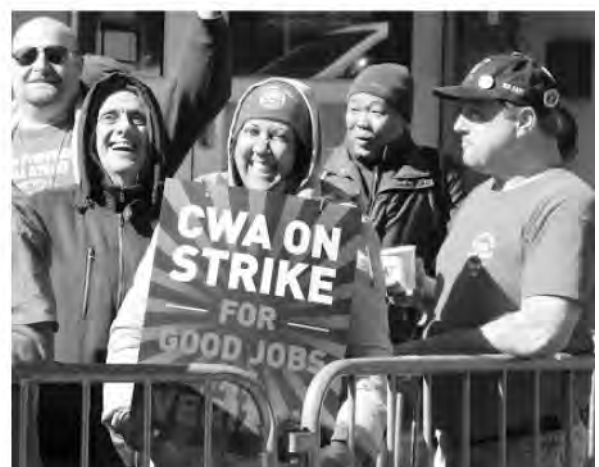
for putting it all on  
the line to protect  
good, union jobs  
for generations to  
come **for all working  
people.**

## **CWA**

**Dennis Trainor**  
Vice President, CWA D1

**Bob Master**  
Assistant to the Vice President

**Gladys Finnigan**  
Assistant to the Vice President



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lose than their  
chains, but  
we still have a  
world to win!**

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From Mark Finkel

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of Central Ohio

***The Revolution Starts at the Local Level***



# Greetings!

**From Leo Casey**

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Miami Beach, FL

In Memory of True Comrades  
**Selma Lenihan**  
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From Maxine Phillips

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A Project of the DSA Labor Network

*Talking Union is a project of the labor network of Democratic Socialists of America. We report on the activities and views of DSA and Young Democratic Socialists of America labor activists. We seek to be a place for a broad range of labor activists to discuss ideas for the renewal and strengthening of the labor movement.*

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Left, top and bottom:  
 Jay Froebe, and  
 Kayleigh Birch at  
 Bernie rally in Carson  
 Graham McNeill and  
 TeamBernie4LA with  
 mouths taped at voter  
 disenfranchisement  
 rally at LA City Hall

Top row:  
 Carol Newton, Victoria Best  
 and Bob McGowan at the  
 Keep It in the Ground march  
 Left:  
 Jack Rothman, Sean Doyle  
 voter registration West LA

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You've been warned.



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

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