

DEMOCRATIC LEFT

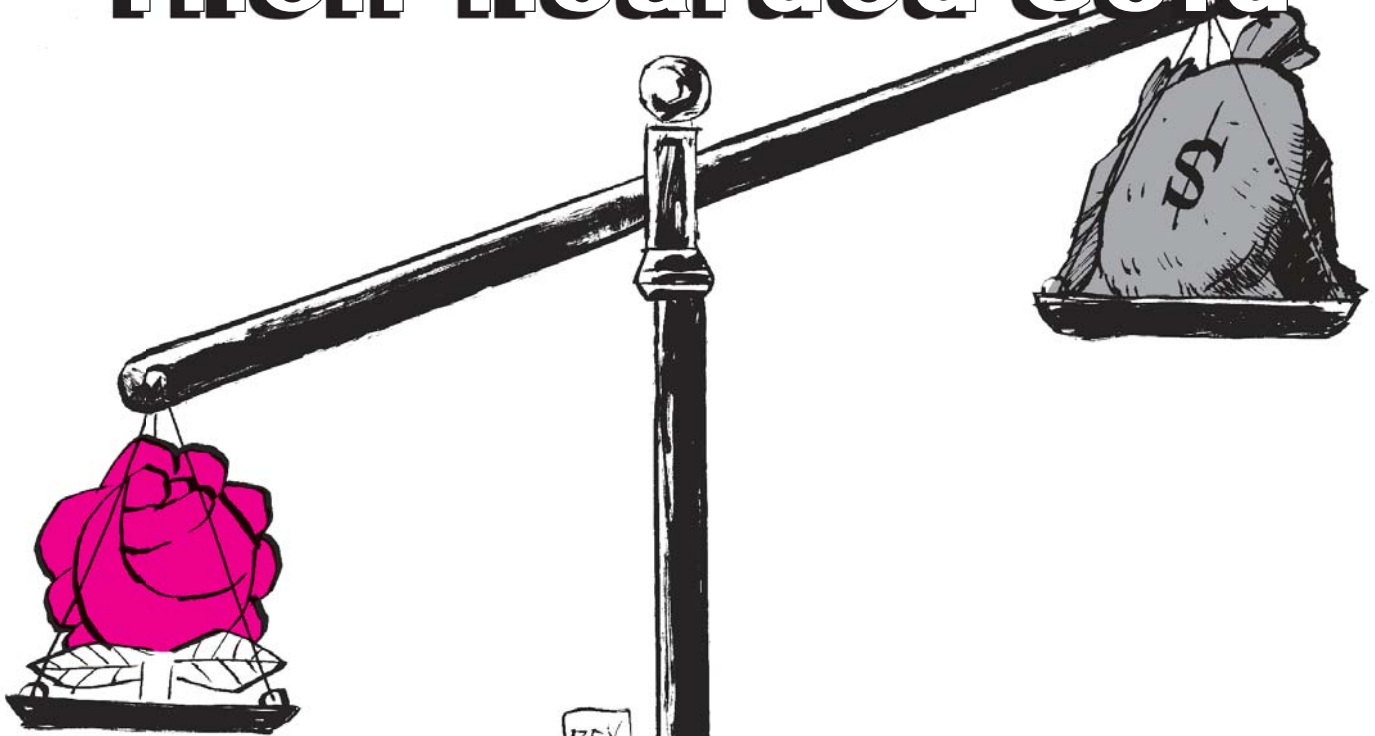
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Power Greater than Their Hoarded Gold



REV
N.D.
S.D.

From the National Director

How We Fight

By Maria Svart

What is a union? Put simply, it's a collection of workers who decide they have a common interest, an interest that is in conflict with their boss.

More precisely, it is the organization those workers form so that they can negotiate with their boss collectively, instead of individually, over the terms of their employment. They do so by threatening to disrupt their boss's accumulation of profit, by withholding their labor. But their power goes beyond just one workplace and one employer. Unions are the only enduring institutions in the United States that are dedicated to being run by and for the working class—through pooling of dues money—to advance their class interests in the economy and in the formal political arena.

Is it any wonder that the capitalist class seeks to destroy them? Or that democratic socialists defend them?

When I was at the People's Summit in June, I used my time on stage to tell the story of the 1912 Bread and Roses strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Some 20,000 textile mill workers struck for better wages, led by immigrant women speaking more than 30 languages. In the words of James Oppenheim's poem written the year before and linked to the strike, the workers wanted bread, "but we fight for roses, too."

They didn't just want to survive, they wanted to thrive. I think of our organizing as democratic socialists in much the same way: we're demanding not just a fair share of the fruits of our labor, we're demanding control of our workplaces, our institutions, our families, and our economy.



By telling that story in front of a progressive audience, I could join a radical vision of democratic control of the workplace to a vision of democratic control of society. I could also explain the central role of multi-racial working-class organization to disrupt the capitalist system and win change. It didn't hurt to connect the Bread and Roses strike with the DSA rose emoji that members use on Twitter, either!

As we go into a period where many unions are struggling to prepare for national "right to work" and other anti-union moves by the federal government, DSA is a unique place for union members and other working people to make sense of the changing economy and engage in collective action to make it more democratic.

Major sectors of the economy are being privatized or automated by the capitalist class, both of which have devastating effects. As socialists, we can analyze these trends and fight back, whether with our coworkers as union members or in solidarity as supporters. Our national Labor Working Group supports the self-organization of union members inside DSA and can serve as a focal point for those efforts.

As always, our strategy has three prongs depending on conditions and context: in this case, *offensive* struggle to organize more workers; *defensive* struggle to protect unions and the most exploitable, such as migrant workers; and *ideological* struggle to challenge the very logic that says the bosses can and should control our lives and labor. We can do better, and that's why we fight! ❖

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Cover art by Frank Reynoso

A THOUSAND STRONG

DSA held its largest-ever convention August 3-6. *Democratic Left* went to press before the convention, but you can read about it online at

dsausa.org

Check it out!

Making the Unions Strong

Joseph A. McCartin Talks with Maxine Phillips

The U.S. labor movement is facing some of its greatest assaults in more than a hundred years. On this Labor Day 2017, we asked labor historian Joseph A. McCartin what lies ahead and how labor and its allies can make gains in such a hostile environment.—Ed.

DL: When many of us think about the modern-day attacks on labor unions, we think of the way Ronald Reagan broke the Professional Air Traffic Controllers' Union (PATCO) in 1981. You've written about that strike and its effects, but do the roots of the attack go back further?

JAM: The PATCO strike was an important turning point in the fight to roll back unions and collective bargaining in the United States. No strike in the post-World War II era took place on a larger stage. No strike was broken more convincingly or produced a greater degree of demoralization across the labor movement. The air traffic controllers were a highly skilled, difficult-to-replace workforce. Not only were they fired for striking illegally (because they were federal workers), they were permanently replaced.

The effects were devastating. Private-sector employers saw that they, too, could break strikes, and private-sector workers began to fear that they, too, could suffer the fate of PATCO's strikers. All of that contributed to increasing employer aggression and a dwindling of strikes by private-sector workers: the average number of major work stoppages plummeted from 280 a year in the 1970s to 20 a year in the 2000s.

Yet, the PATCO strike wasn't the beginning of the attack on unions. That strike took place at a crucial moment when deindustrialization, deregulation, corporate reorganization, the financialization of the economy, and the privatization of public services were all gathering momentum. These developments made workers vulnerable to employer aggression post-PATCO.

But the pushback against unions had been underway at least since 1946. The Wagner Act of 1935 and wartime protections of workers' rights to unionize during the Second World War had led to a union

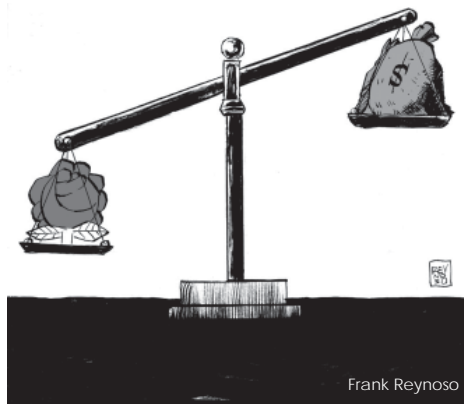
consolidation that encompassed nearly a third of all non-agricultural wage earners. But once Republicans retook the Congress in the midterm elections of 1946, they began pushing back on employers' behalf. The 1947 Taft-Hartley Act weakened Wagner Act protections and led to a stalemate in private-sector labor relations that lasted into the mid-1970s. In the intervening time, unions began to grow in the public sector (expanding tenfold between 1955-1975). In the mid-1970s, though, "stagflation" (inflation coupled with high unemployment) hit the economy. This new context allowed employers to be more aggressive in both the private and the public sectors. In many ways, we have not recovered from the offensive that started in the 1970s and has not ceased since.

DL: The United States has one of the most brutal anti-labor records in the industrialized world. There were certain laws and Supreme Court decisions that aided workers' struggles. These are now at risk. Could you tell us what's at stake?

JAM: Most people are surprised to learn that the United States had a bloodier labor history than any other economically advanced nation. Employers here have been much more resistant to unions than employers in European countries. In part, this was due to the sheer size and scope of the U.S. economy, which for much of our history defied efforts at effective regulation. The shape of our economy encouraged and rewarded employers who avoided unionization and exploited their workers. Workers in turn resisted this exploitation.

Thus, during the period of our industrialization, violence was endemic. Employers hired gunmen and used blacklists and strikebreakers. Workers often armed themselves and fought back. At the "Battle of Blair Mountain" in West Virginia in 1921, to take one example, ten thousand armed coal miners, many recently returned from the First World War, did battle with thousands of armed company guards and strikebreakers, causing the U.S. Army to intervene.

What finally brought order to our labor relations was the federal government's extension to workers of the right to organize and bargain. This began



Frank Reynoso

with the passage of the Railway Labor Act in 1926, but it really came to fruition with the New Deal and the Wagner Act of 1935. That act extended the right to organize and bargain to millions of workers. Although it excluded millions of others (agricultural, household domestic, and government workers) in order to win the approval of the segregationists who controlled key congressional committees, it was transformative in its impact. More than ten million workers joined unions who had never had the chance to do so before.

When it passed, no one was sure that the act would survive review by the Supreme Court, which had overturned many of the New Deal's key programs. But in a crucial 5-4 decision, *NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin*, the court upheld the constitutionality of the act 80 years ago in 1937.

The Wagner Act established an approach to labor relations that could be called the *workplace-government model*. Under that model, once a majority of workers decided to form a union they could negotiate a contract that covered all of their colleagues in that workplace. That contract could require everyone represented by the union to help pay for the costs of the union's representation. This model created a strong union movement coming out of the Second World War. In 1947, the Taft-Hartley Act weakened that model by allowing states to pass so-called "right to work" laws that forbade unions from negotiating contracts in which union-represented workers paid for the costs of their representation.

States all over the South immediately enacted such laws. In time, the "right to work" model spread beyond the South. Currently, 28 states have such laws. Everywhere these laws passed, the workplace government model and the unions that served as workers' vehicles under that model were weakened. This weakness contributed to the dwindling of union power in the private sector, where now only 6 percent of workers are in unions.

To some extent the labor movement was able to make up for the weakening of private-sector unions

by spreading the workplace-government model to the public sector. Beginning in the late 1950s, government workers' unions grew. By the 1970s, these unions began to win state laws that allowed them to collect "agency fees" from the workers they represented. In 1977, in *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of these fees.

Now, we are at risk of losing the workplace-government model in the public sector. Since the 1970s, anti-unionists have been arguing that state and local government workers ought not be required to pay any fees to the unions that represent them. They claim that such fees infringe on their First Amendment rights of freedom of speech, because they might not agree with their union's political positions. In the upcoming term, the U.S. Supreme Court will consider this argument in a case called *Janus v. AFSCME*. Now that Donald Trump has installed Neil Gorsuch on the court, it would appear that the court is inclined to rule against the unions. If it does, this will represent the most significant reversal of the Wagner Act's model of workplace-government since the passage of Taft-Hartley. It would dramatically weaken unions in states where they are currently a strong influence, such as New York and California, and it will open the whole labor movement to further attacks from its opponents. If *NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin* confirmed the ascendance of the New Deal labor order, *Janus v. AFSCME* might confirm its demise. The *Janus* case thus represents a serious threat to organized labor's survival.

DL: What can those of us who support unions do to aid them?

JAM: If nothing else, the depths of the current crisis and the threat of losing the gains of decades encourage us to return to first principles, to see more clearly why we need a strong labor movement, and to consider again what the goals of that movement must be. Senator Robert Wagner, author of the 1935 act, believed in and advocated for what he called "industrial democracy." He believed that political democracy would not survive in an era of mammoth corporations unless workers had power and a voice in the workplace. If work relations were not democratized, democracy itself would be snuffed out.

Democracy has clearly been in retreat in both the workplace and our politics over recent decades. The revival of political democracy will have to proceed hand in hand with the revival of democracy in work relations. We can't accomplish one without the other.

“We need to reformulate the argument for democracy at work in ways that resonate with and respond to 21st-century realities.”

continued on page 15

Teachers' Unions Defend Public Education

By Diane Ravitch

The only things that stand between the privatization movement and its destruction of public education are teachers' unions.

For the past three decades, a well-organized and wealthy alliance has created a false narrative about the “failure” of public schools and the necessity of turning children over to privately managed schools, private schools, religious schools, and even cyber schools. Their stated goal is “school choice,” but their true goal is to redirect public funding to private hands. As Rupert Murdoch memorably said, the \$500 billion public education market is a market ripe for entrepreneurs.

Free public education—open to all and democratically controlled—is one of the pillars of our democracy. The privatization movement is led by billionaire-funded nonprofits such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Edythe and Eli Broad Foundation, and the right-wing Walton Family Foundation. Hedge fund managers, equity investors, technology companies, and Wall Street have donated millions of dollars to create new charter schools and to aid state and local political candidates who support them. The great appeal of charter schools to entrepreneurs and Wall Street is that more than 90% of them are non-union. Every Republican governor and legislature has endorsed charter schools, and many have enacted voucher programs, despite the specific prohibitions in their state constitutions against sending public money to religious schools.

Some Democratic governors—such as Andrew Cuomo in New York and Dannel Malloy in Connecticut—have been as friendly to charters as their Republican counterparts, because they rely on hedge funders for campaign cash. Behind most of the anti-public school, anti-teacher, anti-union legislation is the corporate-sponsored, right-wing American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which fights for deregulation of schools, the environment, the workplace, and gun ownership.

The selling of privatization began with the claim that U.S. public education was failing and obsolete. Since publication of the report called “A Nation at Risk” in 1983 by a Reagan-era commission, we have been told repeatedly that our public schools are failing and that we are falling behind in global competition because of them. The narrative of failure has been echoed by captains of industry, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and even the Council on Foreign Relations, which issued a report in 2012 saying that the public schools were so terrible that they were a “threat to national security.”

All of these claims are false. Based on data from the U.S. Department of Education website, the facts are these:

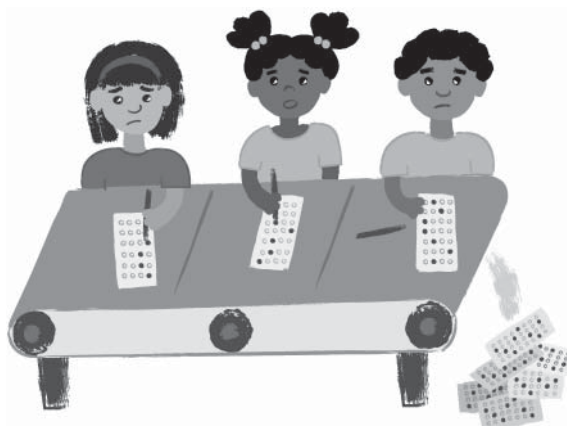
1. As of 2013, test scores for white students, black students, Hispanic students, and Asian students were the highest in U.S. history. The

scores are from the only federal test that has longitudinal data, the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Scores leveled off in 2015, possibly because of the long-term negative impact of President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind legislation, which prioritized testing over all other school activities.

2. High school graduation rates are the highest they have ever been in U.S. history. About 82% of all students graduate within four years; with six years, graduation rates exceed 90%.

3. Dropout rates are the lowest they have ever been in U.S. history.

Because they can’t get much support from national assessments, privatizers love to point to international test scores to bemoan the state of U.S. education. U.S. students rank about average on these tests. What privatizers ignore is that U.S. students never ranked high on international tests. When the first such tests were given to national samples in 1964, twelve nations took the test in mathematics. American seniors placed dead last. Our eighth graders were next to last. Yet in the fifty-plus years that



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followed, the United States surpassed the other eleven nations in gross domestic product, economic productivity, cultural and technological innovation, military might, and by every other measure. The international tests have no predictive value.

What standardized tests—including the international ones—do measure is family income. No matter whether it is a state test, a national test, the SAT or ACT, or an international test, those with the top scores are the most affluent, and those at the bottom are the poorest. The SAT posts a list each year showing the correlation between test scores and family income. As family income rises, so do test scores.

Poverty is the reason behind our consistently mediocre international test scores and behind the low scores recorded in districts such as Detroit, Cleveland, and Washington, D.C. The United States has the highest rate of child poverty of any advanced nation in the world. From poor maternal health care to lack of quality preschool programs, the United States lags far behind other industrialized countries while outstripping them in resources.

Ignoring the well-documented causes of low performance on tests in school, privatizers target “bad” teachers and “failing” schools. It’s no coincidence that the overwhelming majority of such teachers and schools are located in impoverished neighborhoods where they enroll high proportions of children of color, children with disabilities, and English language learners. In red states, hostile legislatures have eliminated collective bargaining rights, making it easier to defund public schools and transfer public money to charter schools and vouchers.

The privatizers say that “education is the civil rights issue of our time,” and they present themselves as crusaders for civil rights when they demand that teachers be fired, public schools closed, and that privately managed charter schools and vouchers be provided. This was the mantra of Barack Obama and his education secretary, Arne Duncan, both cheerleaders for the charter school movement. And it is now the mantra of Donald Trump and Betsy DeVos, who speak the same language about “saving poor kids from failing schools” by funding private and religious schools. To advance this right-wing agenda, they must cripple teachers’ unions. Why? Because teachers’ unions are the most effective force to repel attacks on public schools and on the teaching profession itself.

The privatizers have launched court challenges—in California, Minnesota, and New Jersey—to strip away teacher tenure, which is not a guarantee of a lifetime job but a guarantee of due process in the event of termination. They have attacked seniority, which honors the value of experience. They

have lavished millions of dollars to bring untrained amateurs into teaching via Teach for America.

State after state has enacted hostile legislation that strips teachers of professional autonomy and of job security in a low-paying profession. With Trump as president and DeVos as secretary of education, the attack on public schools and on unions will deepen. Experienced teachers are leaving their careers behind, because the working conditions and pay are intolerable. Enrollments in education schools have sharply declined. This situation does not concern the privatizers, because their long-term goal is to cut costs by replacing teachers with technology.

None of this is good news for U.S. education. Students need teachers who are experienced and well prepared. Technology should be a tool, not a replacement for teachers. Teachers need the support of strong unions that will protect their rights and the funding of their schools.

The privatizers want the public to believe that resistance is futile. But teachers and parents are fighting back. In New York, activists have gained political power by opting out of state testing. In red states, activists are forming alliances to inform the public and oust inept and abusive political leaders.

Without resistance, the U.S. public is in danger of losing the teaching profession and public education. The teachers’ unions are the point of the spear. They have the resources and staff to educate, activate, and resist the privatization movement. And that is why the corporate reform movement has put a target on their backs and is busily engaged in opening non-union schools.

The battle to save public education from privatization should enlist everyone, not just teachers and parents. Whether you have children in public school, whether your children are grown, whether you have no children, we must work together to preserve and improve the promise of equal opportunity of education. ❖

Diane Ravitch is a historian of education and research professor of education at New York University. She is the author, among other works, of Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools and founder, with Anthony Cody, of the Network for Public Education networkforpubliceducation.org.



Pipeline Issue Divides House of Labor

By Paul Garver

The ever-fragile “Turtles and Teamsters” coalition of environmentalists and labor unions that emerged almost 20 years ago cracked even further during the fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), threatening both the environmental movement and the labor movement. This rift has only been exacerbated by Donald Trump’s election.

Last September, even as progressive organizations mobilized to support the struggle of the Standing Rock Sioux against the completion of the pipeline, AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka called upon President Barack Obama to allow pipeline construction to continue because the pipeline “is providing over 4,500 high-quality, family supporting jobs.”

Within days, the Labor Coalition for Community Action issued a statement in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux and their allies, linking the pipeline struggle to other struggles of “many communities of color and marginalized populations, whether it be fighting for lead-free water in Flint or uncontaminated water in North Dakota.”

The coalition is a child of the AFL-CIO, formed to advance the organization’s political agenda within specific sectors of working people. It includes the six primary AFL-CIO Constituency Groups: the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, and Pride at Work. For the coalition to publicly and directly oppose the AFL-CIO president was unprecedented.

The more progressive unions within the AFL-CIO (National Nurses United, the Communications Workers of America, the Amalgamated Transit Union, and the American Postal Workers Union, (which had also endorsed Bernie Sanders for president) had already come out in opposition to the pipeline. Their stance triggered an angry letter to Trumka from Sean McGarvey, president of North America’s Building Trades Unions (NABTU). Mc-

Garvey’s five-page letter, copied to all AFL-CIO union presidents, passionately argued the case for opposing Obama’s suspension of the pipeline. But the main thrust of his letter was to denounce the presidents of the four AFL-CIO unions that opposed the pipeline, accusing them of allying with environmental extremists and professional agitators as well as with the Standing Rock Sioux tribe at the expense of genuine AFL-CIO members. He called them an “outdated, lowest common denominator group of so-called labor organizations.”

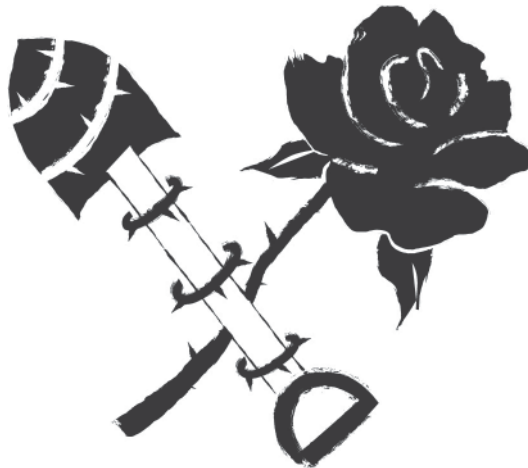
The next day, Trumka issued his own statement in support of the pipeline. Although, as a former coal miners’ union president, he may well share those convictions, those in the four unions targeted considered his statement inappropriate, given the virulence of McGarvey’s personal attack on his fellow AFL-CIO presidents. Trumka could have remained silent or issued a more balanced statement expressing the divided views on the Executive Council.

The internal conflict within the AFL-CIO on how to preserve and create good union jobs during the transition from a fossil-fuel economy to one based on renewable sources

threatens to paralyze organized labor for decades to come. Over time, more sustainable jobs would be created through renewable energy and infrastructure projects. This argument is well advocated by the Labor Network for Sustainability, whose position papers can be found at labor4sustainability.org.

However, leaders of building trades unions remain skeptical, and not without reason. Obama’s promises of a broad Green Jobs program was not fulfilled during his administration, and Trump’s empty promises of millions of jobs in the coal, oil, and energy transportation industries attract many of its members. The larger number of dispersed jobs that would be created by moving toward a sustainable economy seem hard for unions to organize and may often be held by undocumented laborers.

This internal conflict within labor over DAPL reveals a fault line between divergent conceptions of



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the political role of organized labor. This rift continues and threatens to paralyze effective resistance by organized labor to Trump's virulently anti-union and anti-people agenda. Will organized labor, and specifically the leadership of the AFL-CIO, join the common front against the right-wing coup or will it not? The AFL-CIO constituency groups and progressive union leaders want to align organized labor with a broad social movement for economic and climate justice. If labor solidarity and climate jus-

tice are able to merge in a single movement, workers and the planet have a fighting chance. If not, the remnants of organized labor may disappear even faster than the melting glaciers.

Paul Garver is a retired labor organizer and founding member of DSA. As a member of the Pittsburgh New American Movement's People's Power Project, he helped establish the Pennsylvania Alliance for Jobs and Energy. ❖

NY Renews: Building a Labor-Environmental Justice Coalition

By Mark Schaeffer

New York City and Albany DSA chapters are members of New York Renews (NYRenews.org) a coalition formed in 2015 to bring unions, environmentalists, and communities of color to work together based on their common interests. NYR is dedicated to a just transition to 100% renewable energy in NY State, living-wage jobs, and justice for communities on the front lines of climate disruption and toxic pollution and for workers displaced from jobs dependent on fossil fuels. Crucial to the coalition are commitments to fair labor standards and access to jobs and funding for communities of color as well as the understanding that massive investments in clean energy would create a jobs bonanza.

NY Renews extends beyond the usual green suspects, such as 350.org, Catskill Mountain-Keeper, Environmental Advocates, and the Sierra Club to New York branches of the Communications Workers of America, the Service Employees International Union, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the Amalgamated Transit Union, the Transport Workers Union, the United Auto Workers, the New York State Nurses Association, the New York State Union of Teachers, and community organizations such as NY Working Families, ALIGN, Citizen Action, Communities for Change, DSA, El Puente, the New York State Labor-Religion Coalition, Make the Road NY, the NYC Environmental Justice Alliance, PUSH Buffalo, and UPROSE. As one of its first activities, NY Renews drafted

the Climate and Communities Protection Act, which passed the NY State Assembly on its first try in 2016 and again in 2017, but was kept off the floor by the GOP leadership of the NY State Senate.

The unions, environmental, and community groups joining to found NY Renews agreed on nine "Points of Unity."

Here are some highlights:

All people have a right to make a living on a living planet. We can address both the climate and inequality crises with the same policies. Climate change is a serious threat to all, especially workers, people of color, seniors, youth, and the poor. Unchecked corporate power jeopardizes a sustainable future—we support democratic and public control of the energy and finance sectors.

We support rapid movement toward 100% clean renewable energy. The jobs created must be good jobs that respect workers' right to organize; jobs must be accessible to those who have been excluded and discriminated against and climate-vulnerable frontline communities. Workers in carbon-intensive industries should be guaranteed work in new industries. We must ensure community participation and oversight in decisionmaking. ❖

Mark Schaeffer, a founding member of DSA, serves on the DL Editorial Advisory Committee and the NY Renews Policy Development Committee.

Labor Lessons from Scandinavia

By George Lakey

A century ago, the Nordic countries were in such bad shape that masses of their people emigrated to the United States and Canada. Scandinavians had extreme inequality, major poverty, and faux democracies run by their economic elites.

Today, they are at the top of the international charts, playing tag with each other for “firsts” in individual freedom, income equality, shared abundance, and real democracy. Fierce class struggle made the difference. In the 1920s and 1930s, Swedes and Norwegians pushed their 1 percent out of dominance to invent what economists call “the Nordic model.”

None of the countries are utopias devoid of racial, ethnic, or economic conflict. In formerly homogeneous Norway, one person in five is foreign born; mosques and head scarves are part of Oslo’s streetscape. Sweden has taken in more refugees from the Middle East per capita than any European country.

Even though the majority in each country continues to support the presence of foreigners, there is pushback from the right wing, especially marked in Denmark. However, the not-so-secret strategy for success in resisting the right has been unity at the grassroots. What does the labor movement do when tens of thousands of Polish workers come to log Norwegian forests on short-term visas? Organize them!

In the 1920s, the then-communist-led Norwegian Labor Party ignored Lenin’s advice, united with family farmers, and won. Study groups sponsored by cops, union locals, civic associations, and radical students shared the Marxist insight that class domination survives if working people can be kept divided.

Their answers to division included campaigns, coalitions, and the cooperative movement. The synergy could be seen in Sweden when housing cooperatives were formed that hired construction workers to build new housing, and credit unions financed the projects.

Activists in the United States worry that U.S. labor is too weak, compared with the Scandinavian

unions that did much of the heavy lifting in bringing about a power shift. We mustn’t forget that Nordic unions also suffered their ups and downs.

Although the U.S. labor movement is currently in decline, it, too, could come back. The growing power of labor pre–First World War was curbed in the 1920s and then roared back to new heights under the impact of the Great Depression. We may be seeing the beginnings of such a comeback despite the current dismal state of organized labor.

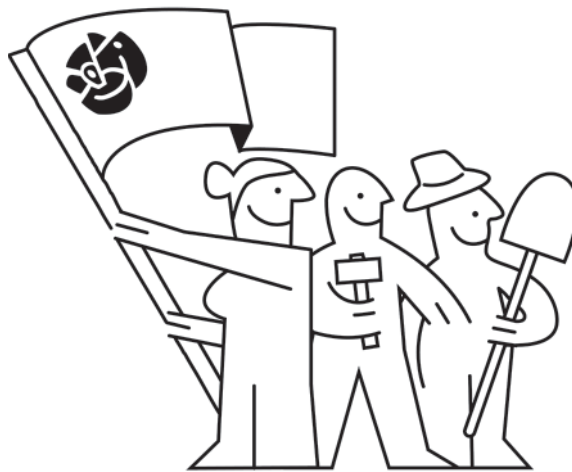
We’ve already seen an increased level of struggle. Actions on immigrant rights, specific campaigns such as Fight for Fifteen and Medicare for All, and the burgeoning cooperative movement are hopeful signs.

Scandinavian workers fully expected repression as a response to their growing movements; they knew who controlled the state and its troops. Correspondingly, they counted on what’s now called civil resistance or nonviolent direct action to win that

round of the class war. Most dramatically, in Sweden and Norway, direct action forced a power shift and the opportunity to invent the world’s most just economic model to date.

The Scandinavians had a cynical view of political parties. The unions saw that the existing parliamentary parties were accountable to the economic elite. That led to two fundamental strategic decisions: (1) they didn’t expect to be well represented by a political party they didn’t control, and (2) they battled on strategic terrain where grassroots power was the strongest, such as the streets. When it became useful for the movement to have political parties to represent it, activists created their own parties to lead their governments. After mass direct action forced a power shift, the new governments could implement the movement’s program. ❖

George Lakey has lived and taught in Scandinavia and led over 1,500 social change workshops on five continents. His most recent book is Viking Economics: How the Scandinavians got it right and we can, too (Melville House, 2016; paper, 2017).



James Thacher

Every Day Is Labor Day for DSA

By Dan DiMaggio

We have two Labor Days in the United States: one in September (first celebrated in 1882) and one in May (commemorating the Haymarket Massacre of 1886). For members of DSA chapters throughout the country, support for labor goes on all year round. Here's a round-up of recent local activity.

Washington, D.C.: The chapter has been supporting a campaign by the workers' center Many Languages One Voice to get five workers reinstated to their jobs. Matchbox Pizza fired the workers for organizing to address low wages and conditions in the kitchen. DSA members have picketed the restaurant with them and participated in dinnertime disruption actions. The chapter also co-sponsored a DC Jobs with Justice training along with the DC Metro Labor Council, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689, and the Washington Teachers' Union. Trainees learned how to develop and run campaigns with community and labor allies.

Burlington, Vermont: The Burlington Organizing Committee has rallied with teachers against attacks on their collective bargaining rights, marched with the immigrant worker organization Migrant Justice as part of the Milk with Dignity campaign, and picketed with AT&T strikers.

New York City: The New York City chapter has established a labor solidarity working group that is focused on a solidarity campaign with Latino warehouse workers at B&H Photo Video. The 300 workers voted to join the United Steelworkers in November 2015 and are still fighting for a first contract.

In January the company announced plans to shut down its two Brooklyn warehouses and move them to New Jersey. DSA members have organized weekly pickets in front of the store on Friday and Sunday afternoons with signs that say, "Keep Jobs in NYC" and "No Contract, No Peace." Members have also disrupted press events and the Optic conference in early June, of which B&H was a major sponsor. Organizers from the Laundry Workers Center, which led the initial organizing drive at B&H, have spoken at several of our chapters and participated in a panel on union organizing at the Left Forum along with NYC Labor Chapter co-chair Bianca Cunningham, who was part of the successful campaign to unionize Verizon Wireless stores in Brooklyn in 2014. NYC DSA members also organized benefit screenings of *Harlan County, USA* and *The Hand That Feeds*. The latter film covers a union drive by the Laundry Workers Center at local deli chain Hot & Crusty. Chapter members also organized a comedy fundraiser for the B&H workers in June.

Columbus, Ohio: In addition to organizing a presence on the picket line for all three days of the AT&T Mobility strike, in late May the chapter joined a picket by Teamsters Local 413 at the 7-Up plant, where 68 warehouse and delivery workers struck over efforts to undermine their grievance system and put them on an inferior health insurance plan.

Chicago, Illinois: Chicago DSA held a teach-in on May 13 titled "Labor 101: What is the labor movement?" The workshop provided an overview of U.S. labor history,



B&H rally, New York City. Photo by Brandon Hauer.

basic information on what unions do, the relationship between organized labor and the rest of the working class, and why socialists see unions as critical vehicles for working-class power. Fifty people attended. Organizers and workers involved in several campaigns also spoke, including a charter school organizer and an editor from the *Chicago Reader*, where workers are embroiled in a contract fight.

Chicago DSAers are also supporting Illinois public-sector workers who are fighting for a new contract with the state. The chapter had a brief seminar during which AFSCME members

explained what's at stake in their contract battle and have followed up by distributing flyers outside of Department of Human Services offices to ask people who rely on public services to call Governor Rauner's office and demand that he return to the bargaining table.

On International Women's Day in March, chapter members supported the Amalgamated Transit Union locals by handing out flyers at eight El stops asking commuters to call the president of the Chicago Transit Authority board. Reports are that the call-in day crashed the switchboard.

Los Angeles: The Los Angeles DSA Sanctuary Working Group is working closely with workers centers to reach out to defend immigrant workers rights.

Hundreds of activists joined DSA-LA outside Mayor Garcetti's celebration venue to protest his inaction, and some DSA-LA members were able to interrupt Garcetti during his victory speech on multiple occasions. As Garcetti's security forcibly removed DSA-LA members, the socialist organizers began to chant "ICE out of LA!"

This action was widely covered by local media, from the *Los Angeles Times* to *Variety* magazine. And just two weeks after the DSA-LA action, Garcetti signed Executive Directive No. 20, a progressive executive policy document that begins to address some of the problems that immigrant rights groups in Los Angeles had been trying to bring up to the mayor for years.

The scale and effectiveness of the Garcetti action



Twin Cities DSA. Courtesy of Ian Ringgenberg

drew the attention of local immigrants' rights organizations and workers' centers. Since March, our members began to support community partners like the National Day Laborers Organizing Network (NDLON) to continue plugging in DSA-LA members to local actions and rallies for immigrants' rights.

Eventually, the working group members were invited to the planning meetings of the ICE Out of LA coalition, composed of Los Angeles community members, immigrants' rights organizations, legal advocates, and workers' centers, devoted to fighting deportations and criminalization of immigrant workers. Participation with the coalition has allowed the DSA Sanctuary Working Group to develop closer connections with these community partners.

Bay Area: DSA in the Bay Area is working closely with the California Nurses Association and National Nurses United to gain a single payer health care system for California. Although blocked temporarily in the legislature, this effort will probably go to the ballot in 2018.

California: DSA chapters in East Bay, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and others joined with Cosecha and workers in the strikes, boycotts, and other actions for immigrant rights on May 1. The strike in Los Angeles was smaller than in 2006, but still drew some 30,000 people into the streets. ❖

Dan DiMaggio is a member of the South Brooklyn chapter of NYC DSA and is the assistant editor of Labor Notes. You can reach him at dan.dimaggio@gmail.com.



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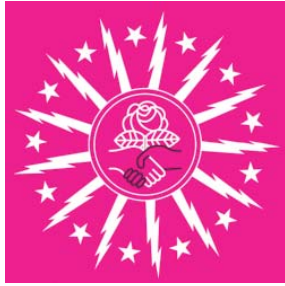
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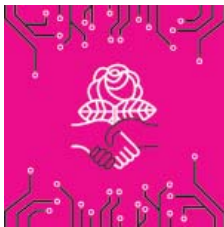
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DSAers Support AT&T Mobility

By Meghan Brophy

On Friday May 19, more than 40,000 AT&T Mobility workers in 36 states kicked off a three-day strike, and on each day of that strike, more than 200 DSAers were at 60 picket lines throughout the country.

This was not only one of the largest strikes of retail workers in U.S. history but the first strike at AT&T Mobility and the first large-scale strike in the wireless industry. Whether they work in retail, call centers, or as technicians, AT&T Mobility workers are represented by the Communication Workers of America (CWA).

For many DSA members, this was their first picket line. By walking the picket line and distributing flyers, our members were able to talk to customers about the issues raised by AT&T Mobility workers and encourage them not to shop in the stores.

The three-day strike took place during contract negotiations, which continue at this writing in late June. AT&T Mobility workers face rising healthcare costs and stagnant wages even as AT&T's profits have risen. It is the tenth-largest company in the United States. Workers see the future in AT&T's outsourcing of many call center jobs.

In New York City, DSA members joined workers at eight AT&T Mobility stores to picket throughout the weekend. Zack Kelaty, a student at Hunter College and organizer with NYC Young Democratic Socialists, joined workers as they walked off the job Friday afternoon in Manhattan.

"Being able to go out on the picket line in solidarity with AT&T workers is exactly why I joined DSA," he said. "That kind of direct action where we can show up and take a meaningful stand is so important. Being a socialist is not just about sitting in smoky bars arguing over Marx and Gramsci. We

need real change, and that means real action."

In Manchester, New Hampshire, DSA members stood with striking workers at their local store. "We're not even in a union ourselves, but we all know the importance of literally standing with our fellow workers against capital," said Paul Goodspeed, New Hampshire DSA. "Holding picket signs and standing with the CWA local was a simple, yet powerful, form of expressing solidarity."

On the West Coast, the AT&T strikers served as inspiration for DSAers thinking about their own workplaces. "It felt really empowering for us in the East Bay DSA to be on the picket lines, both for those of us who are union members and for those who had little familiarity with strikes or unions," said Robbie Nelson, East Bay DSA, "Going forward, I would like to see our chapter (and others across the country) develop rapid-response networks for strike support, in addition to supporting DSA members in unions and encouraging other members to organize their own workplaces."

At several stores in different locations, striking workers pointed out to DSA allies the confusion of managers who were trying (and often failing) to figure out some of the sales software the workers use every day. By going on strike, even for three days, AT&T Mobility workers demonstrated how they, not the CEO and other top executives, make the stores run.

Since 1947, the use of strikes by labor has declined, as unions have had to become ever more creative in their opposition to exploitation. "No one thinks that a three-day strike will bring a company that makes over a billion dollars in profit a month to its knees," said Zelig Stern, an organizer for CWA District 1, speaking as co-chair of NYC DSA.

"Nevertheless, a clear message was sent: Mobility workers are ready to fight. They have the power to stop the flow of profit. AT&T management will have to listen to them. Although strikes may just deal with a specific employer, they are a glimpse of the kind of struggle we need on a larger scale to topple this system. It's our job as socialists to help win each of those battles so that our class can win the war." ❖

Meghan Brophy is a member of New York City DSA and Student-Worker Solidarity (USAS Local 12) at Barnard College.



Photo by Chi Anunwa

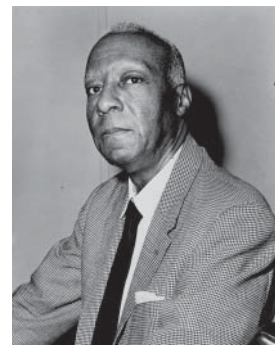


Making Unions Strong / continued from page 4

DSA has a special role to play here. Its vision has always recognized the inseparability of political democracy and democracy in work relations. Its members, and especially the young people who have been drawn into its ranks over the past two years, are well positioned to help reframe and update that old vision of industrial democracy, which has become an anachronism in this world of Uber-ized “independent contractors,” global supply chains, precarious workers, hedge funds, and private-equity billionaires. We need to reformulate the argument for democracy at work in ways that resonate with and respond to 21st-century realities. And we need to rebuild worker organizations that can help achieve that democracy. We can all play a part in that effort with our money, our time, our intellectual energy, our spirit. It has never been more important that each of put our shoulders to the wheel than it is now.

Joseph A. McCartin is professor of history and executive director of the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor at Georgetown University. He is the author of Collision Course: Ronald Reagan, the Air Traffic Controllers, and the Strike that Changed America. ❖

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table of nature,
there are no
reserved seats.
You get what
you can take, and
you keep what
you can hold.*



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A. PHILIP RANDOLPH

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Labor History

A Woman to Reckon With *The Vision and Legacy of Frances Perkins*

By Harlan Baker

“At the time she was a socialist she couldn’t vote,” says Chris Cash about Frances Perkins. “It was no secret she was a democratic socialist. It was her camp.”

Cash does educational outreach at the Frances Perkins Center, which is tucked away in a small alley off the main street in the picturesque town of Damariscotta, Maine. Although the center doesn’t highlight Perkins’s socialist sympathies, it aims to educate the public on her legacy, which was inspired by her socialist sympathies.

Perkins, the first woman ever to hold a cabinet position, was secretary of labor during all of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s terms and pushed through the elements of the New Deal that provided protection for many U.S. workers.

Her early life held no hint of future radicalism. Perkins was born in 1880 in Boston to a conservative New England family and spent her summers at the family’s homestead in Maine. She attended Mt. Holyoke College and graduated in 1902. There, under the guidance of Professor Annah May Soule, she was exposed to the dire working conditions in the factories in nearby Holyoke. She joined the Socialist Party sometime during a stay in Philadelphia (1907-1909) and, despite leaving the party to become a Democrat, never lost her passion for fighting for the rights of labor.

On March 25, 1911 she happened to be near the site of the Triangle shirtwaist fire, where she witnessed young women jumping to their deaths to escape the flames. Later, she would say that the New Deal was born on that day.

She became a tireless advocate of workplace safety—particularly fire laws—and labor law reform. In 1933, when Roosevelt invited her to join his cabinet, she outlined a set of programs as conditions for her acceptance of the job. These included a 40-hour work week, a federal minimum wage, workers’ compensation, abolition of child labor, direct federal aid to the states for unemployment relief, Social Security,

a revitalized federal employment service; and universal health insurance.

Kirsten Downey, one of her biographers, is among many who have noted that elements of the New Deal were in fact socialist ideals. All of Perkins’s priorities were enacted into law with the notable exception of universal health insurance. Obstruction from southern legislators kept

many protections from being extended to domestic workers and farm laborers, battles that are still being fought.

Today, says Cash, “People over 60 usually know who she was,” but “most of the time people walk into the center and say, ‘I didn’t know who she was or that she had a connection to Maine.’”

Perkins was a modest woman. “She didn’t care if other people took credit,” remarks Cash. “She was interested in the big picture and what they could get accomplished.

“She compromised if it meant getting legislation passed. When the American Medical Association

threatened to kill Social Security unless the universal health care provision was removed from the bill, she was willing to live with that in order for Social Security to pass.”

Many left-leaning critics of the New Deal have pointed out that the program saved the capitalist system at a time when the socialist movement was gaining strength in America and fell far short of what socialists proposed. Proponents of the New Deal argue that improvements in the lives of working people who were devastated by the Great Depression saved thousands of lives and gave people hope.

New Deal programs have been under attack for the past several decades, and the current administration is determined to roll back all of them. Perhaps the best way to pay tribute to this remarkable woman would be to campaign and win her unattained goal: Medicare for All. ❖

DSAer Harlan Baker is a former Maine legislator and currently teaches public speaking at the University of Southern Maine.



Courtesy of the Frances Perkins Center



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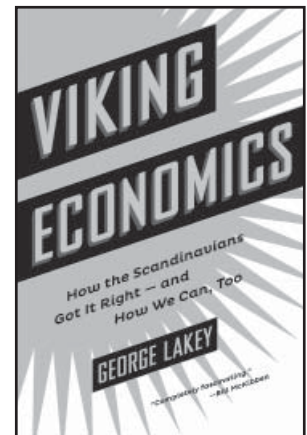
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From **GEORGE LAKEY**, co-founder of Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT.org), instigator of the Global Non-violent Action Database (<http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>), columnist for

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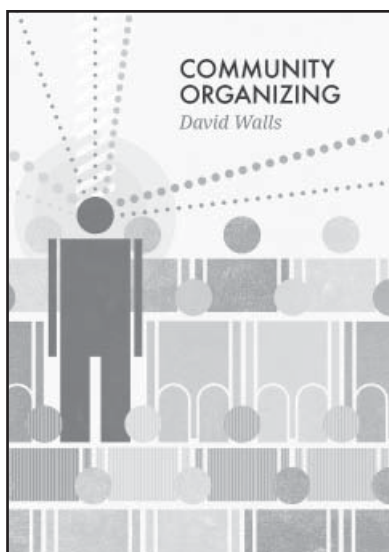
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