

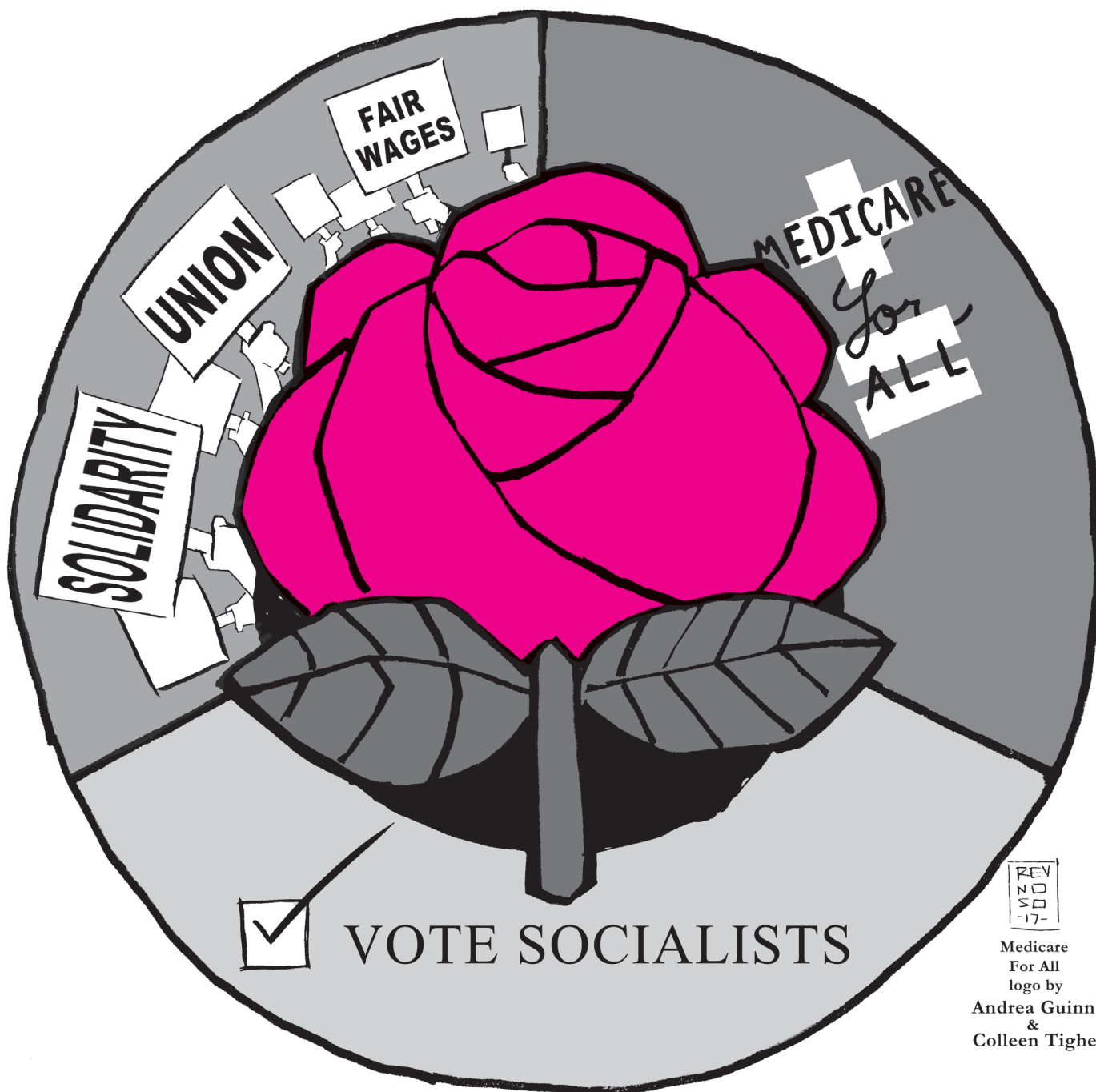
DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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Medicare
For All
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&
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From the National Director

Let's Seize the Moment

By Maria Svart

I'm sitting on a panel on Medicare for All (M4A) at the Women's Convention in Detroit in October. And I'm realizing again how critical DSA's work is in this moment. There are 4,000 women at this conference. Probably a few hundred of them identify as socialists.



I connect M4A to the larger crisis of care caused by neoliberal capitalism. For example, women provide unpaid care in the home because we lack public programs such as universal child care and healthcare as well as living wages. And women are largely the ones providing low-paid healthcare in the racially stratified labor market, exploited by private insurance, hospital, home care, and nursing home corporations. I say to the women in the room that we need to build independent political power from the ground up if we are to have any hope of moving from these crushing individual burdens to collective liberation.

During this conversation and in others, I bring our socialist values and ideas to the convention's liberal audience, and I am reminded of my own journey from being a twenty-something mainstream feminist who yearned for more to finding a class analysis and becoming a socialist feminist in Democratic Socialists of America.

Our recognition of the complexities of class, race, and gender in the United States is one thing that drew me to DSA. Our strategic approach to politics—respecting local conditions and, critically, recognizing the need to build grassroots power in order to win—is another.

November 7, Election Day, proved that organizing works. Movements are tested in unpredictable ways, such as after a police shooting or disaster cap-

italism, as well as predictable ones, such as in the election cycle. With allies like Our Revolution and the shoe leather and cell phones of our members, we supported DSAers running as Democrats, Greens, and independents, depending on political context. We helped elect 16 of them to local office in places from Montana to Tennessee, including unseating the Republican whip of the Virginia House.

I believe our ability to hold this degree of nuance is critical to our success. I have never been satisfied with the idea of simply being ideologically correct. I want to win. And winning on a mass scale in politics, workplaces, and communities, will require building a much larger socialist organization than what we have now. It must be an organization that welcomes a wide range of new people rather than shuts them out. It must be one that is politically independent but that fights alongside mass movements.

What does it mean to build such an organization? For one thing, it means learning to openly disagree in a comradely way. In our toxic culture, it's not hard to get angry with each other. The difficult question is whether we make conflict constructive or destructive. When I was a union organizer, I saw that members had a choice between standing together against their boss and across their differences or losing the union. We face that same choice now.

DSA members come from diverse backgrounds and life experiences, and you can never truly walk in another person's shoes. In fact, not one of us has all the answers. But within our range of politics, we all recognize the centrality of contesting for state power, of practicing democracy as a means and viewing it as an end, and of using the transformative nature of collective action to build multiracial working-class power.

We may not all think the same, but we turn out to be mostly on the same page when it comes to priorities for action. A spring 2017 membership survey foreshadowed the same three top priorities chosen in August by our convention delegates: 47% listed health care, 27% electoral work, and 25% labor solidarity. This degree of agreement doesn't exclude differences that naturally arise—how can they not?—but it keeps us from becoming paralyzed. We have a world to win.

That's why I've chosen to devote my life to working-class organization, first in the labor movement

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Cover art by Frank Reynoso

DSA Convention Adopts National Political Priorities

By Joseph M. Schwartz

At the Democratic Socialists of America's bi-annual convention in August, some 800 delegates representing more than a hundred active chapters set three national priorities: the fight for Medicare for All (M4A); the revival of a strong labor presence both within and without DSA; and the election of open socialists to office. In the run-up to the crucial 2018 congressional and state legislative elections, DSA hopes to challenge the Democratic Party's failure to offer a coherent economic justice program as alternative to the reactionary Trump regime.

The political and organizational priorities are not meant to be a laundry list of every struggle in which our chapters engage. They represent campaigns in which national staff and leadership can focus our limited national resources and change the political equation from a zero-sum game. Even in presidential elections, the majority of working class voters of all races do not vote; but as Bernie Sanders's presidential primary campaign demonstrated, working-class voters of all races can be mobilized around an agenda that would make healthcare, higher education, and a living wage basic social rights. These programs would be funded by progressive taxation and major cuts in military spending.

Medicare for All

The convention decided that a national Medicare for All campaign could turn the tide against Republican attacks on the Affordable Care Act (ACA), Medicaid, and Medicare. Some 50% of the country is covered by Medicaid and Medicare. But we can only provide high-quality health coverage for all if the government takes over the private healthcare insurance industry completely. Most advanced democracies have some form of universal health care (not just insurance, but publicly funded coverage). However, in the United States this is a profoundly radical (or "non-reformist") program in that it both institutionalizes a new social right and "decommod-

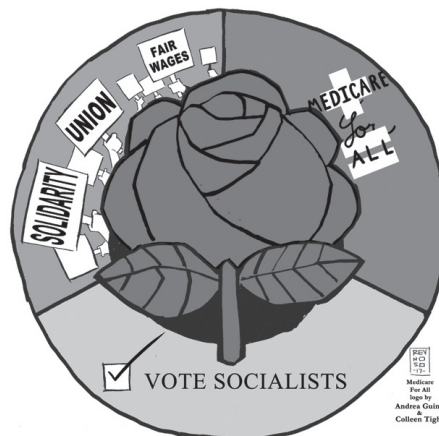
ifies" (takes out of the private sector) health insurance.

The private healthcare sector is politically and psychologically entrenched in the U.S. psyche. If we are to achieve a national single-payer program, we must transform U.S. politics. Thus, DSA groups around the country are canvassing in favor of the basic principles of single-payer in order to change how the public sees health care. DSA chapters are petitioning in favor of the five basic principles that constitute a robust M4A plan: a comprehensive single program; comprehensive coverage (including mental health coverage, the full range of reproductive health services, drugs, dental, and vision care); free service at the point of service, funded by progressive forms of taxation; universal coverage (for all U.S. residents); and a jobs program for those in the private insurance industry affected by the transition.

Thus, DSA chapters will push House and Senate members to sign on to John Conyers's single-payer bill (HR 676) or Bernie Sanders's one (S 1804) and to turn these paper endorsements into strong advocacy for the bills. Already, sixteen senators have signed on to the Sanders bill and more than 120 House members to the Conyers bill. Some of these signers are moderate Democrats who fear primary challenges from the left. This will happen only if a mass social movement pressures Democrats to do the right thing for opportunistic reasons—because doing so becomes central to their chances for being re-elected or winning a primary.

Strengthening the Labor Movement

The convention also recognized that a major cause of the weakening of left forces in U.S. politics over the past forty years is the destruction of the labor movement. Even mainstream liberal economists admit that de-unionization has been a major cause of the stagnation of working-class living standards. Union density has declined from 22 percent of the workforce in 1980 to a paltry 11 percent today



Frank Reynoso

(only 6.5 percent in the private sector). DSAers are active as rank-and-filers, elected officials, and staffers in numerous unions. The convention endorsed reviving a strong Democratic Socialist Labor Commission (DSLCL) that would promote labor working groups in every chapter and enable DSAers to coordinate their work in various economic sectors. In addition, the Labor Commission could help DSAers gain jobs in workplaces that are being targeted for union organizing drives. DSA has many younger members working in the critical tech and logistics industry, as well as teaching and healthcare, all areas of potential growth for a revived labor movement.

Electing Socialists

Ultimately, the space for organizing and the chances for single-payer will be crucially influenced by who governs. Thus, the third part of the DSA National Priorities resolution focuses upon increasing the strength of socialists and the broad left within electoral politics. DSA does not see electoral politics as an arena separate from social movement work. Without Occupy, Fight for \$15, and #Black Lives Matter, there would not have been a Sanders campaign or pressure on the campaign to expand its racial justice agenda. But Sanders also demonstrated how running as an explicit socialist opens space for issues long considered off the political agenda (such as publicly financed free higher education and a financial transaction tax). DSA will concentrate its scarce national electoral resources on supporting chapters that are campaigning for open socialists who are running as Greens, independents, or in partisan Democratic primaries. Already such a strategy in an off-year election has contributed to DSA now having 34 members elected to office, some at the non-partisan local level, but also several as open socialists in state legislatures (such as Mike Sylvester (D-ME), Mike Connolly (D-MA), and Lee Carter (D-VA)). Although the national DSA will only devote its scarce resources to supporting openly socialist candidates, the resolution recognizes that building a more multiracial post-Sanders electoral force inside and outside of the Democratic Party will be crucial to the fate of the left in the 2018 and 2020 elections.

As Lorraine Minnite and long-time DSAer Frances Fox Piven argue in "Why the Democrats and Movements Need Each Other" (*In These Times*, October 17, 2017), if social movements grow among constituencies that traditionally vote Democratic, then some Democratic politicians will respond by moving to the left. DSA understands that electing a Democratic Congress and president won't guarantee radical reform (see the Obama administration).

But it also understands that it would improve the chances of democratic socialist movements to win progressive reforms. It's no accident that single-payer is on the state agenda in two of the "bluest" states—California and New York.

Coalition-building

Why build a socialist presence within a broader left? Any reform that will redistribute power and wealth from corporate America to the working class will be militantly opposed by capital. As the movement for single-payer strengthens, we will witness more overt red-baiting of the program (after all, the ACA was and still is subject to such attacks). The Sanders campaign demonstrates how legitimizing the term "socialism" expands political possibilities. As DSA's legitimacy grows, we'll both be able to elect open socialists at the local and state level and to increase our weight within progressive coalitions fighting for meaningful reforms. Ultimately those reforms, even if won, will be weakened by pressure from those who control investment—corporate elites. Thus short-term struggles, such as M4A, which aim to socialize a part of the corporate economy, illustrate the possibilities of a more robust economic democracy. Opponents who worry that single-payer might be the slippery slope toward socialism could be right, if we continue to build a more vibrant political presence for DSA at both the grassroots and national levels. Our five-fold growth over the past two years makes such a reality possible, but only if we choose our battles with care and marshal our scarce national and chapter resources intelligently. ❖

Joseph M. Schwartz is a member of DSA's National Political Committee and a professor of political science at Temple University. He is the author of The Permanence of the Political and The Future of Democratic Equality.

DSA MAKES GAINS ON ELECTION DAY

Sixteen DSAers won state and local offices in the November elections. DSA was represented in 25 elections across 13 states. Four of those running had national endorsements from the DSA, and of those, Tristan Rader won his race for City Council of Lakewood, Cuyahoga County (Ohio), and JT Scott is now Ward 2 Alderman in Somerville, Massachusetts. Many others were supported by local DSA chapters. We are very proud of DSA member Lee Carter, who defeated Virginia Republican House Majority Whip Jackson Miller despite vicious last-minute red-baiting. Find out more on the DSA website.

Educating for Socialism

By Christine Darr

At the DSA National Convention in August, members voted to adopt a national training strategy to help chapters sharpen their skills in organizing and member retention as well as to teach members the history of socialism and inculcate DSA values, structure, and strategy. In listservs and in other online forums, conversations about how better to educate ourselves abound.

As we develop our educational programming on the local and national levels, let's remember that not all forms of education are created equal. Some educational ideologies are more aligned with DSA's goals than others. The ruling ideology is aligned with capitalism (think high-stakes testing and the continued destruction of the public education system).

Radical or critical pedagogy has an incredible leftist history. Beginning in the 1950s, some educators began to challenge the status quo. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator whose work among the poor, illiterate populations of Brazil drew the attention of progressive educators worldwide, was convinced that education has the power either to reinforce the status quo or to revolutionize society. His *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is considered the foundational text, in which he says that "liberation is praxis: the action and reflection of [people] on their world in order to transform it." Freire's ideas spread abroad, where they were put into practice by the Black Consciousness Movement in apartheid-era South Africa and to the United States, where they influenced the Freedom Schools in the southern United States. They are already in use in many DSA chapters today.

Contemporary educators such as bell hooks and

Henry Giroux have adapted and often challenged Freire's ideas, but they maintain a commitment to the potential for education to free us from the dominance of the white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy in which we live.

Although some elites have managed to educate their children in "progressive" institutions, the majority of schools still reinforce the idea that students need only be trained to give the correct answers on standardized tests that will be their ticket to good jobs and futures. K-12 education has socialized

most of us to see education as a transaction; that is, students are consumers of information delivered by experts, the teachers.

If these students make it through academic and financial hurdles to reach college, they are quickly slotted into a field of study that they are told will result in a career. As colleges compete for students, they are forced to ratchet up their promises of jobs

and prosperity for graduates. These are jobs that often no longer exist except in college brochures. Because we live in a society fully oriented toward capitalist accumulation, our educational system prioritizes grooming compliant workers for jobs that, like our education, often have a low tolerance for curiosity or self-actualization.

This method of education is the air we breathe. Scores of children who begin school with a passionate drive to learn quickly come to think that school is terrible. Think back to your own childhood, your voracious appetite for information, and your actual experiences. If you were lucky, you had at least one teacher who broke the mold. However, it's safe to say that many of us bring into adulthood the idea



Dubuque, Iowa DSA steering committee members (from left, Christoffer Lammer-Heindel, Rachel Lenstra, Alex Kruse, and Kalee Kerper) plan an educational event. Photo by Naomi Clark

that education means torturous memorizing of facts and regurgitating material that does not connect to our lives and experiences. Many of us have so often experienced the pain of our voices and perspectives being silenced that it can be difficult for us to share our experiences. Additionally, most of us went through years of schooling that taught us not to question or criticize the dominant narratives of our lives.

“Problem posing,” a method developed by Freire, can be helpful as you plan your chapter’s educational program. Problem posing involves the three-part structure of listening-dialogue-action. First, we listen to each other’s experiences and struggles in order to identify problems of central concern to our members. In Dubuque, our conversations kept coming back to the lack of safe, affordable housing in our city. We then posed that as a problem to be investigated and understood more clearly, always with an eye to how we can act collectively to solve the problem.

In dialogue, we can uncover the dominant myths that have led to the problem being discussed. For us, our dialogue led to the conclusion that in a society ordered toward profit, housing is simply one commodity among others. The objective of the own-

ing class is to make a profit, not to provide shelter. The Dubuque Landlords Association is very explicit about this fact. On their website, they say that “a full house in poker is a good hand, but a full house in the rental business may mean your rents are too low.” When the purpose of ownership is to make a profit, offering affordable housing is a liability. Once we have a clearer understanding of the problem, the action can be more targeted and powerful. Our chapter has started a renters’ union in order to put collective pressure on the landlords in our community.

The effectiveness of problem posing depends upon creating an educational space that is democratic, empowering, and holistic. We need to be intentional about the educational space we create. How welcoming is it? How conveniently located? Is the time of day or evening right? What about the day of the week?

For education to be empowering, we must actively promote respect for each other as whole persons who are capable of interpreting and critically analyzing the world around us. We should also consider de-emphasizing the role of experts. Putting an expert at the front of the room shifts the dynamic to

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Dialogue Days

By Ray Miklethun

For four years, the Metro Atlanta DSA’s primary educational program has been twice-a-month Sunday afternoon events called “MADSA Socialist Dialogue.” The programs have ranged from deep dives into Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* to a viewing and discussion of *She’s Beautiful When She’s Angry*. Participants have been frustrated that the two-hour format of panel discussion and questions and answers didn’t allow for adequate member participation. So, in July we tried something different.

The topic was “An Age of Unrest,” focusing on the centenary of U.S. entry into the First World War and the subsequent repression of the left in this country. Under the leadership of MADSA member Ian Fletcher, a popular educator and people’s historian, we crafted a new format. The audience of 50 (most of them new DSA members) broke into groups of five to six people, and each person received a card with a description of an event or feature of the era leading up to the war (1890-1910s). After sharing the information on their cards, group members looked for patterns,

connections, and contemporary parallels. This approach brought all participants into the discussion, grounded the conversation factually, and sparked lively discussion. Each small group then reported major findings to the whole group.

The cards had brief descriptions of war, imperialism, state and corporate repression, anti-immigrant policies, and attacks on women and workers. They also included information about resistance efforts. What struck most participants was how these attacks were met by organized unions, women’s groups, and environmentalists. Many were surprised by the global reach of progressive and socialist movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The response to the new format was almost universally positive. Following the discussion, attendees were invited to go to a row of tables where they could connect with activists from a variety of local groups. ❖

Ray Miklethun is chair of MADSA’s Education Working Group. You can get samples of the cards by writing to him at [miklethun\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:miklethun(at)gmail.com).

A DSA Night School

By Jarek Ervin and Melissa Naschek

Philadelphia DSA is piloting a political education series called the Socialist Night School. Despite the name, the program is not a “school” in the traditional sense: there are no fees, grades, or enrollments, and anyone can attend as many or as few sessions as they like.

The Night School is a comprehensive reading group based on the assumption that all people are intelligent, motivated, and deserve access to quality education. In an era of privatization and austerity, colleges and universities have largely defaulted on their promises to teach. Further, students are often presented with cartoonish misrepresentations of radical thinkers, intended to reinforce the notion that capitalism forms an inevitable and permanent horizon. In the spirit of democratic socialism, the Night School aims to make knowledge and education available to all.

The Night School is similar in design to a conventional reading group (see “How to Run a Socialist Reading Group,” *Democratic Left*, Spring 2016). However, we wanted a more comprehensive scope, so we crafted a “syllabus” that would be interesting to new and veteran activists alike.

The syllabus is based on three key areas of study: political theory, history, and practical issues. We believe that the only way to understand our current political situation is to bridge the artificial gap between theoretical representations of the world and the struggles that define our political system. Night School sessions cover topics from Marxist theory and the Russian Revolution to gender, environmental destruction, and Medicare For All.

The night school offers a space for members to engage in contentious but comradely debate about a range of issues. One of our recent sessions was titled “The Prison State.” We began with the introduction to Marie Gottschalk’s excellent book *Caught: The Prison State and the Lockdown of American Politics*. This text allowed us to pose important theoretical questions: What are prisons, Why do they exist, How do they affect the working class? We then turned to two articles about prison abolition, both recently published in *Jacobin*. The question of how

to respond to prisons isn’t just theoretical: it’s an actual debate within DSA. This session ultimately allowed us to engage a timely issue in a rigorous fashion and to allow our membership to decide for themselves about an issue that may shape the very priorities of DSA.


A Night School is easy to build. There are excellent leftist resources on the web if you don’t have access to a good library, including Marxists.org, *Jacobin*, and the Online University of the Left. Many libraries will also order multiple copies of a text for a reading group. Once you have a topic, you need facilitators, a venue, and a program such as Word or Pages to make handouts and flyers twice monthly.

Our sessions meet bimonthly from 7:00-9:00 p.m. We promote sessions via the Philadelphia DSA website, social media accounts (Twitter and Facebook), and our local listserv. We had to find a larger venue after our first session drew 30 people to a room that held half as many, and our more recent sessions have attracted crowds of up to 50. We’ve relied on free options and have found space in coffee shops, campus venues, and churches. Participants range from longtime members to people who are attending their first DSA event. Although the syllabus was designed to be cumulative, each session is self-contained enough that anyone can jump in or out at any time. New attendees come to each session.

Many of our facilitators are experienced teachers and organizers, but good planning is just as important as formal training. During our sessions, we try to vary activities. Lectures can be effective, but large-group discussion, small-group breakout sessions, presentations, and debates are important ways to make Night School meetings less like actual school and more like forums for serious learning. ❖

Jarek Ervin is a writer, teacher, and the chair of Philadelphia DSA’s Political Education Committee. Melissa Naschek is the co-chair of Philly DSA and serves on its Political Education Committee. Copies of the syllabus are available from Philadelphia DSA at <https://phillydsa.com/night-school/>.

Philadelphia Democratic Socialists of America



socialist night school

...an approachable but rigorous series of ideological discussions.

The Prison State Tuesday, October 3
7:00 PM
Rad Dish Coop Cafe
1301 Cecil B. Moore Ave.

Reading List:
Gottschalk, “The Prison State”
Berger, Kaba, & Stein, “What Abolitionists Do”
Lancaster, “How to End Mass Incarceration”

Contact:
Melissa Naschek: mnasho24@gmail.com
Jarek Ervin: jarekpaulevins@gmail.com

phillydsa.com

an audience of learners waiting for learning to be done to them. There might be times when consulting an expert fulfills a valuable need, as when we're trying to understand the ins and outs of health-care legislation, but that format would be the exception rather than the rule.

The most transformative education occurs when we encourage each other to share our own experiences and perspectives. This is more effectively done in smaller groups or in a circle, perhaps with a designated facilitator who is actively listening and documenting the discussion, drawing out connections when they see them, and asking questions. When facilitators are also experts on an issue being discussed, it can be helpful for them to share their knowledge as it fits into the conversation while also being attentive that they don't dominate.

Finally, radical pedagogy is driven by a commitment to the well-being of the whole person, pushing back against the harm that compartmentalizing our lives has caused to our minds, bodies, and spirits. Our educational efforts must not be limited to intellectual understanding, but should expand to include the health of our bodies and our emotional lives. For an excellent discussion of this, see Dierdre Cooper Owens's article "Black Bodies, Self-Care, and the Limits of Class," on the Democratic Left blog. In this piece, she examines Audre Lorde's statement that "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." Refusing to separate these dimensions by critically reflecting on how we as communities can bring about greater holistic well-being can be one of the most powerful tools we can use to create a vibrant, socialist society where everyone's needs are met. ❖

Christine Darr is the secretary of the Dubuque, Iowa, chapter of DSA and an assistant professor of Christian ethics at a small midwestern college.

FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR/continued from page 2

and now in DSA. These are the places where we come together to fight authoritarians, whether our bosses in the workplace or the capitalist class in our economic, legal, and political systems. These are places where we support each other in showing up for our communities and the most vulnerable. And they are places where, for the most part, people realize that we're in a now-or-never moment.

It's not that what came before Donald Trump was a walk in the park. It's that Bernie Sanders opened the door and brought democratic socialist ideas back to the mainstream in this country in a way

not seen since the campaigns of Eugene Debs and Norman Thomas. And he did it just in time, as we face not only global authoritarianism but the ecological point of no return. The question is, will we go the way of barbarism or of socialism? Despite his detractors, Sanders is the most popular politician in the country, across demographic groups. He's made socialism a household word to millions, and November 7 proved that our blend of electoral work and year-round grassroots organizing is the answer. It's up to us to bring these nascent socialists into a powerful, organized socialist movement. Will we rise to the challenge? *Sí, se puede!* ❖

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Archives for Activists

By Casey Westerman

The winners may write history, as the saying goes, but as the years go by, historians will write and rewrite based on what's been preserved in archives. Memories fade, members drift away, and for future chroniclers, the best source of information about the history of any organization is that organization's archives. Any group interested in preserving its own past should take care to preserve its archives.

A decentralized organization like DSA presents a unique archival challenge. With decades of history and thousands of members active in dozens of local chapters and working groups, we rely on individuals, active in their local groups, to save the records. The materials that are the most relevant and useful include meeting minutes, correspondence between members or between groups, photographs and videos of events, and newsletters of locals and working groups. (Files are not archival while they are still in active use, and financial records such as receipts and bank statements are generally not considered archival; these should be retained for a period of time and then shredded.) The larger the collection, and the greater the span of time it covers, the more valuable its contents will be to future organizers and historians.

Prevent Deterioration

If you want to preserve your files for future use, you can take steps now to prevent them from physically deteriorating. Paper materials, even acidic paper such as newsprint, can remain stable over a long period of time if stored in certain environmental conditions. Cool, dry conditions are ideal, but it's most important to protect files from flooding, drastic swings in temperature, and insects and rodents. The simplest way to achieve this is to avoid storing them in attics and basements. If you have space at the back of a closet, move your files there instead.

If you have a collection of significant size, consider donating it to an archival repository. A number of universities and historical societies across the United States have substantial holdings of DSA-related documents, including the papers of individual

activists and the records of local chapters. The websites of archival repositories provide information on the types of papers they collect.

DSA Collections in Archival Repositories

The biggest collection of DSA archival material is at New York University's Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archive. In 1980, Michael Harrington arranged for the donation of the records of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) to that library, and after DSOC merged with the New American Movement (NAM) to create DSA, the current organization has continued to send its files there. Later

donations of NAM files complemented the DSOC material. The Tamiment Library also holds Harrington's professional papers, the research files for Maurice Isserman's biography of Harrington, and the archives of *Dissent* magazine, many of whose writers and editors were active in DSOC and DSA.

The archives of local DSA groups and of some members of the organization can be found across the country. University archives often acquire the papers of prominent alumni or faculty, and historical societies collect the records of activist organizations in their regions. The Wisconsin Historical Society holds the archives of many activist groups and individuals who kept files on DSA, DSOC, and NAM. The John C. Cort Papers at Catholic University of America include the records of the DSA newsletter *Religious Socialism*.

If you'd like to investigate the history of DSA groups in your region or look for the papers of DSA leaders, start by searching the collections listed at beta.worldcat.org. Most archival collections are open to researchers, and archivists are able to assist you remotely if you can't travel to do research in person.

And if you want to be sure that your own chapter's history is preserved, date and save that flyer or folder! ❖

Casey Westerman is a member of Central New Jersey DSA and a professional archivist.

“Any group interested in preserving its own past should take care to preserve its archives.”

How to Raise Money Without the Rich

By Colleen Shaddox

Say what you will about capitalists, they're good to have at a fundraiser. But as DSA chapters raise bail money for comrades arrested at protests, few capitalists will be riding to the rescue. So, I share the story of a fundraiser mounted by an ongoing resistance group in the small, rural town of East Haddam, Connecticut, without benefit of the usual philanthropic class.

The group, Together We Rise CT, raised \$18,000 to bail immigrants out of detention. We also raised awareness about our government's unconscionable treatment of immigrants and the general injustice of cash bail.

Although most people detained for pending immigration matters are not deportable, they often lose their children, their jobs, and their apartments while they are in detention. And, as in criminal cases, people who are incarcerated at the time of their hearing often receive harsher penalties. Most people we talked with were unaware of the harm done by these practices. Thus, in promoting the event, we had an opportunity to educate the public. I did several newspaper interviews that discussed the issue. On the night of the event, a woman whose husband was in detention (and who was later bailed out with some of the dinner proceeds) spoke about the hardship that bail posed for families.

Step one for a traditional nonprofit fundraiser is finding a sponsor, a corporation that will cover expenses in exchange for good public relations. But even businesses with a left-leaning persona did not line up for this cause. We relied on ordinary people instead. Every day I'd post on Facebook some opportunity to be an angel. A Guardian Angel paid for the event insurance. People competed to be the Ice Cream Angel. More than a hundred people gave goods, money, or time.

We also needed pedestrian stuff, from dishwashing liquid to rice. We set up a Target wish list where people could buy these things and ship them directly to volunteers. The event was a farm-to-table dinner with live music and a silent auction. Our local farmers donated wonderful, locally sourced vegetables, meats, and cheeses, thus allowing us to charge a fairly high ticket price. Tickets were \$100 and included an open bar. I did get criticism from people who believed that the event was beyond the reach of many.

We held our event in early June because we were responding to an urgent need. If I had it to do over, I would wait until the September harvest.

We rented an old Grange hall for \$150 (covered by a friend) and transformed it with white lights, lavish floral arrangements, and mason jars. Those materials came from people's Christmas decorations, gardens, and pantries. We spent nothing on creating a magical setting, but it was extremely labor intensive. Volunteers worked for three days solid to pull it off. It also required vision. The best decision I made was to recruit Ed Therault, a florist and chef who gave of his time and talent. Each community needs to find its own "Ed," someone with deep experience throwing events.

All the services were donated, including those of professional chefs. You can certainly get volunteers to support them. (I caramelized so many onions that my kitchen smelled like onion soup for a week.) But if you charge a hefty fee, you need pros to devise a menu several levels above home cooking.

We borrowed everything: pans, plates, coolers and so on. This kept costs down, but getting everything returned was a logistical nightmare. I should have assigned volunteers to do nothing but manage that process.

Should you try something like this in your chapter or should you do Internet crowdfunding? It will be more work than you imagine. But in addition to buying freedom, you'll show the extraordinary results of collective effort and build community in the process.

In raising the money, we identified various talents within our group. We are using those lessons now to organize a sign-up drive in our area for insurance on the Affordable Care Act exchange, because the federal government has cut funds for publicizing the shortened sign-up period. Recently, we held a much smaller scale dinner to help support refugees, featuring delicious Syrian food cooked by a woman who recently immigrated to our community.

In taking on the big bail project, we learned what we needed to run successful events. Major donors, it turns out, were not on the list. ❖

DSA member Colleen Shaddox is a writer and chair of political action for Together We Rise CT.



Mike Harrington and his Legacy

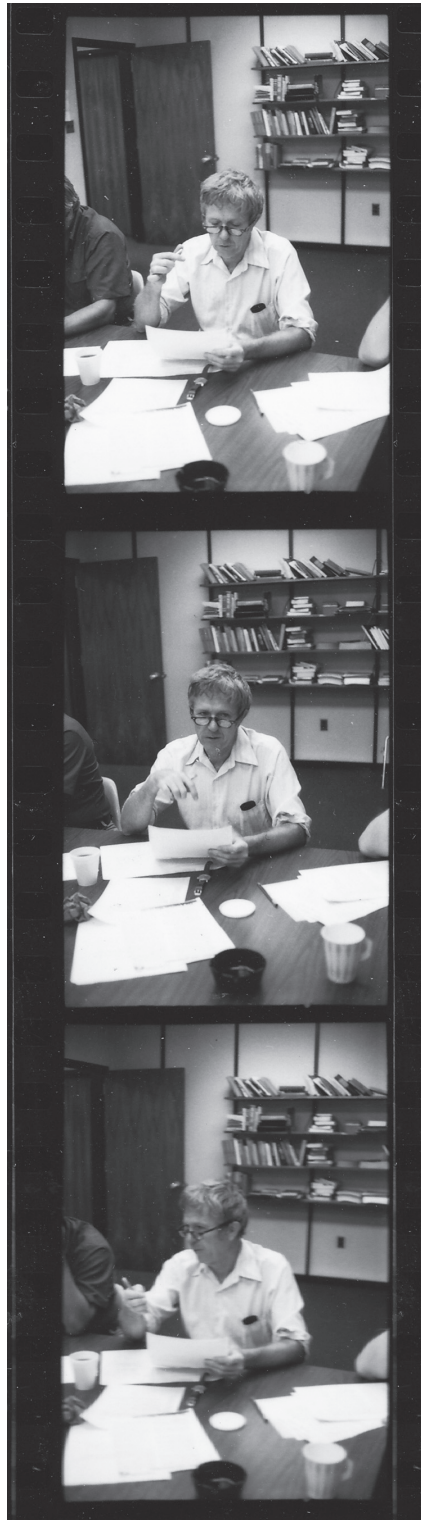
By Maurice Isserman

If there is a heaven, and it reserves a place for virtuous skeptics, I imagine the late Michael Harrington looking down with celestial satisfaction at the recent growth of Democratic Socialists of America, having played such an essential role in its founding 35 years before.

Harrington, who would have turned 90 in February 2018 but who died too young at age 61, was born in St. Louis and moved to New York City in 1949 to become a writer. In 1951, he began a life-long commitment to radical politics when he joined Dorothy Day's anarchist-pacifist Catholic Worker movement.

Mike soon shed his anarchism as well as his parents' Catholicism, and in 1952 left Day's community for the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), youth affiliate of the battered remnant of the Socialist Party (SP). YPSL counted 134 members nationwide that year. And it was about to get smaller, because Mike joined a faction that split away to form an even fringier group, the Young Socialist League (YSL), whose adult mentor, Max Shachtman, had a long history of radical in-fighting.

In the late 1950s, the Shachtmanites rejoined the SP. As newly appointed YPSL national organizer, Mike hitch-hiked across the country, visiting campuses from Brandeis to Berkeley to recruit young socialists (among those who joined in those days was an undergraduate at the University of Chicago named Bernie Sanders). Tom Hayden and other campus activists, in the process of creating Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), were among those Harrington influenced. Mike famously wound up quarreling with Hayden and other SDSers at their founding convention



Photos by Gretchen Donart.

in Port Huron, Michigan, in 1962, over some serious issues (the Cold War, the Soviet Union, anticommunism), but also over unspoken generational tensions. It was a rift he later deeply regretted.

In the mid-1960s, following the publication of his book *The Other America*, Mike became famous as “the man who discovered poverty.” He was invited to take part in planning sessions for the President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty in 1964 and advised Martin Luther King Jr. on the civil rights leader’s plans for a Poor People’s Campaign in 1968. Like King, Mike wrestled with the political and moral dilemma posed by LBJ’s escalation of the Vietnam War, reluctant to sever ties with an administration that, domestically, had been so committed to a progressive agenda. King’s breaking point came in 1967, when he publicly denounced and marched against the war. Mike, for complicated reasons including ties to the comrades of his youth, the increasingly right-leaning Shachtmanites, took much longer to do so. It was probably the costliest political mistake of his life, among other results undermining any remaining influence he had over the New Left in the later 1960s. Mike never abandoned his opposition to communism as the antithesis of his own democratic socialist beliefs. But, through painful experience, he learned from King’s example that a morally consistent politics also proved, in the long run, a pragmatically sound politics.

By the early 1970s, the old SP was hopelessly divided over the war in Vietnam and other issues, and in

1973, Mike and others, breaking with the right-wing Shachtmanites, created the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC), which grew to several

thousand members. Nine years later, in 1982, DSOB merged with the New American Movement (NAM), which had been founded some years earlier by former New Leftists. The new Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) represented a partial healing of old generational/political divisions.

The greatest challenge the U.S. left has faced over the years is organizational discontinuity. As once-promising movements collapse (see 1919, 1956, 1969), new generations of activists must reinvent the wheel. DSA's major achievement has been to preserve some organizational coherence and continuity on the democratic left.

DSA, it's worth noting, was never entirely or exactly a "Harringtonite" group, and no one in the organization during Mike's lifetime ever so described themselves. Mike did not seek nor did anyone in DSA cede him the cultish authority implied by the label. In both DSOB and DSA, robust internal debate was the norm, resulting in many of Mike's proposals being voted down or revamped by his comrades.

But if DSA had no "Harringtonites," Mike's leadership is still worth remembering for three reasons: (1) Mike's commitment to building a socialist organization; (2) his commitment to creating broad independent coalitions; and (3) his commitment to communicating socialist values and proposals in accessible terms.

Commitment #1: The socialist movement, Mike wrote, "is itself the embryo of socialism." The movement has had a long history of nurturing talented speakers, writers, and organizers who sooner or later departed its ranks to achieve individual celebrity in post-socialist careers (see, for example, newspaper columnist Walter Lippmann, labor leader Walter Reuther, and sociologist Daniel Bell). After the success of *The Other America*, Mike could have done the same. Instead, he doubled down on his commitment to building the movement. He spoke at hundreds of gatherings every year, for free at socialist gatherings, and, when paid, often donated his speaker's fees to the organization. Nor did he shrink from the scut-work of organization-tending, including hours and hours of not always exciting meetings.

Mike was not a martyr. He enjoyed the camaraderie that came with hanging out with old comrades and new recruits. But there was a moral seriousness at the core of his lifelong devotion to the day-to-day labor of building durable and effective organizations.

Commitment #2: By the 1970s, Mike identified his politics as "the left-wing of the possible." Successful social movements, as measured in durability and influence, were those capable of winning real gains for their followers (see the labor movement of the 1930s and the civil rights movement of the 1960s). To be relevant to the everyday and pressing

concerns of ordinary people, socialists had to work with those with whom they shared some common goals, but not necessarily a common vision of social transformation. For Mike, that meant building strong coalitions with the labor movement; the civil rights movement; church groups; campus groups; and the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, which (worth remembering) in the 1970s and early 1980s was still largely defined by its New Deal heritage.

What this did *not* mean was surrendering an independent socialist perspective. Mike worked with many leading Democrats, but he was not part of or subservient to the party establishment. He criticized Democratic leaders who retreated from social justice principles when they were in power (playing a leading role in mobilizing opposition to the conservative drift of Jimmy Carter's administration) and when they were not. In the early Reagan years, he condemned the "Democratic collapse" in the face of the right-wing Republican agenda. With the exception of the Congressional Black Caucus, he wrote in *Democratic Left* in the fall of 1981, "the Democratic party either stood idly by while reactionaries mounted their savage attack on social programs... or worse, joined in the destruction of gains they themselves had pioneered." Being the left wing of the possible did not mean ceasing to be left wing.

Commitment #3: In writing and speaking, Mike developed a voice that was at once passionate and persuasive. *The Other America*, one of the most influential works of social criticism in the 20th century, contains no overheated rhetoric, no disdainful posturing, no sanctimonious bullying of the privileged. Mike could convey moral seriousness without lapsing into moralism. His tone suggested that the reader was a reasonable person, and reasonable people, once apprised of the plight of the "Other America," would agree on the need to find solutions.

In 1989, five months before his death from cancer, Mike spoke to a February conference of the DSA Youth Section. He noted that some in the crowd would pay their dues for a year or so ("God bless you") then move on to other things, and "probably remain, at least, a good liberal." But to those who wound up staying for the long term, he had special words of encouragement, words as relevant today as they were then: "This movement should enrich you. This movement should allow you to lead a different kind of life. This is not a burden. At its best this is a movement of joy." For Mike, democratic socialism was a generous, positive, and affirmative movement. May it always continue to be so. ❖

Maurice Isserman—a charter member of DSA—teaches history at Hamilton College, and is the author of The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington (2000).

To Censure Donald Trump

Jules Bernstein talks with Eleanor LeCain about an unusual strategy

Disgusted by Donald Trump's numerous violations of the U.S. Constitution and his other misdeeds, longtime DSA member and labor lawyer Jules Bernstein initiated his own citizen activism project this past summer via an online petition to get Congress to censure Trump. Journalist and political consultant Eleanor LeCain talked with him about this form of activism. As we went to press, the petition had 55,600 signatures and can be located at censuredonaldtrump.com.—Ed.

Eleanor LeCain: *In July of this year, you started an online petition for a "Redress of Grievances under the First Amendment Seeking Congressional Censure of Donald Trump." What is congressional censure?*

JB: It's the process of either or both the House of Representatives and the Senate censuring (or condemning) members of either body or presidents as well. For example, Trump's favorite president, Andrew Jackson (who was responsible for the "trail of tears"), was censured by the Senate in 1834 for failure to turn over documents. And the infamous Senator Joseph McCarthy was censured by the Senate in 1954 for bringing that body into "dishonor and disrepute." In my view, Trump's record of wrongdoing is as deserving of censure as any previous U.S. political malefactor, including Richard Nixon.

EC: *What are your grounds for censure?*

JB: When I first posted our petition on July 27, I listed nine specific grounds that ranged from firing FBI Director James Comey to refusing to release his tax returns. Since then, I've added six more, ranging from encouraging police misconduct to adopting unlawful bans on immigration and transgender people serving in the military, and abusing the pardon power by pardoning Joe Arpaio. It is hard to believe that in less than a year a president could have engaged in as much misconduct as has Trump.

EL: *Why do you believe he has done so much harm so soon?*

JB: He appears to have no respect for law, or the rule of law itself. Throughout his business career he treated the legal process with contempt, and he dealt with those who opposed him by using lawyers and litigation as a financial bludgeon to impose upon them the rule of the financially stronger, namely brute legal force, which is the opposite of what the rule of law aspires to be. Presidents of the United States have a constitutional and fiduciary

obligation to respect and uphold the Constitution and laws and promote the legal system for the benefit of all. He uses the law solely for his own benefit.

EL: *How does censure relate to impeachment?*

JB: Impeachment is a slow and deliberate process involving both houses of Congress and requires a trial in the Senate before the Chief Justice of the United States. It requires proof of the commission of "high crimes and misdemeanors," and a 2/3 vote for conviction. In contrast, censure involves a simple majority vote in the Senate or House, or both, and while it would not result in Trump's removal from office, it would constitute a significant act of congressional reproach. And it could be a stepping stone toward impeachment.

EL: *Who is signing the petition?*

JB: As best as I can tell, they are ordinary citizens—right, left, and center—who believe that Donald Trump is an outlier from the normal spectrum of U.S. political discourse and engagement, someone so far outside the boundaries of presidential conduct as to threaten the foundations of our republic. Indeed, one of our most active signatories is Richard Painter, a law professor, who was chief ethical adviser in the George W. Bush White House between 2005 and 2007.

EL: *Activists are constantly being asked to sign petitions. What do you hope to achieve with this one?*

JB: We want members of Congress to join us and sponsor Trump's censure. If they don't, voters will know where they stand. We will present it to Congress close to the 2018 elections to keep Trump's misdeeds in the public eye. Meanwhile, we urge readers to sign on and circulate our petition as widely as possible on social media. It can be found at censuredonaldtrump.com. ❖

Jules Bernstein is a Washington, D.C.-based lawyer who has represented unions and workers for more than five decades. Eleanor LeCain is a political consultant and journalist with a weekly radio show on Progressive Radio Network heard worldwide on www.prn.fm.

CALLING ALL DSA AUTHORS

Our members write a lot of books. Once a year we run a list of books written by members in the past year. Send your title by January 15 to maxine.phillips@gmail.com.

DSA Across the USA

By Dan DiMaggio

DSA members in Gainesville, Florida, took part in the protests against far-right troll Richard Spencer's visit to the University of Florida in October. Despite being urged to stay home by the university's president, more than a thousand protesters showed up. "Spencer barely got a word out. As soon as he opened his mouth, there was continuous chanting," says Roxanne Palmer of Gainesville DSA, who estimates that 90% of those inside the event were protesters. "We showed that we have collective people power in our community." Palmer emphasized that the protest was successful in part because organizers tried not to appear like outsiders coming in, but rather emphasized they were part of the community (including chanting "Let's go, Gators!" and "Orange and Blue!").

Orlando DSA joined Disney workers at a big demonstration demanding a \$15 an hour minimum at the theme park. The unions representing Disney workers are in negotiations now. DSA members also marched right behind the Disney workers in the "Come Out With Pride" parade, as part of a socialist contingent.

NYC DSA members have initiated biweekly "Spanish for Socialists" classes, which draw between 15 to 35 people ranging from beginners to native speakers. The classes grew out of the Immigrant Justice working group and aim to build Spanish-language conversational skills to benefit ongoing campaigns, learn vocabulary related to the projects DSAers are involved in, and read and discuss Latin American socialist writing and history. To date, classes have practiced vocabulary related to immigrant rights, workers' rights, and healthcare. Classes generally start with a song or poem, before breaking into small-group discussions, with role-playing throughout. A recent class focused on practicing vocabulary used in canvassing for the NY Health Act, including going over the Spanish-language version of the survey canvassers use. One class took place at a local church where a Guatemalan family is living in sanctuary, as part of the Immigrant Justice Working Group's effort to strengthen ties to local sanctuary efforts. "The goal is to make the work DSA is doing more accessible to non-English speaking communities," says Elijah Stevens, one of the class facilitators. "It also makes the out-

reach work we're doing reach broader audiences."

Honolulu DSAers showed up to support a strike by UNITE HERE Local 5 members at the Ilikai Hotel, run by Hawaii's largest hotel operator. Workers complain they are making \$3.50 an hour less than the union hotel across the street while facing a punishing workload. DSA also joined a demonstration by News Guild members who are fighting layoffs at the island's only local paper, the *Star Advertiser*. DSAers are also building connections to Hawaii's displaced indigenous population by participating in work days ("Ho'i I ka Lo'i") to build food sovereignty and secure local land rights.

DSA Knoxville initiated a resolution—passed at the 2017 DSA national convention—endorsing a national boycott of Pilot/Flying J, the largest operator of travel centers and travel plazas in North America. Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam, the wealthiest



Honolulu DSAers support UNITE HERE. Photo by Timothy Zhu

elected official in the United States according to a 2015 *Forbes* magazine report, is the company's co-owner. Haslam has been pushing the outsourcing of 10,000 jobs at state universities, an initiative opposed by United Campus Workers (UCW). Although Warren Buffett has announced his intent to buy a 38% stake in the company, the Haslam family will continue to hold a majority interest in the company for the next six years. At the end of October, University of Tennessee administrators announced they had decided not to participate in Haslam's outsourcing scheme, following a two-year long campaign by UCW.

"Changing a brake light is not typically difficult or expensive. However, being stopped by a police officer for having a brake light out can be both." That's the impetus for the free brake light repair clinics being organized by a growing number of DSA chapters around the country. The **New Orleans** chapter kicked things off in August, with 15 to 20 volunteers changing lights on 50 cars in a local parking lot. Their success sparked interest from other DSAers; 80 joined a conference call to find out how to organize a clinic in their area. Since then, there have been events in places including **Fort Worth, Texas, Huron Valley, Michigan, the Bay Area of California, and Carrboro, North Carolina.** A DIY guide for DSA chapters interested in doing their own brake light events is available at: bit.ly/DSAbreaklightguide

Coming off of a good organizing meeting at the Chicago Convention, DSAers are launching or strengthening religion and socialism groups from **New York** (where the group will participate in Food Justice actions in December) to **Los Angeles**, where there are weekly get-togethers, complete with food and discussion, for any interested person in the chapter. Religious socialist members of **Seattle DSA** have met for what may become a monthly discussion group. **Austin** has begun a group, and religious socialists gathered at the New England DSA Solidarity Summit in **Portland, ME**, and at the monthly DSA meeting in **Dover, NH.** **Richmond DSA** has started a Christian Socialism/Liberation Theology Reading Group as a prelude to connecting local religious groups and congregations with the chapter's organizing. For more information, check out religioussocialism.org. ❖

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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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.

Owing to a press error, these ads in the Labor Day issue didn't print properly. Thank you, again, to all comrades who took ads in the Labor Day issue of *Democratic Left*.



BUFFALO DSA

