

# DEMOCRATIC LEFT

EDITED BY  
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March 1981 Vol. IX No. 3 \$1

## INSIDE

### Planning for Doom, p. 4

Supply siders say they have a new formula. But they have more in common with Keynes than they want to admit. Mark Levinson raises the key question: Since economic planning is inevitable, who will do it?

### NAM-DSOC Merger Talks, p. 6

The left's history has been one of fission rather than fusion. Now the New American Movement and DSOC are holding unity talks. Harry Fleischman assesses the situation.

### Special Report: Tenants, p. 8

Tenants are an emerging constituency that can play a major role in progressive politics. John Atlas and Peter Dreier examine the country's most successful tenant organization and suggest strategies for other groups.

### Arms Race Madness, p. 12

One of the most consistent leaders in the struggle to halt the arms race is Olof Palme, leader of the Swedish Democratic Party. Patrick Lacefield asks him about the next steps.

### On the Left, p. 14

A peace conference, primary election, religious socialist gathering . . . DSOCers have not been caught in a winter slump.

# GOP Stalks New Majority

By Jim Chapin

IT IS NOW ALMOST A CLICHÉ THAT the key to whether 1980 turns out to be a realignment election lies not so much in the returns themselves, but in the events of the next two years. Having said that, it remains true that much information contained in the actual returns and in the polls of 1980 has not been fully teased out. And any realignment, if it comes, will clearly build on economic, social, and political facts that already exist, rather than being created anew in the next few years.

Looking back, then, on the returns of 1980 from what seems the vast distance of four months, what can we learn? First, it is now obvious just how massive Carter's defeat was. His was the fifth worst showing by a Democratic candidate in the 29 elections since the Civil War, and the second worst by an incumbent President *ever*. (Only poor Taft, with T.R. taking half his party's vote, did worse.) In 19 states and the District of Columbia, he ran worse than George McGovern, and, in fact, got a lower percentage of the vote than McGovern overall in the 39 states outside the Confederacy. In a number of Western states, such as Utah and Arizona, he received the lowest vote percentage of *any* Democratic presidential candidate in history.

Defections from Carter between 1976 and 1980 had a strong sectional tinge. The 25 states where he lost the most votes contained 18 of the 19 states west of the line from North Dakota to



Thomas Nast

“A Republican party majority remains an elusive goal.”

Texas (excluding Hawaii). On a state to state basis, interestingly, his vote correlated not only to 1976, but to Adlai Stevenson's 1952 showing. In fact, his percentage of the two-party vote overall (excluding Anderson, Clark, Commoner, etc.) was only one-tenth of a point off Stevenson's showing in 1952.

Although Carter's showing was particularly bad, the Democrats have a permanent problem that runs beyond a particular presidential candidate. The Republicans have now won five of the last eight presidential elections, four by landslides; the Democrats have won but three, two narrowly. Only one state, Arizona, has gone Republican eight times straight, only D.C. has gone Democratic every time it has voted (since 1964). But 18

states went Republican in all elections but that of 1964, and another ten went Republican in six of the eight elections. On the other hand, only Hawaii has voted for the Democrats all but once, and only West Virginia all but twice.

Bluntly put, with a quasi-solid West and the addition of such normally-Republican bastions as most of the farm states, as well as Virginia, Indiana and New Hampshire, Republicans have only to carry a few other states to win presidential elections. The key, of course, to this Republican bloc is California, and that offers the Democrats a great opportunity. For, according to census predictions, it is quite likely that sometime in the next dozen years, California will become the third presidential voting unit with a non-white

majority. The other two? The District of Columbia and Hawaii.

What about the rest of the Republican party? Here, the picture for them is less rosy. They actually received a minority of the vote for Senate at the same time that they gained 12 Senate seats. The malapportionment of the Senate has never had a major effect on the political lines in this country, because in previous alignments the sections involved (usually North-South) did not reflect a large-state/small-state division. But now they do. Most of those 29 generally Republican states are among the less populous states in the Union, and so we may expect a strong continued Republican overrepresentation in the Senate.

Were Republican gains at other levels of office impressive? Well, let's go back to that 1952 comparison and see. In 1952, the Democrats held almost all the southern seats in Congress. But Eisenhower's coattails were *very* long: the Republicans carried close to two-thirds of the non-southern congressional seats that year. This time the Republican gain in House races was only average (and they are still a minority). Their showing in state legislative races, despite the well-publicized expenditure of nearly ten million dollars of nationally-raised funds at that level, was *below* average. They hold fewer governorships than any party that has just captured power in the twentieth century.

### Losses for 1982?

Historically, one may expect the Republicans to *lose* seats in the House and at the state level. Their chances in the Senate are better in 1982 because of the malapportionment and because of the two-to-one Democratic ratio of incumbents up that year. But they are almost certain to lose Senate seats at the 1984 and 1986 elections. A Republican *party* majority remains an elusive goal.

Translating returns into politics—what do these political alignments mean for the Republican party? First, we must

## LETTERS

To the Editor:

Mr. Clark's article and Mr. Brand's letter in your February issue prompt me to some reminiscences and some thoughts on the Socialist International.

I first became acquainted with the Socialist International when it was getting started again after World War II under the more modest title of the Socialist Information Bureau. There attended its sessions in those years representatives of the Socialist Parties then participating in coalition governments in Eastern Europe. It was interesting that a number of them privately expressed concern that their countries might simply be absorbed by the Soviet Union, as Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were. For whatever the reason, this fortunately did not happen.

When the Communists took over the Socialist Parties in Eastern Europe, some of the socialists I had known stayed with the combined parties and in their homelands. Others went into exile, including the Czech Socialist leader Vilem Bernard, whom I met in Madrid for the first time in 30 years. Indeed, he and I may have

been one of the few—perhaps the only—people at the Madrid [SI] gathering from those early days.

Turning to Mr. Brand's rather grumpy letter, he seems to hold socialists responsible for all Europe's disasters. Actually, those who were in power were responsible, and they were not, in most countries and for most of those years, socialists. Incredibly, Mr. Brand states that the expansion of the welfare state in Europe was "largely in response to the pressure of Stalinist Russia." I should like to see him attempt to document this assertion.

Finally, may I urge that the phrase "European ghetto" be dropped from your pages. You can make the point that the International has expanded in the Third World without resorting to this singularly graceless phrase.

David C. Williams  
Sumner, Md.

*Letters to the editor must be signed. We reserve the right to edit for brevity. Please limit letters to less than 250 words.*

## DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Formerly the  
Newsletter of the  
Democratic Left

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DEMOCRATIC LEFT is published ten times a year (monthly except July and August) by the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, 853 Broadway, Suite 801, New York, N.Y. 10003. Telephone: (212) 260-3270. Subscriptions: \$15 sustaining and institutional; \$8 regular. Signed articles express the opinions of the authors. ISSN 0164-3207.

Second Class Permit Paid at New York, N.Y.

analyze the constituencies of the Republican party, by class, economic interest, and cultural tone. A majority party *must* identify with the leading economic and sectional-cultural forces in the society. It is clear what the core constituency of the potential new Republican majority will be: the Protestant middle- and upper-classes of the South and West.

Ironically, these people are the physical descendants in many cases, (and sometimes even politically, as in the case of Reagan himself) of 19th century Democrats, but culturally, they reflect the final victory of the "New South" and "New West" over earlier modes of existence. Remember that the "New South" was an attempt by southern elites who cooperated with the North to instill Yankee "virtues" of hard working, individualistic entrepreneurial capitalism into their own populations.

Clearly excluded from this potential majority are all minorities, particularly blacks, unionized workers, and central cities everywhere, particularly those of the Northeast and Midwest. What groups remain to be fought over?: the lower class whites of the South and West; the better-off suburban inhabitants of the Northeast and Middle West (with an economic and cultural base quite different from those of the Southwesterners) and the blue-collar and small-business whites of the same area—particularly the non-unionized ones.

The well-publicized groups within the Republican administration (neo-conservatives, Friedmanites, Old Right, Kemp-Stockmanites, California Mafia, New Right, etc., etc.) all have strategies for dealing with various groups in the coalition. Reagan and the California millionaires who surrounded his political life and are still closest to him, probably have a less-conscious majority building strategy than most of the other leading groups in and around the Republican party. Their views, shaped in the forties and fifties under the New Deal alignment, have not really changed—they were then and are now opponents of the New Deal. Mostly in their seventies, they are unlikely to provide the impetus for a radical reconstruction of American society or political alignments. Reagan wants to be an Eisenhower or a Coolidge—but both of those presidents presided benevolently over a strong America, not one in the middle of a process of political realignment (or dealignment).

### What Strategy?

What most Republicans appear to mean by "big government" is certain specific agencies—EPA, OSHA, Consumer Product Safety Commission, etc.—rather than government as a whole. They are dedicated to a slow but undramatic weakening of the unions, but a much more dramatic and immediate attack on the Naderite constituency. It is no coincidence that James Watt is the only secretary whose appointment reflected a possible 180-degree shift in the policy of his department. But *such* a choice, coupled with the social choices being made on abortion and other issues, sug-

*“The guess here is that the Reagan administration will try Kemp-Stockman for something like 18 months, until it is clear that it doesn't work.”*

gests that the Reagan administration has in fact already decided not to reach out to the John Anderson constituency which is *the* powerful constituency concerned about the environment, abortion, etc.\*

What other choices are there? The New Right formula is for an all-out *attack* on the Anderson constituency, looking for a stress on such issues as abortion as a way to appeal to blue-collar Catholics and Protestant fundamentalists. The key here would be an administration which would choose stylistically and in other ways to present itself consistently as a *populist* (in a right-wing way) administration, continuing an attack on the eastern elites, and so on. The problem with this strategy is that it becomes an ineffective formula for governance, since the key governmental institutions and communications elites of the society could be repelled by such a strategy.

Kemp-Stockman are trying to duck around these problems by suggesting that tinkering with tax rates, if carried out with properly apocalyptic lan-

\*A strategy to reach out to these people would stress *class* in both its connotations, and in that sense would be an effort to recapitulate the Eisenhower majorities.

guage, becomes a substitute for governmental economic policy (i.e., the private economy will do it all). Theoretically, everything will grow so much that the kind of constituencies represented by Stockman and Kemp in the House (southwest Michigan, Buffalo, N.Y.) will not suffer even though the rest of Reagan's economic policies (cuts in all budgets but defense, etc.) will tilt to the South and West. Since their solution seems "painless," it is the first that will be adopted. But it arouses opposition from the older Republican elites concerned about inflation getting out of hand, and from the New Right, which sees it (correctly) as a way of avoiding the social issues. And since, in fact, only parts of the program will ever be adopted and they will not work, it is only a temporary stopgap for the Republicans.

What else remains? Well, there's the John Connally Japan, Inc. style of governance (state capitalism with government and business barely distinguishable), which does require a major restructuring of the economy using government, but seems to fly in the face of Reagan's own rhetoric and gut perceptions (although the New Right is probably more sympathetic to this than to Kemp). There's the anti-Communist crusade, which can link most of the Republican coalition (except some of the Andersonites) together *as long as it isn't serious*. (Serious is defined as actually getting into a minor or major war.)

So, the guess here is that the Reagan administration will try Kemp-Stockman for something like 18 months, until it is clear that it doesn't work. Then will come a great struggle for the "next" solution. (Models for such shifts are FDR's change in 1935, or Nixon's in 1971.) Most likely of all, given Reagan's penchant for intra-party compromise and pleasing everyone, most especially the group which in a gut sense he represents (retirement-age California millionaires who are doing very well and don't really *want* a radical reconstruction of society even in a conservative direction), is that *none* of these strategies will be followed clearly and consistently, that the up-for-grabs groups will remain up for grabs, and that a Democrat, if he's from the right (i.e., western) section of the country, will come to power in 1984 and face the same excruciating choices and problems in majority-building that Reagan does now. ■

# Flipping to the Supply Side

By Mark Levinson

"I do believe in supply-side economics."

Ronald Reagan

N.Y. Times, February 3, 1981

A new president is elected who promises to get the country moving again. He gathers around him a group of economists armed with a supposedly new but simple theory that they claim will pull the country out of its economic doldrums. The budget deficit is increasing, yet the new administration has promised to increase defense spending. However, based on sound Keynesian principles, the President proposes a massive tax cut, promising Congress that "within a few years of the enactment of this program federal revenues will be larger than if present tax rates continue to prevail."

The President was John Kennedy in 1960. But it also describes Ronald Reagan in 1981. How can this be? Reagan's economic policies are largely influenced by a group of supply-side economists who proclaim the death of Keynes. Yet Kennedy's proposal for a tax cut was based on the Keynesian theory that the supply-siders claim to have rejected. Could it be that there is really nothing new about supply-side economics—that it's just an old theory dressed in a reactionary guise?

To make sense out of the current debate on economic policy we must put it in a historical context. Fifty years ago, during the great depression, it was evident to orthodox economists that supply creates its own demand. Orthodox economic theory claimed that capitalism automatically tended towards the full employment of labor and the full utilization of all resources—provided, of course, that the mechanism of the market was not impeded. It followed that the role of the state was to modify or remove any frictions or imperfections that might prevent these inherent tendencies from working and to oppose all attempts to restrict the free play of market forces.

But reality intervened and in the

face of prolonged unemployment in the 1930s and the world-wide economic crisis, a new theory on which to base a new policy was needed. Enter John Maynard Keynes.

Keynes argued that demand creates its own supply and therefore government manipulation of demand is the essential prerequisite to the maintenance of full employment. Keynes believed that although the system was self equilibrating there was no inherent tendency for the system to tend towards full employment. In Keynes's view it was the level of investment spending planned by capitalists that was the crucial factor in determining the level of output and employment.

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## WE COULDN'T HAVE SAID IT BETTER

As Ed Nell, a prominent post-Keynesian economist, has remarked, "the picture of the price mechanism efficiently allocating society's resources should be hung next to the round square in the Gallery of the Theatre of the Absurd. The Invisible Hand, if it is to be found anywhere, is likely to be found picking the pockets of the poor."

*The Public Interest*  
Special Issue, 1980

But, as Keynes pointed out, investment plans depend on the anticipation of future profits and hence are characterized by uncertainty. This led to two conclusions: first, there was nothing in the automatic mechanism of the system that would make capitalists plan just the right amount of investment to ensure full employment; and second, since expectations of future profits are volatile, investment plans and hence output and employment levels are prone to wild fluctuations. Therefore, the role of the state is to manipulate demand within a framework of progressive taxation so as to achieve full employment and steady growth.

But once again reality conflicted

with theory. In the 1970s three recessions, each characterized (contrary to economic theory) by rising rates of inflation, have thrown economics into turmoil. According to theory, inflation and unemployment exist as mutually exclusive alternatives. But now, in defiance of theory and policy, they exist side by side. In fact, they grow simultaneously. Stagflation becomes a household word.

## Enter Reagan

The 1980 presidential campaign took place in the context of this bewildering economic crisis. Carter's dismal record allowed Reagan to be perceived as the candidate with an alternative vision and program. Armed with "supply-side" economics, the right boldly proclaimed the death of Keynes.

There is no doubt that Keynesian "fine tuning" cannot respond to our current economic ills. But is supply-side economics really an alternative? And is it a revolution in economic thought as its adherents claim?

The basic idea behind supply-side economics is quite simple. The supply-siders argue that by cutting tax rates the government will increase incentives for work and investment. The result, they claim, will be an increase in productivity, greater growth, and lower inflation.

In addition to the tax cuts, their other policy proposals are: stable, predictable growth in the money supply; a cut in government spending to ease the tax burden (The supply-siders do not think that the tax cuts should be dependent on the spending cuts, although Reagan wants to link the two.); and, perhaps most revealingly, an end to fiscal and monetary fine tuning and a greater reliance on the internal dynamics of a free market economy.

These theories hold many pitfalls. There is little empirical evidence to show that lower tax rates will result in the growth of productivity and investment. *Business Week* (January 12, 1981), citing a study done for the Office of Tax Anal-

ysis of the Treasury Department, states that tax rates are not stifling work activity, despite supply siders' claims to the contrary. Likewise with investment. In an America characterized by stagflation, investment is held down by factors more powerful than high tax rates. In the context of a capitalist economy an investment will be undertaken only if it is profitable. If there are not profitable investment outlets, tax cuts and other handouts to the corporate rich will simply result in a redistribution of wealth upwards as the rich invest in inflation hedges. And even if this tax cut program did work, it would be no cure for inflation. As Jeff Faux and Gar Alperovitz of the National Center for Economic Alternatives state in a recent memo on Reagan's economic policy, "Not even their most ardent booster is confident they will achieve productivity improvements of more than one percent over the decade—and inflation is now in the 12-13 percent range."

In regard to monetary policy, as Leonard Silk pointed out in the *New York Times*, the "ingenuity" of financial institutions in controlling the level of money and credit according to their own dictates makes government control difficult.

Reagan's program could also run into political problems. Although his first priority will be to cut taxes, he still plans to attack the budget. The Office of Management and Budget has proposed slashes in such programs as food stamps, Medicaid, CETA programs and unemployment benefits. In the House, both Democrats and moderate Republicans have doubts about carrying out those cuts deemed necessary by Reagan to defuse the inflationary potential of the tax cuts. *Business Week* quotes a top Senate staffer, "Without these reductions, Reagan could wind up as the first President to preside over a \$100 billion deficit."

Finally, there is the belief in the workings of the free market. Here the supply siders show that they share the same theoretical assumptions as Keynesian and pre-Keynesian economists. It is important to remember that whatever the policy implications of Keynes's *General Theory* (and they were substantial), Keynes had much less of an effect on the general conceptual framework of economic theory. Keynes challenged the traditional orthodoxy only at one crucial point: its assumption of a unique equi-

librium characterized by full employment towards which the economy was always supposed to be tending. Keynes showed how the economic system could be tending toward an equilibrium characterized by unemployment. But Keynes and his followers have always believed that once the state was able to control the level of aggregate demand, the profit motive and private self interest would ensure an efficient supply of goods and services in the public interest.

Although they would reject the identification, the supply siders share with Keynes every basic assumption about how the economy works. This does not mean that the supply siders advocate the same policies as traditional Keynesians. Indeed, the Keynesians have been the architects of the modern welfare state which is now under attack from the supply siders. They are, to use a term coined by Joan Robinson, "Bastard Keynesians." Faux and Alperovitz point out that the supply siders' policy proposals "are an odd mixture of conventional conservative tax subsidies which serve business and the upper income classes, and conventional liberal deficit spending to maintain demand." A new policy? Sort of. Revolutionary economics? Hardly.

### Lessons for the Left

For all its overblown claims, there is, as Mike Harrington remarked in these pages last month, a kernel of truth in the supply-side argument. After all, Keynesianism is inadequate to cope with

stagflation. It is not enough for the government simply to act to stimulate demand and leave investment and production in private hands. Socialists have always argued that public democratic control of supply is a precondition for economic efficiency and social justice. Central to this will be democratic planning.

But socialists are not the only people talking about planning. Twenty years ago Gunnar Myrdal pointed out that "the development toward planning . . . was not itself planned. . . . It happened in a way much more accidental, less direct and less purposive, by an unending series of acts of intervention by the state." Sophisticated businessmen such as Felix Rohatyn have called for increased corporate planning.

The issue, then, is who will do the planning, in whose interests. The work we must do now in constructing a program for democratic planning will be of utmost importance. The urgency of our task was perhaps best expressed by Irving Kristol. In the *Wall Street Journal* he said that the new conservative political economy "is the last, best hope of democratic capitalism in America, and if it fails—well, then conservatives can concentrate on nostalgic poetry and forget all about political economy. Someone else will be in charge of that." ■

Mark Levinson was National Chair of the DSOC Youth Section from 1978 to 1980. He is currently a graduate student in economics at the New School for Social Research in New York City.



Robinson, Wisc.

# DSOC and NAM Hold Unity Talks

By Harry Fleischman

**A**S A 16-YEAR-OLD I JOINED THE Young People's Socialist League in 1931 to win "Socialism in Our Time." We haven't won it yet, and in the intervening fifty years, I've seen more splits than unity in the Socialist Party and its successors, until now. In contrast, in its eight-year history, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) has proven to be remarkably tolerant in its diversity, enjoying a steady growth free of factional backbiting and bitterness.

DSOC was formed in 1973 by a few hundred members whose immediate histories had largely been as the antiwar minority in the Socialist Party of the sixties and has grown to its current size of nearly 5,000 members with amazingly diverse backgrounds. For the overwhelming majority of the DSOC membership, this is the first socialist organization they have ever joined. Most come from activism in the Democratic Party, trade unions, feminist, religious, campus, and community groups. The remainder belonged at one time or another in their lives to such varied and conflicting political groups as the pre-1950s Socialist Party or Social Democratic Federation, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the Communist Party, the American Labor Party, and various Trotskyist sects.

From its inception DSOC saw itself as the explicitly socialist ingredient in a larger democratic left-liberal-labor coalition that was to be found in and around the Democratic Party. It called itself an Organizing Committee as an expression of its hope that it was only the embryo of what would one day become a substantial and powerful organization of democratic socialism.

During the past year and a half, a further step toward this end has been on the agenda—the possibility of enhancing

our work through unification with the New American Movement (NAM).

As one who has not yet made up his mind as to whether he favors or opposes merger, I'll try to assess the current status of this effort. What's it all about? How did this discussion start? What is NAM and what does it stand for? What are the similarities and differences between both groups? Are the groups compatible? Perhaps no conclusive answer can yet be given, since unity discussions are just starting, but here's a rough outline of the situation.

NAM was founded in 1971 by members drawn largely from Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the New Left who sought to build a democratic socialist organization that would reject both Communism and anti-Communism. In an attempt to conquer the intense factionalism that destroyed SDS, its founding convention barred not only organizers for the Maoist Progressive Labor Party and the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, but of the Democratic party as well. It shared the disdain of many SDSers for electoral politics.

NAM has built up a membership of about 1300 full and associate members, has dropped its earlier opposition to electoral action and, on many issues, has moved closer to DSOC's views.

At DSOC's last national convention (February 1979), the delegates voted by a nine-to-one margin that, "We note with excitement the current development and shape of the New American Movement. They are a group with whom we should work closely to strengthen our ties." The National Board appointed a committee to explore the possibility of a NAM-DSOC merger and urged locals to engage in joint projects with NAM chapters.

NAM responded at its 1979 convention by voting to encourage joint

work between the two groups and setting up a formal national committee to explore the similarities and differences between them. The NAM-DSOC negotiating committees met several times and reports were published in NAM's internal *Discussion Bulletin* and DSOC's internal *Socialist Forum*. Joint work was also carried on by many DSOC and NAM local groups.

NAM's 1980 convention then voted by an overwhelming margin (404 to 208) to elect a committee to begin negotiations with DSOC on merger as soon as possible.

## Differences

Profound differences between the two groups must still be examined. Their organizational styles and structures differ considerably. NAM is a federation of local groups, with the main focus of its work in chapters. Dues range from \$30 per year for low income (under \$4,000) full member membership to \$360 for single members earning over \$20,000. High dues and thrice-yearly dues assessments lead to a relatively high turnover in membership. NAM also has associate members, who pay \$15 per year but have no voting rights at conventions. Most full NAM members are active in chapter life, which has a high degree of internal discussion, and do considerable local coalition work around energy and health issues, reproductive rights, and trade union support work. NAM has no full national projects similar in scope to DEMOCRATIC AGENDA. However, its national commission structure provides for sharing much information and coordination among its activists in energy, health, feminist, community organizing, and urban political arenas.

The overwhelming majority of NAM's members are between the ages of 25 and 40, with few over the age of 50.

DSOC, on the other hand, started out with a strong national presence, and has evolved more slowly on the local level. Today it has built a considerable chapter structure which is now deeply involved in community organizing, union support work, political clubs, and electoral activity. It has continued to be the initiator or cooperator in a number of important national events and movements, largely as part of a coalition with liberal and labor groups around the Democratic party on issues of corporate influence, unemployment, and investment pol-

icy. It has avoided long position papers and resolutions, stressing programmatic statements on issues that involved DSOC organizationally. It has encouraged, through its low dues structure and its absence of demands for high levels of activity, the idea that all who agreed with its basic political position belonged in DSOC. Its members include many recognized national figures—elected officials, trade union leaders and others of prominence. While its age range is considerably wider than NAM's, its activists are largely also from the generation of the sixties. In the past few years, through its new youth organization, it has also built up a considerable number of articulate members under age 25.

Issues that complicate discussions of unification deal primarily with international affairs. Although neither DSOC nor NAM has focused its activity in the areas of foreign policy, such issues have ramifications in domestic politics as well as in international policy. Earlier NAM documents have referred generally to the Communist nations as "Socialist." But NAM has denounced violations of human rights in the Soviet Union, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. NAM, nevertheless, appears to view some of these "Socialist" countries as deserving of critical support. At the same time, in its statement of principles, NAM defines socialism as follows: "NAM is committed to working toward a socialist society in which material resources and the decision-making process are democratically controlled by all people. We are committed to a socialism that has equality and respect for all people at its core—one that carefully balances the need for collective planning, ownership, and decision-making with a high regard for individual rights and freedom." The combination of views appears confusing to many DSOCers.

DSOC's founding statement, "We are Socialists of the Democratic Left," says: "We consider democracy as of the socialist essence . . . democracy is thus not simply central to the political structure of socialism; it is the guarantee, the only guarantee, of the people's economic and social power. Given this analysis, we reject the claim that Communist countries are socialist."

On the Middle East, NAM has softened its earlier anti-Israel position to one that now calls for a Palestinian state, the maintenance of Israel and recognition of the Palestinian Liberation Organization

(PLO) as the "only effective representative" of the Palestinian people which should be "centrally involved in any peace negotiations." NAM's position excludes aid to Israel by the United States while DSOC's specifically calls for continued economic and military aid. DSOC supports Palestinian self-determination, but does not discuss the PLO. In its only reference to terrorism, NAM opposes "the use of armed force by the PLO, Israel and other parties against unarmed civilians."

As one DSOC member observed, after attending the 1980 NAM convention, many DSOCers would find some NAM members' insistence on the "primacy of the American threat to world peace and self-determination at best simplistic, at worst apologetic for Soviet foreign policy."

*“But all—from the most optimistic to the most negative—share a determination to maintain a tone of comradeship, so that neither DSOC's nor NAM's past achievements and future contributions to the American left are impaired by these discussions.”*

Although DSOC was critical from the start of U.S. foreign policy, opposing U.S. involvement in Vietnam and Chile, organizing opposition to draft registration, some NAM members find DSOC's opposition to "international double standards" at best utopian, at worst apologetic for U.S. foreign policy.

Another source of contention was NAM's "reservations" about membership in the Socialist International, a membership DSOC is proud to hold. The recent involvement of the SI in support of détente, disarmament and Third World liberation, as well as exposure to many of the leaders of SI member parties at the recent successful conference on Eurosocialism and America sponsored by the Institute for Democratic Socialism have deepened DSOC's commitment to the SI. We note, however, that although NAM's documents remain highly critical of many SI parties, the negotiating committee is willing to maintain membership of a merged organization in the SI.

### *Facing the Divisions*

In full knowledge that these and other points of controversy remain to be resolved, DSOC's National Board, meet-

ing in January 1981, passed a resolution to continue negotiations and discussions with NAM. Indeed, both the DSOC Committee Against the NAM Merger and the anti-merger group in NAM insist that they favor joint work between NAM and DSOC nationally and in locals and chapters on issues of mutual concern.

The DSOC National Board majority expressed satisfaction over the NAM-DSOC discussions in the past two years, as well as the "cooperative work" of the organizations and the "joint groups" created by them in at least two localities. Noting that some political issues must still be "clarified" and the "actual process" of unification defined, the Board majority felt that none of the problems were "insuperable." It noted approvingly NAM's "successes in promoting socialist

feminism, sparking grassroots activity, and building strong vital chapters," which "give grounds for hope that unification will not only enhance DSOC, but transform it, creating an organization not only larger but better than the organizations that now exist."

The same resolution also noted that an active minority group within DSOC, sensitive to the desirability of unifying all democratic socialists, nevertheless opposes merger with NAM "at the present time." This minority is concerned that "a good number of crucial political issues" remain about which there are still "important differences of outlook" or where "no adequate clarifications of opinion have yet been made." These include: "the problems of totalitarianism in the 20th century, attitudes toward one-party Communist and Castroite dictatorships, judgments concerning Western defense policy, the defense of Israel in the Middle East, relationships between democratic socialists and the labor movements." This group fears that a unification in the "absence of sufficient agreement and understanding" could lead to "a demoralizing and wearisome factionalism." The minor-

Continued on page 14

# Tenant Power Is Growing

By John Atlas and Peter Dreier

**I**N THE WAKE OF THE NOVEMBER elections, before the next electoral battles, the democratic left has to rethink its strategy for mobilizing community residents and voters. In particular, the nationwide network of grassroots/community organizations that mushroomed in the 1970s must reconsider its traditional reluctance to engage in electoral politics. The New Jersey Tenants Organization (NJTO)—with 60,000 dues-paying members, the toughest landlord-tenant laws in the nation, rent control in more than 100 cities, and an impressive string of electoral victories under its ten-year-old belt—provides a model for linking "direct action" organizing and election campaigns.

Recent polls suggest that public opinion has *not* shifted to the right. An overwhelming majority of Americans continue to support basic progressive issues: national health insurance, the Equal Rights Amendment and reproductive rights, government protection of consumer rights, workplace health and safety and environmental quality, public control of the energy industry, democratization of corporate decision making, progressive tax reform, and related concerns. Why haven't these attitudes been translated into political victories?

The right's November victory was a testament to its nuts-and-bolts *strategic* success, not to its new ideas for solving basic social and economic problems.

Critical to this success was the right's ability to get out the vote on election day. Equally important was the failure of progressives to do likewise. Traditional progressive constituencies sat this one out. Only 53 percent of eligible voters went to the polls on November 4. The overwhelming number of *nonvoters* were the blacks, poor, youth, and blue-collar workers who decided that "none of the above" spoke to their interests and feelings. Most of these people are tenants.

Ironically, during the past decade,

it has been these groups that the grassroots public interest and community organizations have so successfully mobilized around immediate reforms. For the most part, however, they have steered clear of direct involvement in election campaigns, except for issue-oriented referendums, where the results have been mixed. Their philosophy, adopted from Saul Alinsky and his followers, has been straightforward: organize people around immediate common problems (utility rates, property taxes, public service cutbacks, rent increases, redlining); embarrass elected officials through clever media manipulation, careful research and direct action protests; and "raise consciousness" of broader problems by linking issues and pointing out the ties between corporate abusers and their government allies. Groups such as Massachusetts Fair Share, the Illinois Public Action Council, ACORN, the Connecticut Citizens Action Group, the Ohio Public Interest Campaign, the Clamshell Alliance and its counterparts, C.O.P.S. (San Antonio), and many others have won impressive victories. They have forged national networks such as Citizen Action, National Peoples Action, and the National Association of Neighborhoods, to help share ideas and train staff members. Deeply embedded in the Alinsky (community organizing) tradition is the importance of avoiding the taint of "politics." This is understandable, given the American public's deep-seated suspicion and cynicism toward elected officials and government. Community organizations haven't taken sides in elections, espoused "ideology," or run their leaders for office. To do so might divide their members over candidates and issues, weakening the organization. Or, organizers feared, they might endorse and campaign for candidates who, once in office, would renege on their promises, hurting the credibility of the organization.

For almost a decade, this strategy has

worked. It built successful dues-paying membership organizations, it mobilized apathetic poor and working class people around important issues, and it won victories. It gave people a sense of power and self confidence to "fight City Hall."

But, times have changed. Not only the conservative victories for President and Congress, but also the conservative victories on statewide property tax and nuclear power initiatives (Ohio, Massachusetts, Maine, and elsewhere) indicate a growing sophistication by the right. Equally important, the Reagan administration is likely to cut off or reduce many of the government programs—VISTA, Legal Services, the Community Services Administration—that community organizations have relied on for staff and support services.

## Tenant Victories

For over ten years, NJTO has won victories by using a wide range of tactics, including lobbying, providing tenants with legal advice, organizing buildings and citywide tenant groups, rallying tenants in rent strikes and demonstrations, and using the mass media to make "tenants rights" an important issue. Its efforts (with only a small staff) have brought results. Not only do more than 100 New Jersey communities have rent control, but the state legislature has passed the toughest pro-tenant laws in the country.

How did NJTO do it? What lessons can be learned?

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, large numbers of New Jersey tenants faced a severe housing crisis that cut across racial and class lines. In response to rising rents, deteriorating conditions, lax enforcement of building codes, eviction of long-term tenants, and speculation, tenants began to organize independently and spontaneously. "Tenant consciousness" was rising among both poor and middle-income tenants. A major event was the rent strike, beginning in



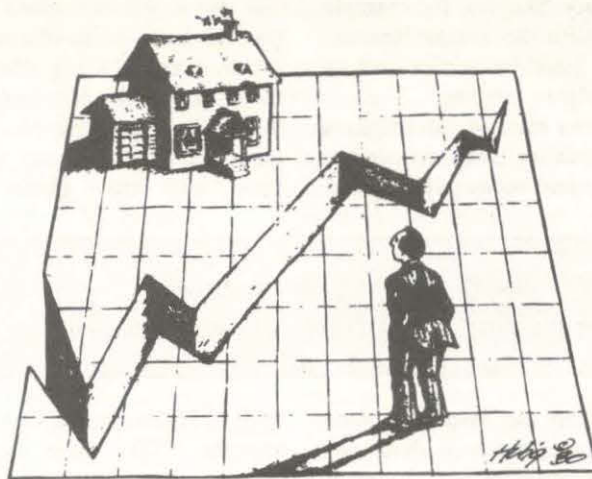
1970, in which 11,000 tenants in the Stella-Wright public housing projects in Newark withheld rent for more than four years. The Stella-Wright actions inspired tenants elsewhere. Although NJTO was not involved in the Newark strike, by the end of 1970 it had organized 43 rent strikes across the state involving 20,000 tenants in private housing.

NJTO leadership was beginning to recognize a potential problem in a strategy that relied too heavily on direct confrontation to win concessions from landlords and political officials. The problem was that the rent strike failed to expand tenants rights and build stable organizations and grassroots leaders.

The rent strike, for example, did not lead to any lasting control of rent increases or enforcement of codes. Tenants remained subject to arbitrary evictions at the end of their lease or, if they had no lease, on merely a 30-days notice. Many tenant leaders were harassed and evicted for organizing or even complaining to the building department or other government officials.

At its first annual membership meeting, the NJTO leadership presented a proposal to link direct action with an electoral strategy at the state and local level. One leader told the membership that "this is a political fight and we have become a political organization. We've gone beyond the stage where our only course of action is tenant-landlord confrontations." Two hundred tenant leaders attending the meeting committed themselves to registering 250,000 New Jersey tenants in a voter registration drive.

By the end of 1970 the NJTO organizing and voter registration drives were well under way. In the suburban bedroom communities in Bergen County, 40 NJTO members became deputy registrars. The county's election commissioner reported that NJTO people had registered almost 1000 tenants in the small town of Fairlawn four days after the drive had begun. Reports coming from tenant organizations across the state indicated that thousands of tenants were being registered. The political response to the voter registration drive and organizing campaign surprised even the NJTO leaders. More than 40 landlord-tenant bills, including four rent control bills, were introduced in the state legislature during 1970. Local tenant organizations threatened recall elections for unrespon-



“ More and more households will be shut out of the 'American dream' of home ownership and can expect to spend the rest of their lives as tenants. ”

sive public officials. In many towns, tenants captured control of the local government (city council). By 1971 the NJTO was ready to launch a major legislative campaign and begin the fight for rent control.

The NJTO board urged local affiliates to become more aggressively involved in local elections. The locals organized as citywide tenant organizations screened council candidates and supported those who favored tenant interests. In cities and towns throughout New Jersey, local tenant organizations held "candidates nights." The NJTO board interviewed and screened candidates for statewide offices. Screening committees were also set up in every legislative district, even those which had sparse tenant populations. After completing written questionnaires, candidates were given personal interviews with the screening committees. Following recommendations of the local committees, the statewide board made the final endorsements. In an attempt to win tenant support for its candidates, the New Jersey Democratic Party Policy Council endorsed rent stabilization. However, the NJTO remained non-partisan and endorsed pro-tenant candidates of both parties (although most were Democrats). Following the November 1971 legislative elections, the NJTO staged a "March on Trenton." Thousands of tenants and many of the successful NJTO-endorsed candidates rallied at

the State Capitol and gave the organization added public recognition.

### Strategy a Success

The NJTO electoral strategy proved to be a tremendous success. During the next five years, the NJTO engaged in direct action organizing while also winning legislative victories. It won pro-tenant laws on the issues of security deposits, evictions for cause, receivership, landlord disclosure, and state income tax credits for tenants. More than 100 communities passed rent control laws. Tenant leaders were elected or appointed to serve on local rent control boards, watching out for tenant interests and encouraging tenant groups to monitor landlords' claims of cost increases.

NJTO's strategy paid off in 1977 when 54 of the 62 state legislative candidates endorsed by the organization were elected. Today there is a group of pro-tenant stalwarts in the state legislature, led by Assemblymember Byron Baer of Bergen County.

NJTO's political influence went beyond tenants rights. Organized tenant support was instrumental in electing Essex County Executive Peter Shapiro and Governor Brendan Byrne, who have been progressive on a wide range of other issues as well. While in office, both Shapiro and Byrne have consulted regularly with NJTO leaders, supported tenant issues, and provided tenants with

critical legitimacy. Shapiro, for example, helped to establish the Tenant Resource Center, which provides advice and organizational help to tenants.

NJTO views election campaigns as important organizing tools. At election time, the media and voters pay attention.

**“But to avoid always fighting these brushfire battles, tenants have to begin electing progressive, pro-tenant candidates to office.”**

Campaign workers can knock on doors and talk to people, not only about candidates and personalities, but also about issues of immediate concern. Endorsing candidates can be a useful way of publicizing the existence of tenant organizations.

Meanwhile, the NJTO and its affiliates continue direct action organizing, using the methods of grassroots Alinskyism. Early in its career, for example, NJTO wanted to call a statewide rent strike as a show of strength, but it knew it lacked the resources to pull it off effectively. Instead, it decided to issue a call for a short-term “rent moratorium,” a tenant delay in rent payments. From their experience, NJTO leaders knew that a majority of tenants don’t pay their rent on the first of the month anyway, but wait a few days, or more. NJTO’s moratorium was widely reported in the papers. When reporters went out to interview tenants on the third or fourth day of the month, sure enough, most tenants had not paid their rent yet. Reporters labeled the tactic a success. Like good organizers, NJTO found that “smoke and mirrors” often work well. The publicity surrounding the rent withholding campaign gave NJTO’s credibility another important boost. People started calling and joining, unsolicited.

Last December, NJTO began a campaign around smoke detectors. A year earlier, it had successfully pressured the state legislature to pass a law requiring landlords to install detectors in every apartment. Two days before the law was to go into effect (January 7, 1981), NJTO President Phyllis Salowe Kaye called the press and issued the results of a statewide survey that revealed that only 10 percent of landlords had complied with the law. Coming in the midst of the coldest winter in recent memory—and a string of news stories about serious

fires due to gas explosions when tenants tried to keep warm—the missing smoke detectors made a big story. The state’s major paper, the *Star-Ledger*, put it on the front page. The *New York Times* carried a lengthy report of the controversy, with many quotes from NJTO

leaders. Again, the surrounding publicity brought NJTO more members and a growing consciousness of tenants’ rights.

### **New Consciousness**

If the situation in New Jersey were unique, the success of the NJTO would be of only passing interest.\* But the growing upsurge of tenant activism around the country since the late 1970s suggests that the lessons of New Jersey can be applied elsewhere.

Like the early stages of the women’s and black movements, tenants around the country are just beginning to develop “tenant consciousness,” to see themselves as a group with common problems and a common political purpose. In the 1960s, tenant militancy was confined primarily to the poor and minorities, a by-product of the civil rights and war on poverty movements. Their transience made it difficult to organize stable tenant organizations. And their low level of voting gave them little political clout.

What is new is the post-war “baby boom” generation of middle-class renters who grew up expecting to be single-family homeowners. But the price of homes skyrocketed in the 1970s (from \$23,400 in 1970 to more than \$80,000 now), rising faster than incomes. More and more households will be shut out of this “American dream” of home ownership and can expect to spend the rest of their lives as tenants.

With more of a stake in the conditions of their apartments, tenants are will-

\*In trying to think of any conditions unique to New Jersey, the authors could find only one. Lodged between New York City and Philadelphia, New Jersey has no television station or broadcast media market of its own. As a result, landlords cannot bankroll an expensive media campaign against rent control and other issues. This puts a premium on grassroots, door-to-door organizing . . . on people over money.

ing to form permanent organizations to fight for their rights. Tenant groups in more than 25 states have won a variety of state and local laws that protect and extend tenant rights. Rent control is a front-page issue in cities around the nation. Several dozen localities have passed restrictions, or outright bans, on condo conversions. In some areas, tenants are challenging the archaic landlord-tenant laws, fighting for many of the reforms that New Jersey has already won. Some low-income tenant groups are concerned with tenant control—taking over abandoned buildings through “sweat equity,” forming a tenants union to bargain with landlords over rent increases and maintenance, and using federal programs (such as the National Consumer Co-op Bank) to develop private tenant-managed low-equity cooperatives or tenant councils in public housing projects.

In California, for example, tenants were outraged when landlords broke their promises to pass on Proposition 13 tax breaks to tenants. They mobilized on the local level and got rent control in many communities. Last June the state’s well-organized landlords tried to undermine local victories by sponsoring a statewide initiative that would have effectively eliminated local rent control ordinances. Although the landlords (with help from their counterparts around the country) outspent the rent control advocates by 100 to 1 (\$4.9 million to \$45,000), the tenants organized an effective grassroots campaign to overcome these heavy odds. Orchestrated by the California Housing Action Information Network (CHAIN), they defeated the landlords’ initiative 65 to 35 percent.

But to avoid always fighting these brushfire battles, tenants have to begin electing progressive, pro-tenant candidates to office. In Santa Monica, the fight over rent control went hand-in-hand with the City Council elections and tenants now have an effective voice, led by activist Ruth Yanatta, on that body. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, City Councilor David Sullivan, and State Representative Tom Gallagher of Boston (both DSOC members), as well as Boston City Councilor Ray Flynn and State Representative John Businger of Brookline, have been elected with the strong support of local tenant groups. Elsewhere, tenants have made a difference in election campaigns, but nowhere has tenant power been as important and consistent as in New Jer-

sey, because only there has a permanent, large, dues-paying tenant organization been established.

Although tenants are only one-third of the American population, in most cities they are a majority, and often a substantial one. There is no reason why tenants cannot become an effective voting bloc in most major cities. It's a question of organization and will.

Of critical importance is the way tenant issues unite the poor and the middle-class. One group may be concerned with rats and roaches, and the other with parking privileges and air conditioning, but all tenants are concerned about rent increases, security from eviction, and building conditions.

So far, tenants' strength has been felt primarily at the state and local level. But the upsurge of tenant activism around the country, and the recent formation of the well-financed National Multi-Housing Council (NMHC), a powerful landlord lobby, has made the importance of national coordination obvious. Last June, more than 300 tenant leaders from 25 states met in Cleveland to found the National Tenants Union. The new group already has its work cut out for it.

Last November, Ronald Reagan's urban advisory task force (which included the head of NMHC, but no tenants) recommended that the federal government cut off housing funds to any city that has rent control. Whether Reagan goes ahead with this policy depends on the ability of tenants to mobilize effectively to convince their representatives and senators to block such a move.

To be effective, this new organization (now headquartered at *Shelterforce*, the tenant movement newspaper) needs to encourage the formation of stable new citywide and statewide tenant organizations. In the short run, it should try to have a strong tenant presence at the mid-term Democratic party convention, putting rent control, cooperative housing, and similar issues on the party's agenda. The convention should also endorse a national "tenants' bill of rights" in Congress. This would include: (1) income tax deductions, or tax credits, for tenants, who are now excluded from the benefits homeowners get, since they can deduct their interest and property tax payments on the federal income tax; (2) protection from arbitrary eviction, modeled on the New Jersey law; and (3) a National Landlord-Tenants Relations Act to pro-

tect tenant organizing. Like the landmark Wagner Act for labor, this would require landlords to recognize and bargain with tenant unions (over leases and other conditions) if more than half the tenants in a building vote for the union.

### Contribution to the Left

The tenants movement has four important things to offer the broader democratic left.

First, it raises political consciousness. Tenant issues, particularly rent control, are powerful weapons in changing peoples' attitudes about what's right and wrong, and what's possible and not pos-



Tenant/cpf

sible regarding private property rights. The underlying assumption of rent control is that landlords do not have a right to make as much profit or charge as much rent as they want. No longer is the apartment viewed by the tenants as the landlord's castle. "What the market will bear" is no longer a fair measure of what is right. In those areas where people have fought for rent control, it is always attacked as anti-"free enterprise" and anti-business. After a victory, the debate shifts to what level of profit the landlord deserves.

Secondly, it moves people to work for more democratic control of ownership and investment in housing through cooperatives and to develop alternatives to the private mortgage market to build affordable housing. In states like New Jersey, California, and New York that have strong tenants movements, the issue of democratic control over the investment process is on the agenda. Governors Carey and Brown, for example, have urged using public employee pension funds to finance housing.

Third, the tenant movement builds grassroots organizations and wins victories. Organization is necessary to develop leaders, to give people an opportunity to develop political skills (chairing

meetings, talking to the press, making speeches, lobbying elected officials), and to shift people from being passive spectators to being active, self confident citizens. Victories improve people's lives directly and immediately. Rent control keeps their housing costs down. Anti-eviction laws and controls on condo conversions give people security and stability.

Finally, the tenants movement can help to elect progressives to public office. The successes so far, however, are only the beginning. For the democratic left, tenants represent an important, but neglected, part of the progressive coalition.

The democratic left must address issues of concern to the non voter if it is to develop electoral clout. Low voter turnouts in recent elections have been one of the main sources of the increasing power of the far right minority. Tenants, a big bloc of non voters, will vote their pocket-books as New Jersey has shown if candidates advocate rent control and other tenant rights issues.

The importance of the tenant movement will be demonstrated this year in New Jersey. NJTO has launched a campaign to elect progressive candidates and stem the drift to the right.

A coalition of tenants, trade unions, consumer groups, environmentalists, women's organizations, civil rights and seniors groups will be set up to elect to local and state office progressives who will translate their common concern into public policy. The coalition will also target vulnerable conservatives for defeat. The groups may differ on the issues each emphasizes, but will unite on candidates.

Nationally, the left could target New Jersey—one of the two states with statewide elections this year (the other is Virginia) as a model and testing ground for this plan.

The strategy of uniting various single-issue groups around common candidates was used effectively by the right this past November. The democratic left has to relearn that lesson. In doing so, it cannot ignore the nation's almost 60 million tenants. ■

*John Atlas is a vice president of the New Jersey Tenants Organization and a lawyer in Newark. Peter Dreier is assistant professor of sociology at Tufts University and a founder of the Massachusetts Tenants Organization. Both are DSOC members and write for Shelterforce and other publications.*

# Palme on the Arms Race

By Patrick Laceyfield

IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT SINCE THE end of World War II, more than 6000 meetings have been held between the two superpowers on the question of the arms race—and that not a single weapon has been eliminated as a result. Certainly this failure to date is no reflection on the efforts of a number of countries—Mexico, Yugoslavia and, particularly, Sweden—to prod, stimulate and sometimes shove the United States and the Soviet Union into substantive progress toward resolving this most dangerous of threats to human survival. And over the last few decades perhaps no world leader has given so unstintingly of his time in this area than Olof Palme, leader of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, former prime minister and currently United Nations special envoy to the Iran-Iraq War. What follows are excerpts from an interview that DEMOCRATIC LEFT conducted with Palme during the recent "Eurosocialism and America" conference in Washington.

**DL:** What is your general assessment of the state of the arms race at this moment?

**Palme:** Well, the level of danger is continually increasing, and if the arms race rolls along at its present pace we shall surely pay the price. It is especially insane since the larger number of nuclear bombs brings with it not further security but instead greater insecurity. I've the sinking feeling that the arms race is pretty much out of control—politically as well as technologically. One significant and disturbing element of late has been the explicit change in strategies by the United States, from a strategy of countercity (targeting enemy population centers) to counterforce (targeting enemy missile silos). This is a posture of nuclear warfighting, the notion that the U.S. can engage in a "limited nuclear war" without touching off a full-scale conflagration.

**DL:** There is considerable debate and discussion over the deployment of 562 intermediate range ballistic missiles in Western Europe as agreed



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*“I've the sinking feeling that the arms race is pretty much out of control.”*

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to by NATO last December to counter a new generation of Soviet SS-20s in Eastern Europe. Many parties within the Socialist International have different ideas on how the deployment should proceed vis-à-vis negotiations with the Soviets. What is your perspective?

**Palme:** Of course Sweden is not directly involved as we are not members of the NATO alliance. We are concerned, however, that this means an increase in the quality and quantity of nuclear arms in Europe and increases the likelihood that Europe will be a nuclear battleground for the superpowers should the distinction between conventional and tactical weapons continue to blur. Without taking sides with one tendency or another, we are in favor of negotiations as soon as possible to forestall an increase in the nuclear arsenals in Europe.

**DL:** The incoming Reagan administration has made clear it does not see a role for the United States in halting the proliferation of nuclear weapons through controls over technology transfers and the like. What will this mean and how do you eval-

uate the American and Soviet commitments to non-proliferation?

**Palme:** I think the fault in holding the line on the proliferation question lies squarely with the superpowers. The prerequisite to the non-proliferation process—as spelled out in article six of the Non-Proliferation Treaty—is that they make sacrifices and concessions by reducing their bulging arsenals. The U.S. and U.S.S.R. have failed to do so. They have failed to reach agreement on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty which has been in the works since the partial test ban of 1963 or even on a test moratorium. Instead, both powers have increased their testing.

If both powers continue to develop and test new prototypes of nuclear weapons at every turn, then the countries of the Third World will choose the nuclear option—for reasons of defense, machismo, or whatever. I was once secretary of the committee studying whether Sweden should acquire nuclear weapons and our committee concluded such a step would inordinately increase tensions in our geographic area. If that was true for Sweden, how much more true it is for countries in the Third World. This is exceedingly dangerous. It must be stopped now. And if it is to be stopped the superpowers must take the lead.

**DL:** What unique contribution do we as democratic socialists bring to the movements for disarmament in which we are involved everywhere throughout the world?

**Palme:** We are popular movements and can arouse public opinion. The politicians can no longer manage the arms race and yet they and a good portion of our peoples have yet to be convinced of this. Therefore, our only hope is to mobilize and organize public concern and it is here we socialists can have great impact. ■

*Patrick Laceyfield is a disarmament activist and a member of the U.S. delegation to the World Youth Disarmament Conference in Helsinki, Finland, Jan. 19-26 representing DSOC.*

The latest issue of  
**DisSENT**

features:

# The Meaning of Reagan

The Winter/1981 issue features a full-scale, sharply-phrased analysis of the Reagan victory by Irving Howe. Here, to whet your appetite, are a few passages. (To read the whole piece, fill out the coupon below.)

"My own persuasion—in the nature of things, impossible to prove—is that Reagan's victory can be half-explained by the hypnagogic effects of this empty phrase, "get the government off our backs." Many people stretch out their hands and yield their hearts to this cry of nostalgia, this hunger for simplicity."

★

"In the short run, then, Reaganism may be the last hurrah of the more primitive versions of American conservatism, a last ecstatic facing backward to a fancied past. Put yourself in the hands of the god who manifests himself as an "invisible hand" and then all will be good. That this hasn't worked in the past keeps no one who desperately yearns for that past from trying to repeat it. But if Reaganism, the conservatism of the Simple Simons, proves a chimera, that doesn't mean, of course, that a more sophisticated, corporate conservatism won't be edging into greater power—with its own kinds of government controls and interventions. Reagan may if he presses, cripple minimum wage laws; he cannot, even if he wishes to, block the long-range trends toward "corporate statism."

★

"Suppose, indeed, that Reagan doesn't go at the welfare state with a meat cleaver. Suppose he just uses a scalpel. Or better yet, suppose he just does nothing to implement or improve existing social programs. Don't you see that this is already doing severe damage to whatever we have of a welfare state?"

★

"And a word must be said here about the blacks. What can they expect from Reagans, from the D'Amatos, from the nameless new senators (we shall learn their names soon enough) who have replaced the beaten Democratic, and some Republican, liberals? Who can take seriously Reagan's talk about getting private enterprise to invest in the South Bronx? Who can fail to take seriously his distaste for the minimum wage? The results of this election can only make a sensitive black person feel forlorn, abandoned."

"What has been happening is, I think, a slow, belated tide of reaction against the counterculture and New Left manifestations of the late '60s, both against what was attractive in them and what was excessive. The willing of simplicity that results in slogans like "Get the government off our backs" finds a moralistic equivalent in a snarling intolerance of cultural and social difference. The Yahoos are up in arms again. And now—this is new!—they have as their allies New York intellectuals, only yesterday the friends of Paul Goodman."

"The air is full of attacks, mendacious from the right and feckless from the left, on the welfare state. It is not enough, this welfare state. It is not good enough, it needs ultimately to be "transcended," or modified, or improved. But first of all, it needs to be protected. And let us not, in the present atmosphere, allow ourselves to be deflected from recognizing that it is a great achievement. It has improved the lives of millions without endangering the liberty of anyone."

**Also in this issue:** A special section on the revolt of the Polish workers, with articles by Abraham Brumberg, Stefan Bratkowski, and Jacek Kuron, leader of the KOR movement.

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# ON THE LEFT

By Harry Fleischman

**T**HE FIRST INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY WAS celebrated on March 8, 1908 by socialist women in New York City. One of the places it will be observed this year is in New Jersey with a festival sponsored by a coalition of women's and labor organizations. "Women: Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow" is the theme of the march from Military Park in Newark.

■ ■ ■

DSOC'S YOUTH SECTION was well-represented at the recent World Youth Forum for Peace, Détente and Disarmament in Helsinki sponsored by the national council of Finnish youth organizations. Four DSOCers—Patrick Laceyfield and Horace Sheffield from New York, Peter Mandler from Boston, and Tom Herwig from Minneapolis—were chosen by the International YMCA for the 36-member U.S. delegation and interacted with the more than 600 delegates from five continents on issues of nuclear disarmament and development. In addition to playing a major role within the U.S. delegation, DSOC cemented ties with brother and sister democratic socialist youth organizations represented through the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY). DSOCers were strong advocates of the idea of a European nuclear free zone and successfully incorporated into the conference criticism of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and U.S. moves in El Salvador.

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DEBS POSTER. The Eugene V. Debs Foundation, P.O. Box 843, Terre Haute, Indiana 47808, has just reproduced the Debs 1912 Socialist Presidential Campaign Poster. The 23 by 28 inch poster sells for \$4 per copy. . . . TWO VETERAN SOCIALISTS DIE. *Ruben Levin*, dean of America's labor editors, died in January at the age of 78. Levine was once editor of the *Milwaukee Leader*, a Socialist daily. *Rabbi Isador B. Hoffman*, a DSOC member and honorary chairman of the Jewish Peace Fellowship, died at the age of 82.

VICTORY AND DEFEAT. The Cambridge, Mass. City Council, spurred by David Sullivan, passed a "Consultant's Tax" on gross receipts from technical, professional and commercial services. This imaginative left response to compensate for revenues lost by Proposition 2½ was reversed the following week when, according to DSOC organizer Matt Jones, a social science consulting firm used its political connections to persuade the City Council to reverse its vote. . . . CONGRATULATIONS to Lowell Peterson, who won the Ann Arbor primary race for a City Council seat.

CONVENTION EXHIBIT. SEVERAL MEMBERS HAVE ALREADY sent posters, photos, pins, busts, medallions and letters of Gene Debs, Norman Thomas and other Socialist, union and civil rights leaders for the pictorial display of the political history and traditions of DSOC for our Memorial Day weekend 1981 DSOC national convention in Philadelphia. *We still need yours.* Send them on loan to Harry Fleischman, DSOC, 853 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10003. We will insure the exhibit.

RECLAIMING THE VISION. A conference on "The Religious Left in the 1980s: Reclaiming the Vision" was held in New York February 8, sponsored by New York DSOC, Franciscans for Socialism, OLAM: Committee for Jewish Political Ethics, and Emmaus/Harlem, drawing a hundred religious activists. . . . THE NEW INTERNATIONAL REVIEW, edited by DSOCer Eric Lee, has moved its editorial offices to Israel. Its 10th issue comes out in the spring. . . . At the January Board Meeting, Nancy Lieber was elected chair of DSOC's International Committee. As such, her prime responsibility will be as liaison to the Socialist International. . . . There will be a DSOC Western Regional meeting on March 28 in San Francisco. ■

ity expressed itself as "prepared to accept continued discussions between the two organizations, and to "seek actively to engage responsible NAM representatives in political discussions so as to clarify areas of agreement and/or disagreement."

## **Agnostic Majority**

Although a vast majority of the Board wishes to continue exploration and a minority opposes it, the majority itself is not of a single mind. A wide range of views—expressing different degrees of skepticism with regard to the political and organizational differences—remains. Some in the majority group believe that the differences may turn out to be

## **DSOC-NAM UNITY, from page 7**

such that it would be unwise at this juncture to force a compromise that might lessen DSOC's capacity to grow in the arenas that count most in American life. They believe that it may turn out that continued joint work, cooperation, and sharing of ideas is the best path at the present, leaving the door open to merger at some future time. Others see few important differences. But all — from the most optimistic to the most negative—share a determination to maintain a tone of comradeship and consideration, so that neither DSOC's nor NAM's past achievements and future contributions to the American left are impaired by these discussions.

The DSOC has always worked to

resolve issues on the basis of the broadest possible consensus, an approach that the entire Board felt has played a significant role in our success over the past eight years. The Board voted unanimously to set up the following process:

1. Negotiations and discussion between DSOC and NAM—and, in particular, frank exchanges between the most skeptical minority in DSOC and members of NAM—in the period leading up to DSOC's Memorial Day weekend National Convention in Philadelphia.

2. The establishment at the Convention of a procedure for resolving the question as quickly as possible in the period after the Convention.

3. Instructions to the DSOC nego-

tiating committee elected by the National Executive Committee to meet with the similar NAM committee to try to clarify all remaining issues and explore the political principles and organizational procedures of unification.

Success for such a unified group, suggested the Board resolution, could best be achieved by continuing DSOC's political principles and practices, including: coalition work with others in the democratic left to promote social reform and to inject socialist ideas into the mainstream; working to create a left wing, with a strong socialist presence, within the Democratic party; work with unionists, both rank and file and leaders; and opposition to authoritarian regimes throughout the world, whatever they may call themselves.\*

The Board also urged the inclusion of critics, or opponents, of unity within DSOC in the continued discussions with NAM at all levels. All agreed that further exploration of this issue should take place within DSOC channels open to all members, such as *Socialist Forum*.

It was also agreed that DSOC would maintain its primary emphasis on coalition work within the democratic left as well as its other regular functioning during this period.

The DSOC negotiating committee felt that the best basis for a merger would be an enlarged and transformed DSOC. The NAM negotiating committee proposed that it take the form of a new organization.

So where does this leave us? Discussions of unity between NAM and DSOC will continue. Their results, plus the extent of the civility of debate within each organization and between both, will determine whether a merger will occur, and, if so, whether it will succeed in broadening the scope and horizons of a unified socialist movement in America.

Whether or not the discussions result in merger, much positive joint activity has grown from the fact that they were opened, and each group has a greater tolerance and appreciation of the other . . . no small achievement in these fractious times. ■

\*Full text of the National Board resolution is available from the DSOC National Office, 853 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10003, as well as in NAM's latest documents on unification.

*Harry Fleischman serves on the DSOC National Board.*

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# JIMMY HIGGINS REPORTS



**FACING DOWN THE FED**—The complaint is familiar. Interest rates are too high; the Federal Reserve Bank is squeezing the life out of the economy and hurting the little guy. But the complainers are very different. That's still a position pushed by the labor movement, by a very few pro-labor, pro-full employment economists (most notably Leon Keyserling). Now the cry has been taken up on new fronts.

In early December, Lee Iaccoca complained that sky-high interest rates crippled Chrysler's recovery hopes. And in January, before the inauguration, Jake Garn, the new head of the Senate Banking Committee, took the Fed to task for pushing small business out of business. A witness from Garn's home state, car dealer Jerry Hayes of Salt Lake City, told of a colleague driven to suicide by the high interest rates. Ironically, credit may become more politicized now that the right's in control. But neither Jake Garn nor the current managers of the Fed are likely to come up with policies that can meet the needs of consumers, workers or small business. The allocation of credit and control over capital needs to be addressed for such policies to take shape.

**PENSION FUND SOCIALISM**, the theme of Peter Druckers' book a few years back, has been mostly a bad, right wing joke. Look, Drucker and his co-thinkers would say, the workers already own the factories. Except, of course, that banks and insurance companies have traditionally controlled the workers' investments. The professional managers never gave a thought to the workers' interests and did not even do a very good job at getting a good return. People in the labor movement have talked about counter-action to get real control over these enormous (projected to amount to about three trillion dollars and more than 60 percent of stock ownership by 1995) pension funds. Last August the AFL-CIO Executive Council established four policy goals for union participation in pension funds (employment, social needs, exercise of worker-shareholder rights, keeping union funds away from anti-worker companies),

and now the Industrial Union Department is producing a monthly newsletter, *Labor & Investments*. The newsletter reports on efforts by unions to use their funds to meet labors' goals, offers collective bargaining tips on dealing with pension funds and presents relevant information about controversies in management of pension funds. *Labor & Investments* is available free to members of IUD unions, or for a \$24 annual subscription to nonprofit institutions, \$60 to others. Write to *Labor & Investments*, IUD Editorial Office, 815 16th Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

**WALK SOFTLY AND CARRY A BIG STICK**—The Reagan administration gives new meaning to Teddy Roosevelt's old advice about U.S. imperial relations south of our border. With Mexico, which has oil and natural gas we want, we walk very softly. Thus, no one is so undiplomatic as to criticize Mexico for its support of El Salvador's Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR). In Nicaragua, we carry a very big stick. The support of the Sandanista government there for El Salvador's rebels is not only mentioned, it is used as the pretext for suspending a \$75 million economic aid package.

**WHAT'S IN A NAME?** According to Exxon, big money is. The world's largest corporation is suing in British courts claiming that the name is "an original literary work." Exxon's lawyers are challenging the right of an insurance company to name itself Exxon Insurance; there's no infringement of trademark since the insurance firm does not compete with the energy conglomerate. Exxon responds that the insurance company is making money from the name without permission from the company; the oil giant seeks copyright protection. In a similar case, Exxon's lawyers forced a small Texas mail order house to destroy supplies of a plastic greeting card which read "Xxmas Greetings." If Exxon wins the British case, the company's permission might be needed before use of the copyrighted, original literary work is used in print or broadcast journalism.

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412

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