

# DEMOCRATIC LEFT

dsausa.org

THE MAGAZINE OF THE  
DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS  
OF AMERICA • SPRING 2019  
VOL. XLVI NO. 4



## GREEN NEW DEAL

Building a New World from the Old



# WE DO OUR PART



**From the National Director**

# Ready to Save the Planet, and Ourselves

By Maria Svart

**M**y grandmother Viola Svart passed away last month. She was 101 years old and ready to join my grandfather, but I still mourn her as I celebrate her. She was born a two-month preemie in an Oregon logging town, grew up to go on strike for over a year during the Great Depression as a young woman, and then raised four children while waiting up each night for my firefighter grandfather to come home alive. She was among the strong women who taught me to stand up for my rights, and she never stopped. In recent years she joined DSA and organized neighbors in her assisted-living facility to support Bernie Sanders.



She was an ordinary woman who did extraordinary things, but thinking about her while I was in California between the teacher strikes in Los Angeles, Denver, and Oakland, reminded me that *this is what we do*. Working-class people have been fighting and striking for generations—always facing down institutional and vigilante violence from the ruling class. I met a DSA member my mother’s age at the Knoxville preconvention conference who remembers hearing Florence Reece, author of “Which Side Are You On?,” sing miners’ union songs.

Collective action is how we go to battle in the class war, and our strength has ebbed and flowed, but it’s time to marshal the lessons of our elders and the energy of our youth and win this once and for all. The planet cannot wait.

I think we’re ready.

In New York city, DSA pivoted from a successful state senate campaign in 2018 to respond imme-

diately when Amazon made a surprise November announcement that it was setting up a headquarters in Queens. In addition to daily canvasses, the chapter organized direct actions and lobbying, in conjunction with coalition partners, and raised concerns not just about gentrification, but also about Amazon’s collaboration with Immigration and Customs Enforcement and refusal to allow its warehouse workers to organize a union.

Amazon turned tail and ran, and now other cities are renewing their fight against Amazon and corporate welfare in general. Meanwhile, in West Virginia, teachers, including DSAers, went on a strike against the privatization of their schools—and won after just one day. We’re standing together across our differences of age, race, and geography.

After decades on the defensive, we in the working class are remembering our power, and just in time. Donald Trump and the global fascist movement tell us the solution to climate change is militarized borders and scapegoating, while Wall Street Democrats tell us to recycle more of our household trash while letting the massive fossil fuel industry drive us off the climate cliff. It’s time for us to take action to protect ourselves from the capitalist class.

How to prepare for climate change is one of the debate topics at our regional preconvention conferences in Los Angeles; Knoxville; Albany, N.Y.; Denver; Washington, D.C.; Boston; Dallas; Portland, Ore.; and Chicago. Hundreds of members have come together so far to look inward by reviewing the national convention timeline and process to prepare for August and outward by learning skills to build power and debating what strategies and tactics will best help us win.

Spending time with comrades from across states and chapters is a huge plus. I hope to see you if your regional conference is coming up. Talk to your chapter leader(s) or, if you are at-large, the national office, about pre-registering.

### **National Convention**

These official preconvention conferences all feed toward our 2019 national convention, August 2 - 4 in Atlanta, Georgia. Check the convention website for more details and to sign up for the most up to date convention information via email: [dsausa.org/national-convention](mailto:dsausa.org/national-convention).

## **Contents**

Green Dream .....	4
The Culprit Is Capitalism .....	5
Tax the Climate Criminals, not Carbon Footprints .....	6
Green Jobs and a True Right to Work.....	7
Power to the People: Public Ownership of PG&E .....	8
Unriggering the Power Game .....	9
Making Detroit the Engine of a Green New Deal .....	10
Climate Horror in California.....	12
Books by DSA Authors.....	14

Cover concept by Brian Siano

## Important Convention Deadlines

- **February 2 - April 14:** preconvention conferences in Los Angeles, Knoxville, Albany, Denver, Washington, D.C., Boston, Dallas, Portland, Ore., and Chicago.
- **Now through March 30:** chapters may do drives for Movement Builders monthly members (20% of the dues shared with chapters) or to renew annual memberships, so that members will be included in the delegate apportionment count.
- **March 1 - April 30:** at-large members nominations period.
- **March 2 - May 2:** any member or group of DSA members in good standing may propose changes to the DSA national constitution or bylaws.
- **After April 2:** the national office will inform local chapters of the number of delegates apportioned to them based on the formula of 1 delegate for each 51 members.
- **April 2 - June 2:** people running for the National Political Committee must fill out a candidate questionnaire.
- **April 2 - June 2:** any member or group of DSA members in good standing may propose political or organizational resolutions.
- **April 2 - June 18:** local chapters hold delegate elections and notify the national office of results.

## Bernie Sanders

Another debate topic at the conferences, on our national website, and most likely in every chapter is whether to endorse Bernie Sanders for president. By the time this copy of *Democratic Left* hits your mailbox or inbox, we may have made a decision, but I'll take space now to outline our draft campaign plan should we endorse, because it flows from our always helpful-to-review national electoral strategy.

First, any campaign would be centered around core demands and our issues, such as Medicare for All and a Green New Deal. In other words, it would be movement centered—not merely around the candidate himself—and complementary to other issue work. Second, it would be closely connected and carried out in conjunction with our labor work and our campus work. Third, we would do constant mass political education about capitalism and socialism through social and other media. Fourth, we would build our own campaign infrastructure in order to ensure that after the election we have an organized constituency to keep fighting for transformative reforms. And fifth, the work would focus on chapter capacity building, training, and support so that chapters can organize based on local conditions and build grassroots socialist power. Learn more about the draft campaign here: [bit.ly/2020cmtee](http://bit.ly/2020cmtee).

## A Green New Deal

This issue of *Democratic Left*, guest edited by Laura Colaneri, Meagan Day, and Don McIntosh, focuses on the Green New Deal. Why climate change is a socialist issue—and why only a mass working class-movement can save us all—are the questions we ask and answer in this issue. Meagan Day walks through the bill put forth by Congresswoman and DSAer Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey and reminds us that a single piece of legislation is just the beginning. Benjamin Fong carries forward that theme of necessary transformation: The capitalist class is the obstacle we face, and saving ourselves means taking back our world from them. Matt Huber reminds us to tax the rich, not feel guilty about our consumer choices, because democratizing energy production is the only way to reach the scale we need. Chris Maisano goes further. The full employment necessary to stave off the climate crisis is both a smart political demand and a strategic goal for socialists. A working class aware of its own critical role in society and production is in a powerful position.

Erik Apland gives us a glimpse of our fiery future if we don't win this class war, and Anna Kastner and Eric Ruud present case studies of DSA chapter campaigns to democratize public utilities on opposite sides of the country. Finally, Natasha Fernández-Silber describes Detroit DSA's work with Congresswoman and DSAer Rashida Tlaib to call for a new Great Lakes Authority federal agency and transition of a soon-to-be shuttered General Motors plant to large-scale green manufacturing.

Ben Fong points out that “we're at a point in history when no environmentalist who is not also a socialist can be taken seriously as an environmentalist.” As we participate in strike picket lines and direct actions in congressional offices, let's make sure to remind folks that *only we* have the power to save ourselves. ❖



Read the national EcoSocialists Working Group principles and get involved at [ecosocialists.dsausa.org](http://ecosocialists.dsausa.org).

# Green Dream

By Meagan Day

In early February, DSA member and U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez unveiled her plan for a Green New Deal. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi responded with condescension. “The green dream or whatever they call it,” she quipped, “nobody knows what it is, but they’re for it, right?”

Actually, we do know what it is, and we’re for it with good reason. The Green New Deal represents our best opportunity yet to establish serious U.S. climate policy that can help us avert ecological disaster and ensure a habitable planet. It’s also a program to build the power of the working class, the only force on Earth with the will and the strength to protect whatever gains we might make from capitalist rollback efforts.

The Green New Deal bill put forth by Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% to 60% by 2030 and achieve net-zero global emissions by 2050. This is required to keep the planet below 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and spare us from severe storms, raging wildfires, rising sea levels, and all the chaos they entail.

The Green New Deal bill’s objective is to meet all of the U.S. power demand with renewable and zero-emissions energy. This will require a massive coordinated effort to develop, upgrade, and replace our infrastructure, from building new energy-efficient power grids to outfitting existing buildings for maximum sustainability. It means investing in zero-emissions vehicle manufacturing, public transit, and high-speed rail. And it will require overhauling our agriculture and food systems, publicly funding research and development in ecology and energy, and restoring and protecting fragile ecosystems.

It’s no walk in the park. But if there were ever a time to accept a mission so difficult, it’s now, with climate Armageddon looming. And it is entirely feasible, so long as we can muster the political will to place the well-being of the global majority over the financial appetites of a handful of capitalists who prefer things just the way they are.

As ambitious as all of it sounds, the scope of the Green New Deal is wider yet. The bill calls for the creation of millions of high-wage union jobs to

make the necessary transitions.

This proposal would likely amount to a *de facto* job guarantee, as it could bring the nation up to full employment, functionally guaranteeing a job to anyone who wants one. But the bill goes one step further and makes the job guarantee explicit. It sets as a goal “guaranteeing a job with a family-sustaining wage, adequate family and medical leave, paid vacations, and retirement security to all people of the United States.”



John Leavitt

This Green New Deal bill is an opening gambit. The project it lays out can’t be accomplished by a single piece of legislation, and though it must be undertaken immediately, it must also be measured in decades. Ocasio-Cortez’s bill calls the Green New Deal a “national mobilization” — as when a nation mobilizes for war. But in this case, as with the original U.S. New Deal, lives will be improved rather than destroyed. And the war will be waged not against another nation, but against a common threat to the people of all nations.

Education and training will be required to prepare the workforce for this heroic effort. The bill calls for the provision of those, too, free of cost to all. And how can we ensure that our people are healthy and stable enough to participate fully in this monumental collective undertaking? The bill affirms the right of all people to high-quality healthcare and safe, affordable housing. For good measure, it identifies economic security for everyone as a necessary component of a Green New Deal. In practice, this will mean breaking capitalist power over the working class.

The Green New Deal isn’t just about saving the world; it’s also about remaking the world. And it’s easy to make the case that the second task is just as necessary as the first. After all, the market-driven, profit-motivated, and drastically unequal society we have now has led us to the brink of annihilation.

The Green New Deal says, “Let’s rescue ourselves and the planet, and let’s also ensure that we never come to the brink again.” ❖

Meagan Day is a member of East Bay DSA and a staff writer at the socialist magazine *Jacobin*.



# The Culprit Is Capitalism

By Benjamin Y. Fong

The history of environmentalism up to the present is the history of the realization that only a total transformation of the global economy will stave off climate catastrophe.

This realization is a fairly recent one. For a long time, the ecologically minded thought we could avoid environmental destruction by “greening” our consumption habits: composting, eating vegan, reusing and recycling—“being the change you want to see in the world.” Today, this individualistic ideology has been relegated to the shelves of Whole Foods.

For a long time, too, environmentalists have believed that with the proper watchfulness and regulatory zeal, we could catch and punish the rogue companies profiting off of the destruction of the planet. It turns out that it’s not the companies but the *industries* that are rogue. Cathartic as it might have been to lambast Volkswagen over its diesel scandal, in which it tampered with software that showed how much nitrogen oxide and dioxide its cars emitted, it is only one of many carmakers that deliberately exploit lax emissions tests.

There is nothing wrong with biking to work or fining corporations billions of dollars. But neither action is going to save us from the mass suffering that climate change threatens.

This is because environmental destruction is not caused by individual consumers or individual companies. It is caused by production in the service of

profit rather than of people or the planet. When the only thing that matters to a company is that quarterly earnings go up, the environmental impacts of its production are decidedly secondary considerations, in fact, only registering when they endanger or bolster profits. This is true regardless of the degree of malevolence of the people in charge. Morally abhorrent as individual capitalists can be in their disregard for the foundations of human life, it is not their particular actions but rather the massive indifference of capitalists as a whole to anything but their bottom line that is at issue.

Two important conclusions follow from this: First, capitalists—again, not on account of their personal character defects but by virtue of their class position alone—are *the* obstacle to addressing climate change. Not the climate deniers, or the liberal hypocrites, or the gas-guzzling suburbanites. It’s the capitalist class that’s going to hold this thing up, and thus anyone concerned with impending planetary doom must be singularly obsessed with diminishing their power.

Second, and by extension, environmentalism and socialism are one project. They never were in fact different, but we’re at the point in the history of environmentalism when no environmentalist who is not also a socialist can be taken seriously as an environmentalist. Things have thus been simplified for us, at least theoretically. Where before people spoke of the “intersection of environmentalism and socialism,” today we can name the political-economic vision wherein ecological collapse is avoided with a more straightforward term: quite simply, *socialism*.



*Benjamin Y. Fong  
is a member of  
Phoenix DSA.*



Chico DSA, North Valley Mutual Aid, and other local activists gather at the Walmart parking lot fire refugee camp. Photo by Francis Tatem, Sacramento DSA.

# Tax the Climate Criminals, not Carbon Footprints

By Matt Huber

If you feel guilty about your carbon footprint (the amount of energy you consume that adds to greenhouse emissions) and you're not in the 1%, you're buying into a false ideology. We hear too often that the responsibility for climate change rests with all of us. We all have “carbon footprints” and must share the costs of climate solutions.

As socialists, we must reject this ideology. The majority of society (that is, the working class) might generate emissions attached to our severely constrained consumption choices, but the real power, and responsibility, lies with capitalists who own and control the production of those commodities for profit. The capitalist class might also live lavish carbon-intensive “lifestyles”—think private jets—but the wealth funding their consumption comes from the exploitation of labor and nature for profit.

Thus, the only climate “sacrifice” must be shouldered by the rich who profit from carbon-based capitalism. Yet elite policy wonks and politicians often think a carbon tax is the “sensible” approach to climate policy. As recently as January 2019, a group of former Federal Reserve chairs and economists signed a joint statement calling a carbon tax “the most cost-effective lever to reduce carbon emissions at the scale and speed that is necessary.” Although the logic of such proposals aims to send “price signals” about the “cost” of emissions, the French *gilets jaunes* or “yellow vests” movement shows how ordinary people respond to “price signals” that place the burden of climate solutions on the working class.

France's carbon tax was a regressive one combined with tax cuts for the rich. One could conceivably design a progressive carbon tax targeting only the corporate polluters, but these companies could

then pass on such costs to households. Because we all use carbon, this allows the climate-denial Right to claim the policy is a “tax” on working-class lives.

A socialist slogan for climate politics could be “Don't tax molecules, tax the rich!” Carbon dioxide has no class interest. Climate politics should not be

about tweaking price signals. It should be about a basic principle: We need to tax them to fund us. The striking teachers in West Virginia and Oklahoma called for higher taxes on the fossil fuel industry to fund better education. Similarly, Bernie Sanders called for a tax on Wall Street to fund free public college for All.

A climate policy based on taxing the rich in general can be part of a larger politics of redistribution that delivers benefits to the working class

through decarbonization. A Green New Deal could be based on a federal job guarantee, a public sector-led transition to carbon-free energy, and “green” public housing. Furthermore, just as Medicare for All is a wildly popular proposal based on the de-commodification of a basic social need, we could organize around an “energy for all” program.

The key is to make sure that this energy transition is not controlled by capitalists seeking profit. Socialists must argue that the future of our planet is too important to be left to the private sector. But we first need to understand that capitalists, not our airplane ticket to visit our grandparents, got us into this mess in the first place. ❖

*Matt Huber is a member of the Syracuse DSA Organizing Committee. For a report by Colin Kinniburgh on the gilets jaunes in France, go to DL Exclusives Online*



A *gilets jaunes* demonstrator waits at the end point of a solidarity march in Paris led by unionists on February 5, 2019. The back of the vest reads, “We live on the same planet, but not in the same world. Let's save the earth together.” Photo: Colin Kinniburgh



# Green Jobs and a True Right to Work

By Chris Maisano

In *The Sun Also Rises*, Ernest Hemingway's novel of a "lost generation," one of the characters gives a pithy description of how he went bankrupt: "gradually and then suddenly." The same is often true for breakthrough policy ideas like the Green New Deal or a federal jobs guarantee. Once confined to the left fringes of political life, they're suddenly being embraced (rhetorically, if not substantively) by the likes of Cory Booker and others not known for their radicalism.

Unlike Booker, whose proposal for a job guarantee "pilot program" is weak and tentative, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez isn't wasting any time. Her recent congressional resolution for a Green New Deal contains extremely ambitious language calling for "high-quality union jobs that pay prevailing wages... adequate family and medical leave, paid vacations, and retirement security to all people of the United States," coupled with a demand to end restrictions on unionization and collective bargaining.

By linking a green energy transition with the demand for full employment at high standards, AOC is helping to push a working-class environmentalism that could break climate politics out of the elite sphere of academics, policy wonks, and benevolent billionaires, where it's been trapped for far too long. There will not be a mass audience for green politics if it's perceived as a program of austerity and lowered living standards. As the window for effectively addressing the climate crisis rapidly closes, it needs that audience as soon as possible.



John Leavitt

## Read Online Exclusives

Go to [dsausa.org](https://dsausa.org) and click on *Democratic Left*

A Green New Deal with full employment wouldn't just help us avert a full-blown climate catastrophe. By providing employment to everyone who's willing and able to work, such a program could potentially lay the groundwork for a transition beyond capitalism to a new social order based on the values of solidarity, cooperation, and sustainability—which is precisely why the economic and political establishments are so opposed to it.

Socialists have long understood that capitalism's constant creation of a "reserve army of labor" is one of its most powerful weapons against the working class. So long as employers are able to point toward the jobless outside the factory gates or the office door, they can exercise a tremendous degree of discipline over their workers. In his classic 1943 essay "The Political Aspects of Full Employment," Marxist economist Michal Kalecki observed that under a full employment regime "the 'sack' would cease to play its role as a disciplinary measure. The social position of the boss would be undermined, and the self-assurance and class-consciousness of the working class would grow."

We want full employment not because of a moral aversion to leisure and idleness. And we want it not just because there's so much work that needs to be done to rebuild our country and stave off the climate crisis. We want full employment because it weakens the power of the boss and opens up opportunities for a wider transformation of social relations. It's time to unite the employed and the unemployed, the organized and the unorganized, the secure and the precarious behind the demand for a genuine right to work—not just for a paycheck, but for social and ecological reconstruction, too. ❖

*Chris Maisano is a member of New York City DSA and the National Political Committee.*



# Power to the People

## Public Ownership of PG&E

By Eric Ruud

In California, when you can't pay your bill, Pacific Gas and Electric turns off your electric power. But when investor-owned PG&E can't pay what it owes, it goes to the courts and state legislature for relief. After deadly forest fires caused by its negligence, in January, PG&E filed for Chapter 11, a form of bankruptcy where the debtor (in this case, PG&E) retains possession of the company while a court oversees its progression back to solvency.

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has held PG&E's hand through the process and authorized \$6 billion in bank loans the day before PG&E's bankruptcy filing, violating state utility code and preventing transparent independent review.

Decades of putting profit before safety left PG&E with unreliable and fire-prone equipment. Neglect coupled with hot and dry summers brought by climate change resulted in dozens of deadly wildfires and as much as \$30 billion in liability that the company says it can't pay.

So far, PG&E has used bankruptcy to avoid payment to fire victims and to void contracts to buy green energy. There is no precedent for the situation the company faces, and no clear path back to business as usual.

As socialists, we view PG&E's bankruptcy proceeding as a great opportunity. DSA chapters and organizing committees in Northern California, including Chico, North Bay, East Bay, San Francisco, Sacramento, Santa Cruz, Silicon Valley, and Sierra Foothills have formed a coalition around the following demands:

**No bailout.** In profitable times, investors make billions each year from ratepayers. We reject privatized gain with socialized risk. No public funds should be used to pay PG&E's debts, and costs should not be passed to ratepayers.

**Public and worker control.** Decisions about our utilities should be made by the 16

million people who use them (and the 20,000 who do the work), not a small group of millionaire executives who serve billionaire investors.

**Green New Deal.** Public ownership of utilities would provide a mechanism for a just transition to clean energy and good-paying union jobs.

East Bay DSA created a working group focused on research and coalition building and created a website, LetsOwnPGE.com, to popularize public ownership with democratic and worker control. And San Francisco DSA and Sacramento DSA have organized disruptive direct actions at CPUC hearings alongside partner groups such as Local Clean Energy Alliance, Diablo Rising Tide, Mask Oakland, Communities for a Better Environment, and East Bay Clean Power Alliance, generating a slew of compelling press coverage and imagery.

If you've read anything about PG&E in the last three months, you probably saw DSA's red banners.

Given the power of PG&E's money in the state capitol, we have no illusions: this will be a long and difficult fight. But we believe dangerous conditions won't change until we're rid of the profit-seeking structures that created them. We will look to build support for militant union workers at PG&E and in the energy sector broadly. We will support democratic coalitions that prioritize our climate and our future. We will continue to campaign to popularize our socialist vision, and we believe we will win. ❖

*Eric Ruud is a tech worker, a resident of Oakland, and a member of East Bay DSA. See p. 12 for more on how California DSAers responded to the climate catastrophe of wildfires.*



“PG&E has used bankruptcy to avoid payment to fire victims and to void contracts to buy green energy.”



# Unrigging the Power Game

By Anna Kastner

I get a faux-friendly email almost weekly from National Grid, the British multinational that provides my gas and electricity. It reminds me to turn down my thermostat to save money. Because National Grid successfully lobbied Rhode Island regulators to decouple usage from revenue, no matter how much I turn down the thermostat, National Grid will still profit. The game is rigged.

For the past year and a half, we in the Providence, Rhode Island, chapter of DSA (ProvDSA) have waged a campaign we call #NationalizeGrid—a call to replace National Grid with a publicly owned utility that is democratically controlled, treats workers fairly, and allows us to have a just transition to renewable energy sources. Boston DSA recently voted to start its own Nationalize Grid campaign.

The current system allows National Grid to make billions in profits worldwide while passing its liabilities onto us, the ratepayers. Meanwhile, carbon taxes and fancy electric cars are insufficient to address the gravity of climate change. Decoupling National Grid's revenue from usage doesn't address the root causes of climate change and only allows National Grid to continue to extract vast amounts of money from those who can least afford it.

We know we won't win publicly owned utilities overnight, but it won't happen unless we organize. We've been building power with those most directly affected by the high cost of energy. Constant rate hikes have made National Grid's rates the highest in the continental United States. We've been working hand in hand with the George Wiley Center, a grassroots anti-poverty organization that organizes low-income people. Together, ProvDSA and the George Wiley Center fought National Grid's proposed rate hikes in the spring of 2018. The company got more than we'd have liked, but less than it requested. Now we're advocating for the state legislature to pass a Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) which would allow low-income folks to pay a percentage of their income toward their utility bills, making the utility system less regressive and reducing the number of shutoffs. ❖

*Anna Kastner is a Massachusetts public defender, a co-chair of Providence DSA, and a member of the Rhode Island National Lawyers Guild.*



The first regional conference drew DSAers from California and Hawaii to meet each other, share information, and prepare for the national convention. Photo by Miguel Duarte.

# Making Detroit the Engine of a Green New Deal

By Natasha Fernández-Silber

**D**etroit DSA's mobilization around the Green New Deal started last November, when GM announced that despite earning record profits in 2018, it would be closing five plants in North America (including two in Michigan) and laying off 14,000 workers.

The announcement—which came just ten years after taxpayers saved GM from bankruptcy with a \$50 billion bailout—opened up old wounds in Detroit, a city whose fate has long been tied to the auto giant. The Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly, also known as the “Poletown Plant,” was built in the early 1980s on land taken by the City of Detroit via eminent domain and gifted to GM. The entire neighborhood of Poletown—including 4,000 homes, hundreds of local businesses, and several historic churches—was bulldozed so that GM could build the plant it now plans to “idle.”

GM also made clear that as part of its “global restructuring,” it would be discontinuing the Volt, a hybrid-electric car produced at the Poletown Plant as part of the 2009 bailout agreement. This clears the way for GM to focus on high-margin, gas-guzzling pickup trucks and SUVs, and reveals its commitment to a “zero emissions” future to be a sham.

The response from elected officials was characteristically anemic. So in December, Detroit DSA organized a screening of the 1983 documentary *Poletown Lives!*, which tells how Poletown residents valiantly fought to save their neighborhood. Some 250 outraged Detroiters attended, including newly-

minted U.S. Representative Rashida Tlaib, who is a member of Detroit DSA. Tlaib spoke on a panel alongside the film's director and Sean Crawford, a Detroit DSAer who until this February worked at the Poletown Plant.

Encouraged by our success, we set out to organize a mass action at the annual Auto Show Charity Preview, a ritzy event commonly called “Auto Prom.” We planned to protest GM's criminal incompetence, its degradation of the environment, and its ceaseless efforts to roll back domestic auto production.

But we also wanted to make clear that the problem wasn't just GM and its “greed”—it was that the fates of countless people are in the hands of profit-seeking corporations.

In collaboration with local labor, environmental, and racial justice groups, we developed three demands: for GM to honor its labor contract and keep the

plants open; for any idled plants to be seized via eminent domain and put to green, public use; and for a Green New Deal, which would include a federal union jobs guarantee, rapid decarbonization of the economy, and a just transition. Our rallying cry was “Make Detroit the Engine of a Green New Deal.”

On January 18, over 400 protesters carried bright yellow and green signs (all designed and hand-printed by DSAers) that read, “Detroit Demands a Green New Deal,” “Seize the Plant, Save the Planet,” “Justice for Poletown,” “Green Union Jobs Now,” and “Eminent Domain: Take Over GM.”

As elites in tuxedos and cocktail dresses attempted to enter the gala (without making eye contact),



U.S. Congresswoman and DSA member Rashida Tlaib protests to stop the GM plant closings and re-tool the factories for green manufacturing. Photo: Joseph Xu.

they were confronted by protesters shouting, “Make better life choices!” and “Which side are you on?” The chants were buoyed by DSA’s newly assembled Detroit People’s Marching Band, which provided a joyous sonic background. DSA members marched alongside rank-and-file UAW and Unifor (Canadian auto) workers, radical Brazilian unionists, students, and activists from a wide swath of community groups. Protesters wore yellow vests in solidarity with the *gilets jaunes* in France.

“Let’s not forget what happened to Poletown,” said Rashida Tlaib over the megaphone. “Let’s not forget every single person that gave up so much for that plant in Hamtramck to be built—and for them to

[just] walk away. So I am telling you, I stand with our UAW leaders, but I am for accountability today. If you [GM] leave, I want our money back. If you leave, I want our plant back. I want every single thing we ever gave you back. Because that’s what we deserve.”

Using the GM plant closures as a springboard to call for radical economic reforms in the form of a Green New Deal has struck a nerve in Detroit and around the nation. At least 20 articles were written about the Auto Show rally. The action not only saw DSA strengthened as a force in Detroit politics, it gave rise to the Detroit Coalition for a Green New Deal, which is seeking public hearings around our demands.

Detroit DSA will continue to organize around bold initiatives to “Make the Rust Belt Green” and put Michiganders back to work. We believe centering the Rust Belt—and Michigan and Detroit in particular—is essential to any package of green federal legislation.

To that end, Detroit DSA, in collaboration with local elected officials and our coalition partners, is developing a proposal for a new federal agency called the Great Lakes Authority—modeled after the Depression-era Tennessee Valley Authority—tasked with building a just, regenerative, sustainable economy here in the Rust Belt. Such an agency would funnel federal resources (under local control) to large-scale green manufacturing, retooling of idled factories, generation of renewable energy, green infrastructure, environmental assessment and remediation, sustainable agriculture, protection of fresh water sources and ecosystems, and ecotourism.



Natasha Fernández-Silber on the bullhorn at the Auto Show Charity Preview (also known as the “Auto Prom”), demanding a Green New Deal for Detroit. Photo: Joseph Xu.

In so many ways, the ecological and economic apocalypse now being discussed as a motivator of a Green New Deal has already happened in the Rust Belt, particularly in Detroit, Gary, and Flint. No one in America needs a Green New Deal more than we do, and we are ready to fight for it. ❖

*Natasha Fernández-Silber is co-chair of Detroit DSA.*

**DSA Swag Shop**  
<https://store.dsaua.org/>

Purchase a limited edition print of the  
 Winter 2018 *Democratic Left* cover

# Climate Horror in California

By Erik Apland

*A sad reality of the climate crisis that has hit close to home for DSA chapters across the country is the increasingly frequent devastation caused by extreme natural disasters. Over the past two years, hurricanes Florence, Harvey, Irma, and Maria have devastated parts of the United States and Puerto Rico. More recently, the Camp Fire wreaked havoc across California, displacing thousands of people from their homes and threatening entire cities with dangerous air quality. In the face of these disasters, our capitalist bureaucracies have proved insufficient, but DSAers and other community members have been spurred into action in solidarity with their neighbors.—EDS.*

**A**t 6:30 in the morning on November 8, 2018, something terrible and totally predictable happened. In howling winds, uninsulated PG&E lines in the rugged North Fork Feather River canyon in Northern California malfunctioned, starting a fire in dry brush near Camp Creek Road. Fire personnel responded, but found themselves fighting just to save people, animals, and themselves from the inferno. By noon, the town of Paradise—population 27,000—was devastated. Fifty thousand people



RaeAnne Owen, Chico DSA co-chair, unloads donated supplies at the Walmart parking lot fire refugee camp. Photo by Francis Tatem, Sacramento DSA.

from Paradise and neighboring communities were evacuated, almost 14,000 homes and apartment buildings burned to the ground, and 86 people were killed. The destruction is unprecedented in modern U.S. wildfire history.

The Camp Fire and its aftermath show the stark future that faces a world hurtling toward uncontrollable climate change: vast destruction and millions in Northern California choking on some of the most toxic air in the world. And even after the fire was contained, the impacts kept accumulating. The Pan-



The Winter YDSA conference drew hundreds of young people from across the country. Photo by Ben Adam Rosenberg.

“The Camp Fire and its aftermath show the stark future that faces a world hurtling toward uncontrollable climate change.”

dora’s Box of capitalist plagues sprang open for us on November 8.

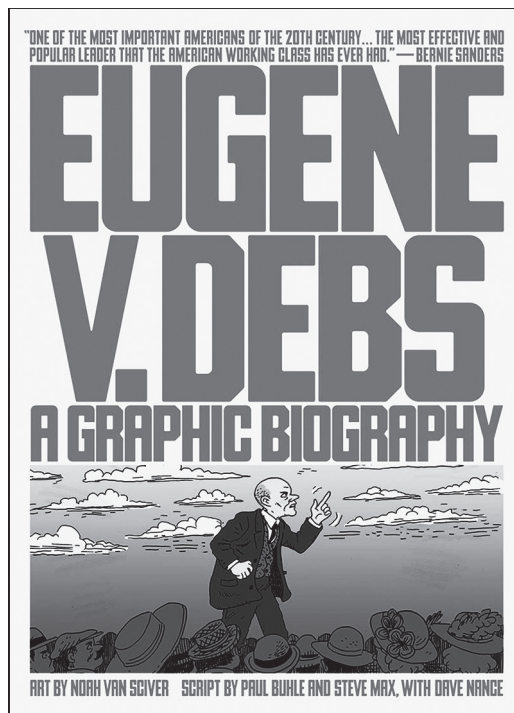
Both Paradise and the neighboring city of Chico, already tight housing and rental markets, became jammed due to the vast destruction of housing stock. The financially starved federal agencies charged with responding to such disasters provided only meager transitional support. The destruction of schools, businesses, and the only hospital in Paradise threw many out of work at the same time that the fire burned their homes, their belongings, and their transportation. Thousands of people, many of them already near the margins of society—the elderly, the working poor—were stripped of the security they had struggled to create for themselves.

Many who were not even in the path of the fire had their lives upended, as landlords and property managers with eyes on quick, high-dollar sales or insurance-funded higher rental fees booted working-class tenants from their homes. On the heels of the fire came a government shutdown, closing the very agencies that are supposed to protect the environment and prevent future wildfire catastrophes: the EPA and the U.S. Forest Service, among many others.

Chico DSA members have been active on the ground since shortly after the fire began. Our scheduled Brake Light Repair became an impromptu donation drive, with hundreds of pounds of supplies collected and distributed to evacuees in parking lots and unofficial shelters. We received critical material support from East Bay, Sacramento, San Francisco, and even New York DSA chapters, as well as advice and encouragement from National Director Maria Svart. Sacramento DSA produced and released a video showing the conditions on the ground at the ad hoc evacuee camp, including Chico DSA members reading excerpts of a statement on the Camp Fire and capitalism.

More recently, we have been collaborating with Chico 350 in pushing the Chico City Council to declare a climate emergency and have been pushing

New from Verso and the DSA Fund



Go to [dsausa.org](https://dsausa.org), click on DSA Fund, order the book, and download the study guide.

for local support for a Green New Deal. In the recent California Democratic Party delegate elections, North State Progressive Alliance slates in our and neighboring assembly districts won numerous delegate positions, with the Green New Deal taking an important place in their policy platform.

This catastrophe in our community drove home the urgency of ecosocialist action. Only through grassroots organizing for government action can we force the immensely powerful polluting industries to stop cooking the earth. And only through this same organizing can we create social programs to protect all of us when our lives go up in smoke. In the Camp Fire, we have a crystal-clear example of how rent control, Medicare for All, and the Green New Deal can create a more humane future. ❖

*Erik Apland is active with Sacramento DSA, and helped start a Chico Working Group in May 2018. He works in federal land management and is active in his union local (IAMAW 1995, AFL-CIO).*



# Books by DSA Authors

**W**e in DSA love to read, and many of us love to write. Once a year we present a list of all the books published by DSA members in the past three years and some we missed. If we missed yours this year, please write to [dleditorvol@dsausa.org](mailto:dleditorvol@dsausa.org). Enjoy!—EDS.

**Aronson, Ronald**, *We: Reviving Social Hope* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), looks at social movements as “powerful examples of socially energized, politically determined, and actionably engaged forms of hope.”

**Brown, Jenny**, *Birth Strike: The Hidden Fight over Women’s Work* (PM Press, 2019) and *Without Apology: The Abortion Struggle Now* (forthcoming, Verso, November 2019).

**Buhle, Paul; Nance, Dave; Max, Steve**; illustrations by **Noah Van Sciver**, *Eugene V. Debs, A Graphic Biography* (Verso, 2019), the story of U.S. socialism’s iconic leader and up through Bernie Sanders’s campaign.

**Casagrande, Roy**, *The Blood Throne of Caria*, feminist and internationalist historical fiction set in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE (<https://bloodthronecaria.com>).

**Davenport, Tim**, and **LeBlanc, Paul**, *Dissident Marxism in the United States, Volume 1: The “American Exceptionalism” of Jay Lovestone and His Comrades, 1929-1940* (Haymarket Books, 2018).

**Davenport, Tim**, and **Walters, David**, co-editors, *The Selected Works of Eugene V. Debs, Volume 1: Building Solidarity on the Tracks, 1877-1892* (Haymarket Books, 2019, No. 1 in a projected six-volume series).

**Ellis, Frederick**, 1908 edition of “DEBS: His Life, Writings and Speeches,” a facsimile available for \$38.95 from [frederick658@hotmail.com](mailto:frederick658@hotmail.com).

**Feffer, John**, Dystopian eco-fiction: *Splinterlands* and *Frostlands* (Haymarket Books, 2016, 2018) and *Aftershock: A Journey Through Eastern Europe’s Broken Dreams* (Zed, 2017).

**Foster, Katie**, *Major Diamonds Knights and Knives*, a poetry project modeled after a deck of cards, [www.tridentcafe.com/products/major-diamonds-nights-knives-by-katie-foster](http://www.tridentcafe.com/products/major-diamonds-nights-knives-by-katie-foster).

**Frantin, Lillia**, and **Edwards, Herb**, *Re-Imagining NOW: Towards A New Society*, a graphic study guide (forthcoming from [peopleforanewsociety.org](http://peopleforanewsociety.org)).

**Haynes, Jay**, and **Weisman, Eleanor**, eds., *The Role of the Arts in Learning: Cultivating Landscapes of Democracy* (Routledge, 2018), “offers imaginative ways the arts and sciences intersect with democratic learning and civic engagement.”

**Henson, Michael**, *A Small Room with Trouble on My Mind and Other Stories* (Bottom Dog Press, 2016), a novella and stories about working class life among urban Appalachian migrants. *The Dead Singing: Poems* (Mongrel Empire Press, 2016), Appalachian landscape and beings. *Maggie Boylan* (Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 2018), linked stories of the meth and oxy wreckage in Appalachia

**Kay, William Walter**, *Malthus to Mifepristone: A Primer on the Population Control Movement*, a history from 1798 to 1998 (Amazon.com, 2018).

**Ketchum, Christopher**, *This Land: How Cowboys, Capitalism, and Corruption are Ruining the American West* (forthcoming, Viking Press, 2019).

**Lowney, John**, *Jazz Internationalism: Literary Afro-Modernism and the Cultural Politics of Black Music* (University of Illinois Press, 2017).

**McKanan, Dan**, *Eco-Alchemy: Anthroposophy and the History and Future of Environmentalism* (University of California Press, 2017).

**Messner, Michael**, *Guys Like Me: Five Wars, Five Veterans for Peace* (Rutgers University Press, 2018), <http://guyslikemebook.com>.

**Olds, Lee**, *Summer of Love: Happenstance, A Trilogy*, myriad characters clash and combust in Haight Ashbury (Amazon.com, 2017).

**Patel, Raj**, and **Moore, Jason W.**, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things, A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet* (University of California Press, 2017).

**Piasek, Andy**, *In Motion*, “a novel about love and solidarity” (Sunshine Publishing, 2016).

**Post, Dianne**, *Blood and Honor* and *Twisted Justice*: feminist thrillers, available at [diannepost.com](http://diannepost.com) or [diannepost.net](http://diannepost.net).

**Silliman, Ron**, *You*, a long poem, translated into the French by Martin Richet (Vies Paralleles, Brussels, 2016 and *if wants to be the same as is: Essential Poems of David Bromige*, with **Jack Krick** and **Bob Perelman**, co-editors (New Star Books, Vancouver, 2018)

**Slaughter, Jane**, *Secrets of a Successful Organizer*, co-authored with **Alexandra Bradbury** and **Mark Brenner** (Labor Notes, 2016).

**Walzer, Michael**, *A Foreign Policy for the Left* (Yale University Press, 2018) and *Political Action, A Practical Guide to Movement Politics*, with an introduction by **Jon Wiener** and a new preface by the author (New York Review of Books Press, 2019). Written during the Nixon years, still timely.

**Zink, David C.A.**, *A Hundred Lifetimes*, an eco-socialist science fiction novel of climate change (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

# National DSA Convention

August 2-4, 2019 • Atlanta, Georgia

Read Maria Svart’s column on p. 2 and go to [www.dsausa.org/national-convention/](http://www.dsausa.org/national-convention/) for more information.

Nominations are open for At-Large Delegates  
between March 1 and April 30.

Submit a self-nomination at [bit.ly/nominate-at-large](http://bit.ly/nominate-at-large)

***Y’allidarity Forever!***

## Change the USA! Join the DSA!

Yes, I want to join the Democratic Socialists of America. Enclosed are my dues (includes a subscription to *Democratic Left*) of:

\$175 Sustainer  \$110 Family  \$45 Introductory  \$20 Student  \$27 Low-Income

Yes, I want to renew my membership in DSA. Enclosed are my renewal dues of:

\$175 Sustainer  \$110 Family  \$60 Regular  \$20 Student  \$27 Low-Income

Enclosed is an extra contribution of \$50 \$100 \$25 to help DSA in its work

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Year of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City / State / Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Union Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

BILL MY CREDIT CARD Circle One: MC Visa No. \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Security Code \_\_\_\_\_

### MY INTERESTS ARE

- Labor
- Religion
- Youth
- Anti-Racism
- Feminism
- LGBTQI Rights
- International
- Environmental Justice
- Other

Return to:

**DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS  
OF AMERICA**

75 Maiden Lane, Suite 702

New York, NY 10038

212-727-8610

[info@dsausa.org](mailto:info@dsausa.org)

[www.dsausa.org](http://www.dsausa.org)

**Moving?** Let us know: [info@dsausa.org](mailto:info@dsausa.org). The Post Office charges for every returned copy of *Democratic Left*. We save money, and you don't miss an issue.

## DEMOCRATIC LEFT

(ISSN 1643207) is published quarterly at 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 702, New York, NY 10038. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY (Publication No. 701-960). Subscriptions: \$10 regular, \$15 institutional. Postmaster: Send address changes to 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 702, New York, NY 10038. *Democratic Left* is published by the Democratic Socialists of America, 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 702, New York, NY 10038. (212) 726-8610. Signed articles express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily the organization.

**Executive Editor:** Maria Svart **Editor:** Maxine Phillips  
**Guest Editors:** Laura Colaneri, Meagan Day, Don McIntosh  
**Editorial Team:** Olivia Bauer, Zinzi Clemmons, Meagan Day, Maurice Isserman, Barbara Joye, Christine Lombardi, Stephen Magro, Don McIntosh, Joseph Schwartz

**Founding Editor:** Michael Harrington (1928–1989)  
**Production:** Ed Hedemann  
**DSA Weekly:** Editor: Christine Lombardi  
**Socialist Forum Editorial Committee:** Arash Azizi, Benjamin Fong, Martha Gruelle, Rafael Khachaturian, Dan La Botz, Chris Maisano, Rivka Maizlish, Kalena Thomhave, Micah Uetricht

Democratic Socialists of America share a vision of 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 people. We are dedicated to building truly international social movements—of unions, environmentalists, feminists, and people of color—which together can elevate global justice over brutalizing global competition.



**Join, Renew, or Donate to DSA between  
March 17-31 in honor of International  
Working Women's Month and receive  
a Socialist Feminist Sticker!**

**Join:** [dsausa.org/join](https://dsausa.org/join)

**Donate:** [dsausa.org/donate](https://dsausa.org/donate)