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INSIDE DL	
The Maquiladora Strike .....	3
DSA Labor Activist Profiles .....	6
Reflections on a Labor Day .....	7
"Peoples Right to Know" .....	9
Social Security on Chopping Block .....	11
Better Left Than Bereft .....	15
Manifesto Anniversary Celebrated .....	19

# Labor's Victories

BY HAROLD MEYERSON

**I**N THE END, WHAT REALLY DOOMED Proposition 226 (the anti-labor proposition on the ballot) in the June California primary election was its pedigree: This was a measure that, politically, came from nowhere. That is, 226 didn't emerge out of a mass discontent with unions or with union political-action programs, which it sought to decimate. With the labor movement reduced to representing just 14 percent of the work force, the percentage of Americans with a visceral dislike of unions has correspondingly dwindled as well:

It's hard to hate that which you don't even encounter. More positively, the public perception of unions has taken a modest upturn in the three years since John Sweeney took the helm at the AFL-CIO, during which labor has increasingly focused on such popular causes as raising the minimum wage and campaigning against sweatshops.

So, unlike Proposition 227 — which is the misshapen expression of a genuinely widespread lack of confidence in bilingual education and the public schools generally, as well as of a

nativist uneasiness at the growing multiculturalism of California — Proposition 226 neither arose from nor was rooted in a public clamor to do something about a social problem. To the contrary, it arose from a very select clamor: that of Republican leaders and strategists, who were shaken by the scope and effectiveness of the union effort during the '96 campaign. And nowhere had the movement been more active and effective than in California, where labor mobilized thousands of volunteers who enabled the Democrats to win back the Assembly.

The public perception of unions has taken a modest upturn.

It's no mystery, then, what led Grover Norquist, the head of Americans for Tax Reform and a longtime strategist and henchman for Newt Gingrich, to fund the drive that put 226 on the ballot, and to develop plans to run parallel campaigns all across the nation. As the Republicans saw it, the time to dismantle labor's newfound political clout was now, before it had the opportunity to become even more proficient at waging campaigns and to cultivate a new generation of political organizers.

*continued on page 2*

What this meant, however, was that 226 was rooted in nothing more than a strategic conceit, as the dearth of volunteers working on its behalf made abundantly clear. Arrayed against it was a constituency that felt its very life was on the line: that without the ability to engage in politics, the American labor movement would shrivel and die. In the campaign just completed, labor had both the resources and the passion on its side, a combination that in politics is almost always unbeatable.

It was, of course, the "Yes" campaign that looked unbeatable for many months preceding the vote. As recently as February, Prop. 226 was leading in the Field Poll by a 71-to-22-percent margin. At first glance, the measure seemed all but unarguable within the Jeffersonian framework of American politics: Requiring unions to obtain the annual permission of members to use a small portion of their dues on politics seemed reasonable enough. At second glance, however, the measure virtually mandated a shift in the balance of class power in California politics, for it was only unions that were required to seek such permission: Other membership groups weren't so obliged. Corporations, say, which already outspent unions by an 11 to 1 margin, were not required to seek approval from shareholders.


The Norquist coven accuses labor of waging a deceptive campaign against 226. In fact, labor did largely refrain from debating the question of the rights of individual members, although when it engaged the issue, it noted that members already have the right, under the Supreme Court's Beck decision, to withhold the portion of their dues that goes to politics, and that the turnover rate of local union leadership is high enough to suggest that discontent with union policies does not go unregistered. But the core of labor's campaign, which addressed the aggregate effects of erasing unions from California's political landscape, was entirely on point. The privatization of education, the con-

tinued export of jobs and the reduction in the pressure for HMO reform — three of the issues that the "No" campaign highlighted in its ads — were all predictable consequences of 226's enactment.

For all that, the "No on 226" campaign took some time to get on track — and particularly, the campaign that the AFL-CIO waged to turn around the vote of its own members. In the February Field Poll, fully 67 percent of union-household voters expressed support for the measure. In the late-May Field Poll, 68 percent said they were opposed. The epochal effort to reverse the union vote began in earnest in mid-March, when the national AFL-CIO sent Arlene Holt — once the California director of the Ameri-

can Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, more recently an official at the AFL-CIO's Washington headquarters — to coordinate the unions' campaign here. Holt spearheaded the activities of more than 50 full-time coordinators that various unions donated to the campaign — a group, drawn from the new generation of Sweeney-era organizers, that was disproportionately young, female, and nonwhite. They coordinated a campaign that, by Holt's estimate, sent at least eight pieces of mail to all AFL-CIO members in the state, reached 500,000 of them by phone and hundreds of thousands more through precinct walks. Which is to say, for all the money that labor ponied up, the

continued on page 13



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# The Strike at the Han Young Maquiladora

BY HERB SHORE

A labor struggle that may have consequences for the entire Western Hemisphere is taking place in a small factory in Tijuana, Baja California. Tijuana is a 20-minute freeway drive from downtown San Diego, just across the busiest border crossing in the U.S. The population has grown rapidly, to the point that Tijuana is as large a city as San Diego, though most San Diegans are barely aware of its existence. Fueling the growth has been the rapid rise of the maquiladora industry, the 600 plus foreign-owned factories that produce goods for the export market. The majority of TV sets sold in the U.S. are assembled in Tijuana maquiladoras.

Tijuana is a study in contrasts. The downtown tourist areas cater to U.S. visitors. Numerous nightclubs draw San Diego teenagers eager to get around the 21 year drinking age in California. Prices for most goods, such as basic foodstuffs at the Calimax supermarkets, are about the same on either side of the border. Many of the maquiladora factories are large single story buildings in modern looking "industrial parks," in the Southern California style. But if one looks at the working conditions in these factories, the \$40-a-week wages, the barrios where the workers live, or the toxic waste dumps on the outskirts of town, there is no doubt that the third world begins at the border.

The workers in the maquiladoras are in theory represented by labor unions. In fact, Mexican labor law is quite progressive. Workers have the right to strike, are supposed to participate in profit sharing arrangements, are supposed to have a say in health and safety arrangements, etc. The problem is that the situation in the factories bears little relation to the laws on the books. The factory owners sign agreements with PRI-controlled unions that have no responsibility toward the workers, who may not even be aware that there is a union that is

supposed to represent them. This cozy arrangement between the employers, unions and political establishment ensures that wages, health and safety costs will remain low, making the border region attractive for additional investment.

Everything changed in June 1997. The Han Young factory employs about 120 workers, producing chassis and platforms for Hyundai tractor

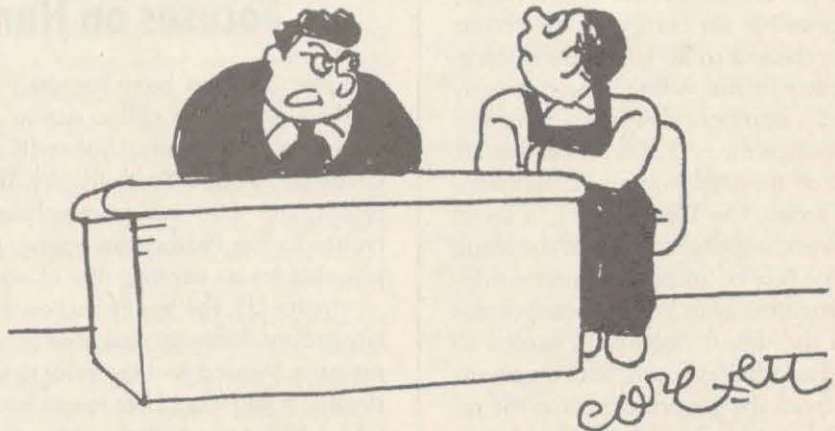
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A cozy arrangement among the employers, unions, and political establishment ensures that wages, health, and safety costs will remain low.

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trailers. After a very successful year of production, Han Young told its workers that their profit sharing for the year would range from \$7 to \$31 depending on seniority. The workers, who had never seen their union contract, and who were not even told which PRI union (CROC) "represented" them, decided they had had enough. They began a two-day work stoppage on June 2 for better wages and against dangerous safety conditions at the plant. This in itself was

WARNING! THE MACHINERY  
AT THIS PLANT IS OLD & DANGEROUS.  
WORK HERE AT THE RISK OF LIFE  
AND LIMB- OSHA.



"Sorry, but we only hire illiterates!"

not a unique occurrence for Tijuana; what was truly new was that the workers also decided to get rid of the PRI union and replace it with an independent union of their own choosing. This represented a whole new level of challenge; if this action spread to other factories the entire maquiladora system could not exist in its current manner.

The ensuing struggle has continued until the time this article was written in early August 1998. There are really two stories to recount: the struggle of the Han Young workers against the various players in the maquiladora establishment, and the support the workers have received from progressive activists in the U.S. There is no doubt that the workers in Tijuana have borne the brunt of the struggle and made the greatest sacrifices. However, it is not slighting their heroic role to recount the U.S. role, because it is very likely that their struggle would have been silently and violently crushed if it were not for the international attention their cause has aroused.

The following is a brief recounting of events on the Mexican side. Following the June work stoppage, the company tried to derail the move toward an independent union by firing union leaders, bringing in new workers from Vera Cruz, and other acts of intimidation. In spite of this, the workers on Oct. 6, 1997 voted overwhelmingly to replace the PRI affiliated CROC union with the independent FAT (Authentic Labor Front) union. The government labor board (CAB) responsible for certifying the results then refused to do so, claiming irregularities in the voting. The company fired a number of workers who had supported the FAT. On November 20, four of the fired workers began a hunger strike. On December 1, a series of work stoppages began at the plant. In the face of increasing international attention, Han Young management and the union organizers agreed to hold another election, with a guarantee from the government that the results would be accepted. Despite attempts to bring in fake workers to cast

votes against the independent union, to management's surprise on Dec. 16 the FAT affiliated STIMAHCS union

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There are two stories to recount: the struggle of the Han Young workers against the maquiladora establishment, and the support the workers have received from progressive activists in the U.S.

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won again. The workers who had been illegally fired for union activities were reinstated with back pay. On Jan. 14, 1998 STIMAHCS was certified as the representative of the Han Young workers.

At this point, it seemed as though the workers had won. All that remained was a contract to be negotiated between STIMAHCS and Han Young management. Instead, Han Young hired a representative of the PRI affiliated CROC union as its "human resources director", and set about a campaign to break the new union. There has been much speculation that the Mexican government and other maquiladora owners laid down the law

to Han Young that the independent union must not be allowed to survive. No progress was made toward negotiating a contract, and new workers were hired to reduce support for STIMAHCS. As a result, Han Young workers began a strike on May 22 that continues to the present. Various officials have declared the strike illegal, then legal. Warrants were issued for strike leaders. Police have torn down strike banners. Imported goons have threatened the strikers. A third election was held between the PRI union and the independent union. The election was won by the independent "Oct. 6" union, which took over the registration of STIMAHCS/FAT. The strike continues; its outcome will determine the future of the union movement in the maquiladora industry.

Given the power of the forces arrayed against the workers, it seems surprising that the movement for an independent union has survived for more than a year. One reason is the conflicting interests within the opposition. Baja California and the local labor board is controlled by the right wing PAN, whereas the federal government and the government allied unions are PRI. The Han Young management has to answer to the players in Mexico, but also to Hyundai Precision America, with headquarters in San Diego. Given Korea's need for

## International Day of Action Focuses on Han Young Struggle

October 30<sup>th</sup> has been targeted for actions worldwide in defense of workers rights. The call to action came from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) together with the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY). These two organizations together represent over 400 million members. From Canada to Argentina, from France to The Philippines, young, pro-labor activists will join with trade unionists for an exciting day of education, advocacy and direct action.

In the US, the Youth Section of the DSA will organize with community groups, labor groups, and youth activists from the PRD in Mexico to pressure Mexico and Hyundai to recognize the rights of the Han Young strikers. If you would like to get involved, contact Gabe Kramer at (317) 955-1492, Joan Axthelm at [jkaxthel@midway.uchicago.edu](mailto:jkaxthel@midway.uchicago.edu) or Daraka Larimore at [dklarimo@midway.uchicago.edu](mailto:dklarimo@midway.uchicago.edu).

# Join Gloria Steinem AND Cornel West at our 25th Anniversary Celebration SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 1998

• Landmark on the Park, New York City

Join us as we celebrate our anniversary and the kick off of DSA's Legacy Campaign commemorating the legacy of socialism and its continuation into the next century.

This event will be part of a weekend long series of activities including DSA's Activist Conference and the screening of a new film about the life and work of Michael Harrington.

This is an important gathering — a time for reflection, renewal and celebration, that will bring together veterans of our movement, current leadership and youth activists from throughout the United States.

Join us just to mingle, as we define strategies and tactics appropriate to the current political climate or at one of the skills workshops. One price gains admission to all of the activities.

For a current list of speakers and for more information, please call Susan Davidoff or Frank Llewellyn at the DSA office at 212-727-8610, e-mail: [sdavidoff@dsausa.org](mailto:sdavidoff@dsausa.org); or write to us at DSA, 180 Varick St. 12th Floor, New York, NY 10014.

financial support from the U.S. in the Asian financial crisis, Hyundai is very sensitive to bad publicity and doesn't want to appear the heavy. The result has been inconsistent and vacillating behavior on the part of the opposition.

There is another more important reason the workers have not been crushed: their struggle has been waged in the full glare of international publicity. Here one small organization and one person have made the difference, the Support Committee for Maquiladora Workers and its executive director Mary Tong. The San Diego based SCMW has been drawing attention to unsafe working conditions, sexual harassment, environmental devastation, and labor law violations since it was founded by Tong in 1993. One of its main activities has been to take U.S. politicians, religious people, union members, and others on tours of Tijuana toxic waste sites created by maquiladora operations. Mary Tong emphasizes that the SCMW is not itself engaged in organizing workers in Mexico, but is concerned that

organizing efforts by Mexican workers be protected by publicizing them in the U.S. and around the world.

The SCMW has been Han Young's worst nightmare. During the long interval from June through December 1997 when the labor board refused to certify the FAT election victory, the SCMW organized a national boycott of Hyundai Motors and picketed Hyundai headquarters in San Diego. Letter writing and fax campaigns to Hyundai were organized among labor and church organizations and publicized over the internet. Medical aid and other support was provided to the hunger strikers. The SCMW, the FAT/STIMAHCS union, and several other Mexican, U.S., and Canadian labor organizations, filed a complaint with the National Administrative Office of the U.S. Labor Department under the labor side agreement of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The NAO is responsible for investigating labor law violations in the NAFTA countries. An NAO hearing was actually held on Feb. 18, resulting in a report issued

April 28 calling for Ministerial Consultations between the U.S. Secretary of Labor and the Mexican Minister of Labor. Several members of congress, led by U.S. Representative David Bonior, have gotten involved in the situation in response to information provided by the SCMW.

Since the beginning of the strike on May 22, the struggle at the small Han Young factory has become a major focus of the progressive movement around the world. On June 16, demonstrations in support of the strikers were held at Mexican embassies and consulates around the world. Reports of demonstrations or support came in from Los Angeles, New York, Mexico City, Brazil, Toronto, Sri Lanka, and many other places. The SCMW is raising as much money as it can to support the striking workers and their families. A Han Young National Action Day has been called for Saturday, Sept. 19, to hold larger demonstrations focusing on Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo and Hyundai Motors.

DSA has had a role in the Han Young story. The San Diego Local and the Latino Commission cosponsored a resolution at the November 1997 convention in support of the Han Young workers, which passed unanimously. San Diego DSA participated in the picketing of Hyundai headquarters, and has raised over \$1500 in support of the striking workers. Eric Vega and Sacramento DSA were organizers of the June 16 demonstration in Sacramento.

It is not yet clear if the economic development of Tijuana will provide more than a low wage platform for foreign owned, low wage, export oriented assembly plants. A captive labor movement or an independent labor movement may well determine the outcome. Finally: in mid-July, the 350 workers at the Axiohm factory in Tijuana, which makes printheads for industrial printers, filed to join "October 6," the union founded by the Han Young workers.

*Herb Shore is a member of San Diego DSA.*

# DSA Labor Activist Profiles

BY BILL MOSLEY

## BOB FRANKLIN

Franklin, a Washington resident, has been a DSA member since 1992 and is treasurer of the DC/MD/NOVA local. Since 1995, he has added to his activist portfolio the presidency of Local 3579 of the American Federation of Government Employees, representing workers at his employer, the Consumer Products Safety Commission.

Franklin said that his commitment to DSA and to labor activism "arise out of the same philosophy. Because of DSA I may have a broader perspective than that of the local union members," he said.

In his union role, he has tried to foster a feeling of solidarity, — combating the feeling among some "that the interests of the higher-paid workers are different than lower-paid workers."

Working in the labor movement "helps you learn what appeals to the workers, the people," he said. "Most people in unions are not political activists. My union work provides an actual connection to people we're supposed to be supporting."

DSA can help provide the connection between political theory and the real world of unions, he said. "We need the organization doing political education, giving people in the labor movement the theoretical framework to put it in perspective," Franklin said. "With our union publications we could win converts."

## CARL GOLDMAN

Goldman, a resident of Takoma Park, Md. and a longtime DSA member, has put in 21 years as a labor staffer on top of his earlier rank-and-file work. He is currently executive director of Council 26 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, as well as

a vice president of the District of Columbia Central Labor Council and of the D.C. and Maryland AFL-CIO councils.

"There is a network of progressives in the labor movement," Goldman said. "Sometimes I will be in a meeting of the Central Labor Council and will count the number of people who are or have been DSA members." Union organizing, he said, "can be very frustrating work. The ideology gets me through difficult times."

He once believed that labor work should be the DSA's overriding priority, but over the years he developed an appreciation for the diversity of perspectives among the membership. "I've since become a little more humble about the work I'm doing, and

I've come to respect what people are doing in other arenas," he said. "Especially the intellectual arena, which is shaping consciousness and being involved in ideological battles. Sometimes I'm so involved in the nuts and bolts that I'm not conscious of larger issues." Now, he said, he realizes that "victories in any progressive arenas are important."

He sees the prospect for an alliance between labor and the broad left as

more promising than ever. "One of the nice things going on in labor is that the head of the AFL-CIO is a DSA member," he said. "There's an openness in the labor movement that hasn't been seen for years." Such union initiatives as Union Cities and Street Heat have been part of "a call for labor to win allies and build coalitions," he said. "There's an understanding in the labor movement of what we're up against, and a willingness to be open to new ideas."

*Bill Mosley is a member of DC/MD/NOVA DSA and on the Democratic Left Editorial Board.*

## INTERRIGATION

The "KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation" manual — the CIA's 1963 guidebook on interrogation — offers an inside view of the agency's coercive strategies for breaking down "resistant sources." The manual outlines methods for inducing mental and physical agony, including the use of narcotics, electrocution and hypnosis, and contains numerous references to the CIA's MKULTRA mind control research.

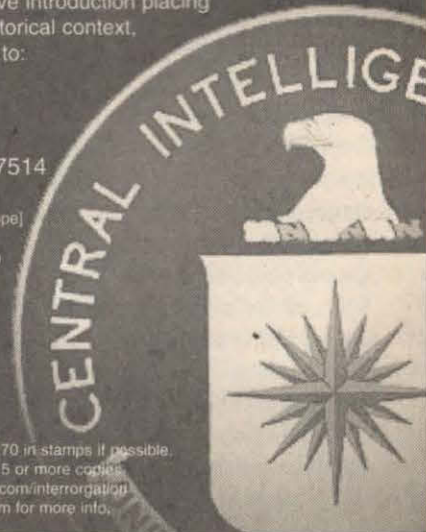
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# Reflections on Labor Day

BY JAMES CHARLET

I recall when Labor Day was merely a vacation from school. A hot, sunny extension of the weekend with hot dogs on the grill and watermelon rinds on soggy paper plates — I loved Labor Day! It was a celebration of the freedom from working! Now I'm the grill chef with sticky faced kids playing in the sprinkler. My perception of the holiday has changed in other ways, too. I carry a much more complex appreciation for Labor Day now, reflecting on the struggle of workers against oppression on the job and within society. This Labor Day — my second as a DSA member, and my fourth with my union — has imbued me with the richly interlaced histories of socialism and unionism.

It's no accident that modern socialism and organized labor share a common history. Rather than being distant notions intersecting at random points in time, both socialism and unionism share the same genesis: the Industrial Revolution. The dawn of the nineteenth century saw greed run overzealously on the newly opened fields of capitalism. The nature of work and society changed radically. The hammerstrike delivered to the newly born working class caused a defensive recoiling; associations were formed, theorists debated, and direct action was initiated by labor to protect themselves from the violent storms of free market capitalism.

From these seminal reactions to today's struggles is a convoluted, inspirational chronicle for both labor and social history. Students of either discipline know that trade unions and socialists share parallel histories. Sometimes the alliance was informal, and at other times the partnership was formalized (the Socialist Labor Party, for example). Whatever the nature of the relationship, the cooperative goal was to lift the downtrodden and empower the weak.

Today's clashes are surprisingly similar to yesterday's, and the reason is disappointing: the malevolent nature of profit chasing has changed

very little in all these years. It should therefore be unremarkable to realize that trade unions and socialists have forged friendships to advance the causes of each group's ideologies.

In Donald Stable's book, *Activist Unionism*, there's a great quote from Sol Barkin in his 1960 address before the conference of the International Association of Personnel Women: "The fight for greater social justice is the *raison d'être* of the trade union movement. Unions are created and are being constantly formed by employees to achieve their goals of equality and independence in the marketplace. They represent the local skirmishes in the battle for greater democracy in the full society."

Attaining fairness, respect, and democracy on the job while improving working conditions has always been a goal of organized labor. On many occasions the realization of such goals requires that the bargaining table stretch from the workroom floor

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Both socialism and unionism share the same genesis: the Industrial Revolution.

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to legislative halls. It is through these pursuits that the intertwined threads of unionism and socialism are most tightly woven together into the tapestry of our collective history. Through the altruistic goal of social justice, unionists and socialists advocate fairness and equality for all of us.

Union members are not all socialists, and not all socialists are union members. It is absolutely undeniable though, that there is a common ideal that joins both frequently and that the political goal of economic justice further cements the groups. With the powerfully kinetic energy of fairness, fraternity, and democracy pushing unionism and socialism into the next century, I can say with great passion that I am proud to be a union member, and I am proud to be a socialist.

*James Charlet is a DSA member and union member in North Carolina.*

## SOLIDARITY!

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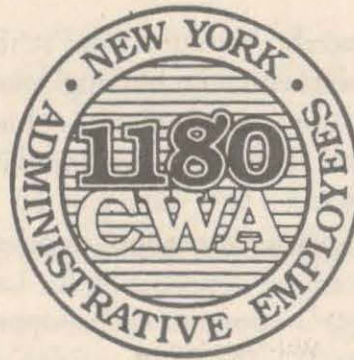
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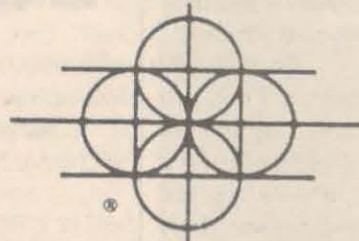
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# “People’s Right to Know” Campaign

The campaign has targeted the largest retailer in the world, Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart is being asked to provide the American people with the list, and addresses, of the factories they use around the world. By knowing which factories products are produced in, under what human rights conditions, and at what wages, people can shop with a conscience.

## The Campaign

In the global economy, with huge multinationals like Wal-Mart manufacturing clothing, shoes, handbags in 49 countries around the world, using tens of thousands of factories (in China alone, Wal-Mart uses 700 to 1000 factories), there is no way to know whether or not the products were made by children, teenaged girls forced to work 15-hour shifts seven days a week, or by super-exploited workers toiling in sweatshops for pennies an hour. (In Indonesia and China, two major Wal-Mart producers, wages are as low as 10 to 12 cents an hour.)

Yet Wal-Mart flat-out refuses to tell where their goods are produced. So production continues to go on in factories hidden behind locked metal gates, walls topped with barbed wire, and patrolled by armed guards.

The campaign is not a confrontation with Wal-Mart shoppers. The median income of Wal-Mart shoppers is \$25,000; these are working families, whose heads of household earn about \$10 an hour. Nor is it a boycott or an attempt to hurt Wal-Mart financially.

The campaign will start during the second annual Holiday Season of Conscience, running from September 1998 through January 1999. During this season constant pressure will be applied to Wal-Mart across the country. Examples of actions include:

**Flooding Wal-Mart with Calls:** The last Friday of every month can be Wal-Mart Call In Day, when people can call:

David Glass, CEO  
Wal-Mart Stores  
Bentonville, Arkansas  
(501) 273-4000 (800)WAL-MART.

## Contest

Wal-Mart makes its private label clothing in at least 48 countries around the world. Set up contests for young people to see who can document the most countries Wal-Mart produces in. **Symbolic Return Day:** Shoppers can return products purchased at Wal-Mart since they refuses to disclose the factories it uses around the world. **Delegations to Local Wal-Marts:** Student, religious, labor, human rights and women’s organizations could form delegations to go to your local Wal-Mart, to request a meeting with the store manager to discuss Wal-Mart’s need to disclose.

**Post card and letter writing:** These standard actions have an enormous impact, and should never be underestimated. **People’s Right to Know Resolutions:** People’s Right to Know/Corporate Disclosure Resolutions could be brought before city councils, state assemblies and senates, schools, religious organizations and dioceses.

In addition several days of action are planned as part of the Holiday Season of Conscience. On Saturday, October

Production continues to go on in factories hidden behind locked metal gates, walls topped with barbed wire, and patrolled by armed guards.

3: People’s Right to Know Day, there will be scores of simultaneous demos, leafleting, car caravans, human billboarding, and other creative actions in front of Wal-Mart stores across the country.

On Thursday, December 10: Human Rights Day, there will be vigils in front of Wal-Mart stores with candles, caroling, songs and signs. More information on these and other activities is available from

National Labor Committee  
275 Seventh Avenue, 15<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
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# Social Security on the Chopping Block

BY JASON PRAMAS

Years of attacks by pro-corporate front groups like the Concord Coalition, Third Millennium, and the Cato Institute have had much of their desired effect. By next year, the largest till of public money in American history may be laid bare to the forces of privatization and austerity.

It doesn't have to happen that way. Although the banking and securities industries have thrown millions of dollars into convincing the public that the program is in imminent danger of going broke-and that "corrective, free-market" measures need to be taken immediately to "solve" that "problem," Social Security remains extremely popular among all age groups.

Which is why Boston DSA has put up a few thousand bucks to start a new DSA Social Security Action Project. We believe that DSA is in a great position to move into the gap on the left of the debate on Social Security, and start injecting a socialist perspective wherever possible into the mix over this most socialist of remaining American government programs.

So here's what we're gonna do. . . The Social Security Action Project will 1) encourage active participation in the Social Security fight by all DSA members, 2) work to foster coalitions between every level of DSA with other groups doing good work on the issue from the Gray Panthers to various unions, 3) produce an educational packet for DSA chapters by September with articles and essays explaining the many facets of the Social Security debate, and Left positions on all of them, 4) produce organizing packets for DSA chapters by October that will contain ideas and information on running workshops, public events and media campaigns around the Social Security debate, 5) conduct "raids" of all corporate-backed Social Security events that we can, and 6) help coordinate a series of DSA-sponsored public events around the country calling for the defense and expansion of Social Security.

of Social Security.

From all indications, right wing corporate forces are totally unprepared for a left wing assault. All their efforts have been aimed at convincing liberal centrist groups to give up supporting the program in its current form and ally more closely with the corporate agenda-giving themselves a veneer of popular support in the process. They would have absolutely no idea what to do if radical democrats like the average DSAer start bringing up class issues and calling for pro-worker, intergenerational solutions-

loudly and repeatedly-in the midst of their carefully scripted media circuses (like the corporate-backed "Americans Discuss Social Security" [ADSS] fiascoes of late).

Students at Ohio State University threw the U.S. war machine off balance earlier this year by disrupting a carefully scripted, invitation-only media circus for a war on Iraq starring Madeline Albright, our peace-loving Secretary of State. Should DSA and our allies do that kind of thing at any of the upcoming ADSS events

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We believe that DSA is in a great position to move into the gap on the left of the debate on Social Security, and start injecting a socialist perspective.

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on national TV-you'd better believe the debate on Social Security would start to shift to the left, and fast.

If the Left is to succeed and preserve Social Security for future generations, we cannot waste time in genteel academic debates with those who would gut our national inheritance on the altar of the free market. We have

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## IS SOCIAL SECURITY REALLY GOING BROKE?

Conservative think-tanks have convinced most mainstream pundits, and even many liberal politicians, that the Social Security system will face a severe crisis once the baby-boom generation begins to retire. Such dire predictions result from extremely pessimistic assumptions about the future of the American economy (from sources who usually paint a glowing portrait of the future of world capitalism). Despite the average annual real growth in the twentieth century being well over two percent, the doomsayers of Social Security assert that the twenty-first century will only witness 1.4 percent per annum real growth. In addition, their estimates ignore the role younger immigrant workers are likely to continue to play in expanding the size of the active workforce and they also underestimate the lesser "burden" on society of younger dependents, as birth rates and family size secularly decrease.

But even with these draconian estimates of the increase in the ratio of elder dependents to active workers, conservatives admit that the system could be "saved" by jacking up the Social Security payroll tax paid both by employers and employees by 2.2 percent starting in the year 2010. This is, of course, a regressive tax move which no one on the right or left countenances. But what the right does not tell us is that one-fourth of the alleged "shortfall" could readily be made up by raising, in real terms, the ceiling on income subject to Social Security tax from \$68,000 in today's dollars to \$250,000. And close to forty percent of the "shortfall" could be eliminated by taking off the income ceiling altogether. In addition, by modestly raising the growth estimates from 1.4 percent to 1.8 percent chops another one-third of the projected shortfall. And the rest could be made up by gradually raising the Social Security tax by one percent or, better yet, through very small increases in the more progressive income tax.

Why don't we hear how easily Social Security can be preserved, without cutting guaranteed benefits

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Close to 40 percent of the Social Security "shortfall" could be eliminated by taking off the income ceiling.

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or raising the retirement age? Because the corporate interests pushing the "national dialogue on Social Security" are not interested in preserving a universal pension system which guarantees each American a halfway-decent retirement income. Rather, corporate America's aim is to abolish "social insurance," — by which society guarantees insurance whose benefits will be determined solely by the individual's workplace earnings and by the vagaries of their individually-owned investment accounts (fortuitously managed by a financial industry ever hungry for new clients).

And while it may be true that over the long-run, investment assets will grow faster if invested in riskier equity markets, what conservative advocates of privatization will not tell the public is that if they happen to retire during a long-term bull market (or if they get swindled into imprudent investments by greedy investment firms) their individual accounts will yield very little. Just ask retirees in Chile what has happened to the value of their individual accounts in just the past few months. Left policy analysts differ over whether the government should collectively invest a portion of the Social Security trust fund (no more than forty percent) in the stock and bond market. But the left should only countenance this strategy if a high-level of defined-benefits remained guaranteed and if firms receiving public investment funds were required to obey labor and health and safety standards.

But whatever differences there may be within the democratic left over how to achieve the minimal reforms necessary to preserve Social Security as a truly social insurance system, the bottom-line is clear: Social Security must continue to guarantee a universal, high-level of defined-benefits to all the disabled and elderly. Thus, the left should fight any and all attempts to privatize through individual investment accounts any and all of Social Security revenues.

—Joseph Schwartz, DSA NPC chair

to fight back. Now.

People can start helping out right away by: a) collecting any articles they come across on the issue—particularly local stuff that we'd be unlikely to get our hands on through the Web or anywhere else here in Boston—and send it to us at the address below, b) start agitating now; write letters and op-eds wherever possible; stir up trouble on

the Internet; always stress your family's personal experience with Social Security and how much it means to you; get out to local forums and debates on the program and muck it up from the audience, and c) DSA "Big Guns" should start using mainstream platforms as frequently as possible to put the left take on this issue more consistently in the public eye.

We'll be calling all DSA chapters soon to clue you all in more thoroughly. Please feel free to contact us anytime with questions or comments. Jason Pramas is the Director of the DSA Social Security Action Project. The Project can be reached c/o: Boston DSA, 11 Garden St., Cambridge, MA 02139; (617) 354-5078; jpramas@igc.org.

## Labor's Victories / continued from page 2

"No on 226" campaign was also hugely labor-intensive. "We can't put a dollar value," said Holt at one East L.A. campaign rally last Sunday, "on all the volunteers."

The rally on the Sunday before the election, afforded a glimpse of some of those volunteers. About 100 red-shirted members of the United Farm Workers stood alongside about 50 purple-T-shirted members of the Service Employees and perhaps 50 other union volunteers, chanting in the noontime break between precinct walks. At the same time, similar rallies were taking place in other locations around L.A., since labor had targeted five Assembly districts within the county in which to concentrate its efforts. In the last four days of the campaign, roughly 2,500 unionists turned out in these districts to carry literature door-to-door and to talk with the union members who lived along the route. Still another core of volunteers staffed the five phone banks, with between 60 and 100 phones apiece, that the unions had put together for the campaign.

The Eastside effort had particular significance for the L.A. County Federation of Labor's ongoing efforts to mobilize newly registered immigrant voters. In this East L.A.-Alhambra-Monterey Park Assembly district, labor was campaigning not just against 226, but also for Gloria Romero, a longtime labor-left activist who was embroiled in a hotly contested election for an open Assembly seat. The unionists who turned out for the Sunday walk were part of a campaign to reach not just the district's 9,000 union members, but also the 14,000 newly naturalized voters who'd registered over the last 18 months — an effort modeled on labor's successful campaign last winter to elect Gil Cedillo to a downtown-area Assembly seat on the strength of union and immigrant voters.

It was clear that labor's efforts, both in one Assembly district and across the state, had paid off big-time. In the race for the Eastside Assembly seat, Romero swept to victory. State-

wide, 226 was defeated by a 54-to-46-percent margin, and L.A. County rejected it by a 60-40 margin — the fourth highest "No" vote among the state's 58 counties, a stunning achievement for the local labor movement. A

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The defeat of Proposition 226 attests to the remarkable success that the Sweeney-era labor movement has had in reconstructing its political program and political clout.

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statewide poll of AFL-CIO members conducted on election night showed that 71 percent had voted against 226 — and union members familiar with their union's position opposed it by an 81 to 19 percent margin. Perhaps most impressive — indeed, astonishing — was the finding of the CNN/L.A. Times exit poll that fully one-third of Tuesday's voters came from union households. In a state where the rate of unionization is just 18 percent, that means labor's mobilization of its own members succeeded on a scale seldom achieved in elections.

Proposition 226 was the most serious attempt to shift the balance of class forces in American politics in decades. Its defeat attests to the remarkable success that the Sweeney-era la-

bor movement has had in reconstructing its political program and political clout (even while its efforts to revive the culture of organizing still have a long way to go). The hope inside the labor movement is that its efforts against 226 have positioned unions to wage even more effective campaigns in the years to come. "Grover Norquist and Pete Wilson did us a favor," Service Employees International Union president Andy Stern observed during the Eastside rally. "They woke up the movement and connected it to our members. I've never seen so many members phoning and walking precincts — and we have to find a way to build on this in November and beyond."

*Harold Meyerson is the editor of the LA Weekly and a vice chair of DSA. A version of this article previously appeared in the LA Weekly.*

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# ETHEL SHAPIRO-BERTOLINI

1910 - 1998

Long time DSA activist and member, Ethel Shapiro-Bertolini, passed away at the age of 88 on February 2, 1998 after a long period of increasing frailty and multiple health problems.

I first met Ethel in 1975 when I moved to Los Angeles. At the time Ethel was very active in the New American Movement (NAM) and, along with many other NAM and future DSA elders, had only a short period earlier been expelled from the Communist Party after many years as a labor activist and internal dissident belonging to the Southern California District of the CP, led by Dorothy Healey. Ethel was born in pre-revolutionary Russia and in 1922 emigrated with her family to the United States. From the age of 16 years she was active in the socialist movement. A fiery young woman would be often seen speaking on a soap box in Gary, Indiana and Chicago in support of striking steel workers. She was arrested many times. She helped lead organizing for the needle trades in New York City and during the Second World War was active with the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers of America (CIO). In a dark foreshadowing of today's immigrant struggles, the US government attempted for decades to deport her under the Walter-McCarran Act. Ethel resisted these efforts in a long legal struggle until she won her case with the help of many friends, supporters, and her attorney, Gary Silberger. Her "proudest day" she

would say was when she was finally sworn in as a U.S. citizen.

Ethel also was an author of a number of books and pamphlets. She was a labor journalist and editor of several house magazines. Her books include "When The Storm Broke," perhaps the first book of fiction in the English language that tells the story of the first three years of the Great Depression. She wrote "And My Heart Was At Home," a novel about the rights of the foreign born and their persecution during the McCarthy era. Among her other works, Ethel wrote the non-fiction book "Through The Wall," in which she published hundreds of letters from prisoners throughout the country with whom she had corresponded over many years. She wrote a dedication to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. entitled "I Never Died," Said He." A copy of that pamphlet was permanently placed by Coretta Scott King at the Martin Luther King Memorial Center in Atlanta, GA. Towards the end of her life Ethel was an activist for renters' rights. Before her death she completed the yet to be published work of fiction entitled, "My Century," a compilation of short stories based on her life.

For thirty nine years Ethel was happily married to Angelo Bertolini. Angelo passed away in 1996. He was also a former CPUSA, NAM, and DSA member. Angelo had been active in the underground Italian Communist Party during the Mussolini regime.

My favorite memory of Ethel and Angelo is sitting in their Venice apartment near the ocean on a late Sunday afternoon, sipping a glass of Italian wine, and having very intense discussions about politics or the latest article in L'Unita, the Italian Communist Party daily newspaper that Angelo always shared with me.

Ethel influenced a broad range and large number of people, many of them much younger than her. Her keen mind, critical sensibilities, and powerful words were a strong presence in any gathering of activists. She was a mentor for a number of current community and labor leaders. She was a dedicated DSA member with an unflinching belief in the working class and socialism, and despite her increasingly poor health participated as long as possible in the life of the organization often to the embarrassment of much younger and fitter comrades.

Ethel had a great love for humanity and for family. She will be sorely missed. She is survived by many nieces and nephews, great nieces and nephews, and by numerous cousins. She is also survived by those of us whose lives she touched, and sometimes scolded as cocksure young radicals, and by those of us who continue to struggle for freedom, justice, and solidarity. Values which Ethel Shapiro-Bertolini exemplified in the highest manner.

—Steve Tarzynski

# Better Left Than Bereft

HARVEY J. KAYE

In this sesquicentennial year of *The Communist Manifesto*, I have a confession to make: I regularly try to disabuse myself of thinking like a Marxist, identifying with the labor movement, and believing in the promise of socialist democracy.

I continually force myself to confront the horrors of history, in particular, those of the twentieth century, among them, the nightmares of the now collapsed Soviet regime. And I do not fail to appreciate capitalism's productive wonders and consumer spectacles, and to cherish our liberal-democratic freedoms.

Moreover, I immerse myself in the arguments of contemporary conservatives. I imagine what a pleasure it would be to accept the world as it is, to believe that the way things are is the way they ought to be — or, at least, to believe that they are the only way they can be. I even day-dream about the commissions to be garnered if I disavowed the left.

Tragedy haunts the historical record; irony mocks humanity's best efforts. Capitalism affords tremendous powers and pleasures (for those who have the wherewithal); liberal democracy definitely is the finest form of political development (thus far). And conservatives not only write smartly, they also score good points (not to mention, I would welcome a greater public voice and bank account).

Nevertheless, however much I acknowledge these truths, I am unable to shed myself of marxian thoughts, laborist commitments, and socialist hopes.

Some have argued that I suffer some intellectual malady: Perhaps nostalgia, a longing to recapture the past, a supposed time of confident socialist politics and laborist solidarities. Perhaps alienation, a desire to reorder society such that intellectuals not only study things, but also rule them. Or maybe utopianism, a yearn-

ing to create a society of complete freedom, absolute equality and total democracy. But they are wrong.

I do long for a more confident socialist politics and stronger solidarities among workers and among workers and intellectuals — but not simply for those of the past, marked in the former case by racial and gender hierarchies and in the latter by an acritical populism or more dangerous elitism. I do desire a reordering of society — but not to empower some refurbished ruling class. And I certainly do aspire to a freer, more equal and democratic future — though not to some unattainable or dangerous fantasy.

I readily admit to romanticism, radicalism, and optimism; but I don't think I suffer — at least not severely — from nostalgia, alienation, or utopianism. Overlooking pure stubbornness and/or stupidity, you might wonder: How can one continue to think like a Marxist, remain committed to working-class struggles, and still hold on to socialist visions?

In the light of history, and in the Talmudic fashion of my Jewish forebears, I reply: How can one not continue to ask Marxian questions? How can one not continue to side with labor? How can one not reaffirm socialist hopes and aspirations? Indeed, contrary to the respective philosophers of the end-of-history and posthistoire, has there been any time more in need and inviting of such questions, engagements and visions?

Why ask marxian questions? My friend Ellen Wood contends: "for the first time, capitalism has become a truly universal system . . . So Marx is more relevant than ever, because he,

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The continuing power of marxian thought lies in the political-economic and moral questions it poses.

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more effectively than any other human being then or now, devoted his life to explaining the systemic logic of capitalism."

And in the *Manifesto* we find a most prophetic narrative of capitalist triumphalism: "The bourgeoisie has played a most revolutionary role in history . . . The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere . . . In a word, it creates a world after its own image." Has there ever been an economist more prescient — or more poetic — than Marx?

Prescience and poetry aside, I think the continuing power of marxian thought, with all its faults and neglects (of nationalism, race and gender), lies in the political-economic and moral questions it poses. Where better to start an exploration of history than with the way in which people organize themselves to provide for their material and cultural needs and development? Specifically, where better to start than with a social order's relations of exploitation and oppression and the struggles engendered by them?

Of course, we need far more than Marx; but without marxian questions how can we possibly make critical sense of history, no less, the past quarter century: Thatcherism and Reaganism; popular revolution in the Soviet world; corporate globalization; Asian economic crises and unrest . . .

Why support workers' struggles and the labor movement? Because, if we really do want to create freer, more equal and democratic societies, then, for a start, we need to do so democratically. And history attests to working-people's commitments and accomplishments.

Against the theses of Cold-War social scientists and Orthodox Marxists alike, recent generations of historians, working from the bottom up, have effectively demonstrated that the working class has been the class most devoted to democratic change and development.

Now, after twenty-five years of class war from above, fragmentation and decomposition, the working-classes are not simply more diverse, they are also recomposing themselves and reconstituting their social movements. In *Workers in a Lean World*, Kim Moody writes: "Like Mark Twain's proverbial death notice, the diagnosis [of labor's death] proved premature. By the mid-1990s the streets of continental Europe, Latin America, and parts of Asia were filled with hundreds of thousands of angry working people . . ."

And, once again, their campaigns have revitalized democratic politics as

intellectuals realign themselves with reinvigorating labor movements. The struggle to extend and enrich democracy continues — globalization has merely raised the stakes.

Why cultivate socialist aspirations? Because, for all its corruptions and perversions, socialism represents the modern articulation of humanity's ancient dream of abolishing exploitation and oppression and creating social orders without overlords. Emerging in the wake of the Enlightenment; taking shape in the course of the Age of Revolution; and developing in relation to the making of labor movements: socialism — at its best — has served as the "prophetic memory" of working-people's aspirations to freedom, equality and democracy.

And just consider: Though democratic life remains constrained and tested, who does not publically revere democracy, or at least defer to it as an ideal? Though inequalities persist and grow, who publically recites the classical conservative defenses of inequality? Though capital and the market prevail, who actually trusts corporate power, global or otherwise?

However we assess the current crop of liberal, social-democratic and labor parties, we should not fail to

comprehend what recent left political victories mean. Against all the best efforts to convince them otherwise, working people and the middle-classes refuse to abandon the hope that societies of greater freedom, equality and democracy might yet be made. *Contra* Fukuyama, history is not over.

Conservatives themselves are not oblivious. In late 1997, in the wake of electoral defeats, New Rightists convened an International Conservative Convention, co-hosted by Margaret Thatcher and William F. Buckley, to consider what the neoconservative *Weekly Standard* called the "Worldwide Conservative Crack-Up".

We should be so lucky. Still, I can't help thinking they, too, have read their Marx.

*Harvey J. Kaye is professor of social change and development at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay (kayeh@uwgb.edu) and the author of "Why Do Ruling Classes Fear History?" and Other Questions (St. Martin's Press).*

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# Anniversary of *The Communist Manifesto* Celebrated

BY JULIA FITZGERALD

I could scarcely believe the Air France flight attendant—no charge for the wine? It must be part of the magic of a visit to the City of Light. It was my first trip to Paris since the age of four and I sat back in contentment, prepared to enjoy. My excuse for a jaunt to France was a conference this past May sponsored by the educational arm of the French Communist Party, Espace Marx. The conference was part commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto*, part call for international analysis of capitalism at the millenium.

I attended with several other DSA members including Honorary Chair Bogdan Denitch (who was a speaker at the conference), John Mason (member of DSA's International Committee) and Robert Sauté and Gina Neff (both members of the City University of New York DSA chapter and organizers of the Socialist Scholars Conference). In addition to the DSA contingent, the Americans included representatives from the Committees of Correspondence (including Co-Chair Charlene Mitchell, who spoke at the opening plenary), people from *Monthly Review* magazine and the Marxist School in New York City and unaffiliated leftists, mostly academics.

The DSA group may be forgiven if we approached the conference with trepidation. The French Communists remained loyal to the Soviet Union and a rigid form of democratic centralism much longer than most other non-governing Communist parties. A couple of years ago the Party engaged in a long, emotional debate before voting to eliminate the hammer and sickle from their insignia. The conference happened to coincide with the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the student uprising of 1968 and the Parisian newspapers were full of analyses and reprinted articles from those tumultuous days. During the course of the conference a few references were made to this New Left anniversary, but

clearly the main focus was Marx and a much Older Left. This is not surprising, since the French Communists did not support the student movement in 1968.

The conference took place over four days and included approximately 30 workshops and plenaries. Most of the sessions were held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France on the banks of the Seine. According to my guidebook, "This new national library is one of the grandest of the Grand Projects bestowed (or inflicted) upon Paris by former President Francois Mitterand." Our party was in the "inflicted" upon camp. The buildings, four glass and concrete high-rises, perched on the bottom third of a stepped pyramid. The pyramid base was reminiscent of the ruins of Chichen Itza and almost as creepy for those with vertigo. Once we had reached the holy ground at the top we found vast tracts of concrete dotted with caged bushes. Bushes surrounded by metal cages. We couldn't figure it out, either. Suffice it to say we did not linger at the Bibliothèque. The New Yorkers had just endured eleven straight days of rain and were loathe to come in from the glorious Parisian sun; we often decided that the panels which looked most interesting were those held on barges moored across from the Bibliothèque on the Seine.

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Of course Marx was stunningly right on a number of points, but the constant assertion of his relevance seemed a trifle defensive.

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The panels ranged from theoretical and esoteric, "Meaning and Position of the *Manifesto* in Marx' Work," or "Is History Intelligible?" to discussions of current policy issues "Overcoming Unemployment." It was a truly international group; the speakers came from over 20 countries and the rest of us were almost as diverse. Speakers and participants were mostly academics, labor leaders, political party activists. Speeches in English were translated to French and vice-versa, but there was unfortunately no translation of Spanish and Portuguese.

The conference was commemorating the *Manifesto*, so perhaps it was not surprising that a main topic of discussion was Marx' prescient predictions of the globalization of capital. Of course Marx was stunningly right on a number of points, but the constant assertion of his relevance seemed a trifle defensive. The effect of the Communist legacy impacted the proceedings in other ways as well. At one point Leo Panitch, professor of political science at York College in Toronto suggested that we were spending too much time trying to understand the failure of the "socialist" societies of Eastern Europe instead of considering the more important question of the failure of Western European social democracies. I thought ruefully that DSAers spend very little time worrying about the fail-

ure of the Eastern block since we never held it up as a model. But in this audience no one responded to Panitch's plea.

In general there was not enough give and take. At one point Immanuel Wallerstein, professor of sociology at SUNY Binghamton, tried to get a debate going by suggesting that the European Union was a good thing. His argument was that the Union would only be as reactionary as the member states would permit. By providing an alternate pole of economic power it will create the possibility of a challenge to the dominance of the U.S. and free market economic policy. No one responded to his challenge. At least at that session. However, two weeks later Daniel Singer, who was also at the conference, wrote a piece for the Nation in which he discussed the possible openings for the Left provided by the EU.

One of the highlights of the conference was the speech by Bogdan Denitch at the closing Plenary. It was held at the beautiful Grand Amphitheater at the Sorbonne, which seemed

to elevate the proceedings. The large hall was packed; this was obviously an outreach event for left Parisians as well as conference participants. Denitch's points were basic and familiar to DSAers, but we were glad he made them. He emphasized that our

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Denitch touched on more dicey issues . . . that the socialism of the former Soviet Union was not democratic socialism.

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movement must include women in positions of power. (While clearly an effort had been made to recruit female speakers, a number of the panels were overwhelmingly or even completely male.) We must attract young people to the movement. (Sustained applause at this point.) Then he touched on more dicey issues. He as-

serted that we must be clear, both privately and publicly, that the socialism of the former Soviet Union was not democratic socialism. We should not fall prey to simplistic political notions: the enemy of our enemy is not necessarily our friend and simply being a victim does not convey moral superiority.

The conference closed with a rousing chorus of the Internationale. It was led by a rambunctious contingent from the Brazilian Workers Party and was sung in many languages. I felt reinvigorated and suddenly closer to everybody in the room. Was I allowing meaningless sentiment to overwhelm critical reason? Not at all, I concluded. Our common anthem is an important reminder of the values we share in spite of our differences. And changes in the world are making our differences less relevant all the time. Besides, emotion is good. Who can sustain commitment without it?

*Julia Fitzgerald is a member of the DSA National Political Committee.*

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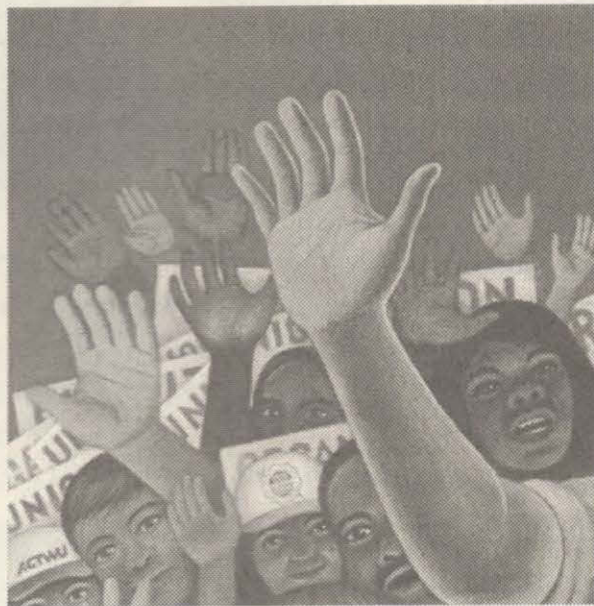
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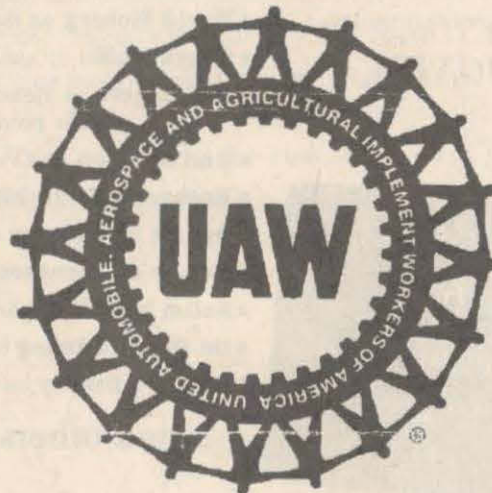
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