

**DEMOCRATIC LEFT**  
Vol. XXIX, No. 3 Winter 2002



## Special Convention Issue

Book Review: *Bobos in Paradise*



# Convention Directs Focus on Low-Wage Economy

Delegates to DSA's Convention overwhelmingly approved a focus on the problems facing participants in America's low-wage economy. Holly Sklar in describing the loss of purchasing power represented by the minimum wage at the Saturday afternoon plenary and Eliseo Medina, Executive Vice-President of the SEIU, in his speech at the Convention dinner Saturday night outlined these problems in detail.



Henry Nicholas, President of the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees (AFSCME/1199C) presents an award for low-wage organizing to Vicki Milhouse and Michelle Cooper of the United Child Care Union, the first such union in the country.

In practical terms that means focusing on minimum wage and living wage legislation, fighting for changes in the welfare reform law when it is reauthorized next year, working against further erosion of Social Security and Medicare and supporting union organizing campaigns and labor law reform. And of course working to prevent the kind of tax giveaways enacted earlier this year in the guise of economic stimulus.

The convention also called for continuing involvement in the globalization struggles and support for a peace movement. An overriding concern of the convention was increasing the capacity of the organization do to effective work and refreshing its infrastructure. The priorities called for organizing a series of regional meetings in 2002 and set developing an effective labor

commission and political education program as important goals.

To increase the resources available to do this work the Convention called on members to strive (voluntarily) towards a goal of giving \$50 a month to support DSA activity. A proposal to begin sharing such gifts with locals and commissions will be presented to the NPC as part of the 2002 budget. In a spirited session, demonstrating the unity of the convention, more than twenty delegates signed up for the plan as more than \$18,000 was pledged to DSA.

## National Priorities Resolution Introduction

We meet in Philadelphia at a time of national crisis. The great economic expansion of the last decade, an expansion that primarily benefited the well off, is over. The economic recession will increase already morally unacceptable levels of inequality by worsening the conditions of low-wage workers and threatening the living standards of the middle class.

Americans have been subject to terrorist attacks and are deeply concerned about the security of their families and



### Editorial Committee:

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### Founding Editor

Michael Harrington  
(1928-1989)

Democratic Socialists of America share a vision of a humane international social order based on equitable distribution of resources, meaningful work, a healthy environment, sustainable growth, gender and racial equality, and non-oppressive relationships. Equality, solidarity, and democracy can only be achieved through international political and social cooperation aimed at ensuring that economic institutions benefit all people. We are dedicated to building truly international social movements - of unionists, environmentalists, feminists, and people of color - which together can elevate global justice over brutalizing global competition.

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## Convention Directs Focus on Low-Wage Economy

loved ones. A war on terrorism has been launched with the promise of effective action to curtail international terrorism. An aerial campaign against the Taliban has been initiated and ground troops have been introduced in Afghanistan. The administration has promised a long campaign with many theaters of operation.

We must acknowledge that our capacity to respond to this crisis is limited by the organizational constraints within which we operate. All our actions must be taken with the aim of ending the marginal position of the left in American political life and to restoring a socialist presence within mainstream politics.

Acknowledging the circumstances we face is the first step towards changing them. This process began at our last convention and was continued at the Future Search Retreat held this summer that fairly stated an organization consensus on building DSA and its capacity. The crisis that began with the September 11th attacks changes the political ground, but not our goals. What all DSAers agree upon is that military action that leaves in place an international economy that promotes poverty and inequality through out the world cannot prevent the growth of extremist groups.

### Our Priorities

For most of history our main focus has been on domestic politics and the inequalities endemic in our society. That shall remain our main focus. We shall concentrate most of our resources on issues and campaigns related to injustices faced by low-wage workers in America. We shall support campaigns to raise the minimum wage and to legislate a "living wage." We shall continue our support of union organizing efforts and support measures in the upcoming legislative fight around renewing "welfare reform" that will aid the poor and not punish them. We will continue our work to defend Medicare and Social Security. And we will engage in visible, public activity aimed at educating the American public about the systematic inequalities of our economy. This campaign will be begin with a conference highlighting the 40th Anniversary of the publication of *The Other America* and the plight of the working poor poignantly depicted in Barbara Ehrenreich's, *Nickel and Dimed*. But this campaign will be much more than a Washington event. We will take our message to local communities in events and activist campaigns organized over the next two years. Recognizing our organizational limitations, we will focus our resources, in the near term on enhancing our capacity for political education and analysis through forums, speaker tours, retreats, think-tanks and publications, passing out literature, talking to young people on campuses, and talking to people in other public situations.

The forces opposed to the manner in which the Bush Administration has carried out "the war on terrorism" are weak, confined to the campuses and existing left organizations, and isolated from even the mainstream left in the trade unions, communities of color, and the progressive wing of Congress. DSA hopes to build a peace movement that stands for justice for the victims of September 11th and recognizes the importance of combating terrorism of all stripes, including that supported by or organized by

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*Cover photo: Convention delegates took a break to mark the Global Day of Action against the WTO by attending a rally at the Liberty Bell.*



## Convention Directs Focus on Low-Wage Economy

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our government's own covert operations. The peace movement, as the ineffectiveness of the administration's military tactics become apparent, can begin to operate within mainstream American politics.

We will participate, with others, in broad educational campaigns and protests consistent with our values on the issues of terrorism and the response to it.

No discussion of inequality in our domestic economy or the widespread poverty in the developing world can avoid the globalization debate. DSA will continue to actively participate in social movements to democratize control of the global economy. Our ties to transnational movements of opposition to corporate globalization and to socialist parties and left trade union confederations central to such struggles provides DSA with the ability to make a unique contribution to these campaigns.

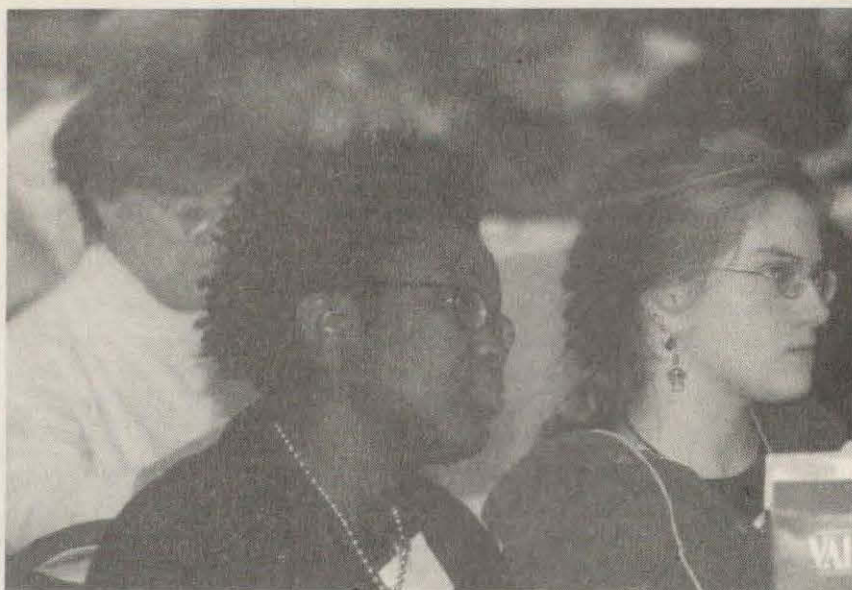
We will continue our opposition to those trade and investment agreements that structure the global economy in the interests of global corpo-



*NPC member Jessica Shearer*

rations, especially those that restrict or deny international human, environmental, and labor rights.

An anti-racist and feminist politics and analysis will be integral to all of DSA's educational and activist work outlined in the priorities



*New NPC member Selina Musuta, a student at Ithaca College, takes in the debate.*

above. A truly democratic socialist politics must combat the social structures of racism, sexism, class domination, and homophobia that construct institutional oppression. It must demand social and economic justice for all, now.

In pursuit of justice, multi-racial and anti-racism politics shall become a priority in our work. Agendas in the organization should consistently include the issues of communities of color. This calls for an immediate re-orientation of our practice toward multi-racial coalition building. We will consistently look for opportunities to work with activists in communities of color.

### ***Building Capacity***

We cannot change America without increasing our capacity to reach out to Americans. We are understaffed and under financed. Changing this reality requires us to increase the level of our personal giving, increase our membership, design our political work in ways which are attractive to outside funding sources, and develop fund-

ing streams which can be used to support local and commission work as well as build our national capacity. Toward that end this Convention endorses:

- Re-directing the bulk of income from new memberships attained thru local activity to Locals and Commissions.
- Setting \$50 month as a national standard of "sustaining members," the revenue from which is to be shared between the national office and Locals and Commissions.
- Charging a Local Development Committee of both NPC and non-NPC members with devising by the May-June 2002 NPC meeting, a plan for building and rebuilding locals.
- Providing locals regularly with current membership lists, literature and materials.
- As feasible, providing locals with news of DSA speakers in their



area, use of bulk mail permit, and administrative support.

- Charging an At-Large Development Committee of both NPC and non-NPC members with devising, by the May-June 2002 NPC meeting, a plan for recruiting and involving at-large members.

The most glaring symbol of our organizational weakness has been our continuing inability to get our publication to our members in a timely way. While the NPC has significantly increased the quality of the publication, the absence of regular quarterly production has gone on for several years under several different staffing configurations. Thus,

This convention directs the staff and incoming NPC to make a timely, quarterly Democratic Left among its highest organizational priorities. The DL Committee will, at its first meeting set production deadlines and timelines for the process for the next two years. The National Director shall appoint a staff person to ensure adherence to this schedule.

Modern Communication requires an effective web site. Important steps have been taken in the last two years, but the organization must improve its ability to develop and post appropriate political and organizational materials, relevant to the political work we are doing on a regular basis. Thus,

The NPC shall develop and implement a plan to update the web site on at least a biweekly basis by the time of our next convention.

### *Refreshing our Infrastructure*

The key to building capacity is to expand and develop our leadership and activist infrastructure. The Future Search Retreat was a good beginning. There are limits to what can be accomplished in national meetings. Thus,

In 2002 DSA shall hold three regional retreats that shall function as our national activist conference. East Coast, Midwest and West Coasts

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## *Convention Modifies DSA Governance Structure*

The DSA Convention amended the Constitution to reduce the size of the National Political Committee to 16 plus a Youth Section representative (17 overall) from 24 plus a Youth Section representative (25 overall). The amendment passed overwhelmingly after another amendment recommended by the convention's Constitution Committee to make it even smaller (15) failed to meet the required 2/3rds majority by two votes. The amendment to reduce the size of the NPC also modified the election process. Previously the Constitution mandated equal division between men and women on the NPC. The new language guarantees women at least eight of the sixteen positions; people of color are guaranteed at least four of the positions.

Another amendment that was adopted creates the position of a National Chair that the convention would elect. This amendment does not go into effect until the next Convention. The new NPC is empowered to select a National Chair by a super majority if it so chooses.

Nineteen people ran for the sixteen NPC positions elected at the Convention. The winners were:

Theresa Alt (Ithaca), Susan Chacin (Berkeley), Eric Ebel (Ann Arbor), Virginia Franco (San Diego), David Green (Detroit), Gabe Kramer (Columbus), Selina Musuta (Ithaca), Gina Neff (New York City), Angel Picon (Stockton), Maria Pineda (Davis), Kathy Quinn (Philadelphia), Jason Schulman (New York City), Joseph Schwartz (Ithaca), Timothy Sears (Oakland), Jessica Shearer (New York City), and Herb Shore (San Diego).

The YDS representatives to the NPC (sharing the one Youth Section vote) are **Joan Axthelm** (Chicago) and **Fabricio Rodriguez** (Arizona).

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retreats will be organized focusing on developing common political work, political education, and skills building.

A national meeting of DSA labor activists may be organized in conjunction with one of these retreats should a new labor commission deem that advisable. These meetings will be supported and assisted by the national organization.

Continuing support for Young Democratic Socialists, DSA's Youth Section, is also an important element in building our capacity.

### *Conclusion*

By our next convention if we carry out these priorities skillfully; do not allow ourselves to be divided or deterred; and if we successfully increase the resources available to support our work, our organization will be larger and more effective and be able to support a larger staff better able to carry out its political, activist, and organizational agenda.



## Convention Passes Anti-Bombing Resolution

The convention's most hotly debated issue was the organization's position on the war in Afghanistan. Prior to the convention the Steering Committee of DSA's National Political Committee issued a statement opposed to the bombing of Afghanistan but supportive of appropriate intelligence, financial, and multilateral "police actions," in the context of criminal justice prosecution aimed at bringing the criminals responsible for September 11<sup>th</sup> to justice. The position opposed the unilateral use of American military force in Afghanistan.

Several resolutions, some more dovish and some more supportive of an explicitly military response were presented, along with many amendments, to the Convention. A sub-committee on War and Terrorism of the Resolutions Committee was created to deal with the submissions. A look through the pages of the *Nation* or any left periodical will reveal an intense debate on this issue, so it is hardly surprising that strong feelings on all sides of this issue are held by DSA members.

Because of the intense feelings involved the sub committee had more participation by delegates than the other convention committees. An extraordinary range of views and analyses were argued in the committee meetings. Often it seemed that delegates were more concerned with the motivation presented for specific language than the language itself. Perhaps because of this the sub-committee presented the Convention with a short resolution focused on a few points and without any analytical or introductory framework.

This resolution was presented to the Convention as the sub-committee's substitute for all of the resolu-

tions submitted to it related to Afghanistan and the military campaign. The Convention in its plenary session considered it and a series of amendments introduced from the floor. Except for amendments strengthening the resolution's opposition to discriminatory practices in the pursuit of domestic security and supporting stronger language on anti-famine measures, no amendments were approved by the Plenary session as the majority

were not sufficiently respected in the sub-committee organized an emergency Women's Caucus Sunday morning and drafted their own statement. During the Plenary Session by a vote of all of the delegates the rules were suspended to allow that statement to be read into the record of the Convention.

The ambiguity of the resolution on some questions and the lack of an analytical framework limits the utility of the resolution as a guide to



*Kathy Quinn, flanked by 14 members of the newly-formed Women's Caucus, reads the statement on Afghanistan passed by the Caucus.*

of delegates clearly felt the subcommittee had found a manageable compromise between the various views. The language recognizing "the limited and directed use of multilateral armed force" as an appropriate step in combating terrorism is intentionally ambiguous. Many DSA activists do not consider the United States military action in Afghanistan to be limited, effective, and truly multilateral. But a significant minority of convention delegates clearly would disagree with that interpretation.

However some delegates did not endorse the compromise. Some women delegates who felt that feminist, and "anti-imperialist" views

DSA's participation in peace activity as called for in the organizational priorities resolution; but the discussion and debate will inform the deliberations of the newly elected NPC as it considers these questions as they emerge over the course of the next two years. It was clear, for example, that the vast majority of delegates would oppose expanding United States military action to other theaters. Also, convention delegates were united in their opposition to sacrificing basic civil liberties and to discriminatory domestic security practices.

The convention resolution follows:



## Convention Passes Anti-Bombing Resolution

### Resolution on War and Terrorism

Democratic Socialists of America unequivocally opposes the mass murders of September 11, and supports bringing those responsible for those crimes to justice.

DSA recognizes the right and responsibility of the U.S. government, in defense of its people, to take appropriate steps to ensure that future September 11ths do not occur. Those steps would include:

- Diplomatic initiatives;
- Technical improvements in domestic security;
- Measures designed to eliminate the international arms trade.
- The regulation of international and domestic financial transactions.
- The limited and directed use of multilateral armed force.

DSA calls for a halt to the bombing and immediate delivery of sufficient food and other supplies to prevent a famine in Afghanistan.

DSA opposes restrictions on civil liberties and immigration in the name of fighting terrorism and opposes racist scapegoating of Arab-Americans and American Muslims and all other racist scapegoating.

DSA opposes "war profiteering" in which working people bear the brunt of the sacrifices in the campaign against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, while corporations make super-profits and receive government subsidies.

*Adopted by DSA National Convention November 11, 2001*

*More material from DSA's National Convention including documents mentioned in this article as well as other materials are available at the DSA Web Site: <[www.dsausa.org](http://www.dsausa.org)>.*



*One of the convention's mandates was to update the web site more frequently. We suggest you make a New Year's Resolution to visit the site more often to see how well we are meeting that requirement—and you can sign up for News from DSA, our new list serve, while you are visiting.*

### Managing Editor Needed

We are still looking for applicants for managing editor of Rethinking Schools. Barbara Miner—our current managing editor is leaving June 1 of 2002.

Applicants must be experienced journalists who have some newspaper/magazine publishing experience, who is left politically, and who is willing to work out of Milwaukee. Knowledge of education is not necessary.

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*John Nichols, political editor of The Nation magazine, and Loraine Ballard-Morrill, news and public affairs director of Philadelphia radio station Power 99 FM, were featured speakers at a media workshop held in conjunction with the National Convention. Nichols and Ballard-Morrill, along with fellow presenter George McCollough, station manager of DUTV in Philadelphia, discussed with the audience various ways of having an impact on media in an age of media concentration and decreasing attention to local news.*

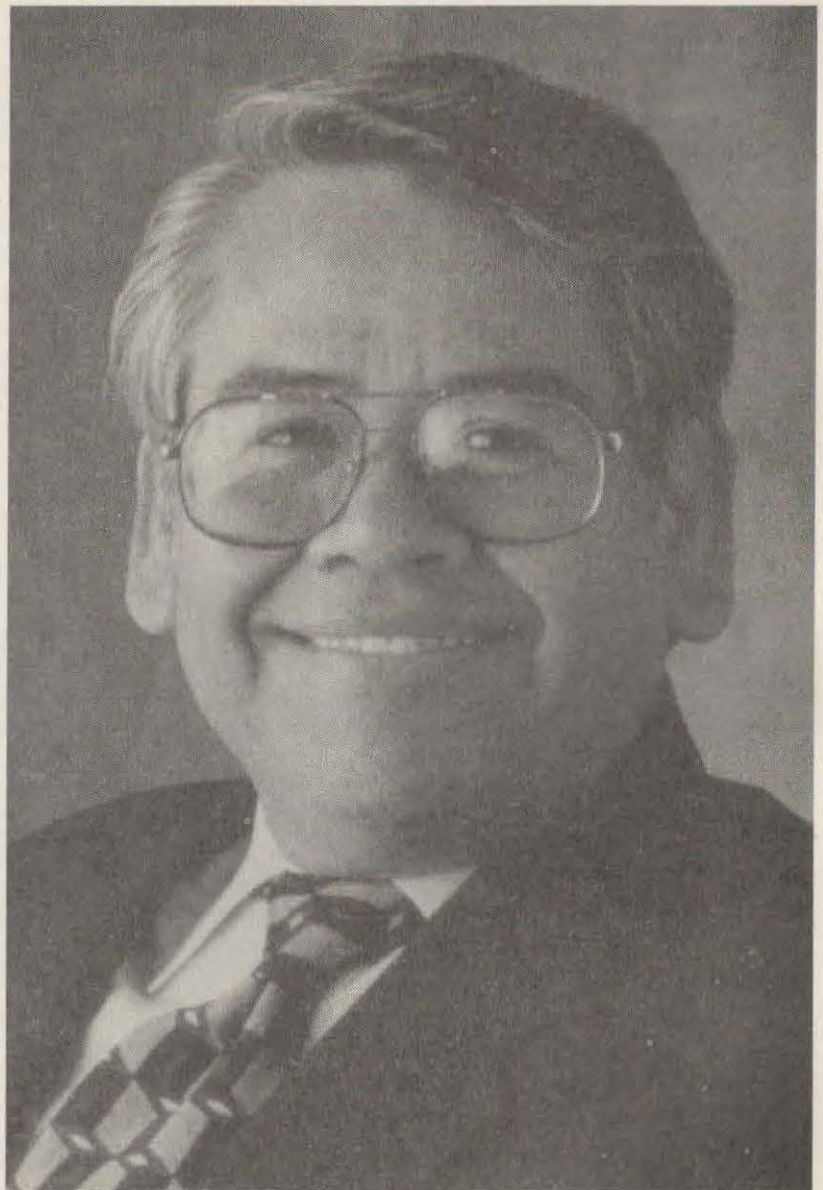


## Medina Speech

What follows is the text of the speech given by SEIU International Executive Vice President Eliseo Medina at Greater Philadelphia DSA's The Other America Awards Banquet held on Saturday, November 10 during the Convention:

*Let me say how much I appreciate your invitation to be here with you tonight. And I wanted to say that, when I got the invitation, I really wanted to be here tonight for three reasons. The first reason is that I wanted to thank you, the Democratic Socialists of America, for answering the call when America needed you. You know the DSA has been the consistent strong voice of progressive America, and at a time when we are facing a difficult situation in this country, you continue to stand up and speak for the issues of workers' rights, civil rights, and for social justice. And I want to say to you how much that means to the people of America, because, thanks to you and your efforts, America is a better place for all of us. Thank you for everything you've done.*

*But the second reason I wanted to be here with you tonight is personal. You know, I came to this country when I was 10 years old as an immigrant from Mexico, and I moved to a little town called Delano in the central valley of California where, at the age of 15, I left school to go to work in the fields to help support my family. And I was fortunate to join a farm workers' strike. And then one day Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez said to me, "We'd like you to go to Chicago and stop the sale of grapes. I was 21 years old, never been outside of Delano. If you've never been to Delano, and you've driven highway 99, and you weren't paying attention, you'd miss it. A very small town. A town, though, that was completely domi-*



*nated by the growers' structure. So, for most of us, we never expected to do anything but work in the fields. So when I was asked to go to Chicago and stop the grapes, I didn't know where Chicago was. I thought it was an hour away driving, so I said "What time do I leave?" And they said, "No, you've got to take a plane." What do I know, I'm 21 years old, they say go, and so I went. I knew nobody in Chicago. Gave me one name and a bag of buttons and said, "Here, go stop the sale of grapes."*

*And it was the DSA chapter that adopted me in Chicago, that got us food, found me a place to live. It was a DSA leader name of Carl Shier who took this scared kid and helped him not only to find a home but also to figure out how to stop the sale of grapes. And I remember that whenever Michael Harrington came to town, that chapter always made sure that I got an opportunity to speak about the plight of farm workers, because that's where the biggest crowds were always gathering. And*



so I want to thank you, 35 years later, for what you did for me and for what you did for farm workers, because, I think, thanks to that help, we were successful, and we did stop the sale of grapes, and we did build a farm workers union.

But the third reason I wanted to be here with you tonight is that I wanted to join you in saluting some of the best and bravest activists in this city as they struggle to win dignity and justice for working people in this city, and to win justice and dignity for those workers who are unable to find work because of the current economic climate. The fights that these activists have waged, and the victories that they have won, are a critical part of our common struggle as we try to figure out how we deal with the plight of low-wage workers in this country; and Philadelphia SEIU Local 36 has been working to do its part by organizing janitors who work in the wealthy suburbs yet have to live on poverty wages.

In downtown Philadelphia, janitors who work for the same contractors and the same building owners as the ones in the suburbs make twice as much with benefits like family health insurance than do the janitors that work in the suburbs of Philadelphia. And the difference is very simple: The workers in downtown Philadelphia have a union, and the workers in the suburbs do not. So Local 36 has been working with these janitors, fighting to make sure that they also enjoy the same benefits, the same respect and dignity, as do the workers downtown; and eight days ago the janitors took an important step towards that goal. After a strike that began on August 20, janitors who worked for Shellville Services reached an agreement with the company to recognize the union and raise their wages immediately from \$6.50 to \$9.00 an hour and for

the first time ever provide benefits, including vacation pay and holiday pay. That's one small step towards a dream that will unite building service workers from coast to coast and border to border and it all is summed up with a very simple but very powerful three words Justice for Janitors.

Now I know later on I am going to be having an opportunity and an honor to present an award to these brave janitors, who waged a difficult fight and won, but I would just like them to stand up and be recognized along with the rest of the SEIU delegation here this evening.

Let me also once say that I want to join you in expressing my appreciation for the work of the Philadelphia Unemployment Project. Now that unemployment claims are at the highest level in eighteen years, and when two-thirds of all the unemployed workers in this country cannot qualify for unemployment benefits, the efforts of this project are more essential than ever before.

And I just want to say to you, that belong to DSA, that your efforts, your insight, and your anger at the injustice that still exists in this country, the injustice in all its forms, that anger is still indispensable, now more than ever, as America's beginning to stumble into a new century with a slumping economy, increasing inequality and an uncertain role in a world where most of the people on this planet are struggling to survive on two dollars a day. All of you are giving meaning to Margaret Mead's words, and I quote, when she said: "A small group of thoughtful people can change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has."

But tonight I also think about the man who was America's optimistic conscience, your founding chair, the

late, great Michael Harrington. You know, one of the earliest organizers of farm workers, Ernesto Galarza, used to say that America's conscience has a habit of flickering and dying down like a firefly. I believe that it was his classic study of poverty, *The Other America*, with his thousands of speeches at college campuses, at union halls and church basements, and by mentoring organizers of young idealists, Michael Harrington took America's flickering conscience and built a bonfire of indignation, activism, and achievement. He worked with the finest leaders of our times, with Martin Luther King, with Cesar Chavez, and Robert Kennedy. He walked countless picket lines, among them picketing Jewel Food Stores in Chicago with me. And I think, twelve years after his death, he left us all educated by and indebted to him.

And I believe that if Mike Harrington were with us today he would be telling Americans what you and I know all too well: These are hard times for working people in this country, because, even before the attack of September 11, the economy was slowing, living standards were stagnating and inequalities were skyrocketing.

Four months ago, the Economic Policy Institute reported that 29 percent of working families in the United States with children under the age of twelve, do not earn enough to afford basic necessities like food, housing, healthcare and childcare. Today, in the wealthiest nation on earth, after the longest period of prosperity, 44 million working Americans do not have health insurance and millions more are in fear that their healthcare will be terminated or cut back. Over the past two decades, corporate chief

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*executive officers have seen their pay increase by 536% while the average factory worker's real wages went down by eight percent. Profits are up by 118% but the purchasing power of the minimum wage went down by 15%. You and I both know what that means, Brothers and Sisters: America is becoming a nation of extremes, where the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, and the middle class is disappearing. A country where parents have to work two and three jobs just to keep their children fed. Where they have to spend all their time working just to provide physical sustenance for their children, and have no time left over to provide the emotional and spiritual nurturing that they need to grow up as healthy and happy human beings, as the leaders of tomorrow. This is not the America that we all dream about.*

*I believe that if Michael Harrington were with us now, he would be marching alongside minimum-wage workers, like the janitors who are cleaning the offices of the pharmaceutical and biotech companies on the cutting edge of progress, but whose workers live on the razor's edge of poverty. Since September 11 many more working families in this country are living on the edge of insecurity. More than half a million workers have lost their jobs, from the hospitality to the aerospace industry. And as the recession ripples throughout the economy, more and more working people will have a hard time holding on to their jobs, much less winning pay increases or securing their health-care coverage and pension benefits.*

*Now you would think, with a nation at war, and Americans being asked to join in the shared sacrifice, you might hope that corporate America and con-*

*servative politicians would show some sense of shame or a little bit of twinge of conscience; but, you know, unfortunately they have an immense capacity to disappoint everyone in this country. You know they seem to feel that the worst of times for us means that it's the best times for them. You know, under the guise of passing an economic stimulus package, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives approved a \$100 bil-*

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***“Justice for all—we say it, but it doesn't appear that we mean it.”***

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*lion plan that doles out \$70 billion to the nation's wealthiest, most profitable corporations. This so-called stimulus package is going to repeal the alternative minimum tax, which requires profitable corporations to pay at least some annual tax. The Senate bill would also wipe out the alternative minimum tax, and it will repay these companies for the taxes paid for the last 15 years, and it would allow them to invest their profits overseas tax-free. Now, you know, five years ago, the Congress also repealed the basic welfare program, AFDC (for those of you who don't work for the government, it means Aid to Families with Dependent Children). Now, with the nation on the edge of a recession, the Republican Senate wants to pass a corporate welfare program. We should also call it AFDC, Aid to Our Favorite Dependent Corporations.*

*Now, who are these poor souls that need a handout from the taxpayers. Well, IBM is going to get \$1.4 billion; Ford, \$1 billion; GM, poor little outfit, they only get \$833 million.*

*And who else is on the list: GE, Daimler-Chrysler and Kmart. And the list goes on and on and on. Billions of dollars for corporations, and two-thirds of the unemployed workers can't even get unemployment compensation.*

*Where is the sense of outrage at what's happening in this country? Where are the editorials? Where's Newt Gingrich to complain about welfare. You know, Robert Kennedy used to say, “We can do better.” Well, Brothers and Sisters, I'm here to tell you that, unless we organize, unless we fight back, we can still do much, much worse. And I think it's up to all of us to demand that our Congress pass an economic stimulus program that's worthy of the name. A program that invests in working families through expanded unemployment benefits and health coverage for the unemployed. A program that provides tax rebates targeted to low- and middle-income families, not corporations; and that provides assistance to cities like Philadelphia and states like Pennsylvania, or my own state, California, that are facing budget deficits and will be unable to maintain vital public services at a time when its citizens are suffering.*

*You know, I think we need to offer help and hope to working people, like those janitors who take the bus to the suburbs every afternoon. We don't need any more windfalls for the wealthy companies or the corporations that they go to clean every night. I don't think that human dignity should stop at the city line, or on the poverty line. You know, Michael Harrington used to tell us that our nation wasn't supposed to be divided between the affluent society and the “other America.” We were meant to be what our children pledge every morning at school, “One nation under God with liberty and justice*



for all." Justice for all—we say it, but it doesn't appear that we mean it.

Now, let me also say that building one America also asks us to address one issue that I think is critically important to America and to each and every one of us here tonight who believe and fight for social justice. I believe that the terrible events of September 11 should serve to unite Americans, not to divide us between immigrants and native-born.

You know the attacks in New York were against all of us. The heroes and the victims at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the four hijacked airplanes were a cross-section of working Americans. Now, we're never going to know for sure how many of those who died that day, or even how many of those who performed extraordinary acts of courage were foreign-born, but we do know, we do know, that the victims came from over 50 countries and every continent on earth. We're never going to know how many of those foreign-born heroes and victims were undocumented, but we do know that people that work in those buildings were building service workers, janitors, healthcare workers, restaurant workers, delivery workers and security guards, and that they pitched in when they were needed.

Two of our members, SEIU Local 32BJ, had left work and, when the planes hit, they came back to help bring people out, and the building collapsed on them, and they died. And we know, that when people were rushing to get out of the building, they didn't ask people who were helping them what their immigration status was. And what we do know is that, for the families of the undocumented workers, this was a double tragedy. They not only lost their loved ones; the families of these workers were left totally unprotected because of their

legal status. You know, for these workers, they lived in the shadows of society. They died in the shadows. And their families will continue to live in the shadows, fearful that, if they go and ask for public help, they could be deported.

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**“[T]he terrible events of September 11th should serve to unite Americans, not divide us between immigrants and native born.”**

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I don't know about you, I believe that's unfair. I don't think that's who we are in America. We don't abandon people in their hour of need, and that's what's happening [drowned out by applause]. I think that, in America, when people come to help build America, they come to contribute, they pay taxes, they go to work every day to support their families, they should be treated fairly, they should get an opportunity, they should get an opportunity, they should get an opportunity to legalize their status in this country. They should not continue to live, as I said, in the shadows.

So, I'm asking you tonight, I'm asking you that, together with all the things that you fight for and you advocate for, that you join in the campaign to fight for fair immigration laws, following the same principles that are supported by the AFL-CIO, the NAACP, and other mainstays of the coalitions of conscience. We need to make sure that we don't allow exploitation of workers because of

their legal status. We cannot allow workers to have their rights violated because, as long as their rights are being violated, ours are not secure. I believe that the answer is to legalize hardworking, taxpaying immigrants who are already in this country and we should do it as soon as possible.

One other thing: I do believe also, I do believe that we need to find real solutions, not easy answers, to our nation's problems. In a lot of our cities, and especially here in Philadelphia, that means fixing the public schools, not selling them to the highest bidder. Now, I just got into Philadelphia last night but I learned very quickly that Governor Schweiker wants to turn over management of the Philadelphia public schools to Edison Schools, Inc., a private, profit-making business. And the company says, we're going to save 30% of the school system's budget by downsizing and privatizing. We will take more parents who are making a living wage and make them poorer and expect that their children are going to do better. Now this program does mean a brighter future for Edison's owners. I don't believe, though, that means a brighter future for Philadelphia's children. I don't think that that's what the parents of this city want. I don't think the children need a downsized school system. They need schools that are up to the task. Schools that are clean, that are safe, properly painted, with plumbing that doesn't leak, ceilings that aren't collapsing, and wiring that you can connect to the Internet. And they need the best teachers and the timeliest textbooks. Now, what that means to me, is that means keeping the public schools public. And I'm proud that in Philadelphia our locals are part of a coalition to keep our schools public. To me, that means keeping the public

continued on page 12



*continued from page 11*

*schools accountable to the parents and the taxpayers, caring for all of our kids, focused on nobler ends than just the next quarterly corporate profit statement.*

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***“[W]e need to find real solutions. In a lot of cities that means fixing the schools not selling them to highest bidder.”***

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*Now, you know, come to think of it, that's the kind of America that we're all fighting for through our coalitions of conscience, just like the people that are gathered here tonight. We remember the lives, the lessons and the legacies of those who have brought us this far, and, like the janitors in the suburbs of this city, we are resolved to keep moving one step forward, one day at a time, but keep moving forward we will, because that's the way we will make progress. And I know that, whatever the injustice, we can hear Michael Harrington urging us never to give up on the America he loved; whatever the obstacle we can hear Dr. King reassuring us that we shall overcome; and whatever the challenge, we can hear Cesar Chavez telling us, "Si se puede," "It can be done."*

*I want to thank you all of you again for what you did for me 35 years ago but, more importantly, for what you will do for my children and my grandchildren in the future. Thank you very much.*

Eliseo Medina learned the meaning of a union in workers' lives in 1965 when, as a 19-year-old grape-picker, he participated in the historic United Farm Workers' strike in Delano, California. Over the next 13 years, working alongside the UFW's legendary Cesar Chavez, he honed his skills as a union organizer and political strategist by running hundreds of union elections, organizing the grape boycott and negotiating farmworkers' first union contracts.

Today, after more than 30 years in the labor movement, he is one of the nation's most visionary leaders, whose infectious energy has inspired thousands of workers to make their dreams real. In 1996, he made history when he was elected as the first Mexican-American to a top leadership post at the 1.4-million member Service Employees International Union, the nation's largest union.

As International Executive Vice President of SEIU based in Los Angeles, Medina has helped make SEIU the fastest-growing union on the West Coast and the largest union in California.

Medina was appointed by AFL-CIO President John J. Sweeney to the labor federation's Special Committee on Immigration Policy. Medina's leadership was instrumental in the AFL-CIO Executive Council's historic shift in immigration policy in February 2000. Medina's work on immigration policy is deeply felt; when he was nine years old, his mother, insistent upon reuniting the family, led Medina and his siblings across the U.S.-Mexican border to join their father, who was an immigrant farmworker in the U.S. In Los Angeles, he's helped strengthen ties between the Catholic Church and the labor movement to work on common concerns such as immigrant worker rights and access to health care.

He was a key strategist in the recent Los Angeles strike by SEIU Local 1877's building service workers, who in April 2000 won the largest wage increases in the 15-year history of SEIU's Justice for Janitors campaign. In addition, he helped more than 100,000 homecare workers in California—most of whom work for minimum wage to assist seniors and people with disabilities remain independent in their homes—secure \$100 million in the state budget for raises and health care benefits this year.

Medina resides in Los Angeles. He is married and the father of three children.

*SEIU is the nation's largest and fastest-growing union, with 1.4 million members who work in health care (hospitals, nursing homes, home care), public services (state, county, and city employees) and building services (janitors).*



# A Loyal Opposition

by Susan Chacin

One of the most bizarre ironies of our current crisis seems to have gone unnoticed in the torrent of patriotic mouthwash pouring into the public discourse: my congresswoman, Barbara Lee, received death threats for her sole vote against granting unprecedented war powers to the Bush administration. What does this say for the love of democracy in our country? Is the right way to "stand united" to menace dissenters with lynching?

When I considered this fact carefully, it appalled me. I was even more shocked to realize that initially I had not been surprised by the threats. I have learned to assume that anyone who opposes the military-industrial complex effectively on key issues will be attacked by foul means as well as fair. I have grown so accustomed to our own domestic mullahs that I expect anyone who dares to dissent will receive anonymous calls, obscene promises of mayhem and annihilation. Is this not the rule for anyone who advocates women's rights to control our own bodies? Isn't there another alternative to the Taliban?

Another symptom of this sorry state of affairs came from an unlikely source. Jay Leno, whose own wit was kept carefully shrouded in the immediate aftermath of 9-11, invited Bill Maher to appear as a guest on the Tonight Show shortly after the uproar about Maher's remarks on the air. Leno introduced Maher as someone Leno knows personally to be a "good American." Maher, threatened by sponsors of his show for the very political incorrectness which he was hired to foster, was effusively apologetic. His perform-

ance would have seemed pathetic had it not spoken so eloquently of the power of the corporate censors. However Leno's phrase, "good American", has stuck in my mind, evoking dim memories of the McCarthy hearings on the radio in my childhood.

Unfortunately, these examples are not unique. The censure of Susan Sontag's short piece in the *New Yorker*, numerous attacks on academic freedom on campuses and on freedom of speech in other workplaces, and the reluctance of anyone in congress to challenge the bipartisan steamroller flattening civil rights, all speak to the profound shift in the political climate. Retrograde, jingoistic attitudes many of us had hoped were buried forever have been reanimated and stalk the land. It is easy to feel like the famous protester, facing down a tank in Tien An Min Square; but now, where is the "free world" to watch?

But to fight despair, I think I have found a simple political concept that will serve as an antidote to this mindless drive for thought-control. The concept of a "loyal opposition" has a long and honorable tradition as an essential component of democracy. Given the differences of opinion on the left about the need to support or oppose the war—dramatically played out in the pages of *The Nation* among other venues—this is one point on which progressives can unite. We have to unite to expose the fallacy: Bush's equation of opposition to his policies with support for terrorism is the most serious threat to democracy that we face.

Jennifer Stone reminded her listeners on KPFA the other day of the famous slogan: "I may disagree with what you say, but I will fight to the death to defend your right to say it." Stone recommended that we work to see that every school child memorizes this commitment, and it seems that there are many adults who need education on this point as well.

Another possibility to consider is the need for a public registry of mind-control incidents, where attacks on freedom of speech could be compiled and analyzed. If such already exists, let's publicize it and make sure it is used. This kind of effort would serve a function similar to the hate crimes reporting system we are struggling to enlarge. If we cannot put an end to this kind of attack on our freedoms yet, let us at least be aware of the dimensions of the problem.

And above all, let us not exercise mind-control on the left. If we disagree, well and good. We need to keep talking and debating while we work for a more just world. There are not enough progressives around to be able to throw anyone overboard because we dislike their opinions.

*Susan Chacin, MSW, is a member of the Office and Professional Employees International Union, OPEIU Local 3, living in Berkeley with her domestic partner. She was elected to the National Political Committee of Democratic Socialists of America at their convention in November.*



## BOOK REVIEWS

### *A Little Happy Dance*

*Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* by David Brooks.  
Simon & Schuster, 2001, 288 pp.

Review by Scott McLemee

David Brooks, a writer for the conservative *Weekly Standard*, is also an amateur sociologist; which is to say, someone who makes mental footnotes to the *New York Times*. His field of specialization is the American bourgeoisie. In this much-discussed new book, Brooks demonstrates, to his own satisfaction, that a decisive shift has taken place in the folkways of the ruling class. The old conflict between the stodgy business ethos and the wild-eyed freedom of creative rebels is over; art and commerce have reached a mutually satisfying truce. Yuppie-style consumption is dead. In its place, there now reigns the Starbucks/National Public Radio aesthetic of the "bourgeois bohemians"—or, to use Brooks's coinage, "bobos."

The argument of *Bobos in Paradise* is simple, and the author restates it every two pages (perhaps as a courtesy to the people he is discussing, who must do their reading between cell phone messages). Half a century ago, ancient issues of the *Times* reveal, the American ruling class was WASP in its deepest cells. Those whose ancestors did not come over on the Mayflower sedulously mimicked the people who did—conducting their lives with a certain quiet and unpleasant dignity. Meanwhile, downtown, artists and writers and other denizens of bohemia whooped it up, enjoying a liberated existence of self-expression, which often included freedom from hot water or electricity.

Jumping ahead in time—to the roaring whatever-we-call-this-past

decade—we find that all is changed, changed utterly. Today, the elite is a meritocracy with no use for WASP reserve or vital debutante statistics. Its money and power come from brains, not ancestry. To acquire this status—and to manifest it—members of the new ruling class reject all the boring old virtues of stability, regularity and conformity. They are wild and crazy guys. And gals, too, of course. This cohort is post-feminist, post-modernist, post-

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*The old conflict between the stodgy business ethos and the wild-eyes freedom of creative rebels is over.... In its place, there now reigns the Starbucks/National Public Radio aesthetic of the "bourgeois bohemians"—or, to use Brooks's coinage, "bobos."*

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everything.

The socio-economic impact has been tremendous—and not just for the man in the gray flannel suit, now compelled to bungee jump. In the information economy, intellectuals are all entrepreneurs, and vice versa. Creativity is the name of the game. And its only rule is that (as a fast-food chains instructs us in its ads) "Sometimes You've Gotta Break the Rules."

The *bobosie* is the cause of all these changes. Or perhaps their by-product. It isn't too clear which; and insofar as *Bobos in Paradise* addresses that puzzle, the answer is "Whatever." Bourgeois bohemia includes, in Brooks's estimate, "about nine million households with incomes of over \$100,000"—what he calls "the most vocal and active portion of the popula-

tion." Just how they relate to the rest of society—those above and those below—is not really the author's concern.

Rather, he focuses on the quirks and consumption habits of the most powerful and trend-setting caste. The product is, in effect, a very long magazine article on the Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous (Ivy League division). Brooks counts himself as a bobo; and while tongue may be planted quite visibly in his cheek, social criticism this isn't. He writes about his peers with a certain affection, if not exactly admiration, in tones of unrelenting puckish humor.

Which has the important effect of obscuring what goes on between the lines. "Bobos" is a catchy neologism that will, with luck, die swiftly; yet the phenomenon itself pre-dates this monicker. For example, Paul Fussell sketched the bobos as "the X people" in the final pages of *Class* (1983)—a funny but more tough-minded book, lacking cuteness.

But to see the context of *Bobos in Paradise*, you have to look further back in time. Like any writer for the *Weekly Standard*, Brooks must know that the bobosie is just another name for "the New Class." That quasi-Marxist expression emerged in the late 1930s and got hijacked by the right in the 70s. It refers to those experts, technicians, bureaucrats, and brain-workers that—while vital to the functioning of an advanced industrial society—don't necessarily regard themselves as having



the same interests as business owners. Their power comes from the knowledge and/or access to media.

Many neoconservatives regarded the sixties as the dreadful moment when the New Class embraced the counterculture—rejecting ambition, individualism, profit-minded discipline, and sundry other Ben Franklin virtues. There were undermining the West. If they kept it up Soviet tanks would eventually roll down Main Street, cheered on by hordes of welfare mothers and militant homosexuals. Of course, the neoconservatives, who worked mostly as journalists and academics, were members of the New Class themselves, but never mind.

David Brooks belongs to the latest generation of this group; and *Bobos in Paradise* is, in part, addressed to his elders. The chapter on bobo intellectuals (neocon and otherwise) is particularly telling. Brooks makes clear just how much steak and gravy are available to New Class members who, as the saying has it, “go along to get along.” As for the notion that they have any interest in biting the hand that feeds them—it is to laugh. They embody no values at odds with the existing order of things—and in fact provide many useful services to the empire.

As an afterthought, Brooks wonders if this might change. “Indeed,” he writes, “it’s possible to imagine a coming generation that will grow bored of our reconciliations, our pragmatic ambivalence, our tendency to lead lives half one thing, half another. They may long for a little cleansing purity, a little zeal in place of our materialism, demanding orthodoxy in place of our small-scale morality.”

Brooks puts all this in parentheses, and never mentions it again. The prospect is not very worrisome. In dealing with the New Class, he suggests, the best policy is one of indulgent good humor. The new code of hipster gentility means that the closest they will come to upheaval is redecorating. So Brooks winks at the old ideological warriors, saying, now let us do a little happy dance.

*Scott McLemee writes about the humanities for The Chronicle of Higher Education. A version of this article originally appeared in Newsday.*



*Philly DSA members John Strauss and John Braxton lead the audience in singing “Solidarity Forever” at the Saturday night awards banquet.*

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I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. Frank Llewellyn, Editor, 12/17/01.



## Detroit DSA Challenges Michigan Hospice: Honor Patient and Labor Rights!

By David Green

On Tuesday, December 4th, at the request of the United Steel Workers-Region 2, members of **Detroit DSA** joined an informational picket at Hospice of Michigan in Farmington Hills. Approximately seventy-five people representing DSA, Gray Panthers, Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO, Jobs with Justice, Alliance for Democracy, and Michigan Universal Health Care Access Network (MichUHCAN) picketed in order to show community and labor support for the nurses aides, cooks, and other ancillary personnel at Hospice of Michigan who are attempting to organize a union (The nursing staff has been excluded from the proposed bargaining unit due to a recent Supreme Court decision which defined nurses as management in the institutions in which they are employed.). Even the former mayor of Farmington Hills, Aldo Vagnozzi, participated in the demonstration. Eleven DSAers marched in the picket line, including Earl Mandel, Eric Ebel, David Elsila, Maurice Geary, Helen Samberg, Lon Herman, Ed Nol, Linda Housch-Collins, Brandon Moss, Larry Schwarczynski, and David Green.

Employees of Hospice of Michigan (HOM) are organizing in response to two issues that are relevant to the general community: staffing ratios and staff turnover. The cooks and aides earn \$10-12/hr at HOM while the administrators of this non-profit organization earn six-figure salaries. The poor pay leads to difficulty retaining competent, motivated staff. Staff turnover prevents caregivers from becoming familiar with particular patients, their families, and their individual needs. Poor staffing ratios (i.e., the number of patients assigned to each caregiver) reduce the amount of time a caregiver can devote to each patient. These issues can be addressed through collective bargaining. A National Labor Relations Board election is tentatively scheduled for December 20th.

**Detroit DSA** is also assisting the organizing effort at HOM through other means. At the request of United Steel Workers organizer (and DSA member) Dan McCarthy, we asked area physicians who refer to HOM to sign a letter to management at HOM requesting that they remain neutral in the organizing campaign. Detroit DSA Steering Committee member Selma Goode is arranging a meeting between area clergy and the CEO of HOM to discuss the connection between just wages for caregivers and quality of patient care.

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