

DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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BD19

From the National Director

Inspired by YDSA

BY MARIA SVART

I'm writing this column before Super Tuesday, so rather than comment on the presidential campaign, I'll talk about the national conference of the Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA), which I attended February 14-16 in Chicago. These young socialist organizers have more at stake than any of us, and while they were very pumped about Bernie Sanders and many are volunteering long hours back home for the Sanders campaign or a campus YDSA for Bernie operation, the prize they have their eyes on is a lasting socialist movement.



Some 275 students traveled from Arizona and West Virginia, California and Florida, and in between. Colleges, high schools, and even a middle school were represented. We met in the union hall of the legendary Chicago Teachers Union.

Conference sessions included a mix of panels, skills workshops, and discussion breakouts, a chance for students to canvass with DSA for Bernie on Sunday afternoon, and a speech from Phillip Agnew—organizer, artist, and founder of the Dream Defenders—that brought down the house. In my speech, I touched on my own history of organizing and emphasized that the relationships the students build now and the lessons they teach each other and learn from more experienced generations of DSAers will prepare them for the work ahead.

YDSA promoted good praxis, or the alchemy of combining thought and

action. National co-chairs Amelia Blair-Smith and Kristen Cervero reminded YDSAers to organize events after their state primaries to invite students to join DSA and become part of the struggle for the long haul as well as to take rank-and-file union jobs in key industries after graduation. We gave the attendees a copy of *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism, American Style* (reviewed on page 14), along with a discussion guide (at fund.dsausa.org/resources). [The DSA Political Education committee is developing educational programming linked to the book.]

Why do I give this description of the YDSA conference? Because it highlights a major strength of DSA: We fight hard to get our members and allies into office, but we will still be organizing long after election day. If we put Bernie in the White House, we can expect the capitalist class to do everything in its power to hamstring his agenda.

More than a hundred DSA-endorsed candidates are currently in public office. DSA chapters across the country are teaching each other how to build volunteer field programs through door knocking for candidates or legislative pressure campaigns like Medicare for All or public energy. DSA for Bernie alone (our independent expenditure effort), has knocked on 381,000 doors as of mid-February. This is possible because we have trained up members to bypass the consultant class and support working-class candidates to run winning campaigns that rely on direct voter conversations instead of expensive radio or television ads.

And members are organizing their workplaces into unions or strengthening their existing unions, setting up chapter-based labor committees, and

sending delegations to the Labor Notes conference this April. They are organizing Climate Strikes for Earth Day, Fund-a-Thons for Abortion Access in April, and demands for elected officials at all levels to sign the National Nurses United's People Over Profits Pledge, stating that they will not take contributions from executives, lobbyists, and PACs affiliated with the Partnership for America's Health Care Future and their corporate backers.

We're working alongside ally organizations with a multiracial working class base, such as the Center for Popular Democracy Action, Make the Road By Walking, People's Action, and Dream Defenders, among others in the People Power for Bernie independent expenditure coalition.

Most important, we're able to do all this amazing work because we are funded and run democratically by you, our members. We are unbought and unbossed, fueled largely by the small-dollar contributions of tens of thousands of democratic socialists.

At the 2019 DSA national convention, delegates passed a resolution to grow our membership to 100,000 by 2021. One of our most recent new members is Phillip Agnew, who ended his rousing YDSA conference speech by declaring that he had joined.

I hope you will join this membership campaign by asking your friends, neighbors, family, and coworkers to join DSA. And I hope you will find the closest DSA chapter and attend a meeting or event. You may be nervous about attending your first meeting if you don't know anyone. But, as I said to students at the conference, going alone to my first YDSA meeting when I was a student was a decision that changed the trajectory of my life. I realized I actually wasn't alone, and that there's power in solidarity. Now I ask you, in this critical moment, to take that step.

DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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

Building DSA with Bernie

BY ALEC RAMSAY-SMITH

Bernie Sanders is running an unprecedented class struggle campaign for president that is capturing the imagination and enthusiasm of millions across the country. Students, union members, Walmart and warehouse workers, teachers, and the rest of the multiracial working class are donating and volunteering in droves because they believe they can meaningfully change their lives through a Bernie victory. But, even if Bernie wins the presidency, it will take much more to enact his democratic socialist platform.

That's where DSA comes in. Our membership formed an independent expenditure campaign for Bernie, with our own messaging and the ability to tailor the work to local conditions. As of February, more than 70 chapters have launched active DSA for Bernie campaigns, and these chapters are already making a real impact on the election. More than that, these chapters are structuring their campaigns to ensure we leave this primary season with a stronger, larger DSA that is ready to fight the ruling class and win our transformative demands.

In the Chattanooga DSA, their DSA for Bernie campaign is bringing in new members while laying the groundwork for campaigns after the primary. In a city without a formal Bernie field office, the local DSA chapter has attracted new active members who were looking for a way to support Bernie. This chapter, with around 100 members, regularly holds canvasses with around 15 volunteers, and several of the people leading these canvasses (including a chapter co-chair) have come from this new wave of members. One chapter leader outlines their strategy: "Obviously Bernie's the leader of this giant wave of support across the nation, and we have to capitalize on



DavidHellman.art

this. And because we live in Tennessee, the battle here is completely during the primary, so we need to think beyond the Bernie campaign to build power in Tennessee after March 3."

Chattanooga's DSA for Bernie campaign has focused on canvassing within specific districts of the city, in places where DSA is considering running down ballot candidates in the future. The chapter is also working to build canvassing skills and lists for a future pressure campaign demanding a police oversight board in Chattanooga and other potential campaigns around cash bail or housing justice.

Meanwhile, New Orleans DSA is finding new ways to bring in Bernie supporters and challenge them to get involved in their organization. Louisiana is another state that lacks a strong Bernie campaign presence, so Bernie supporters have been turning out to DSA events and making recent general meetings and canvasses some of the largest in the chapter's history. Through its DSA for Bernie campaign, the chapter is working to set up regular phone banks to Bernie supporters identified from canvasses to invite them to future meetings or to get

involved in the chapter. New Orleans DSA also holds events beyond Bernie canvasses to get new folks engaged in organizing, including voter registration drives and tabling in targeted areas from the Mardi Gras parade to a high school. The chapter is also building up a pressure campaign with med student organizations demanding the city council endorse Medicare for All, and potential crowd canvasses at hospitals or other tactics will be a strong onboarding point for activated Bernie supporters who know we need a movement past election day to get this done.

Chapters often struggle making membership asks, but Los Angeles DSA has used its DSA for Bernie campaign to bring in dozens of new members by integrating deliberate and repeated membership asks in their public events. During a recent city-wide canvass, where more than 150 volunteers attended, chapter leaders had DSA members identify themselves in the crowd, had volunteers make dues pitches, and set up a signup station for non-member volunteers. This single canvass netted around 20 new DSA members for the chapter. At the chapter's debate watch parties, speakers go up during commercials to talk about their campaign, and work to get non-members to sign up. By practicing and experimenting how to best make pitches, DSA is preparing to make the most of our potential Bernie bump.

This is a unique moment. If chapters are strategic about bringing Bernie supporters into DSA, we have the opportunity to build a 100,000-strong socialist organization. We are challenging chapters to host public-facing events to bring in Bernie's base shortly after their state primaries and to plan long-term to keep them in our movement. Chattanooga, New Orleans, Los Angeles DSA, and others have already gotten the ball rolling, and I can't wait to watch chapters with and without DSA for Bernie campaigns seize this moment to grow bigger and stronger. ■

Central Connecticut DSA member Alec Ramsay-Smith is the campaign manager for the DSA for Bernie independent expenditure campaign.

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How the Bipartisan War on Immigrants Explains Politics as We Know It

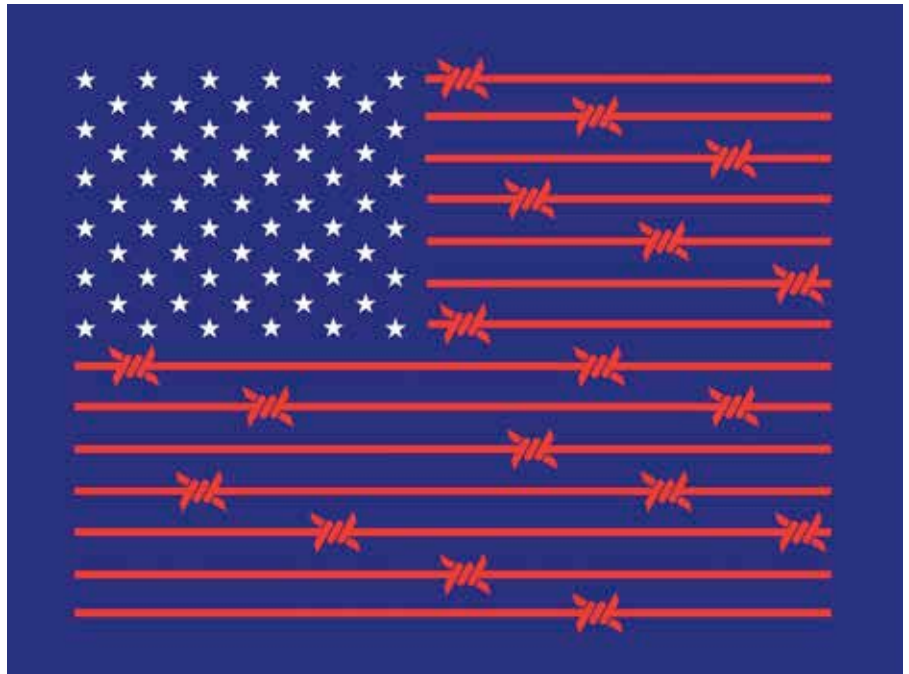
There's a profound realignment coming, and U.S. anti-immigrant politics is on the way out.

BY DANIEL DENVIR

Donald Trump is in the White House, so it might surprise you to learn that U.S. support for immigrant rights is at a historic high. In 1994, 63% of Americans agreed that “immigrants are a burden on the country because they take jobs, housing and health care,” according to the Pew Research Center. By 2019, 28% thought that, while 62% agreed that “immigrants strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents.”

The Republican Party has made xenophobia a cornerstone of its politics. But Democratic voters have moved in the opposite direction. And fast. Until a decade ago, Republicans and Democrats held similar opinions on immigration. Then they diverged sharply. Last year, 83% of Democrats had positive views of immigrants, compared to 38% of Republicans. And Republicans who oppose immigration have come to oppose it in more brazenly racist terms, growing more likely since Trump took office to believe that the United States risks losing its identity if it is too open to immigration. At the same time, immigrants and an increasingly diverse Democratic Party base have emphatically supported of immigrant rights and freedom. The task of the Left is to join the immigrant rights movement in forcing Democratic politicians to catch up to their base—or, if necessary, to replace those politicians.

Under Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, the war on immigrants was bipartisan. But escalating enforcement and the spectacular demonization of immigrants provoked a powerful movement in response. Starting in 2006, that movement began to weaken xenophobia's hold on the Democratic base, even as Republican xenophobia become more radical. Today, nativism is increasingly a project of a right wing that—while tenaciously using anti-democratic levers to maintain power—is in



The Left wins when it embraces a capacious and inclusive “we the people” against economic elites.

long-term decline.

This polarization presents dangers, as when Trump moves to terrorize asylum-seekers and ban Muslims and Africans. But it also provides immense opportunities for the immigrant rights movement, because the bipartisan war on immigrants can't continue as such without bipartisan public support. It's an opportunity for the socialist Left to put immigrant workers at the core of an agenda that transforms this country for all workers.

It's no coincidence that immigrants and their children—Latinos and Muslims in particular—are now core to Bernie Sanders's base. Sanders pledges not only to end the war on immigrants but also to transform the rotten system that

made it possible.

Bernie has a stellar immigration plan, but it's his universal class-struggle politics that has been key to drawing the support of Latinos, who've long been central to an emerging multiracial U.S. working class and its labor struggles. For decades, immigrants have been stigmatized for using social services, softening up the public for an attack on everyone's social services. Sanders's proposal for Medicare for All includes undocumented people, a radical break with an ugly history of using racism and xenophobia to attack the welfare state.

The Right wins when it uses racism to divide ordinary people against one another. The Left wins when it embraces a capacious and inclusive “we the people” against economic elites. That is why we're starting to win right now.

During the 1990s, Bill Clinton co-opted Republican nativism, painting immigrants as a welfare drain and criminal threat. With support from both parties, Congress militarized the border and passed laws that connected the deportation machine to the country's criminal justice system. It also made deportations more difficult to fight, and deportees' exclusion more permanent. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, immi-

grants came to be portrayed as a terrorist threat, and the deportation machinery was attached to the national security state. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama (the latter earning the moniker “Deporter in Chief”) pushed for more deportations and more border crackdowns—in the hope of winning right-wing members of Congress over to “comprehensive immigration reform,” which combined legalization of undocumented people with guestworker programs and new enforcement measures. The right wing, however, consistently refused to support anything that looked like “amnesty.” They accepted the crackdowns as a free gift, offering nothing in return—all while further radicalizing their position and accusing Democrats of advocating open borders.

Any Democrat who defeats Trump will likely at minimum reverse escalations in the long-running war on immigrants—such as his Muslim ban and deep cuts to refugee admissions. We on the socialist Left must work with organizations like the National Day Laborer Organizing Network and Movimiento Cosecha and others in fighting for just bills and executive actions that demilitarize the border, legalize undocumented immigrants, and break the ties between the criminal justice and immigration enforcement systems—rejecting all compromise with the nativist Right.

What history demonstrates is that such compromises are not only morally odious as policy but also disastrous politically. For decades, the liberal establishment has abetted nativist politics and caused misery for immigrants. But worker freedom depends on immigrant freedom, because immigration status is used to divide the working class. And immigrant freedom depends on worker freedom, because immigrant struggles on the job are inseparable from their struggles for legal status. The good news is that immigrants are at the center of a U.S. working class that is starting to fight back and win. ■

Providence DSA member Daniel Denvir is a visiting fellow in International and Public Affairs at Brown University, host of The Dig podcast on Jacobin Radio, and author of *All-American Nativism: How the Bipartisan War on Immigrants Explains Politics as We Know It* (Verso, 2020).

WISDOM OF THE ELDERS

Staying in it for the long haul

BY CHRISTINE RIDDIOUGH

One of the biggest dangers for activists is burnout. We asked some long-timers (about 500 years of combined activism) how they’ve paced themselves to stay the course. The questions were, “How have you managed to remain active and committed over the years? How do you avoid burnout?” Answers have been edited for length. A longer version appears in the online version of Democratic Left.

RON BAIMAN: Forge close, lifelong friendships with other comrades!

MIRIAM BENSMAN: We need a loving community to sustain ourselves. When I have descended into meanness, I have always regretted it personally AND found it counterproductive.

JULES BERNSTEIN: Socialist thought and activism have been satisfying, sometimes frustrating, but never dull.

PAUL BUHLE: Stay loose. New challenges will happen, and with them new learning.

DUANE CAMPBELL: Select campaigns and efforts that can make a difference, and then focus on those.

CARL DAVIDSON: Triage your tasks—those you are good at, those you want to learn, and those you’re not so interested in. Drop the last bunch. Learn to say “no” nicely, learn to delegate to others, and train them when you can.

BILL MOSLEY: The biggest factor is my relationships with other long-time activists. I figure as long as they can keep going, I can, too.

MAXINE PHILLIPS: A sense of solidarity with current and past socialists has sustained me. My religious faith gives me perspective. My family and friends give me emotional strength.

MICHELE ROSSI: Make time for friends, family, and fun. Access to good quality psychotherapy at some key moments in my life has helped, too. Stay curious and open.

MAX SAWICKY: Figure out a way to live the way you want that accommodates your activism. If you don’t have some basic foundation of contentment, nobody will want to be around you.

KURT STAND: Sometimes we can do more, sometimes less according to the rhythms of our own life. Teach what you know but also listen and learn from those younger than yourself.

PEG STROBEL: Find something that advances your politics and that you enjoy doing. Find friends, not just comrades, in your political work. The friendships will sustain you when the political work feels like a slog.

MILTON TAMBOR: I have adopted Michael Harrington’s model of the long distance runner [who] understands that a radical agenda worth pursuing must be grounded in political reality.

JAMES WILLIAMS: Learn to pick your fights and, most important, have a life—other ways to nurture yourself. For years, I used alcohol—not one of my better choices.

We must intensify existing democracy

A conversation with Louisville DSA member Robert LeVertis Bell



Across the country, DSA members are running for office and getting elected. Even when they “lose,” democratic socialism wins because it becomes part of the conversation, as it is in every industrialized country except this one. Robert LeVertis Bell is a public school teacher and DSA member who’s running for Metro Council in Louisville, Kentucky’s District Four. Nick Conder, also a member of Louisville DSA, spoke to him about why he decided to run.

What made you decide to jump into politics? This is the time to be bold with regard to our electoral strategy in DSA. I believe that DSA should be using elections to expand the influence of socialism and to organize people into socialism. The person who previously had the seat I’m running for decided not to run. When that opportunity presented itself, I realized that this particular race was one that I was well suited to win. And I thought it was a good test case for establishing an electoral presence in Louisville of the sort of politics that DSA advocates.

Where do your politics come from? I grew up in a movement household. My grandmother is a local activist.

“Democratic socialism means strengthening political democracy into our economy.”

She’s one of those people that every city has, the stalwarts of the black community in the civil rights tradition. I’ve been an activist, radical organizer, and anticapitalist since I was a teenager. I was involved in anti-police brutality organizations and various anti-fascist organizations as a young person. Now I’m 39 years old, and I’m a teacher. I’ve been involved for the past two years in rank-and-file teacher organizing. We’ve had some work stoppages here in Louisville and throughout Kentucky, which have gotten a lot of attention as part of the Red for Ed teacher strike wave. So all of that together, from black activism to anticapitalism to the teacher revolt, has shaped my politics.

What are some of the most pressing issues that are facing District Four?

When people in my district talk about the problems that the city is facing, they go immediately to talking about the schools: police in the schools, segregation in the schools, the teacher strikes, the administration’s bullying of teachers. They talk about schools first.

Then they talk about housing. They talk a lot about gentrification, the fact that this particular district is home to pretty much all of the most acutely gentrifying areas in the city of Louisville, each of them in different stages of the process. People want somebody to stand up to the city’s runaway developer-centric politics.

The other thing people are most concerned about is what we would call austerity politics in the city. Last year, when there was a budget shortfall, the mayor responded by instituting some draconian cuts to city services. They wanted to close our nearby fire station. They already closed the library, and turned it into a community center, then they closed the community center. They want to close the public pools, they want to close an additional library, they want to take an ambulance off the streets. People are concerned about this. They want to live in a city that provides a baseline of a decent life.

You’re open about being a democratic socialist. What does socialism mean to you? I want to expand democracy. Where there is not democracy in our communities or our neighborhoods, I want there to be community councils and tenants councils. Where there are not unions, I want there to be unions in the workplace. Essentially, where there are not existing democratic structures, I want to make more of them. I also want to intensify existing democracy. If there is already a union, I want to make it a stronger union. There’s already some semblance of democracy at the ballot box, but I want to increase people’s level of access and choice. Democratic socialism means strengthening political democracy and expanding democracy into our economy. It means giving people control over more and more aspects of our social life in a democratic way.

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Taking Back International Women's Day

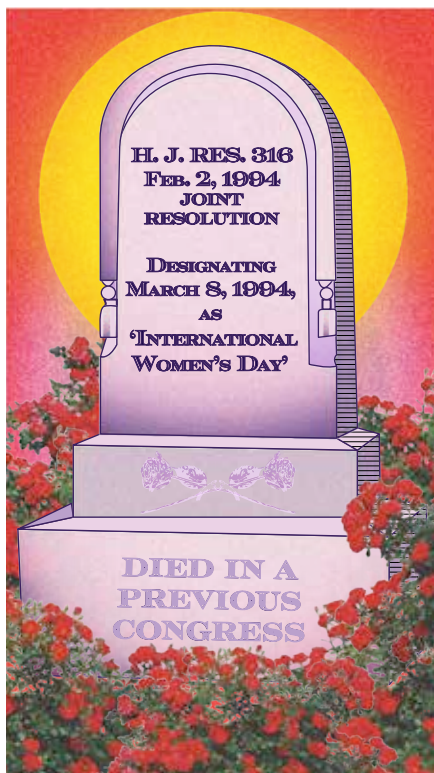
Women's Day was begun by U.S. socialists; it's time we reclaimed it.

BY CINZIA ARRUZZA

The United Nations instituted International Women's Day (IWD) in 1975—or so the official story runs. Few remember not only that the origins of March 8 lie in the history of the international workers' movement, but that it was the socialist movement in the United States that first launched the idea of a day devoted to women's rights centered on working-class women. In fact, the Socialist Party USA first established a day of education and action around women's rights called "Woman's Day" in 1908, and the following year U.S. socialists held demonstrations in several cities to demand women's suffrage. In 1910, German socialist Clara Zetkin proposed the transformation of the U.S. Woman's Day into an international day of action—International Working Women's Day—which, in 1914, started being celebrated on March 8. Three years later, on March 8, 1917, Russian women workers took to the streets in St. Petersburg, organizing a strike to demand bread and peace. It was the beginning of the Russian Revolution.

When the United Nations declared IWD in 1975, it took care to remove the word "working" from the title. This was only a first step toward the transformation of the day from a demonstration of working women's struggles to a day of festivity in celebration of "women" as such, returning to an essentialist or biology-based identity of women as natural mothers and caregivers. Once the memory of the women strikers who had fought for a better present and future was gone, IWD became a day of festivity like any other, at best an occasion for mimosa-based brunches with girlfriends and greeting cards.

Over the past three years, however, millions of cis and trans women have rediscovered the militant history and spirit of March 8. In 2017, a new international feminist movement called for the first international women's strike. The initiative was inspired by the massive women's strikes that took place in the fall of 2016 in Poland (where they managed to stop a total ban on abortion)



Megan Ganey

and Argentina (where they protested against femicides). The 2017 strike took place in dozens of countries: in some, it managed to stop work in hundreds of workplaces in addition to mobilizing millions of women in the streets. In others—such as the United States—it had a significantly more modest size.

But everywhere, women who decided to mobilize felt empowered by the international solidarity and coordination that had made the day of actions and strikes possible. The strike movement continued to grow over the following years. In 2018, the Spanish feminist movement managed to organize a five-million-strong workplace general strike demanding *cambiarlo todo*, to change everything. In 2019, the strike movement spread to new countries such as Chile—where it organized a massive demonstration that was, at that time, the largest street protest since the end of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship—and Switzerland, where it organized a 400,000-people-strong workplace strike in June.

This year, activists from Argentina, Chile, Italy, France, and Mexico, and many other countries met digitally in

order to draft a joint call for strikes and actions on March 8 and 9 in response not only to the international rise of a misogynistic, transphobic, and racist far Right and in defense of abortion and bodily self-determination, and against gender-based violence, but also in protest against exploitation, the casualization of labor, and extractivism. The call, moreover, emphasized the importance of reproductive labor and insisted on the relation between productive and reproductive work under capitalism.

The international feminist strike movement is a far cry from the discourse of liberal feminism that still dominates media and public perception in the United States. The movement does not demand "equal opportunity in domination" for elite women and is not interested in electoral quotas, "diversity," and individual empowerment at the expense of other women. Rather, it insists on the connection between gender oppression and capitalism and challenges all the institutions and practices that contribute to the oppression of women and queer people: the state, the police, the job market, imperialism and neo-colonialism, and xenophobic migration policies.

In past years, the spirit of the feminist strike movement was brought to the United States by the International Women's Strike (IWS-US), a national network of feminist, queer, and anticapitalist collectives and organizations that organized wildcat work stoppages, rallies, and marches in a number of cities. However, the United States continues to be an exception, insofar as no mass feminist movement has yet emerged.

This weakness is due to a number of factors. Over the course of the last decades, the United States has seen the emergence of a well-funded network of liberal feminist organizations and media with no significant relation to class politics and with a political agenda at odds with anti-capitalist and anti-racist feminism. One of the difficulties faced in the past three years has been the lack of visibility and solid organizational infrastructure of the feminist strike movement in the United States, especially in contrast with the enormous financial resources and visibility of liberal-leaning women's

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The Weight of History

Lauren Jacobs is a longtime labor and community organizer who now leads the Partnership for Working Families. Puya Gerami spoke with her about building the power of the Left at a time of opportunity.

What is the Partnership for Working Families?

The Partnership is a network of permanent coalition organizations in 20 different metropolitan regions across the country. Our organization arose during the urban construction boom of the early 2000s. We were part of the movement that focused on the central question of how to increase the power of workers. Who benefited and who suffered from development?



Lauren Jacobs

How were public dollars used? How did development affect workers, community members, and the environment? We worked to bring together labor and community so they weren't pitted against one another but in fact could act as allies in the struggle. This work led to the creation of the community benefits agreement, a key tool that our members like the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) developed and many organizations use today.

But we've also grappled with self-criticism. Although our campaigns have improved the lives of working people, we as a Left still haven't tipped the balance of power. The work that our organization is doing right now still uses the tactics we've used in the past, but pursues a long-term strategic agenda for our regions. Every fight we're taking on targets the forces harming working-class communities and tries to build permanent organization and leadership among our base.

How do you balance this long-term strategic agenda with the need to win immediate, concrete gains?

One of the folks in our network put it best, so I'll paraphrase him: "Death to incrementalism! Long live incrementalism!" Of course, in a way we have to be incrementalist in our thinking, because if we sat out and refused to fight except for our ultimate goal, we'd never get

anything done. We can't reach it in one fell swoop. What we *can* do is ask ourselves in the present, How is what we're doing shaping the common sense? What is the hegemony we need to secure to reach our goal? What is every action we're taking in the present laying the ground for in the long term?

Building off of André Gorz's view of non-reformist reforms, we need to think about enacting change not for the sake of reform but for the sake of advancing our long-term agenda. The opportunities in this moment aren't the endgame; they're steps along the way.

What do you mean by hegemony? What steps are required for us to begin building that hegemony? What are the pitfalls to avoid?

The kind of hegemony we need is to shift the common sense by advancing the demand of abundance for all. One of neoliberalism's first hegemonic attacks was against the very idea of society itself—an attempt to return to the nuclear family as the central political subject and not the commons. We have to revive collective responsibility.

Activism around Medicare for All is a great example. We're arguing that healthcare is sacrosanct, a right that shouldn't be commodified. We have more than enough resources if we wrest them away from those at the top to ensure that everyone receives the medical care they need.

If that's the shift we want to make, we have to think about who we need to ally with us. What is the historical bloc required to win? What is the collection of forces we need to drive this shift in how the public thinks about a particular issue? One big pitfall is mistaking mobilizing for organizing by focusing only on the people who absolutely agree with us, as opposed to searching for alliances with those who may have different points of view but who align with us on the central issue and should join our bloc to advance it.

Rising labor militancy has sparked a new conversation about rebuilding and even restructuring the labor movement. What's your take on this debate? I'm excited we're having the conversation about revitalizing the labor movement, thinking big about legislative changes to expand the chance of recreating mass organizations, and imagining how to organize industries where we don't yet know what structures and strategies are required. But let's remember that the last period of rapid union expansion relied on mass unrest: not symbolic actions, but actions meant to shut down the economy in a particular city or region. That's how legislative reform was won. The question today is, "What kind of worker power do we need to generate so that the forces against us won't dare get in the way of the right to organize?"

Our movement—including trade unions, worker centers, and other labor organizations—also has to find ways to overcome our fragmentation so we can formulate strategy in a more coordinated and cohesive way.

You've been organizing in the labor movement for more than two decades. How would you characterize the possibilities we face in our current moment? Gramsci said, "The old world is dying and the new world struggles to be born. Now is the time of monsters." This is a moment where we have the potential to achieve a great hegemonic leap forward. Twenty years ago, I never would have thought that we'd have popular candidates, even on the presidential stage, calling for expansion of the social safety net by taxing the rich. I wish we were better organized going into this moment. A lack of institutions and organizations at scale is a challenge we face today. But this is an opportunity to make a major shift—an opportunity we have to seize.

At the same time, we have to understand that if we lose, we're not just going back to the neoliberal status quo of the last 40 years. The White House regime has moved further toward an authoritarian state. We should take seriously the incredible weight of history that's upon all of us. ■

Puya Gerami is a member of Central Connecticut DSA.

National Political Committee (NPC) Report

Elected at the convention, the National Political Committee (NPC) is DSA's leadership body.

BY MARIANELA D'APRILE

Our August 2019 convention set many high goals for DSA! Since then, the National Political Committee (NPC) elected at the convention has met twice, and members have gotten to work. Here's what we've been up to:

At the October 2019 NPC meeting, we elected our five-member steering committee, which meets every two weeks and makes decisions between NPC meetings. We also assigned each of our NPC members to national committees. A central goal for the October 2019 meeting was for us to get to know each other and DSA staff. In a practice we hope to continue, we started the meeting with a discussion of our political moment, framed by three texts proposed by

NPC Steering Committee

Erika Paschold, Lincoln, NE
Jennifer Bolen, San Francisco, CA
Kristian Hernandez, North Texas
Natalie Midiri, Philadelphia, PA
Sean Estelle, Chicago, IL

YDSA co-chairs also sit on the SC.

NPC members.

At the February 2020 NPC meeting, we set staffing priorities for the organization, committing to hires in tech, design, and communications so that we can bring in new members and be ready to retain them. We discussed our grievance structures at length and made plans to strengthen them. And we approved a budget for 2020.

Overall, we want to put our organization in a good position to take advantage of this exciting political moment, recruit more members, and build the strength of our movement. We want to build capac-

ity at the national level so that we can remain in this fight for the long haul. This can take the form of tweaks, like changing how we prepare for NPC meetings so there's more time for review and discussion ahead of time. It also means big commitments, like one-third of the NPC serving on the Growth and Development Committee, which will be developing our strategies for recruitment, member retention, fundraising, and training our members so that they all feel confident as socialist organizers.

It also means being nimble and responding to things quickly, as we did when we organized an anti-war call that is now becoming a coalition.

We know we're living through a hugely important moment for democratic socialism, and we want DSA to be the place where people commit to socialist politics for life!

Ed. Note: Go to dsausa.org for info on NPC statements and DSA campaigns.

Join DSA's National Abortion Access Fund-a-Thon!

For years, DSA chapters across the country have taken part in an annual bowl-a-thon to raise money for the National Network of Abortion Funds (NNAF). This year, NNAF changed the name to Fund-a-Thon to reflect the wide range of creative community events. Members of DSA's Socialist Feminist Working Group are coordinating efforts across the country right now. Sign up today, and encourage your chapter to participate! Last year, 79 teams from over 50 DSA chapters took part and raised \$137,472 for the NNAF. And we expect to meet or exceed that number again this year!

To help organize or connect to a DSA fundraiser for NNAF near you, visit bit.ly/DSAFthon2020

Robert Bell

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

How did you come to DSA?

It took me a while to join DSA. I had to be convinced about the efficacy of electoral campaigning as a vehicle to build socialism in the United States. That was something I was very skeptical about for a very long time. But that changed with the 2016 Bernie campaign. And as I watched more DSA campaigns, I saw in real time how people were deepening their political understanding, how people were becoming strong organizers, how people were and still are building something that is approaching a robust movement against capitalism in part, though not exclusively, through electoral campaigns.

Has being part of DSA's national network improved the prospects of your campaign?

Absolutely. In a real sense, we need finances to run campaigns. That's how it works. And I've gotten a lot of financial support from people in DSA across the country. The reach of DSA into local campaigns like mine has been game changer, especially when I'm

fighting tooth and nail against opponents who are funded by mega churches and developers. Having this broad nationwide socialist movement behind me has been an equalizing force, maybe more than equalizing force.

Do you see your campaign as an extension of the teacher revolt?

Absolutely. The work stoppages here were a crash course in solidarity and class consciousness for so many people. That was invigorating to me, and it helped do away with some cynicism I had about the future of our city and our state. Being a teacher in that movement has given me a different view of what's possible.

If you were to win, how would you see your relationship to the socialist movement playing out?

First off, I intend to stay active in my DSA chapter. I do political education in our chapter, and I will continue to do that, whether through our DSA Socialist Night School or through the office itself or both. And then I intend to use whatever tools are available to me to foment more political participation throughout my district. More democracy. That, to me, is how we're going to build socialism. ■

John Sayles: The Griot of Late Capitalism

Sayles's collected works could fill a semester of Socialist Night School.

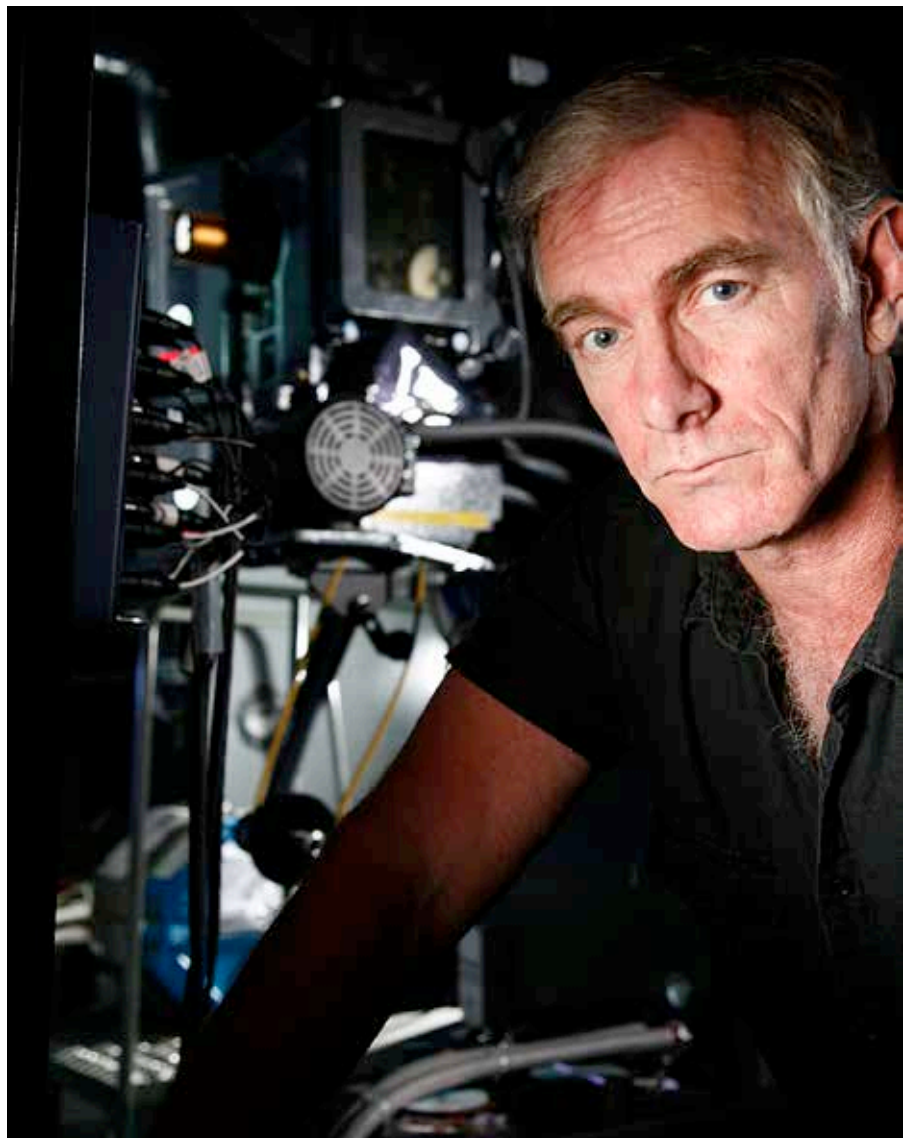
BY CHRISTINE LOMBARDI

When I said that I was going to interview John Sayles, my friends shouted out their favorite movie titles. Sayles is a movie maker of whom the *Washington Post* once snarked, "If John Sayles were a ballplayer, they'd call him Lefty—not for his pitching arm but for his politics." His 18 films so far can obscure Sayles's literary output, fiction whose propulsive prose tackles similar questions. All of his work explores life under capitalism, with its embedded racism, misogyny, and classism.

Sayles asks, "How did we get here?" and "How are we coping?" Born in Schenectady, New York, in 1950, he remembers "being fed this idea of 'democratic America.'" Sayles soon began to gauge the limits of that ideal. In 1956, on a family trip to Florida, six-year-old Sayles was delighted to see a COLORED sign above a Washington, D.C., water fountain, thinking it offered colored water: maybe red, white, and blue, for the nation's capital. "It's broken!" he remembers telling his parents. "That water's still clear!" His father said softly, "No, John, down here these people have a real problem." Sayles would learn that the problem wasn't just geographical.

Sayles's parents were both educators. "My Dad voted Republican because of Eisenhower, but that's because he was in Eisenhower's Army." The household wasn't wealthy, and Sayles worked minimum-wage jobs both before and after going to Williams College. He chose jobs—as a hospital orderly, as a meat-packer ("my first union job!")—with lots of down time for writing, learning, listening.

The voices he heard populated his stories, from the prize-winning truckers' tale "I-80" to the near-classic *At the Anarchists' Convention* (a must-read for anyone who has been at a left-wing gathering). And when his first novel was optioned by Hollywood, Sayles learned that writing for movies was a good-pay-



Ric Kallisher

ing job. Scripts for genre movies like Roger Corman's *Piranha* earned him cash for his own, starting in 1980.

The *New Republic* sent Sayles to Detroit in the summer of 1980 to cover the Republican National Convention that nominated Ronald Reagan. "The convention on TV, it was all this, 'Morning in America,'" Sayles said. "But on the floor it was a Goldwater convention. I remember talking to two young women wearing 'Stop ERA' pins. I asked them why, and they said, 'They'll force us to have abortions.' I asked, 'Have you actually read the amendment?' and they said 'NO! That's how they get you.' And I realized, there's a lot of willful ignorance, a lot

of fear of the Other in these people."

Sayles's films and novels comprise a syllabus for a class in Life Under Late Capitalism—including the assault on and decline of the U.S. labor movement. Like most fiction writers, Sayles looks for the site of conflict—"when two entities want the same thing," especially when "they don't share a language for that situation." Such scenarios make complex characters, he added. "I like dramatizing good people making bad decisions."

As he tackles a subject, Sayles's main question is, "If people are acting like this, what can possibly be going through their heads?" Sometimes one story idea breeds another. His latest

novel, *Yellow Earth*, began when he was contemplating a movie about the United States Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Talking to Native families in Carlisle, near the Marcellus Shale, which is subject to fracking, made Sayles think about oil resources on Native land—and about the current oil frenzy sparked by the Bakken Formation, 200,000 acres of shale underlying parts of Montana, North Dakota and Saskatchewan. “While the Bakken was rockin’, network news covered it very well,” Sayles said with a laugh. “Then I had to go there and see what it looked like when you fracture land that way. I had to meet some of these people,” some of whom became the characters that populate *Yellow Earth*’s story.

The preponderance of nonwhite Native characters made me ask Sayles about the recent controversy sparked by the novel *American Dirt*. Jeanine Cummins’s bestselling narrative of undocumented immigrants at the U.S.-Mexico border rang false to critics already suspicious about a white author far outside the community. “What are your thoughts on writing outside your community?” I asked.

Sayles, who has made films in Spanish and films with all-black casts, and whose novels are often similarly populated, replied that he didn’t know much about that particular controversy. “Any writer, unless it’s a diary or memoir, you’re writing someone else—someone older than you are, younger than you are, a different color.” Or someone living in a different time; his next novel will be set in 1758 in what was then the colony of Pennsylvania. “I’ve never met any of those people. Basically, it comes down to what you can pull off, how you present it, and what you claim for your book.”

People are free, Sayles added, to say, I don’t believe these people. “But there are always surprises.”

When I asked how to most honestly create characters from other communities, Sayles said simply, “People aren’t exotic to me, no matter where they’re from. Make sure your characters aren’t, either.” Also, make sure you know what you’re talking about: Do your homework. Read stuff by people who were in their situation. Talk to your friends in that community.

“Also,” Sayles said gently, “try to avoid having only one” such character. “If there’s only one it turns into Sidney Poitier. Even Poitier resisted that. If you have multiple characters and kind of a range of behaviors, it comes down to people as people.”

Asked why he still makes working-class stories, Sayles quoted his friend Studs Terkel: “What else do you do all day?” He remains fascinated by the details of work, any kind of work. One *Yellow Earth* character works as a pole dancer, “which is a job! And a hard one.” Workplaces are also great listening places.

Sayles finds the current wave of union organizing encouraging, including the almost-unions at Walmart, but he doesn’t yet see it making a dent in the right wing’s long, successful anti-union campaign. And as anti-corporate as his ethos is, Sayles isn’t that impressed with DSA yet. “I think Bernie will sink, because of the socialist label,” he said. “People don’t understand that the U.S. economy is already mixed, some capitalist, some not, with portions of it quite socialist.”

He’s encouraged by DSA’s visibility, “but I don’t think it’s a movement,” he said. “It’s a desire, but I don’t see it where the rubber meets the road. What I see is a lot of words, a lot of opinions.”

One final question. Will we survive late capitalism?

“I just don’t see people being able to put the brakes on in time. There will still be people. But will there be—even the democracy that we’ve had in my lifetime?”

Sayles quotes the main character of his 1996 film *Men with Guns*, a prominent physician in Central America who finally realizes that his own medical students are being killed by the regime for treating poor Indians: “How can I know this? How can I accept that as the truth and live the life that I want to live?” ■

Christine Lombardi is the author of *I Ain’t Marching Anymore: Dissenters, Deserters and Objectors to America’s Wars*, forthcoming from The New Press in November 2020.

40 Years of Sayles

RETURN OF THE SECAUCUS SEVEN (1980). Sayles’ first film, a far more soulful version of Hollywood’s later adaptation, *The Big Chill*.

BROTHER FROM ANOTHER PLANET (1984). Joe Morton plays a Black alien who lands in Harlem, offering a glimpse of 1980s New York.

MATEWAN (1987). This visually astounding story has engraved the 1920s coal miners’ strike in the national memory.

EIGHT MEN OUT (1988). A movie that takes the labor of baseball seriously, featuring Charlie Sheen in the 1919 “Black Sox Scandal.”

CITY OF HOPE (1991). Ever been frustrated by municipal backbiting amid poverty? Sayles’s elegy of a movie stays in your soul.

LOS GUSANOS (1991). One extended family’s story narrates Cuban-American relations before, during, and after the Cuban Revolution.

LONE STAR (1996) set in Texas, is the first of Sayles’s state songs.

MEN WITH GUNS (1997). Sayles’s first Spanish-language film is based on a story from Guatemala.

SUNSHINE STATE (2002) A woman returns home to coastal northern Florida and must deal with encroaching real estate development.

CASA DE LOS BABYS (2003). Daryl Hannah and Maggie Gyllenhaal play Americans at the title orphanage, whose owner is played by Rita Moreno.

SILVER CITY (2004). The discovery of a corpse threatens to unravel a bumbling local politician’s campaign for governor of Colorado.

HONEYDRIPPER (2007). A jazz-fusion tale set in the fictional town of Harmony, Alabama.

AMIGO (2010). Amigo recounts the Philippine War from the perspective of the Filipinos, except for an ambivalent occupier played by Garrett Hedlund.

What's the most exciting work your chapter is doing?

Democratic Left wants to spread the word about the most interesting and impactful work DSA's local chapters are doing. No matter how big or small your chapter is, if it is unifying around an important campaign or has had a success worth sharing with the rest of DSA, let us know at dlchapternews@dsausa.org.

PREPARING FOR THE DNC IN MILWAUKEE

When the 3,979 delegates to the Democratic National Convention gather July 13-16 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to select a presidential nominee, Bernie Sanders will be there, and so will hundreds of DSA members from around the country, hosted by the Milwaukee and Madison chapters of DSA. It's too soon to know what's going to happen at the convention, but inside, some DSA members will be serving as official Bernie delegates following their state party conventions, while outside, others

will take part in civil society activity to show the world that the agenda Bernie wants to take to the White House has overwhelming public support. If you're a DSA member and you're headed to Milwaukee, keep an eye out for email dispatches from DSA national director Maria Svart, and look to the Summer issue of *Democratic Left* (out in early June) for details about how to connect with your comrades for coordinated action and socialist meetups.

CAMPAINING TO LEGALIZE RENT CONTROL IN CHICAGO

Today, at least 26 states ban local rent control ordinances, but battles to beat back the bans have begun. In Illinois, Chicago DSA is part of a statewide Lift The Ban Coalition that includes the Chicago Teachers Union, SEIU, and 20 community organizations. Over the course of three elections in 2018 and 2019, coalition supporters in Chicago gathered signatures to put a non-binding advisory question on the ballot in dozens of precincts: "Should Illinois lift the ban on rent control?" In every precinct, voters said "yes" by more than two-to-one — unmistakable proof to local politicians that the rent control ban is broadly opposed by their constituents. Now the coalition is ramping up pressure on lawmakers to support House Bill 255,



which would lift the ban. State representative Ann Williams sits on a committee that the bill must pass through. After she declined an invitation to a Chicago town hall meeting on rent control, coalition members pulled up outside her office the week

before Christmas with a U-Haul truck, unloaded furniture into the street for a brief occupation and taped a giant "eviction" notice to her office window. The coalition followed up by mobilizing supporters to ask questions at a January 25 town hall she held for constituents.

J.B. Pritzker, the billionaire Democrat who's governor of Illinois, said during his 2018 campaign that he'd support lifting the ban. With Senate president (and real estate lawyer) John Cullerton having resigned in January, rent control advocates see an opportunity to get it on the governor's desk. The bill has 14 cosponsors, and hearings on it are scheduled for March.

FIGHTING FOR WORKER SAFETY IN NEW ORLEANS

A video captures the horror: On the corner of Canal and Rampart—in a crowded tourist area in downtown New Orleans— construction workers run for their lives as an 18-story under-construction Hard Rock Hotel collapses. Three construction workers were killed that day, October 12, 2019, and dozens of others were injured. The cause is still under investigation, but gross negligence and a nonunion contractor culture indifferent to safety played a part. Immigrant workers, some undocumented, paid the price. Hospitalized workers weren't covered by workers compensation, because their employers had classified them as inde-

pendent contractors. One undocumented Honduran immigrant—who survived the collapse but was injured—had repeatedly complained to supervisors about safety issues, and the day before the collapse had noticed the floor beneath him moving. Two days after the collapse, he was detained by ICE, and over the protest of Louisiana investigators, was deported. Meanwhile, the bodies of two workers remain in the unstable building. After the collapse, DSA New Orleans reached out to allies such as the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice to see how the chapter could play a supportive role. Since then, chapter members have helped organize

vigils and protests, and mobilize community support for a responsible-bidder ordinance, a law requiring that city contracts and subsidies go only to employers who respect labor and safety laws. In the course of that campaign, they've phone banked, talked with workers at construction sites, and built a relationship of trust with local building trades unions.

SHOWING UP IN SOLIDARITY WITH ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLE IN HAWAII



Mikey Inouye

At Maunakea, a delegation of members of Democratic Socialists of Honolulu make the Kū Kia'i Mauna (protect the mountain) hand sign.

Measured from its underwater base, Maunakea on the island of Hawaii is the world's tallest mountain. For many Native Hawaiians the dormant volcano is also the most sacred place on the island chain, a burial site with over 100 ancient shrines that plays a central role in traditional religious practice. Yet over their objections, 13 gigantic telescopes have been constructed on the summit since 1964. Now there are plans to build a 14th, the largest yet. The \$1.4-billion Thirty Meter Telescope would rise 18 stories and occupy five acres on the mountain's northern plateau, take most of a decade to construct, and require more than 2,000 truck trips up the mountain.

Many in the Native Hawaiian community view it as one more act of desecration. On July 13, 2019, community leaders began an ongoing encampment to block the access road and stop construction from beginning. A delegation from DSA's Honolulu chapter traveled to Maunakea to express solidarity and take part in the encampment, bringing donations and preparing food. On July 17, a large force of police arrived and arrested 38 Native Hawaiian elders. But

the blockade continued.

DSA members organized fundraisers and collected \$6,000 toward the Hawaii Community Bail Fund, a project of the chapter, which can be used to bail out mountain protectors. A video produced by chapter co-chair Mikey Inouye about the arrests—retweeted by AOC, Bernie, and others—went viral with over 1.5 million views, and helped bring in over \$100,000 more. Chapter members spread the word about calls to action.

For chapter members, the campaign is a stand against settler colonialism and empire. Maunakea, now claimed as state land, once belonged to the Hawaiian monarchy, which was overthrown by an 1893 *coup d'état* led by U.S. sugar planters. Five years later, the islands were annexed as a possession of the United States. Hawaii became a state in 1959. In light of Hawaii's status as a settler colony, DSA members voted in June 2018 to remove "America" from the name of the chapter, which is now officially Democratic Socialists of Honolulu.

Watch a powerful 15-minute video about the Maunakea campaign at vimeo.com/378192084

ORGANIZING TENANTS IN COLUMBUS

Columbus, Ohio, the 14th-largest city in the United States, is one of the nation's fastest growing metro areas. But that growth has meant rising rents and displacement for poor and working-class residents. What if tenants organized? To talk about that, Columbus DSA members have been going door-to-door at two of the most complaint-ridden low-income complexes in the Columbus metro area. Located in Whitehall, a town of 19,000 east of Columbus, complexes totaling 1,160 units are owned and managed by 5812 Investment Group, a limited liability corporation based in Minneapolis.

Rents keep going up at the complexes, but conditions are poor. In some units, tenants leave lights on all night to keep cockroaches from coming out. In November 2018, faulty wiring contributed to a fire that displaced about 60.

Canvassers invite residents to monthly tenants union meetings where they learn their rights as tenants, get phone numbers to call for legal aid, and talk about the possibility of collective action. The response has been almost uniformly positive from the tenants, many of them low-income women of color.

If they succeed in building a tenants organization, that could lay the groundwork to pressure the Whitehall city council for reforms like just-cause eviction, rent control, or a better response than condemnation when units are poorly maintained.

LEADING A WILDCAT STRIKE AT UCSC

A remarkable wildcat strike began in December among graduate teaching faculty at University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC), and members of DSA Santa Cruz are involved at every level—as strikers and strike leaders, and as faculty, staff, students, and community members supporting the strikers. It began as a grade strike, a refusal to release fall term grades until the university increased their stipend: In the shadow of Silicon Valley, rent in Santa Cruz has become increasingly unaffordable. On February 10, the struggle escalated, and many graduate union members stopped teaching classes. Strikers also took to the streets daily and occupied intersections in protest, facing arrests and physical force from police in riot gear.

The university began disciplinary proceedings, and on February 28 terminated as many as 80 graduate student teachers from their spring term appointments. More than 500 other grad students have pledged to refuse appointments to replace the strikers.

The strike is termed a "wildcat" because it isn't sanctioned by the grad workers' official union, United Auto Workers Local 2865. A statewide collective bargaining agreement negotiated by the union was approved by members only narrowly, and was rejected by 83% of union members at UCSC.

Now the strike is spreading, starting with rallies on nine other UC campuses. On February 27, grad faculty began a full teaching strike at UC Santa Barbara and announced a grading strike at UC Davis. UC President Janet Napolitano—former Obama Secretary of Homeland Security—has so far refused to bargain.

We own the future

BY MAXINE PHILLIPS

“You may say I’m a dreamer, but I’m not the only one,” is better known than the words to the “Internationale” but both speak to a universal longing. We’ve all dreamed big at one time, and *We Own the Future*—a new book edited by Kate Aronoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin—reminds us why, and why socialists not only dream but do. With a resurgence of the democratic Left and new interest in socialist ideas, the writers featured in this anthology have dared to dream big again. Not just prison reform, but prison abolition. Not fair immigration laws, but open borders. Not subsidies for art that allow free museum nights once a week, but publicly funded art available to all. Not just paid parental leave, but 24-hour quality daycare for all. Not full employment at low-wage establishments, but guaranteed jobs for all at living wages and in safe conditions. Not predatory lenders, but peoples’ banks. The list could go on. And it does. There are 21 essays here. [Full disclosure: I’ve worked with and edited many of the contributors.] This means that your study group could meet twice a month and finish in a year with time left over for the leisure Karl Marx promised in “The Ger-

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man Ideology.” (You can download the study guide from the DSA Fund website under “resources.”) And when you’re done, you’ll have thought about what it might mean to govern for the common good, to live in a non-capitalist system, and to argue productively with your co-habitants on our one and only fragile earth. If all the authors were in one room, sparks would fly. They represent a spectrum across a broad Left dedicated to democracy. This part of the spectrum of U.S. politics, we might add, has been infinitesimal until recently. It’s still not as

large, say, as the number of people who post pictures of their cats on Facebook (although there is overlapping membership). But it’s a vibrant band that’s growing larger every day. Share this book. Talk among yourselves. Love parts of it. Disagree with other parts. Shape your own ideas. And prepare to shape the future.

Maxine Phillips is the volunteer editor of *Democratic Left* and a former national director of DSA.

Women’s Day

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

and LGBTQI+ organizations. The Women’s March, which managed to organize some of the largest mass demonstrations in the history of the country, adopted a typical NGO-style, top-down organizational formula (despite having a more left-leaning political program and sets of demands), which actively pre-empted the emergence of a grassroots nationwide movement. Moreover, the frame of labor laws that severely constrain the possibility of organizing workplace strikes and the weakness of the U.S. labor movement make the organization of feminist strikes much more difficult than in countries in which the feminist movement can

ally with radical unions to call for legal general strikes.

At the same time, the threats faced by women and queer people in the United States under Donald Trump are no less serious than in other countries, at a moment in which Republicans are actively preparing for a challenge to *Roe v. Wade* at the Supreme Court and even the hard-won basic civil rights and liberties of trans and queer people are under attack. Within this context, the DSA has an important role to play. There is much to be learned from the experience of millions of working-class women and queer people mobilizing around the globe. As we go to press, some chapters will be showing solidarity by taking to the streets on March 8 and linking this day to ongoing struggles for Medicare for All and in defense of reproductive freedom,

of women workers’ rights, and of racialized and immigrant women currently under attack. But solidarity should not be limited to one day a year. DSA could spread knowledge of this international movement by organizing public events, translating and publishing materials produced by activists in various countries, and opening a conversation about building a militant class-struggle feminist movement in the United States. ■

Cinzia Arruzza is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research. She was one of the main organizers of the International Women’s Strike in the United States and co-authored *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (Verso, 2019).

FURTHER READING

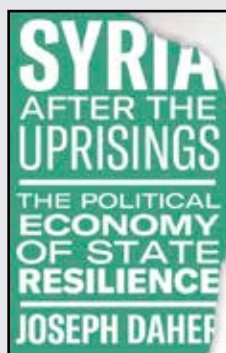
Making Sense of Syria

Three books on the Syrian conflict, written by leftists, provide original insights into the defining calamity of the 21st century.

BY DANNY POSTEL

SYRIA AFTER THE UPRISINGS

(Haymarket Books, 2019) Joseph Daher is a Swiss-Syrian activist and scholar who teaches at Lausanne University in Switzerland and maintains the blog Syria Freedom Forever. His previous book, *Hezbollah: The Political Economy*



of the Party of God, is a Marxist critique of the Lebanese Islamist organization. In *Syria After the Uprisings*, he analyzes the nature of the Assad regime going back to 1970. He views the Syrian uprising in the context of the region-wide political earthquake that began in Tunisia in December 2010. But while protesters in cities across Syria took inspiration from their counterparts in Tunis and Cairo, their revolt met a very different fate: Unlike Ben Ali and Mubarak, Assad did not step down in the face of popular mobilization. Daher explains this variance by reference to the architecture of power in Syria: a patrimonial state apparatus “in which the centers of power (politics, the military, and the economy) within the regime [are] concentrated in one family and its clique” — one that “owns the state” and is protected by a “praetorian guard (a force whose allegiance goes to the rulers, not the state).” Daher shows how the regime’s crony capitalism and

arsenal of repression produced inequalities and humiliations that fueled the 2011 revolt. While supportive of the uprising and its aims, he offers a trenchant critique of the opposition’s failures — a critique from within that should be taken seriously by everyone who cares about Syria.

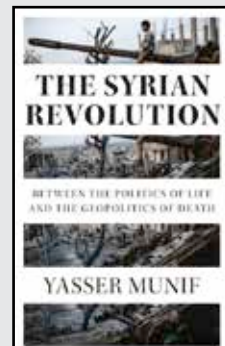
AUTHORITARIAN APPREHENSIONS: Videology, Judgment, and Mourning in Syria

(University of Chicago Press, 2019) Like Daher, Lisa Wedeen, who teaches political science at the University of Chicago, has a lot to say about the way capitalism works in Assad’s Syria. She calls the system since Bashar al-Assad inherited power from his father in 2000 “neoliberal autocracy,” and *Authoritarian Apprehensions* has a particularly illuminating discussion of the complex role of ideology in maintaining that system, both before and after the uprising. (Wedeen’s 1999 book *Ambiguities of Domination*, a study of Syria under Hafiz al-Assad, is a must read.) Among the highlights in *Authoritarian Apprehensions* are Wedeen’s nuanced reading of comedy in Syria and her discussion of the ideological war of narratives. Her engagement with Syrian filmmakers — Ossama Mohammed’s agonizing *Silvered Water*, for example, and the work of the Syrian documentary collective Abounaddara — is arresting. These artists “perform an incandescent otherwiseness to the bleakness of the present moment,” she writes. *Authoritarian Apprehensions* is the most theoretically insightful book on post-2011 Syria yet to appear.



THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION: Between the Politics of Life and the Geopolitics of Death

(Pluto Press, 2019) In *The Syrian Revolution*, Yasser Munif explores “the subterranean territories of the Syrian revolt.” He offers a richly textured, bottom-up analysis of the “micropolitical processes” in areas outside the control of the regime, processes he claims are “mostly invisible to external observers.” He focuses on the experiment in “grassroots governance” in Manbij between 2012, when the northern Syrian town was liberated from the regime, and 2014, when it was conquered by ISIS. During those two years, “revolutionary forces reconfigured the city from the ground up by creating inclusive spaces, forming horizontal networks, and building democratic institutions.” For Munif, the “[e]veryday resilience and unrelenting organizing” of the people of Manbij embodied a “politics of life” that he juxtaposes to the “orgy of death” embodied by the regime’s tactics of “starvation, torture, siege, indiscriminate bombing, chemical attacks, massacres,” on one side, and the violent, obscurantist dungeon of ISIS and other militant Islamist groups, on the other. Munif provides a gripping and moving account of the Manbij experiment. He also provides a forceful critique of the distorted narratives about Syria prevalent in the West—including among segments of the Left — in which Manbij and the larger democratic struggle it represented simply don’t figure. ■



Danny Postel, a member of DSA’s International Committee, is co-editor of *The Syria Dilemma* (2013) and *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East* (2017).

BY THE NUMBERS



MEMBERS 600

CAMPUSES 97

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A large graphic for the Socialism 2020 conference. It features a background of vertical red lines of varying heights, creating a sense of depth and movement. The text "SOCIALISM2020" is prominently displayed in the center in a large, red, sans-serif font. To the right of the graphic, there is text detailing the conference's duration, number of sessions, and location, along with a registration link. Below the graphic, a list of featured speakers is provided.

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