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DEMOCRATIC LEFT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA



**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. 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.



WE NEED ALL OF US!

BY MARIA SVART


When I was a college student, I participated in solidarity actions for unions at my school. I felt I was being true to my family’s union and immigrant roots. But it wasn’t until the first time I tried to organize my own workplace, and at a later job when I was a union steward, that I truly understood the undemocratic power a boss can wield in the workplace and the transformative power of a united, collective response by the workers. I realized that we can win, and at the same time I saw just how far the bosses would go to sow fear and division.

Many of the articles in this issue explore in one way or another how personal experiences shape our politics and our sense of the possible. What does that mean for us in DSA? To me, it’s clear: We must always be organizing.

Organizing gives us a new experience under neoliberal capitalism, where otherwise we would spend our lives in isolation. For many, significant social time is mediated by technology platforms that maximize profits for the few while leading to more loneliness for the many. Work is a race to the bottom as the owning class finds ever more ways to pit us against each other. Neighborhoods and schools are increasingly segregated, and civil society has withered away, to the point where individual consumer choices, such as wearing a T-shirt with the right slogan, are marketed as activism.

In contrast, organizing not only brings us together as comrades, it teaches us both the skills to run our society without the boss class and the skills to achieve such a society. DSA is a school for collective action. We are a laboratory for democracy. And we’re a team to build solidarity. That is the use of having an organization. Together, in strategy debates and on picket lines, we forge a new consciousness and a new confidence in our power.

On May Day this year, 86 chapters organized actions in support of the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act. We organized phonebanks and made one million calls asking voters in key states to call their senators to support the act. And we helped flip two Democratic senators, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Angus King of Maine, who had been against the act. Few other national organizations have this kind of energized and empowered force bubbling from the ground up.

Our grassroots numbers highlight the other value of organizing: scale. The only way to reach the working-class millions who need to recapture their collective power is to stand side by side, understand what we have in common, and fight for it together. You and I and 94,000-plus comrades are not enough. We need all of us. 

CHALLENGED TO SOLIDARITY: DSA AFTER THE UPRISINGS

BY MARIAN JONES

ILLUSTRATION BY iggdeh



A year into the uprisings for Black lives, many predominantly white organizations, including DSA, are grappling with how best to engage in the struggle—being an “ally,” although a good start, is no longer enough. As commonly understood on the Left, “allyship” focuses on interpersonal interactions, such as checking white privilege, being aware of microaggressions, not dominating the conversation, and educating oneself about racism. The focus on white allies changing their hearts and minds often comes at the expense of collective action to change systems of oppression. For instance, posting a social media status about feelings of guilt is not the same as taking to the streets in solidarity with comrades of color.

Challenging white groups to go beyond allyship to a politics of solidarity, Khury Petersen-Smith and Brian Bean have put forth an analysis and critique of allyship. In one form, white anti-racists are urged to follow the lead of people of color, thereby effectively leaving the work of ending racism to people of color. In the second understanding, white allies are urged to use their privilege on behalf of people of color, thereby leaving people of color to receive passively the benefits of white allies’ white privilege. In both cases, one group becomes active participants and the other passive recipients. In contrast, solidarity occurs when all organizers do the work of making strategic decisions, building knowledge, and carrying out actions.

Jaime Grant defines allyship as virtue-signaling meant to show how aware of oppression the “ally” is. An example of this would be “Blackout Tuesday,” where celebrities, influencers, and corporations posted black squares to social media to show their support for Black Lives Matter. Although the original organizers claimed that the protest

would continue beyond that Tuesday, there was no accompanying “ask” to these social media posts, such as donating to mutual aid and bail funds.

Ally work asks very little of allies. Often, allies have to deal only with the discomfort of acknowledging their privilege. As Andrea Smith writes in “The Problem with Privilege,” the task of anti-racist activists is to dismantle racist structures, a project that can’t be done by centering white allies’ behavior; instead, we need to challenge racist institutions such as housing, criminal justice, healthcare, and education.

There is broad agreement among DSA members that solidarity is the key to our growth and success. Many recognize that solidarity isn’t about papering over differences or striving for false unity. Solidarity is about acknowledging that our oppressions are connected and that the only true freedom is collective freedom.

Take, for example, the work of Metro DC DSA’s tenant organizing working group. In a report called “Getting Past the Door, How We Moved from Canvassing to Organizing Buildings,” the group openly addresses its lack of diversity. Noting that “we’re mostly operating in neighborhoods and buildings east of the Anacostia River where almost all tenants are Black and lower-income... We have been intentional about recruiting women and people of color to our volunteer organizing group, but, like the DSA as a whole, our group remains disproportionately white and male.” The report focuses on how the DSA organizers worked to organize through those differences. They did this by making connections with natural leaders within the buildings they sought to organize. They also shared vital

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Photograph by Scott Heins



INTERVIEWING *JACOBIN*'S BHASKAR SUNKARA

Few have done more to broaden the popular appeal of socialism in recent years than Bhaskar Sunkara, 31. Since he founded *Jacobin* magazine in 2010, Sunkara—a self-described “hype man” for DSA—has worked tirelessly to build the magazine, and the movement. *Jacobin* now has a print circulation of about 70,000 and over 2.6 million web visitors a month. We spoke by Zoom April 15. —DON MCINTOSH

I think the question most people want to know is this: How do you pronounce the name of this magazine that you founded?

JACK-o-bin

Why did you choose that name?

It has historical references to the French and Haitian revolutions. It recalls the Enlightenment spirit found in a lot of the socialist tradition. Like the founders of DSA, I situate what we’re doing as socialists as fulfilling the promises of the Enlightenment that aren’t possible to fulfill under capitalism.

How would you describe *Jacobin*'s politics within the greater socialist milieu?

Jacobin is meant to be comprehensible to a wider public that might not be familiar with socialist viewpoints. But even though we’re flexible in our day-to-day politics, and we’re excited by new movements that are emerging, intellectually I would say we’re fairly orthodox Marxists. There are lots of different moral traditions and intellectual viewpoints that are compatible broadly with a socialist politics. We just happen to cling to a Marxist worldview because we find that to be a useful way to understand the world. Along with that comes a special emphasis on working-class politics.

You grew up in a small town, the youngest of five kids. Your parents are immigrants from Trinidad. What were you like growing up? And how did you find your passion for politics and socialism?

I definitely considered myself a liberal in the American sense, in the sense of being *for* a welfare state. I was reading people like Paul Krugman at 12, 13. And 9/11, the war on terror, the Iraq War, all really heightened my sense of opposition to U.S. empire. Then I read the works of Leon Trotsky. I read Irving Howe. I read Michael Harrington. It was a very isolated, intellectual trajectory, but a core political awakening. I discovered DSA as a result of being familiar with Harrington. I went to my first DSA thing when I was 17. And I met a whole host of people in New York City DSA the summer between my senior year of high school and going to college. Primarily my DSA work then was revamping *The Activist* blog, where a lot of early contributors to *Jacobin* cohered. DSA was very formative. I can't really imagine what I was like before DSA because I'm 31 and it's been 14 years since I joined.

What do you see as DSA's strengths today, and what do you think is holding DSA back?

Well, I think DSA's primary strength is the fact that it is an organization with more than 94,000 members. It's one of the largest socialist organizations in U.S. history. I think our ideological pluralism is a big advantage. I think the fact that we've avoided extreme factionalization is very important.

Where we're weak is that we are still an organization that is not rooted deeply in the working class, because the U.S. Left as a whole hasn't been

deeply implanted in the working class for many decades. We still skew too middle class, too college educated, as a result of the Left's historic isolation. So we need to figure out a way, as we grow, to be the type of organization that someone can just plug into. And it's easier said than done, in part because it's not just the Left that's detached from working-class life in America. Much of our working-class civil society has been hollowed out. People don't have the same connection they used to, to the trade union, to the local civic association, even to church attendance.

Is there a tension for you in having socialist values on the one hand and on the other hand being an employer? Are you profiting off the surplus value of the employees?

Well, first of all, I'm an employee of a board myself, and we have an egalitarian wage scale. And we have unionized staff. I and everyone at *Jacobin* are getting paid a lot less than we otherwise could be, but we make sure we're paid a living wage and that we have good health benefits. But I don't really see a tension any more than there's a tension with the fact that DSA has to balance its books, has to get membership dues, has to figure out what to pay staffers. Our main goal is expansion. I think that's probably the only thing we have in common with a capitalist firm. But our reasons for expansion are different. It's to maximize reach, not to maximize revenue.

You have so many projects underway. You're publisher of *Jacobin*, the theoretical journal *Catalyst*, the UK publication the *Tribune*. There's the *Jacobin* family of podcasts. You've got your book [*The*

***Socialist Manifesto: The Case for Radical Politics in an Era of Extreme Inequality*], and *Jacobin* has published over a dozen books so far in partnership with Verso Books. What's your next project?**

Lately, we've been developing a *Jacobin* YouTube channel. We just launched it last year with the help of my late friend Michael Brooks. We have around 75,000 subscribers or so on the channel now, which is not a bad start for a year. Personally, I'm writing two books right now. I'm almost done with one, which is a history of the Grenadian revolution. And I'm also working with a couple of collaborators, Mike Beggs and Ben Burgis, on a big book about the economics of a feasible socialism. It's not because I believe fully in "writing recipes for the cook shops of the future," as Marx derisively put it, but because I think a lot of people today want to believe in socialism, they want to believe that there is an alternative, but they have doubts about its technical feasibility. So let's start talking about alternatives to capitalism, because I actually think it might fuel our work. There was a confidence the Left had for a lot of the 20th century and the late 19th century that we lost. We thought we were inheritors of history. I think we need to rebuild that confidence today. Because we can't just be the people saying "no" to actually existing capitalism. We need to say, "No, and here's an alternative." 

This interview has been edited and condensed for print. In the uncut version at dsausa.org/sunkara, Sunkara talks about *Jacobin's* sprawling overseas operation, his time as a DSA vice chair, why the millennial generation is so radical, and much more.



Lost in the Wilderness: Can the White Working Class Return Home?

BY **NICHOLAS POWERS**

ILLUSTRATION BY **AARON MoDAVIS**

After Joe Biden's 2020 win, a glaring fact stood out. The United States is a house divided. The wholesale repudiation of Donald Trump did not happen. Many white voters cling to the grievance politics he stoked. At stake is what does whiteness mean today?

The answer is in the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son. The U.S. ruling class used race to divide U.S. workers, but now whiteness is becoming an empty inheritance. If the Left can welcome back the repentant Prodigal Sons of history, it can create a social democratic country.

To recap the original story: One son of a rich man took his inheritance early, squandered it, and when famine came, crawled back to his family, ready to take menial work because he was starving. His brother, who had stayed home and been dutiful, was furious. But the father welcomed the errant, repentant adult child.

Dividing the Inheritance

Before America, whiteness did not exist. The early colonial era was a brutal time but not a racial one. In the New World, slaves and indentured servants, Africans and Europeans lived in a limbo. Free Africans could buy land. Europeans could be whipped or branded for disobeying masters.

They worked relentlessly in brutal winters and boiling summers. The sweat of labor glued them together. They were exploited by the same wealthy landowners. When Nathaniel Bacon led a rebellion against Virginia's colonial government in 1675-76, Africans and Europeans shared musket balls and shot the same English enemy.

The revolt was crushed violently. New laws, written by the ruling class, pitted the two groups against each other. "White" became a privileged identity. The Prodigal Son was born. He was white and male; he got more rights, more

land, more status. He felt his power against a Black background. He left the human family.

Today, we live among his descendants. Every wave of European immigrants took up the Prodigal Son's role. Whether Irish, Jewish from whatever country, Italian, they bought new "white" lives, new faces, new cars, new homes, and new last names. They benefited from the New Deal and the post-Second World War economy. Those who could barricaded themselves in suburbs, recalling the scene from Luke 15:12, when the Prodigal Son "took his journey into high country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living."

Now, a great famine has struck the West. Capitalism, the engine of whiteness, has left white workers behind. At home, technology has replaced them. Overseas, cheap labor has replaced them. The Prodigal Son has no future.

The Moral See-Saw

In the 2020 election, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris won just enough of the white working class to tilt the scales. If they can bring about real reforms, such as universal healthcare and a Green New Deal-type jobs program, those voters will stay. If not, they will turn right again, into a dead end. The GOP will do what the GOP always does: channel anxiety at global elites and minorities while pushing business-friendly policies. More tax cuts. More labor rights repealed.

The problem is that if the white working class goes left, they'll meet disgust. Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt maps liberalism as in part driven by a focus on harm. The Left in essence creates "sacred victims," he says, and regards those with privilege as "subhuman, monstrous, morally deformed."

Many of us on the Left feel that way about the Prodigal Son. We see him as a straight white male and Christian victimizer who is now the victim of the very forces that gave him power. He took his inheritance. Now he wants sympathy?

Our disgust at the Prodigal Son comes through in our fetishizing of elite political jargon and the near-religious embrace of Afro-pessimism, a philosophy of despair about the condition of African Americans. It saturates colleges and bookstores. It ripples out from colleges, where professors repeat the iconography of victimization. It is our wall to keep the Prodigal Son out.

Parts of the Left are like the older brother in the parable, who in Luke 15:28 was so angered that the feckless brother was welcomed home, that "he would not go in." What can break down this wall of disgust?

The Celebration


"How do you defuse disgust?" the interviewer asked Haidt at his TED talk. Haidt bobbed his head as if trying to get the right word. "The opposite of disgust is actually love," he said, "Disgust is about borders. Love is about dissolving walls. Personal relationships are probably the most powerful means we have."

In the Prodigal Son, that wayward child returns home in rags. Luke 15:20 says his "father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." The son apologized for his foolishness, and the father, seeing he suffered, did not punish him but celebrated his son's homecoming.

Welcoming back a lost child is tradition in the Black freedom movement, where leaders have turned historical suffering into a bridge to other groups. In his 1988 Democratic National Convention speech, Jesse Jackson said, "Most poor people are not lazy. They are not Black. They are not brown. They are mostly white and female and young. But whether white, Black or brown, a hungry baby's belly turned inside out is the same color—color it pain, color it hurt, color it agony." Years later, Cornel West repeated the theme: "White working-class brother, we know you have pain ... but we're asking you to confront the most powerful, not scapegoat the most vulnerable."

What if this is what our ancestors worked so hard for? They put us in the position to decide the fate of the nation. The centuries-long struggle to transform ourselves from slaves to citizens gave us the authority to define the meaning of our history. We're not victims. We're inheritors of a powerful empathy that can rescue others who are being trapped as we were. Maybe we can be the elder brother in the parable who meets the Prodigal Son, the millions of them in this country, and tells them it's time to rejoin the family.

Writer James Baldwin said in an interview with poet Nikki Giovanni, "For a long time you think, no one has ever suffered the way I suffered. Then you realize ... that your suffering does not isolate you, it's your bridge ... so that you bring a little light into their suffering, so they can comprehend it and change it."

It's not in the Bible, but I like to think that the older brother went into the house where his sibling sat at the table, trembling with shame. I like to think he bent down, lifted up his brother, and hugged him. I think he felt joy when he did. 

NICHOLAS POWERS is a poet, journalist, and associate professor of literature at SUNY Old Westbury. His book *The Ground Below Zero: 9/11 to Burning Man, New Orleans to Darfur, Haiti to Occupy Wall Street* was published by UpSet Press. An earlier version of this essay appeared in the *Independent*.

“Like Standing Rock, but more prepared.”

Minnesota DSA Stands Up Against Line 3

BY CHRIS LOMBARDI



Last fall, Tom Julstrom asked his local DSA chapter in Duluth, Minnesota, what DSA was doing about Indigenous activists who were getting arrested trying to stop a new pipeline carrying tar sands oil. “You mean Line 3? That’s in limbo,” chapter leaders said, noting ongoing court challenges. DSA’s position is clear, they said, citing resolutions by DSA Ecosocialists in 2018 and by Twin Cities DSA in 2019 opposing the pipeline. But that was before 2020 scrambled everything. This limbo meant that a major struggle against a top corporate polluter slated to add 193 million tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere each year (more than in all of Minnesota combined right now) was happening at their front door while most chapters were engaged in the social justice uprisings and pandemic responses. Since that moment, Julstrom and others from a half-dozen Minnesota chapters have been organizing for this summer, when drilling is scheduled to begin in some of Minnesota’s most delicate wild-rice fields.

Line 3, which would replace and enlarge an existing pipeline that runs

from the Alberta tar sands to the Minnesota waters and the Mississippi River, was first proposed in 2015 by the Canada-and-Texas-based Enbridge Corporation. Indigenous communities have been fighting it ever since: HomeToEarth.org, founded by environmental activist Winona LaDuke, assembled “a grand coalition” in support of the Anishinaabe, including the Ojibwe peoples, whose lands are most affected. The last permits for the pipeline were approved in December 2020 by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission and the Army Corps of Engineers, and Native activists started locking themselves onto Enbridge construction equipment. In early January 2021, “Camp Migizi” was established in Sawyer, near the worksite, on land bought by Fond du Lac activist Taysha Martineau. Since then, the site has hosted celebrity activists including LaDuke and Jane Fonda. The Water Protectors are calling for Joe Biden to shut down the pipeline as he did with the Keystone pipeline.

“I first heard about Line 3 when I was still in high school,” Revmira Beeby of Cannon Valley DSA told

Democratic Left. On a trip to Canada, before she joined DSA, she “met some Line 3 organizers,” who told her that time was growing short. She joined Northfield Against Line 3, which met with the Giniw Collective and Anticolonial Land Defense. Then, when a new DSA chapter popped up near her, she not only joined but became co-chair of its executive committee. She knew that a statewide effort to support the Indigenous fight against Line 3 was crucial and that chapters outside of the Twin Cities had the bandwidth to make that happen.

Cannon Valley DSA signed on early to a Line 3 statement posted by the Twin Ports chapter. “We approached other Minnesota chapters in the hopes that a unified statewide DSA would bring greater national attention to the pipeline fight,” Julstrom said via email. “After every Minnesota chapter approved the statement, we kept those initial lines of communication open.” Eventually, a statewide DSA Line 3 Working Group formed, “the most active participants of which are the Twin Ports, Brainerd Lakes Area, Cannon Valley, and St. Cloud



The Twin Ports DSA Ecosocialist Working Group joined Brainerd Lakes Area DSA members on a trip to Camp Migizi near Line 3 outside of Cloquet, MN, bringing needed donations.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **JOHN KRUMM**

chapters.” Given the bevy of banks funding the project—Black Rock Investments, JPMorgan Chase, TD Bank, Citibank and Wells Fargo—DSA activists knew that fighting Line 3 is a strike at capitalism’s heart.

The group met every week to discuss ways to support the protests without undermining the Indigenous leadership. They decided to offer material support to Camp Migizi in person. They drove from Duluth and Brainerd Lakes, with a dozen people squeezed into eight cars loaded with water, food, paper supplies “and most of all, firewood,” Justrum said via text message. “One of our members [who couldn’t come] baked a whole bunch of banana bread,” he added.

These caravans happened in March

and early April, just as Indigenous youth brought the struggle to Washington, D.C., to put pressure on Biden. In April, Representative Ilhan Omar co-authored a CNN.com essay with Anishinaabe writer Tara Houska entitled “The pipeline that President Biden needs to stop.” And Twin Cities DSA staged protests at Enbridge’s Minneapolis headquarters.

In April, working group members noticed that the special anti-protest units trained against pipeline protesters—a mix of state troopers and officers with the Department of National Resources and funded by Enbridge—were being used to confront protesters who gathered in Brooklyn Center after the police murder of Daunte Wright. “I think Line 3 has already demonstrated that some of the ways in which struggles for Indigenous sovereignty and struggles for racial justice overlap,” said Julstrom. “The same cops that have been training for years to brutalize water protectors fighting Line 3 were putting down protests in Brooklyn Center.”


To ramp up the scope of DSA activism, the working group organized

dozens of teach-ins and Line 3 events across the state—especially the week of May Day—culminating with a statewide webinar on May 7.

The race against time is real. After a pause for “seasonal restrictions,” Enbridge set June 1 for the full resumption of work, including high-speed drilling across 227 lakes and rivers. “We will need hundreds, thousands of people taking direct action,” Julstrom told *DL*. “DSA can make a real difference if we mobilize people to come to Minnesota and put their bodies in front of that equipment.” He said that the movement can build on the lessons of previous pipeline protests: “Like Standing Rock, but more prepared.”

If they can’t come in person, Julstrom and Beeby emphasized, DSAers can also take direct action at local Chase banks. Can’t do direct action? Write to Biden, urging him to stop Line 3. Join other disinvestment campaigns, so your city or employer isn’t supporting this devastating project.

For ecosocialists, Beeby said, the Line 3 struggle is part of the fight against tar sands oil, which, along with fracking, forms the late stage of fossil-fuel devastation. “It’s so important to stop. Look what it’s done to Alberta,” where tar sands mining has torn gashes across miles of the province.

“This is an issue that impacts you!” Julstrom added. “If you live near or care about the Mississippi River, it’s your fight. If you care about Indigenous people’s rights, it’s your fight.” 

CHRIS LOMBARDI, a member of the *DL* Editorial Committee, spent years on staff at the California League of Conservation Voters and is a committed ecosocialist. To stay up-to-date on the struggle, go to stopline3.org or honorearth.org/stop_line_3

FOR A SOCIALIST TOMORROW: A REPORT ON 2019-2021

From the National Political Committee

When the current DSA National Political Committee took office in 2019, we anticipated that the presidential election would be the biggest political flashpoint of our term. The outbreak of COVID-19 in the spring of 2020 and the massive uprisings in the wake of George Floyd’s murder in May of that year massively altered the political landscape. There was a tangible shift in the realm of the possible, and our approach to organizing had to adjust to social-distancing, virtual events, a drop in our individual capacity to engage in this work, and the difficult decision early in our term to move to an online convention.

The pandemic has ripped the mask off capitalism, making it clear to millions of people exactly for whom our society is built. At every turn, capitalist interests superseded public safety and our well-being when it came to mask mandates, business openings, vaccine rollout, and school reopenings. These failures contributed to rampant anti-Asian violence that devastated so many communities. The rage from countless police murders was widely felt, and the state responded with increasing violence. As the January 6 insurrection made clear, the far-right has not gone away, and the state is not willing to serve as an opposition to these forces. The mobilization to get Donald Trump out of office has prompted escalating attacks on voting rights by Republicans.

The capitalist-caused climate crisis led to winter storms that took so many lives and will lead to more deaths as drought, tornadoes, and hurricanes devastate the land this summer. ICE continues to be a relentlessly cruel and rogue institution as it ramps up the separation of immigrant families and forced sterilization of Black and brown women. Many countries, already exploited by U.S. imperialism, are suffering devastating loss of life, exacerbated by the monopoly on vaccine patents and lack of medical resources due to sanctions. We’ve seen how the police and the military have played a similar role of enacting violence on the masses as they demand the right to live in dignity: in Nigeria, in Colombia, in Palestine.

Both 2020 and 2021 have shown us how powerful we can be, but it has also reminded us how quickly it can all be taken away. We mourn the lives and opportunities stolen from us as we sustain each other in this work.

Still, there’s hope not only on the horizon but in our day-to-day work of building a mass socialist organization. The last year showed us what our class could have if and when we fight back—both in terms of actual wins, and in terms of our collective power. It’s important for us to remember, as we begin to move toward more in-person events, that we are at our strongest and most powerful when we work together. We know that

solidarity must be worked toward and that part of this work must be to confront empire here. This fight for racial justice also became a cry for abolition, for a world without cages and cops: a vision of a socialist world of abundance, of dignity, and of democracy.

During our NPC term, we made strides in building up chapters in all parts of the country and took steps to synchronize activities between national and chapters. We spent time talking to chapter leaders to learn more about how we can move as a national organization and what particular issues are faced by comrades in the South, comrades in rural areas, and comrades just starting to organize. We have worked to incorporate these lessons into national campaigns, such as our current campaign to pass the PRO Act (Protecting the Right to Organize Act) and last year’s campaign to save the U.S. Postal Service.

We’ve expanded our support for new chapters through the work of the Growth and Development Committee’s training, retention, recruitment, and mentorship teams and deepened our political education efforts through the National Political Education Committee’s facilitation training and basic curriculum. All of this has been done in coordination with our organizing team and our field organizers. We’ve seen our chapters build strong alliances with local organizations and unions, working

DSA National Convention

FROM THE ASHES OF THE OLD

Socialism For A New Tomorrow

August 1-8, 2021

Join us at this year's virtual convention for a week of panels, workshops, and political debate. We'll be debating and voting on a political platform for DSA and setting the vision of the world we're fighting to win.

Convention2021.DSAUSA.org

to root our movement in the working class. We're excited to be sending two delegations to Peru and Venezuela respectively as part of ongoing efforts to deepen our international ties, and we anticipate that deepening DSA's internationalist efforts will be a serious task for the incoming NPC.


As a rapidly growing socialist organization, we have made mistakes. We know we have much to do to make DSA a more welcoming political home and much to learn to focus our power more strategically. But we're doing it. We are working with Tilde Language Justice Cooperative to translate our website into Spanish and coordinating language justice training. Most important, we have committed to helping chapters engage in meaningful discussion around race, reparations, and growing our power with intentionality and a focus on mass-action campaigns that build organization.

The DSA for Bernie campaign taught

us the value of meeting people where they are and how rewarding it is to work toward a shared vision. The 100K Recruitment Drive reminded us of the importance of asking people to join DSA and how much we can grow when we work in unity. The BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) internal priority resolution is helping us clarify where we need a shift in culture and structure to ensure that our organizing is multiracial. Our many elected officials and five congressional members are changing conditions on the ground. And our PRO Act campaign is putting those in power on notice.

The last two years have felt both blurry and endless, but we are firm in looking forward and focusing on the tomorrow we are trying to build. Ahead of the DSA National Convention in August, the NPC will present a comprehensive report on its work as well as on progress made toward achieving the mandated goals of the

2019 convention. We hope this report will lead to reflection on what it will take to make the organization what we want, to assess the reality of how much time and resources are required to win campaigns, and will prompt members to recommit to the work of building a national organization capable of winning and being a vehicle for the working class to take back what's ours. We're a different organization than we were in 2015, and we look forward to seeing how we grow six years down the line. But it feels good to know we're going to figure it out with 94,000-plus comrades at our side, 239 chapters deep, and a vision of a world worth fighting for.

Solidarity forever. 

MARIANELA D'APRILE and **KRISTIAN HERNANDEZ** drafted this article, which was approved by the National Political Committee as it ends its term of office in August 2021.



LIVES ON THE LINE: A RESTAURANT WORKER'S STORY

BY NATALIA TYLIM

ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHANIE MONOHAN

I've been collecting unemployment since March 2020. The virus continues to spread. They ask me to come back to work. Not because my work is essential during a pandemic, but because my labor gives life to the economy.

The risks are real. We've heard and told the stories. GoFundMe pages for immigrant restaurant workers. A California study finds that of all the jobs out there, line cooks are the most likely to die of COVID-19.

Still, when asked to come back, I don't deliberate. Besides Unemployment Insurance, this job—at a cramped, casual neighborhood seafood restaurant supported by 20 years of loyal regulars—has been my only source of income for a decade. My shifts used to be 8 hours; now they are closer to 13.

Even before the pandemic, the work

was fast paced, with high table turnover. While managing a million tasks, we periodically run downstairs for ice, to clean the bathrooms, to refill condiments, and restock wine. At the end of the day, when our bodies have had enough and we are sweaty from the hustle and bustle, we stack all the tables and chairs, sweep and mop, clean the bathrooms, and put everything away—just in time to bring it out again tomorrow.

On top of all the regular work, we are now public safety agents as well. Some who come to eat are intransigent about wearing masks; others get drunk and forget. We are doing extra work with fewer workers, all while sanitizing everything at all times. So when customers are getting impatient—I need to refill table 2's water, table 4 needs ketchup, this guy with the hat is waiting for a to-go order, and

the person on the phone needs me to answer detailed questions about food allergies, while table 1's food is up on the pass and needs to be run before it gets cold—yeah, the first thing to fall down my list is going to be sanitizing a menu. That's just the reality of it.

I want everyone to go out and enjoy themselves. After the year we've had, is there anything more life-affirming than spending time with loved ones and friends over a good meal? This is another of capitalism's brutal ironies: We are social beings who need human interaction, yet we commodify the very things that make us human. Some go to the restaurant to buy the exact experience they are craving. Just one thing reliable and exactly as ordered in an unreliable world. I get it. I yearn for something reliable, too. But this puts more onto restaurant workers than is reasonable to expect.

Restaurant workers have always navigated between what the boss wants us to do, what the customers demand of us, and the reality that we are flawed, human workers who are trying our very best under high stress. Our job requires us to do hard physical labor for long hours while maintaining a calm, unflinching exterior. We are asked to hide our fears and annoyances, even when we find ourselves tasked with bringing a little normalcy to other people's lives no matter what is happening in our own. This was true before the pandemic, but COVID-19 has made it more visible.

They ask me to come back to work. Nothing about this situation makes rational sense. But the market compels it. 🍷

NATALIA TYLIM is a member of the Labor Branch in DSA's NYC Chapter. She's a founder of the Democratic Socialist Labor Commission's Restaurant Organizing Project and can be found on Twitter @nataliatylim.

WHY ARE ALL MY TRANS FRIENDS SOCIALISTS?

BY LILY MOSS

ILLUSTRATION BY BLUE DELLIQUANTI

Trans people are of all shapes, sizes, ethnicities, races, and geographic locations, but the one characteristic I've seen that unites my own network and the trans community at large—more than might be expected in the general populace—is that they support socialistic policies and politicians, are DSA members, and subscribe to ideologies left of the Left. I believe an even greater number of trans people would identify this way if exposed to the message of socialism and shown how much it would benefit them and their community.

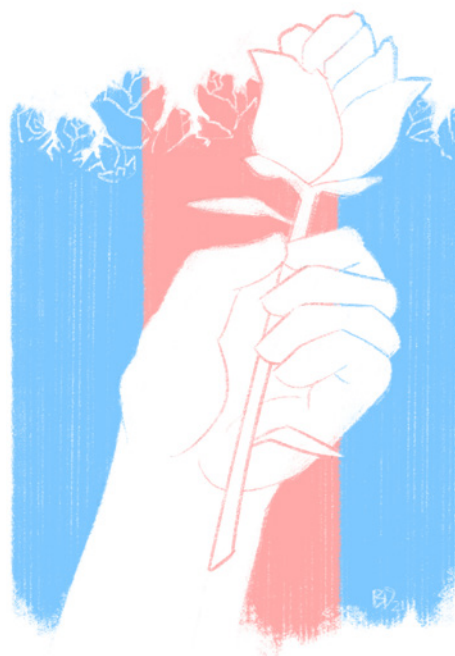
Transphobia permeates almost every facet of society. The National Center for Transgender Equality says that one in 10 transgender individuals have been evicted from their homes because of their gender identity. One in five have experienced homelessness, many because their own families have kicked them out. More than one in four have lost a job because of their gender identity, and three-fourths have suffered from job discrimination because they are trans.

For trans people in multiple marginalized groups, such as trans people of color, these inequities don't just stack—they multiply exponentially. Trans women of color are at particularly high risk for violence and homicide. The trans population is forced to fight against the inequities of our current system every day, and given the amount of discrimination and violence leveled against a population that doesn't even reach 1% in any state, it soon becomes clear that the system is broken at its core.

In today's world, being transgender is seen as a radical act. To be trans is to be pathologized at home, at school, at work, and by society at large as having made a conscious, extremist choice. Trans people, of course, do not see it as a choice, but as being our true selves. Against our will, we are placed in a box by the culture that surrounds us.

Perhaps the only upside is that this forces many in the trans community to more critically examine other “certainties” in our society, such as capitalism. If something as fundamental as the wrong gender was forced upon me, what else in our society may simply be a relic of an antiquated worldview? Personally, realizing I was trans recontextualized the world around me. It was a hard reset that allowed me to take a step back from the life I was living and see the ways I was simply parroting the white, middle-class worldviews with which I was raised.

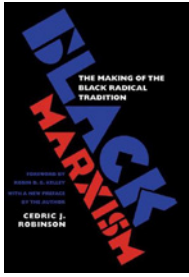
There's another, extremely practical, reason for the openness to socialism in the trans community: healthcare. Transgender individuals have the same health care needs as everyone else, as well as special needs. Like millions in this country, they suffer from lack of basic care. In addition, a study of 27,000 transgender individuals by the National Center for Transgender Equality found that a third had been refused medical care or had been harassed by medical professionals. Many trans people cannot afford or gain access to the care they need in order to transition. Trans suicide rates plummet dramatically post-transition, according to a 2015 survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality.



Even with good insurance, the costs of weekly hormone shots, endless doctor visits, and surgeries quickly add up. I'm one of the “lucky” ones. For the last year, I have worked at Starbucks—one of the few companies with decent trans medical benefits—in order to avoid accruing a mountain of medical debt. While I'm thankful that I have the healthcare I need, I had to leave a higher-paying job in my desired field in order to work long and physically exhausting hours, *just* so I could afford to be trans. For people with conditions that don't allow them to do this kind of physical work, such a job change isn't even an option.

DSA and the trans community are natural allies. Many of DSA's core values, such as protecting workers and advocating for universal healthcare, are aligned with the needs of the trans population. Actively pushing to include the trans population in DSA's vision of the future is to everyone's benefit. 🌹

LILY MOSS is a transgender filmmaker living in Queens. She produces the podcast “Bullsh!t Alert,” available on Spotify.



BLACK MARXISM TODAY

BY SIDDHANT ISSAR

Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition

By Cedric J. Robinson

Today, the phrase “racial capitalism” is ubiquitous—invoked by the Movement for Black Lives, debated in *Dissent*, and even mentioned in the *New York Times*. As a term of art, racial capitalism emerged in debates on the South African Left in the 1970s. Subsequently, Cedric Robinson’s 1983 *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* moved the understanding of racial capitalism beyond apartheid South Africa to encompass the global development of capitalism and neglected forms of anti-capitalist resistance.

The contemporary renaissance around Robinson’s *Black Marxism* and the framework of racial capitalism is driven in no small part by the Black Lives Matter movement. Following a year of sustained Black struggles against anti-Black state violence, UNC Press brought out a third edition of *Black Marxism*. What makes Robinson’s text useful for contemporary anti-racist and anti-capitalist struggles? What lessons might the Left learn from engaging with it?

Black Marxism is not a corrective or plea for Marxist analyses of capitalism to account for white supremacist racial domination. Robin D.G. Kelley puts it best in his new foreword: “*Black Marxism* is neither Marxist nor anti-Marxist. It is a dialectical critique of Marxism that turned to the long history of Black revolt... to construct a wholly original theory of revolution and interpretation of the history of the modern world.” By centering Black struggles against racial

slavery, colonization, and capitalism, Robinson offers a critique of orthodox Marxism, providing an alternative historical and structural understanding of the capitalist world-system.

Black Marxism contests Marx’s and Engels’s understanding of capitalism as a complete overhaul of feudalism. European feudalism, for Robinson, was rife with “racialist” ideologies that normalized intra-European relations of conquest, enslavement, and labor domination. The rise of capitalist social relations out of feudalism extended and expanded racialist differentiation. This is not a transhistorical argument. Robinson shows how racial hierarchies, from the 17th century onward, mark a rupture from the past because emerging global capitalist relations transformed material conditions between differently racialized populations within and outside of Europe. For example, Robinson identifies how modern nationalism and Anglo-Saxon chauvinism stymied working-class solidarities in 19th-century England. By centering England’s colonization of Ireland and the super-exploitation of Irish workers in Britain, Robinson demonstrates how competing “racial” and “national” interests were constitutive of the English proletariat. In doing so, Robinson troubles Marx’s revolutionary subject, as well as the Euro-American Left’s uncritical embrace of a deracialized and universal industrial proletariat as the vanguard of revolution.

Rather than homogenizing class antagonisms, per Marx and Engels, Robinson underscores how capitalism

operates through a logic of differentiation. This structural analysis makes sense of how “extra-economic” coercion (expropriation) exists *alongside* wage-labor exploitation. Moving past a tendency in some Marxist thought to abstract and bracket colonization and the Atlantic slave trade as either outside the orbit of capitalist development or a historical phase prior to the emergence of capitalism proper, Robinson establishes the centrality of multiple forms of racialized and gendered expropriation, including racial slavery and super-exploitation, to the expanded reproduction of capital.

Although not a work of political economy, its power lies in the systematic exploration of the fundamental links between racial domination, colonialism, and global capitalism. Foregrounding the “Black radical tradition,” it also highlights how thinkers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R James, and Richard Wright reshaped or broke with Marxism to understand Black struggles against capital and the state. Going beyond wage-labor relations in the industrial center, *Black Marxism* forces the Left to reckon with resistances that have often been invisible to orthodox Marxists. These include slave insurrections, runaway communities established by those escaping slavery, anti-colonial revolutions (exemplified by the Haitian Revolution), and contemporary struggles against state-sanctioned anti-Black violence. Overcoming racial capitalism thus requires that we bring together, not separate, anti-racist and anti-capitalist struggles, building power across the racialized and gendered exploitation/expropriation continuum. 🌹

SIDDHANT ISSAR’s writing has appeared in *Race and Class*, *Contemporary Political Theory*, and *The Black Scholar*.

information, such as pamphlets on tenants’ rights, legal aid contacts, and health clinics.

During last summer’s uprisings, the NYC DSA marshals known as the Red Rabbits shared trainings on street safety with DSA members and others. Red Rabbits also dispersed walkie talkies (which are not connected to the Internet) and megaphones around the city informally and then offered more formal help when the Defund the Police rallies began in early June. In this case, being in solidarity meant mobilizing support to respond to a dynamic moment.

In general, allyship is not about redistributing resources or dismantling structures and institutions. Solidarity can be about all of those, but above all, it is about taking action. Solidarity is about working in collaboration with marginalized people. In comparison, allies tend to focus on talking with and being educated by people of color.

Another way to think of solidarity is to think of oneself as a “co-conspirator.” BLM activist and co-founder Alicia Garza describes co-conspiracy as “what we do in action, not just in language... It is about moving through guilt and shame and recognizing that we did not create none of this stuff. And so what we are taking responsibility for is the power that we hold to transform our conditions.”

One example of radical solidarity involves the case of artist and activist Bree Newsome. Newsome came to fame for removing the Confederate flag outside the South Carolina Capitol building in 2015. Newsome, a Black woman, was aided by a white male named James Tyson, who stayed at the bottom of the pole to spot her. When police pointed their tasers at Newsome, Tyson embraced the base of the metal flagpole, joining in the danger to her of severe injury or even death. The officials withdrew their weapons. This is a model, Newsome said, of “how we see police escalate or de-escalate due to skin color.”

So, how can DSA members act in solidarity? As organizers, we must experiment to find what works. We can analyze both the successes and failures of socialists of the past.

The difference between DSA and white ally organizations is that DSA is committed to winning socialism for the multiracial working class. At the same time, we have a long way to go to confront white racism within the organization and diversify our demographics. It’s not going to be easy, and it’s not going to be pretty, but I am hopeful about our prospects for building a better future beyond allyship and toward solidarity. 🌹

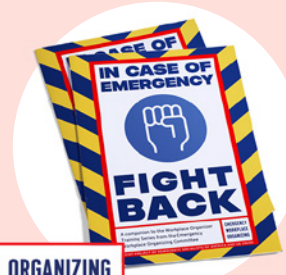
MARIAN JONES is a member of the DSA’s National Political Education Committee and an editor of *Lux Magazine*.

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ABOUT THE COVER ART

Inspired by Jess Dunlap's nature illustrations, we arrived at the concept of a community garden to symbolize what socialist solidarity means to us—by working together, we can grow stronger. Jess's delicate linework was paired with artist bed deth's textural digital coloring for this collaboration.



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