



DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA

Talking socialism:
ADY BARKAN
on freedom and injustice

Racial justice and the
MADISON TEACHERS'
union fight

Lessons from the **INDIAN**
FARMERS' MOVEMENT

DSA in 2021:
CONVENTION RECAP

IMMIGRANT VOTERS *and*
the spectre of 'socialism'

**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.



**BUILDING A MASS
MOVEMENT**


BY MARIA SVART

How do we support and inspire more Cori Bushes? How do we build the mass movement she needs at her back?

That was the real question confronting delegates elected by 176 chapters and at-large members at our national convention August 1-8. Bush, a DSA member and congressional representative, camped out on the steps of the U.S. Capitol until the president caved and extended the pandemic eviction ban in 90% of the United States. As *Democratic Left* went to press, the Supreme Court overturned the ban, throwing the issue to Congress or individual states. Now, imagine what can happen when we have more democratic socialists in Congress and in state legislatures. Imagine what can happen when we have mass strikes to make government respond to human needs, not an unaccountable court. Now imagine how we'll get there.

This was not an abstract exercise for convention delegates. After kick-starting the week with stories of victorious campaigns from chapters in Akron, Ohio; Portland, Maine; and elsewhere, and hearing from DSA Congressmembers Jamaal Bowman and Rashida Tlaib and DSA mayoral candidate India Walton, debate raged over tactics, strategies, and resources. With Donald Trump out of the White House, external conditions are not driving as many new people to join, and we need to adapt our structures and practices in order to grow our power. Coming out of the convention, in addition to mandates to organize for a Green New Deal, voting rights and abolition, housing and Medicare for All, labor rights, universal child care, and more, we have a commitment to build an even stronger DSA in our workplaces, schools, communities, and in the electoral realm.

How do we create state organizations that can learn from NY DSA's successes for tenant rights and taxing the rich? How do we raise the resources to maintain our independence while strategically expanding our staff to meet the challenges of the coming years? How do we strengthen our national structures to support ever better campaigns in chapters? And how do we improve our organizing practice to be more intentional about cross-race, multilingual organizing and expanding our working-class base?

Cori Bush was a homeless mom and survivor of domestic abuse, and through organizing and collective action she became powerful enough to help millions of people facing eviction. As other pandemic economic supports expire out from under us, let's remember that key convention theme: In unity there is power. Other members of what is known as The Squad joined Bush, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez even gave DSA delegates a shout-out from the Capitol steps. They understand what we understand: that if we stand and fight, we can win. 

DSA-BACKED INDIA WALTON WINS BUFFALO MAYORAL PRIMARY

BY PETER LUCAS

Photograph by Scott Mancuso



Buffalo DSA's Healthcare Working Group rallies in support of the NY Health Act in May.

This spring and summer, Buffalo, NY, DSA helped propel community organizer and rank-and-file union activist India Walton to victory in the city's Democratic mayoral primary, beating four-term incumbent Byron Brown. Walton, backed by an entirely grassroots campaign, worked with Buffalo DSA and progressive groups not only to win the election but to address the concerns of working-class communities and advance the fight for socialism in western New York. She earned support from years of involvement on projects such as the Fruit Belt Community Land Trust and Black Lives Matter protests.

In an interview for *Jacobin* magazine earlier this year, Walton told me that “[o]ne of the things that our campaign

has been really good at is storytelling — being able to explain to people why socialism is not this evil monster that the establishment wants you to believe it is.”

Given Walton's record and her embrace of democratic socialism, the Buffalo chapter was excited to endorse her from the start. A vote to endorse her campaign passed unanimously at a January general membership meeting.

Buffalo DSA had hoped to run independent canvasses and host fundraisers, but the legal and organizational complications were too great for the relatively small chapter to handle in the short amount of time they had to win. Thus, the chapter's organizing flowed through Walton's official

campaign. Over the course of the election cycle, as many as 70 members became active in the campaign with phone banking, canvassing, event visibility, data entry, and more.

“What's important to know is that Buffalo DSA is far more passionate about our candidate than the establishment is about theirs, and when the energy of grassroots volunteers is well organized, we can win,” chapter member James Skretta said.

Days after his defeat, Brown announced a write-in campaign for the upcoming November general election, hoping to win an unprecedented fifth term. Although write-in campaigns aren't typically successful, Brown will have name recognition, enthusiastic support from big money donors, and potentially even help from the Buffalo GOP.

Even though Walton's campaign mostly flew under the radar until election night, it did not change the approach that has been key to the success of many DSA electoral projects— the slow build and hard work of knocking on doors, making phone calls, and hanging posters.

Elections give the organization a unique opportunity to talk to people across the political spectrum at their doorsteps about universal programs and working-class organization. It is this commitment to doing the less glamorous work of talking to strangers that not only decides the outcome of elections but plants the seeds of hope in the community that we can win a better world than the ruling class has offered.

Moving forward, Buffalo DSA has an exciting opportunity to explore the possibilities of municipal socialism and connect its nonelectoral efforts to a member in public office. 🌹

PETER LUCAS is an activist in NYC-DSA.

Photograph by Michael Nigro, Pacific Press



‘INJUSTICE IS INTERCONNECTED BUT SO IS FREEDOM’: *Ady Barkan talks to Democratic Left*

BY CHRIS LOMBARDI

Disability activist and DSA member Ady Barkan went viral in 2017 when he confronted Republican senator Jeff Flake on an airplane about an upcoming tax bill and the damage it was about to do to Medicare and Medicaid. “You could be a hero!” he said, his speech slurred by his amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).

That YouTube moment begins a new documentary, *Not Going Quietly* (on PBS this fall). It follows Barkan through some difficult medical decisions, including a lung surgery that robbed him of the ability to speak except electronically, via a computer that tracks his eye movements. It shows how Barkan’s Be A Hero campaign has mobilized millions, first to vote in 2018/2020 and to demand justice afterward.

Barkan responded to questions from *Democratic Left* and from DSA’s Disability Working Group. The interview has been edited for length. A full version is available online.

You’ve been an activist forever. When did the transition to IDing as a socialist start?

I spent my twenties fighting against powerful special interests as a young lawyer in New York City. There, I helped a federal judge end the racist policing program of Stop and Frisk. I co-authored the New York City paid sick days law.

My high school American History teacher, Mike Callahan, first planted the seeds for my belief in democratic socialism. Then, at Columbia University came a radical student group working to ensure fair working conditions and a

living wage for the people who made the university-branded apparel.

From there, both at law school and after, I became more deeply involved in the fight for racial, economic, and social justice. And I poured myself deeper into organizing. I didn't officially join DSA until the summer of 2018, when I spoke at Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's first community town hall following her triumph in the primary. I'm in awe of her contribution to the movement for democratic socialism.

In doing this work, I learned that injustice is interconnected, but that freedom is too. And that it is through collective struggle that we might find personal liberation.

What role has capitalism played in complicating your life?

To be honest, global capitalism has largely redounded to my benefit, as for other privileged white men. In a strange way, I have benefited doubly from the injustices of the world, [building] a successful career and a proud self-identity upon confronting them. The issue, though, is not that I have benefited, but that so many others—Black, Indigenous, people of color, women, immigrants—have been left behind and discarded.

A L S has certainly changed my relationship to capitalism. Take our moral abomination of a healthcare system that I've become a lot more familiar with since my diagnosis. For a long time my insurance company refused to cover the equipment and home care I need to live, [part of] the entire business model of denying people care for the profit of private corporations. This is how capitalism has complicated my life as a disabled person and how our system preys on disability for the profit of a few.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, former chair of the Federal Reserve, talks about full employment as a goal of the Fed now. Does this feel like an organizing success for you, given your organizing of Fed Up? What should we be looking for/afraid of/hopeful for now from the Fed?

As a result of the Fed Up campaign, the Federal Reserve incorporated concern for race, inequality, and full employment in its decision making and made the institution more accountable to the public and not to Wall Street. It's the most important success of my career.

I think moving forward progressives need to continue to keep the Fed accountable and not ignore the powerful institution like they did for the forty years before Fed Up. I hope the Fed continues to focus on issues of race and inequality and full employment, investing more directly in the economy and not just throwing money at big banks.

How would you like DSA to be more disability-inclusive, both nationally and at the chapter level?

To start, every meeting should have a virtual option to join, with translators or real-time captioning available. Organizers should provide a form before *all meetings* to intake requests on accommodations. I agree with the DSA Disability Working Group—disabled socialists should be included throughout all levels of leadership, both nationally and locally. Because to be truly intersectional, our movements for progress must center disabled people.

I would like to see DSA organize around home- and community-based services. The past year alone, over 132,000 people with disabilities died

in nursing homes. Unless we secure the initial 400 billion dollars in funding for home- and community-based services as proposed in the Better Care Better Jobs Act, disabled and elderly people will continue to be forced into dangerous and deadly nursing homes.

This is not only a matter of disability justice, but of racial and economic justice, [given that] the vast majority of our caregiving workforce are Black, Latinx, and Asian women.

What does organizing look like after the pandemic?

The adjustments we made to our work and personal lives during the pandemic showed us that we can build a more inclusive and accessible society. As we collectively moved our lives online, we opened up the opportunity [for all of us] to participate in previously inaccessible, in-person spaces.

We must insist that our pre-pandemic state of normalcy was never good enough for our most vulnerable communities and then work to bring the better world of our imagination into reality. If we provided childcare at our community organizing meetings, who could now show up? If we offered a hot meal, who would then come and stay? If we offered translators, what conversations might we be able to have? The voices we most need to hear from are often the ones we hear least. 

CHRIS LOMBARDI is a journalist and author (<https://chrislombardi.me>) who serves on the *Democratic Left* Editorial Committee and DSA's newly reborn Disability Working group.

2021 CONVENTION: DSA HOLDS COURSE

BY ANDREW SERNATINGER

DSA's 2021 Convention, August 1-8, was held online in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2021 convention would be the first "post-Bernie" national gathering of 1,436 delegates and alternates. Major themes included electoral orientation; internationalism; adoption of a platform; amendments to DSA's internal operation; and the election of a new National Political Committee (NPC), the highest decision-making body in DSA between conventions.

Organizational reports took up the first day of business. National Director Maria Svart warned that new membership growth had "slowed to a trickle." Secretary-Treasurer Kristian Hernandez noted a 60% increase in national staff. Written reports were filed and can be read at bit.ly/proposal-compendium.

Credentials challenges had to be considered, and convention rules had to be agreed upon. A delegate challenge to delegates in Portland, Oregon, was sustained, censuring and removing six delegates. Convention rules substituted Single-Transferable Vote (STV) for the originally recommended Borda Count, replaying the same change from 2019. As in previous conventions, this business put the body behind schedule and ended the first day without an approved agenda. Educational workshops from the intervening days can be found at DSA's YouTube channel: bit.ly/DSA_Videos.

Returning Thursday, Aug. 5, the NPC issued a statement that one candidate would not be allowed to run for a seat on the incoming NPC due to a grievance situation that arose earlier in the week. Delegates put forward a motion to vacate the NPC ruling, which passed 726-333, reinstating the person's candidacy. Having resolved this, the order of business was approved for the convention and the body continued on to the consent agenda.

The consent agenda, a package of resolutions voted on as a single item without debate, was assembled through a poll of delegates in the pre-convention period. Delegates voted to remove two resolutions from the agenda to be debated: R14 Committing to International Socialist Solidarity and R32 Strengthening YDSA. Debate on R14 concerned the

resolution's alliance to "mass parties" including Venezuela's PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela) and Brazil's PT (Workers Party), questioning the record of these parties in power and the consequences for DSA. R14 passed 694-369, and DSA will affiliate to the São Paulo Forum. Debate on R32 took up the price tag of the resolution, ultimately flipping support for the motion, which failed 404-632.

On Friday, Aug. 6, the convention amended the constitution to strike requirements that the national convention rotate location regionally, but all subsequent constitution/bylaw amendments failed. Regardless of the political tendency of motion makers, amendments consistently won only a quarter to a third of delegates, well below the two-thirds needed.

On Saturday, the convention heard the outgoing NPC's recommendations, a 44-page report submitted two weeks prior. Proposed convention/bylaw amendments were out of order per the DSA constitution's requirements, so these were taken as resolutions and accepted by acclamation. The first-ever DSA platform was adopted, but a change to the constitution that would make membership predicated on agreement with the platform was voted down.

On Sunday, "priority" resolutions were passed by the convention unamended. These resolutions continue labor and electoral work in the vein of Democratic primaries and national campaigns for the PRO Act. Resolutions on matching funds for chapters and stipends for the NPC Steering Committee passed, as well as a resolution on universal childcare and another continuing immigration work.

Convention proposals largely approved of existing initiatives and did not stake out new ground. Changes to organizational structure all failed, preserving DSA in its form for at least the next two years. On balance, DSA stays the course it has been going over the last 18 months. 🌹

ANDREW SERNATINGER is a member of Madison-Area DSA who writes and reports on DSA. To read more of the author's convention reporting, visit bit.ly/tempest-dsa. The NPC recommendations can be read at bit.ly/npc-recs-2021.

NATIONAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS, 2021-2023



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Ashik Siddique



Austin González



Gilman Bagga



Gustavo Gordillo



Jen McKinney



Jennifer Bolen



José Alejandro La Luz



Justin Charles



Kara Hall



Kristian Hernandez



Laura Gabby



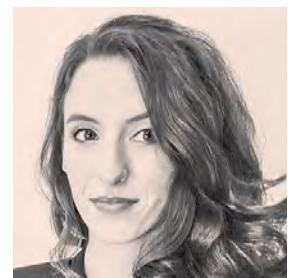
Matt Miller



Sabrina Chan



Sofia Guimarães Cutler



Sydney Ghazarian

2021 CONVENTION BY THE NUMBERS

1,234
delegates

176
chapters
represented

43,725
ballots cast

4
roll call
votes

19 resolutions passed:

11
from the
consent agenda

8
from
the floor

RACIAL JUSTICE VITAL TO UNION GROWTH

BY STEPHANIE LUCE

ILLUSTRATION BY VAL ROSS

In the summer of 2020, in the midst of the uprisings against police brutality, a number of unions issued statements declaring their support for racial justice. But real transformation must go beyond resolutions. Unions have much work to do, from examining their own internal practices and leadership to fighting for their members. The Madison, Wisconsin, teachers union (MTI) offers a good example of a union taking a deep approach to revitalization centered on racial and social justice.

In 2011, Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin implemented massive restrictions on public-sector unions, gutting collective bargaining through Act 10 and making it difficult for public-sector unions to exist at all. Teachers unions already faced the challenge of high turnover. Nationally, 7% to 10% of teachers leave the profession each year, and rates are even higher among teachers of color.

With inspiration from its sister union in Milwaukee, the MTI recentered its mission both to focus on social and racial justice and to highlight that it had a responsibility to uphold an accessible, equitable, and public education system. And in doing so, it also hoped to retain more teachers. It focused its Collaboration to Ensure New Teacher



Retention and Success (CENTRS) program to focus on “professional development opportunities to strengthen teachers’ abilities to deliver instruction through a racially equitable lens.”

Kerry Motoviloff, the Project Lead at MTI CENTRS, says that many new teachers come into the profession with a commitment to social and racial justice but soon encounter work requirements and an educational system that does not align with their beliefs. Part of the work of the CENTRS program is to give these teachers the support they need to refocus on their belief system.

There are over 3,000 educational staff in the Madison Metropolitan School District. Despite Act 10, which decimated the membership of some other Wisconsin unions, more than 2,700 people belong to MTI, an astonishingly high number for a voluntary union that has diminished power to bargain over wages.

Transforming the union and building community

In addition to its deep educational work with its members, MTI has collaborated with Labor Notes, a media and



“Many new teachers come into the profession with a commitment to social and racial justice but soon encounter work requirements and an educational system that does not align with their beliefs.”

Challenges remain

The work is not easy and there is a lot still to do, says Motoviloff. Nationally, the teaching profession is disproportionately white, and while the numbers have been changing, progress is slow, particularly compared to the fact that the student body is becoming more diverse. The Madison school district has been doing purposeful recruitment and hiring more teachers of color, but the teachers are not sticking around.

For Motoviloff, and many others in teachers’ unions, the only way to fight the larger negative trends in education and in labor is to build up a base of rank-and-file teacher leaders. The national union supports such efforts through a slight dues increase that allows it to give grants to local unions to pay for workshops and programs.

With the recent right-wing attacks on “critical race theory,” the Madison teachers offer an excellent example of how integrating a deep racial justice analysis into the school curriculum improves education for all students and creates better working conditions for teachers.

Teachers have expressed their appreciation for the impact the union training has had on their work. One teacher noted that the program helped illustrate “how I can decolonize my curriculum to share power with rather than power on my students.” Added another teacher, “I feel like I have a better idea of what being an abolitionist teacher means. It is creating a home place for my students of color. It is speaking up against racist curriculum and systems within our schools.” 🌹

STEPHANIE LUCE is a professor of Labor Studies at the School of Labor and Urban Studies, City University of New York, and author of several books, including *Fighting for a Living Wage* and *Labor Movements: Global Perspectives*.

organizing project that promotes activism, to offer workshops to members focused on the history of labor unions and race, on grounding anti-racist work in the context of union democracy, and on supporting anti-racist practices within the union and schools.

For example, the MTI recently established 60 new elected positions that included faculty representatives for equity and diversity for each school. Those who have been elected are working to guarantee representation for people of color on every committee in the union.

The MTI began its social and racial justice work by looking for community partners that were already doing it. It collaborates with other organizations in the area, inviting representatives to speak at workshops or partnering for actions.

Union members also work to center student needs. For example, the union asked the Madison school district to provide support for students who had experienced trauma due to the pandemic. With the rise in anti-Asian violence, the union consulted with student leaders of the United Asian Club to develop ideas for action and publicized those ideas.

Immigrant Voters and the Spectre of ‘Socialism’

BY ALEXANDER LEE

ILLUSTRATION BY HALLIE POPE



These days, it feels like every news cycle brings reports of yet another vicious public assault on Asian people. As a Vietnamese American, I feel immense dread after every attack—but the recent rise of anti-Asian racism has only strengthened my belief in social justice and the progressive ideals for which we fight in DSA.

Unfortunately, not all Asian Americans feel similarly, particularly those within my own ethnic subgroup. Even as Donald Trump’s rhetoric helped spark anti-Asian hate last year, a summer 2020 poll by Asian Americans Advancing Justice found that 48% of Vietnamese Americans planned to vote for Trump in the 2020 election. During the January 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, a three-striped South Vietnamese flag was clearly visible amid the scrum of rioters.

Vietnamese American conservatism is disheartening, but not surprising.

“The people who came over here after 1975 came over because they’re rabidly anti-communist,” said Cynthia Nguyen, a psychiatrist and founding member of PIVOT—the Progressive

Vietnamese American Organization, in an April interview. “The Vietnamese who came over are so grateful to America—and for some reason, they think that the Republican Party is responsible for this welcome.”

Indeed, many older Vietnamese Americans view the Republican Party as the last and only line of U.S. defense against communism, a feeling stoked enthusiastically by conservatives in the United States. This sentiment is widespread not only among the Vietnamese American community, but within all U.S. immigrant populations with roots in so-called “socialist” or ex-socialist states.

“The people who lived in Cuba and experienced the period after the Cuban Revolution ... experienced a lot of hardship,” said Fernanda Uriegas, a Cuban American journalist and podcast producer, in an interview with *Democratic Left*. “Because of their decision to move to the United States ... they lost their businesses, they were separated from their families, and they were unable to go back. And I feel like that trauma has made them fearful of the same thing happening in

the United States by electing a Democratic candidate.”

These feelings resurfaced in July 2021, when a wave of domestic protests against Cuba’s ruling Communist Party evoked sympathy from Cuban Americans on social media and in the streets of Miami.

How can we convince these individuals of the benefits of socialism if they gave up everything to escape a system called socialist? For some minority groups, appealing on racial lines might be effective, but this tack is unlikely to work with older Vietnamese or Cuban Americans. When I asked my grandmother, Vinh Nguyen, why her Republican-voting acquaintances hadn’t been pushed to the left by the simple fact of Trump’s anti-Asian racism, she answered without hesitation: “Some Vietnamese people believe that they are next to white.”

In the same vein, according to Uriegas, many Cubans view themselves as separate from the anti-immigration narrative propagated by Trump and his allies: “For Cubans, most of us are white or Black—there are not that many brown Cubans.” Racial injustice



“We’re not being unfilial by saying you really should vote for things that are actually good for you.”

is simply not a core issue for many white Cuban individuals.

Instead, organizations such as PIVOT have found success by approaching Vietnamese Americans through language they understand—literally. Last year, PIVOT created Viet Fact Check, a website that publishes Vietnamese-language articles debunking right-wing conspiracy theories. Through Viet Fact Check—and considerable community outreach efforts—PIVOT managed to convert scores of Vietnamese American voters who would never have been reached by English-language media.

“I think we did a lot to influence the results of the last election, especially in the Georgia runoff,” Cynthia Nguyen said.

Since then, the organization has made similar Vietnamese-language

public safety announcements to inform older Vietnamese Americans about politically charged topics such as COVID-19 safety guidelines. To get these public service announcements in front of older eyes, PIVOT encourages the organization’s younger members to share them with their relatives via email and social media.

Whether through homegrown channels like Viet Fact Check or across the dinner table, both Cynthia Nguyen and Uriegas advise against explicitly using the word “socialism” when pitching progressive policies to ex-refugee family members. This is more than just a semantic issue: “They believe that socialism is equivalent to communism, which is equivalent to the communist regime in Vietnam that tortured them,” Cynthia Nguyen said. While it might feel like ceding

ground to the Right, the fact is that someone whose family was murdered and whose property was taken by communists—both things that happened to my relatives—is more likely to associate socialism with those hardships than with Medicare for All.

There is reason to be optimistic. In the 2018 midterms, more young Vietnamese Americans voted than ever before. Vietnamese American politicians such as Thu-Ha Nguyen, a city council member in Garden Grove, California, have cited the immigration policies of the Trump administration as their direct inspiration to run for office. And, though the Republican Party maintains a strong grip on the Cuban American population, recent polling shows that more and more Cubans between the ages of 18 and 39 are drifting to the Left.

Regardless of this gradual shift, communist oppression still looms large in the living memory of these immigrant groups. By tailoring outreach efforts to the language and media consumed by older members of these communities—and by carefully avoiding overuse of the word “socialism”—it is possible to convert at least some of them into a progressive voting force.

“Education is a big thing, so just push on that. Just say, ‘You know, we are educated, and this is not brainwashing. This is actually what you sacrificed for,’” Cynthia Nguyen advised. “Saying stuff like that makes them understand that we’re not ignoramuses, that we actually know the sacrifice they’ve made—and we’re not being unfilial by saying you really should vote for things that are actually good for you.” 🌹

ALEXANDER LEE is a writer and editor for *Democratic Left*. You can follow him on Twitter @alexleewastaken.

GIVE US SHELTER: A Bus Driver's Story

BY NATHAN VASS

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL MARSICANO



CCOVID-19 has entered history as an infuriating and avoidable tragedy of institutional incompetence. Under COVID, we lost our jobs and slowed way down, confused by the sudden gift of more time and no traffic. We began avoiding each other, smoking and drinking more, gaining weight, getting pregnant, divorcing, and improving ourselves. An emphasis on virtual life and increased attention to news accelerated pre-existing trends of anxiety and depression.

But what does it look like when the city *itself* is depressed?

I've been driving city buses in Seattle for 15 years and love it. Unlike in many U.S. cities, members of all social classes ride public transit in Seattle. Before COVID, we mixed together with reasonable comfort and safety. That's

no longer true. As businesses have closed and resources have shut down, the city has abandoned its mentally ill and unhoused to their own devices. Our homeless population is large, and for a few months it was just them and us bus drivers on the streets, makeshift roving hotels. As street folks are some of my favorite people and the reason I do my job, I could have lived with that.

But summer 2020's social unrest weaponized the mood. Crime on Seattle's buses skyrocketed to historically unknown highs (a near-fourfold increase) and stayed there. These circumstances were made worse by a police force that stopped responding to security incidents on transit for fear of being castigated in the media. How the downtown streets once looked at 2 a.m., and who was on them,



is now how the streets look and feel *all day*. I'm saddened to see the condition of my street friends deteriorate and the safety of everyone else worsen. My female friends give downtown's newly chaotic avenues and their tent cities a wide berth now. People talk about crime in a way they haven't since the early '90s: as a spectre haunting the empty spaces, fouling the air, and making us suspicious of each other.

The pandemic's most immediate impact on the street level has been a shutting down of resource access for homeless and low-income people, leading to an increase in drug use and violent crime. My homeless friends now tell me about their fears of *other* homeless people. That's new. Before, people got their medication and food, and we felt


mostly safe. Seattle was "the best place in the world to be homeless." Now we're just another big city.

Had Mayor Jenny Durkan doubled down on nurturing our mentally ill, the rest of us would have benefited, too. No matter how great the crisis, you cannot forget the little people. We are now living with the consequences of ignoring problems on both a national and city-wide level.

I am not disappointed in King County Metro, nor its excellent union, which has provided us operators with ample personal protective equipment access, safety partitions, and generous COVID leave. Rather, I am disappointed in my city of Seattle. It matters how a city treats its underclass. It matters, in the same way you would study how your date treats the waiter on a first dinner out. You want them to *care*. You want to see kindness. Seattle has forgotten how to be kind.

I had hoped COVID would bring us together. That it would, by the pandemic's end, remind us of the simple beauty and value of what we've missed for a year: handshakes, hugs, and smiles, along with a shared experience about which we could tell each other stories.

I have not given up that hope. Yes, the institutions have failed. But why should *we*? I do what I can as an individual, which is to go out there every night and give. I give what the city doesn't give because it is lazy and strained, and I give what many don't give because they are afraid (and I don't blame them). I take a deep breath and open those bus doors every night and I give to incoming souls what they're not getting enough of elsewhere: love and respect. That is what I am able to do.

Maybe this is where we start. 

NATHAN VASS is an artist, filmmaker, photographer, and author by day, and a Metro bus driver by night. His community-building work has been showcased on *TED*, *NPR*, *The Seattle Times*, and *KING5* and has landed him a spot on *Seattle Magazine's* 2018 list of the 35 Most Influential People in Seattle. His book, *The Lines That Make Us*, is a Seattle bestseller and Finalist for the 2019 Washington State Book Awards.



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LESSONS FOR THE U.S. LEFT FROM A COMRADE IN INDIA

BY FURQAN BAHADUR

At a time when the United States faces internal problems that threaten its very claim to be a democracy, what can leftists learn from struggles in other democracies at risk?

Sundeep Narwani, an organizer and political activist associated with DSA's International Committee and with the Aam Aadmi (Common Man) Party and the All-India Kisan Sabha (Farmers Union) in India, is familiar with both U.S. and Indian political trends and played an important role in supporting farmers' protests in India and, later, COVID relief efforts.

Massive Indian farmers' protests brought thousands to Delhi and other major Indian cities over the past year. They emerged in late 2020 in response to the government's plans to end long-existing subsidies in service of corporate interests. These protests did not end once the second COVID-19 wave hit in March 2021. Rather, the farmers have now resolved that they will be going to states with important upcoming elections to take the fight directly to the Indian government. At the same time, the cosmopolitan coalition that emerged to aid the farmers also created massive mutual aid networks in Delhi in particular, where an estimated 30%–40% of the city's population was unable to make ends meet.



Indian Farmers' Protest: March to Delhi, November 27, 2020

PHOTOGRAPH BY RANDEEP MADDOKE

Despite the threat of arrest or oppression from the central government, political activists like Narwani went to great lengths to provide the support that the state was both unwilling and unable to give. They worked to find oxygen, money, and food for people in poor, largely Muslim Delhi neighborhoods. The importance of such activity cannot be stressed enough. The right-wing forces that have seized power in India—particularly in Uttar Pradesh, where the majority of the farmers' activities are currently focused—are intent on building an exclusively Hindu nation and violently oppressing minorities, including the largely Sikh farmers and the Muslim population.

“Our networks have become inter-faith, all-India, and very powerful as a result,” Narwani said. “The mutual aid networks and communities that have been spawned by these difficult times are all out there doing their best to fill the gaps of the state.”

To Narwani, the beauty of socialist politics and the mass movements that have emerged in India is in the “broad and united movement” that can draw

its strength from a variety of people regardless of their differences. Resistance requires negotiation and solidarity in the face of seemingly impossible contradictions and opposition. At home, doing so means tangibly affecting people's everyday lives; efforts like East Bay DSA's Tenant and Neighborhood Councils show that this kind of direct action can be replicated in the United States.

Narwani noted that U.S. mass movements have not had the organizational discipline or popular momentum to sustain themselves in the way that the Indian farmers' movement has. The power of such organizations stems from their ability to “make reality”: shaping popular imagination with education, mobilization, and action. In other words, treating “humans as the pillars” of our politics. Despite India's great internal divisions, the farmers helped spawn a truly all-encompassing movement. Can DSA do the same?

FURQAN BAHADUR is the pseudonym of a historian and writer based in Chicago.

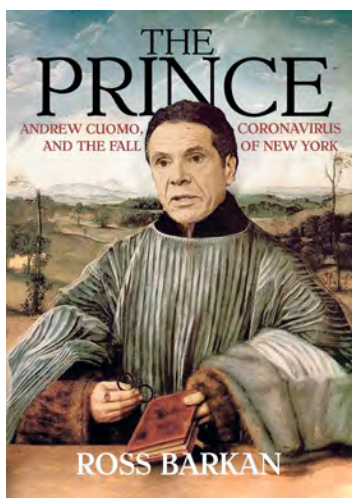
ANDREW CUOMO: WHEN THE PRINCE HAS NO ARMOR

BY HARRY BAGENSTOS

It finally happened. Andrew Cuomo resigned as New York's governor. After a state investigation concluded that he sexually harassed 11 women, Cuomo held out for as long as he could before capitulating. This represents a stark contrast with last year, when Cuomo was acclaimed for his handling of the coronavirus pandemic. Political reporter Ross Barkan's new book, *The Prince: Andrew Cuomo, Coronavirus, and the Fall of New York*, argues that the governor's seeming success was always a fraud: Cuomo's decisions in the early days of the pandemic caused an enormous number of avoidable deaths, and his further mismanagement forced the most vulnerable New Yorkers to bear the brunt of the disease. The book highlights not only Cuomo's incompetence but his career-long adherence to the interests of moneyed elites.

As the coronavirus first hit New York, Barkan writes, Cuomo delayed taking necessary actions to stop its spread. Rather than order immediate lockdowns, he downplayed risks, repeatedly arguing that the disease would be less destructive than the common flu. By the time he issued a stay-at-home order, on March 20, there were thousands of new cases every day in New York City alone. Had Cuomo acted a week earlier, he would have saved nearly 17,000 lives.

But Cuomo not only initially underestimated the pandemic's severity. Some of *The Prince's* most disturbing passages show that, as the crisis



THE PRINCE: Andrew Cuomo, Coronavirus, and the Fall of New York

By Ross Barkan
OR Books, 2021

wore on, he allowed nursing home residents and healthcare workers to suffer immensely. Elderly coronavirus patients did not receive the care they needed, while frontline workers, denied appropriate protective equipment, struggled to manage rising case loads. When the dust cleared there were more than 15,000 deaths in nursing homes.

The most effective aspect of Barkan's book is its focus on the historical and political-economic roots of the tragedy. Problems with hospital capacity, for example, are traced

back to a reduction in state hospital beds, from about 74,000 in 2000 to about 53,000 last year. These unnecessary austerity measures were bipartisan, carried out by Republican governor George Pataki and Cuomo. They went hand in hand with Cuomo's use of the state to promote private profit, as when he worked with lobbyists to shield hospitals and nursing homes from legal liability during the pandemic. At the same time, the governor resisted funding relief for tenants and preferred gutting state services over raising taxes on the rich; only a progressive state legislature, including six DSA members, could force him to act in the interests of working people.

In his self-serving pandemic memoir, Cuomo presents himself as having great foresight about the damage the virus would cause. To the contrary, in what became a major scandal, the administration publicly undercounted nursing home deaths. Cuomo's PR offensive distorted the reality: his response to the pandemic served the wealthy but harmed ordinary people.

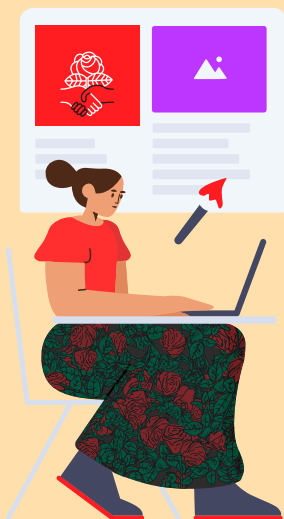
His willingness to designate as expendable certain groups—such as elderly nursing home patients and underpaid care workers—typifies the damage wrought by neoliberal governance. We should be glad to have reporting, like Barkan's, that brings it to light. 🌹

HARRY BAGENSTOS is co-chair of Wesleyan University YDSA.

ABOUT THE COVER ART

Photographer and filmmaker Randeep Maddoke has been covering the Indian farmers' protests from day one, working tirelessly to create a photographic archive of this widespread and cosmopolitan movement. To view more of Maddoke's work, follow him on Instagram @randeepmaddoke.

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