DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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The Boys Who Cried Debt: The Case Against Cuts

By Joseph M. Schwartz

Republicans and conservative Democrats are whipping up public hysteria about the debt ceiling and the size of the federal deficit to justify cutting social programs that benefit the middle and working class. These scare tactics are hypocritical because conservatives militantly pushed for these same cuts when the federal budget was in surplus during the Clinton administration. The United States is not broke. The long-term deficit problem has not been caused by wasteful social spending, as the right contends, but by conservatives' 30-year project of starving federal, state and local governments of revenue via tax cuts for the affluent and for corporations. As conservative activist Grover Norquist quipped during the Reagan era, the goal of the right is to reduce the size of government and drown it in the bathtub. Of course, the "deficit problem" can readily be fixed without cutting Social Security or Medicare if we enact government policies that force the rich and corporations to pay their fair share in taxes and that curtail wasteful "defense" spending.

The Republican leadership never tells the public that well over half of the deficit spending from 2008-11 has nothing to do with the Obama administration's policies. Rather, it is due to the lost revenue from the Bush tax cuts and excessive military spending, including $170 billion per year in "off-budget" expenditures on the unnecessary wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Stimulus spending and the bailout of financial institutions make up another 30 percent of the deficit spending of that period, with tax revenue shortfalls due to the recession constituting the remaining 20 percent. Much of these funds will be recovered if and when economic growth resumes. In contrast, drastic cuts to spending on vital social services will only prolong the recession.[1]

If Congress does not raise the debt ceiling in early August, the federal government will immediately be unable to pay 30 percent of its bills, including Social Security and Medicare payments. The United States Treasury has never defaulted on bond payments, and it probably won't this summer. But even a brush with default could send the global economy into a tailspin that might make the Great Recession look trivial. But Republicans and conservative Democrats are willing to play with fire because they want to use the threat of default to justify cutting government spending on basic social services.

Government budgets are a statement of a society's basic priorities and social values. We can readily afford our commitments to social insurance for the elderly and disabled and federal aid to children and the disadvantaged if we institute a fair and equitable tax structure. The Bush and Reagan tax cuts – which distributed 80 percent of their benefits to the top ten percent of income earners – each cost the federal coffers 2.1 percent of GDP in taxes per year, for a combined total of $600 billion a year in lost revenue. If we returned effective tax rates to the level of 1960, the federal government would take in $400-500 billion more dollars. In 1960, corporate taxes constituted 30 percent of federal tax revenues; today, corporate taxes only make up seven percent of federal revenues.[2]

Thus, returning marginal income and corporate tax rates to those of the Eisenhower era would immediately eliminate most of today's $1.2 billion federal deficit! Even if we can only reverse the Bush tax cuts on the most affluent two percent (which would yield $70 billion a year in extra revenue) and abolish federal tax expenditures on corporations (such as the oil depletion allowance and the corporate exemption from having to pay taxes on foreign earnings) this would bring in $120 billion per year in revenues. Instituting a modest financial transactions tax of 0.25 percent on stock, bond, and derivatives trading – the level proposed by the European Union – could bring in another $200-300 billion per year.[3]

The same story can be told at the state and local level: if we taxed the top 20 percent of income earners at the same average rate that we tax the bottom quintile of taxpayers, most state budget deficits would disappear.[4] The money is there – if we tax those who have it.

Our budget problems also issue from public policies that increase income inequality, such as the conservative attack on the right to unionize. U.S. productivity has doubled over the past 30 years. However, over 90 percent of the resulting income gains have gone to the top ten percent of households. Couple that with massive tax cuts for the top ten percent of income earners and you obviously get a long-term structural deficit!

Big Government, American Style

Contrary to right-wing claims, except for prisons and the military the U.S. is the land of small, not big government. In fiscal year 2011, the U.S. will take in only 15 percent of

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[1]Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Economic Downturn and Bush Policies Continue to Drive Large Projected Deficits," http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=3490

[2]Tax Policy Center, "The Bush Tax Cuts: How do they compare with the Reagan cuts?" http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/briefing-book/background/bush-tax-cuts/reagan.cfm

[3]CBPP, "Economic Downturn and Bush Policies Continue to Drive Large Projected Deficits," http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa_view&id=3490.

[4]United for a Fair Economy, "Flip It to Fix It," http://www.faireconomy.org/flipitreport

DSA Appoints New National Director

The National Political Committee of Democratic Socialists of America has appointed Maria Svart to be DSA's next National Director. She succeeds Frank Llewellyn who announced earlier this year that he was stepping down after ten years. Maria will start on July 5, 2011. Frank Llewellyn will stay on for a brief period to assist in the transition.

Maria Svart

Maria Svart has been a member of DSA since 2004. She first joined as a member of the University of Chicago YDS chapter and quickly became active at the national level, serving as the feminist issues coordinator on the YDS Coordinating Committee and then co-chair for several terms. Her campus activism, through YDS and other student organizations, focused on feminist, environmental, immigrant rights, anti-war and labor solidarity work.

"I grew up in a family that in one generation went from working class to middle class, and our combined experiences inform my political analysis." Maria said. "My grandparents and parents achieved upward mobility by using the kind of government programs that DSA fights to protect and expand like the GI Bill and other federal student loans. Immediate and extended family members are in unions (Mineworkers, Firefighters, Postal Workers, Teachers and other public employees) – in fact my grandmother went out on strike for over a year during the Great Depression. My mother is a first generation U.S. citizen with parents who walked across the border from Mexico during the revolution. And, my first protest was in a stroller at an anti-nuke rally in the 1980s, so I understand the importance of grassroots pressure!"

After college, Maria became a campus organizer with the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group (MASSPIRG), while simultaneously helping successive YDS organizers and leaders begin to bridge the generational gap between YDS and DSA. After MASSPIRG, Maria worked seven years for the labor movement, with the Service Employees International Union and the Committee of Interns and Residents/SEIU Healthcare. At CIR, she organized resident physicians to speak out in support of Medicaid and funding for safety-net hospitals.

In recent years she served as chair of the New York City DSA local and was elected to the National Political Committee at the 2009 DSA convention. On the NPC, Maria has chaired the Program Committee, which has provided materials and guidance that have helped DSA locals and YDS chapters participate in the fight against state and federal budget cuts and to defend the rights of public employees. Throughout her involvement in DSA, Maria has stressed the importance of understanding how patriarchy, racism, and other structures of oppression intersect with capitalism; the need to train more activists in the skills necessary to intervene effectively in politics; and the crucial role of both public and internal socialist education in building our movement.

"I could not be more pleased at the choice of a successor," said Frank Llewellyn, DSA's outgoing National Director. "Maria's organizing experience and her ability to motivate members and activists will serve the organization very well. Her experience in YDS and as a young organizer will enable her to relate positively to the young activists who will be the future of the socialist movement in the United States." ◘

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

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its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in federal tax revenue and another nine percent of GDP in state and local taxes. Recessions lead to lower incomes and therefore lower tax intake. While we will take in 24 percent of our GDP as tax revenue in fiscal year 2011, we will spend 30 percent of our GDP on public spending (at all levels of government). But this 30 percent figure is well below the average of 36 percent of GDP channeled through the United States public sector in the 1960s. And these figures pale in comparison with all other developed nations. Neo-liberal Britain is at the relative low end this fiscal year with 31 percent of tax revenue as a percentage of GDP and 36 percent of GDP being government spending; Germany occupies a middle slot in 2011 with 36 percent of GDP as tax revenue and over 40 percent of GDP as public expenditure. The Scandinavian countries and France spend 45 to 50 percent of their GDP on public expenditure. Why do the German, French, and Scandinavian electorates support these policies? Because these countries raise tax revenue in a fairer, more progressive manner than does the U.S. Additionally, the affluent utilize these societies' high-quality universal public health care and childcare programs and thus willingly pay higher taxes.

And what does our comparatively "small" government spend its revenues on? The conservative propaganda machine claims that federal and state governments waste huge amounts subsidizing poor people. Yet income support and anti-poverty programs such as Head Start, Food Stamps, and Supplemental Security Income constitute only 14 percent of the federal budget. In reality, the federal government is basically an insurance company for the elderly that happens to have the world's biggest military. State governments do most of the spending on education, transportation, and Medicaid. Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security constitute over 41 percent of the federal budget; "defense" constitutes another 21 percent of the budget, with payment of interest on the debt (mostly to wealthy individuals) at 6 percent. Cash transfers in the U.S. for unemployment insurance, Social Security, day care subsidies and the like amount to only 9 percent of household disposable income, by far the lowest among the industrialized nations except South Korea. And we also rank next to last among the rich industrial countries in terms of social transfers that benefit the poor. In contrast, we rank first in tax subsidies for the affluent and for corporations. "Discretionary expenditure" constitutes only 17 percent of the federal budget. This rather miniscule portion of the budget is what funds education, transportation, and public investment in energy, infrastructure and job training. And this is the part of the federal budget that the Obama administration proposes to freeze![5]

[5]CBPP, "Where Do Our Federal Tax Dollars Go?" http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=1258.

Growing Our Way Out

While the total federal debt of $14.2 trillion comes close to equaling our total GDP, the ratio of debt to GDP will naturally come down if we grow our way out of the recession. The loss in federal tax revenue due to the recession constitutes about 25 percent of the current $1.2 billion fiscal year 2011 deficit. And the one-time stimulus expenditures that saved at least two million jobs, according to the neutral Congressional Budget Office, represent another $250 billion of the current 2011 deficit. The stimulus comes to an end in fiscal year 2012. Whatever the wisdom of the TARP bailout of the banks, the bulk of this $700 trillion dollar program has been paid back to the federal government. It's not only leftists who agree with Keynes that government deficit spending must replace lost private and consumer demand during a recession. So do the bond markets. Despite right-wing ideological claims that public debt is crowding out private capital by raising interest rates, the continued absence of strong private demand for investment capital means that real interest rates are at all time low, with the federal funds rate at only 0.75 percent and the prime rate at only 3.25 percent.

Additionally, some deficit spending funds useful investments in education, infrastructure, job training and research and development. Just as corporations use debt to invest in growth (healthy corporations often have a debt to annual income ratio of 4:1), governments also should issue some debt. That's why most advanced democracies run average deficits, over the long run, of three percent of GDP per year (the average annual rate of growth in the 20th century). If the economy grows faster over time than the rate of deficit spending, the total debt-GDP ratio stays the same or declines. In fact, the average ratio of total debt to GDP during strong growth periods in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries ranges from 40 to 60 percent and normally rises to 70-90 percent during sharp recessions.

The one structural aspect of our deficit that is not healthy – and that conservatives fail to address – is that caused by our massive trade deficit. The United States needs to produce more useful goods for domestic and international consumption if we are to cease transferring our debt to foreign investors. We should also engage in international trade and labor policies that support labor rights for Chinese and other low-wage workers. But we can only reverse this loss of advanced industrial production in the United States if the federal government makes investments – in infrastructure, research and development, and alternative energy and mass transit – that will spur private investment in new forms of industrial output.

A People's Budget

The U.S. can readily afford a humane federal budget that funds productive public investments for our future if we restore progressive taxation and enact prudent but

major cuts in "defense" spending. The People's Budget for fiscal year 2012 put forth by the Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) achieves these very goals. The People's Budget ends spending on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and cuts wasteful defense spending while preserving all funding for anti-poverty programs and radically expanding public investments in infrastructure, education, job training, and alternative energy by $300 billion a year – while bringing the total budget into balance by 2021.[6]

The CPC budget rejects the various "bipartisan" budget deficit reduction commission plans that call for achieving a balanced budget through major cuts to Medicare, Social Security, and Medicaid. It also preserves the long-term viability of Social Security by simply raising the cap on income subject to the Social Security tax (currently set at $106,000) and providing a path to citizenship for the eight million productive undocumented immigrants who often do not pay into the Social Security system.

[6]For more information, see "The People's Budget" http://grijalva.house.gov/uploads/The%20CPC%20FY2012%20Budget.pdf.

The budget also recognizes that Medicare and Medicaid can only be saved if we put a halt to corporate-driven inflation in medical costs. If we instituted a single-payer Medicare-for-all policy that eliminated the role of private health insurers, we could lower the 25 percent of private health care dollars spent on health insurance company administration and advertising to Medicare's seven percent administrative costs.

Profligate spending on the poor did not cause the budget crisis. Tax giveaways to the rich and corporations, massive military expenditure, and an out-of-control financial sector drove us into the Great Recession and now prevent us from enacting a budget that serves human needs. The irresponsible policies of corporate America caused the economic crisis. We can only revive the economy if we implement a fair tax system that funds vital social programs and public investment in education, infrastructure and research and development. ◘

Joseph M. Schwartz teaches political science at Temple University and is a Vice-Chair of DSA. His most recent book is The Future of Democratic Equality *(Routledge, 2009).*

The War Within the States

We've said it before, and we'll say it again: state and local government fiscal crises and the fight over who will bear the burden of paying for them will be the primary terrain on which the class struggle is fought for the foreseeable future. While the various struggles against attacks on public sector workers' rights and cuts to public services in states around the country have been inspiring, we must accept the fact that at the moment the labor movement and the left are on the defensive and that the party of austerity has gained the upper hand.

In recent weeks, it has racked up a string of victories in state capitols and city halls across the country. In Wisconsin, right-wing jurist David Prosser won a narrow election to the state's Supreme Court against labor-backed challenger JoAnn Kloppenburg, consolidating a 4-3 conservative majority that overruled a lower court order which temporarily blocked the implementation of Gov. Scott Walker's bill to strip public employees of their collective bargaining rights. In Ohio, the recently enacted anti-union Senate Bill 5 (SB5) – which may be even more extreme than the Wisconsin legislation – has stripped public employees of their collective bargaining rights as well as the right to strike. In New Jersey, where Republican Gov. Chris Christie has made a name for himself as one of the nation's most anti-union politicians, legislation that would greatly increase public employees' contributions to their health and pension plans has passed with bipartisan support. And in virtually every state and city around the country, core public services such as education, health care, firefighting, law enforcement, and libraries are threatened with deep cuts as federal stimulus aid dwindles and budget shortfalls grow ever larger.

Unions and progressive organizations in a number of states have mounted large and spirited protests against the attack on the public sector. Of course, the biggest and most inspiring protest against the drive to austerity was the month-long struggle in Madison, Wisconsin, which electrified activists across the country and around the world. But in Wisconsin and elsewhere, union leaders and Democratic political operatives have channeled the élan that fueled the kind of mass protests we witnessed in Madison into recall campaigns, lobbying, and behind-the-scenes negotiations. With tens of thousands of workers ready and willing to engage in a mass strike against Gov. Walker and his anti-union legislation, the leadership balked. As AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka admitted, it was the rank-and-file who initiated the struggle in Madison, not a reluctant labor leadership that fears an active and militant rank-and-file as much as it fears the agency shop and the end of dues check-off. While mass protest against anti-union legislation and cuts to public services is not guaranteed to succeed, it seems clear that an over-reliance on formal political channels is even less likely to stop the neoliberal offensive. As

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Matt Rothschild of *The Progressive* recently described the situation in Wisconsin:

"It seems to me that the state AFL never had a mass strategy, was surprised by the mass uprising, and was even a little afraid of it. The leadership never called for boycotts, never called for a general strike or any workplace actions whatsoever, never called for civil disobedience...Through it all, the state AFL-CIO charted a course of timidity. It funneled everything into legal challenges and recalls. The main legal challenge is now dead; the new one is doomed. And maybe the recalls will succeed; maybe not. But meantime, the people, as a mass force, have been demoralized and demobilized."

A victory in Wisconsin would have emboldened labor and the left across the country and provided us with the momentum necessary to hold the line against the party of austerity in other states. But so long as labor is not willing or able to lead a mass movement whose main weapon is disruptive protest and the power of numbers, no matter what DSA and other left and progressive organizations do our chances for turning back the drive to austerity appear to be rather slim.

Still, we have no other choice but to keep up the struggle, state by state, and push constantly for the kind of radical strategic and policy orientation we need to successfully confront the fiscal crisis of state and local government. Below, DSAers report on the situation on the ground in California, New Jersey, New York, and Ohio, and what workers, students, and activists are doing to fight back in these difficult times. ◘

- The Editors

California Schools in Crisis - Unions Lead the Fightback

By Duane Campbell

State revenues for schools are in crisis around the nation. School spending is expected to bottom out over the next two years as states and districts run out of $100 billion in federal stimulus aid for education passed when Democrats controlled the Congress. The stimulus money saved about 368,000 school-related jobs during the 2009-2010 school year, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Most school funding comes from the state and local levels. Only about 11 percent comes from federal funds.

The financial crisis is devastating public schools in all 50 states, but perhaps none have been as hard-hit as those in California. Reduced federal stimulus funding for the Golden State has already rendered 30,000 teachers unemployed, and the state's ongoing budget crisis threatens to throw an additional 15,000 out of work this summer. More than $4 billion has been cut from California school budgets in the last three years, and in the best-case scenario an additional $2.1 billion will be cut in the upcoming fiscal year. The Democratic majority in the California legislature is trying to limit additional cuts to K-12 education by passing an extension of current temporary tax increases – but the Republican minority in the legislature blocks the attempt to put such an extension on the ballot for Californians to vote on.

California's teachers' unions, in coalition with student and community groups, are leading the fight against the cuts. In April, the California Faculty Association (CFA) and student groups held concurrent demonstrations at all 23 campuses of the California State university system, where fees have increased by over 250 percent since 2002. In May, almost 800 teachers and their supporters organized by the California Teachers Association rallied in Sacramento and marched to the state capitol to demand adequate funding for the schools. There were protests, rallies, teacher sit-ins and grade-ins, and town halls in cities around the state as part of a statewide "State of Emergency" week of action launched by the CTA, the California PTA, and a coalition of unions and parent organizations. Demonstrations at the capitol and around the state continued for over a week. Some 26 union members, including the state president of CTA, were arrested for placing themselves outside of Republican legislators' offices and refusing to leave the building while demanding that the Republicans vote for a budget that reduces cuts to public schools. The week of emergency actions culminated in rallies by thousands of teachers and their supporters at five locations around the state, including the capitol.

"We are living in a state of emergency," said David A. Sanchez, president of the 325,000-member California Teachers Association, prior to his arrest. "Educators, parents and community leaders are fighting back against state budget cuts that are decimating our schools, public safety and health care services. To protect essential public services, the Legislature must finish the job of resolving the state budget crisis by extending current tax rates legislatively. Time is running out for our students and our communities." ◘

Duane Campbell is a professor (emeritus) of bilingual-multicultural education at California State University Sacramento and the chair of Sacramento DSA. His most recent book is Choosing Democracy: A Practical Guide to Multicultural Education. *(4th. edition, Allyn and Bacon). He blogs on politics and education issues at www.choosingdemocracy.blogspot.com.*

The Fight for Higher Education in NJ

By Alan Stowers

Students in New Jersey are leading the charge against neoliberal austerity measures that threaten public higher education. They are demanding that all of the state's citizens have access to quality and adequately funded higher education. Continued and enhanced organization along this line is imperative if New Jersey's citizens are to hold on to their standard of living and provide a fair chance for all New Jerseyans to prosper.

Chris Christie, the state's deeply reactionary Republican governor, has perfected the art of double talk. He speaks of shared sacrifice, yet consistently attempts to solve the state's fiscal crises on backs of the working class and the poor. Specifically, his cuts and lack of support for higher education have unleashed a broad-based defense of higher education by student leaders and activists from Mahwah to Glassboro.

Gov. Christie cut the state's higher education budget by $173 million dollars in his first year in office. He also cut $820 million from public K-12 education and $445 million in aid to municipalities while cutting taxes for households with annual incomes of $450,000 and up. College and university students around the state have not laid down in the face of this neoliberal assault. Ad-hoc coalitions were formed among a number of New Jersey colleges for days of action and campaigns. Most recently, a recently formed coalition of student activists at public colleges and universities called New Jersey United Students (NJUS) has banded together to fight for New Jerseyans' right to education. April 13 marked a statewide day of action, which ended up becoming a national day of action as students in California, Michigan, and other states marched and demonstrated as well. NJUS has been engaging with and putting pressure on the political system on multiple levels – meeting with dozens of state representatives and lobbying at the state capitol in Trenton, grassroots teach-ins on campuses throughout the state, marches, demonstrations, and sit-ins.

The most recent and dramatic student action occurred on the main Rutgers University campus in New Brunswick, where a dozen activists occupied the university's administration building for nearly two days. The students demanded three student seats on the university's Board of Governors, a tuition freeze, better conditions for campus workers, and removal of a transcript fee. They were cheered on by many fellow students at Rutgers and from other universities, who pitched several tents and spoke to the press during the occupation. These bold students are demanding the right to participate in decision-making, a greater prioritization of higher education as a public good, and respect and support from the governor and the state legislature.

While students at Rutgers led the charge on April 13, additional actions against higher education cuts occurred across the state. Students at William Paterson University (WPU) in Wayne held a day of alternative education, teach-ins, workshops, presentations and networking opportunities with community groups. Every other campus with a NJUS presence did something as well, from educational work, to demonstrations, to phone banking and letter writing to state lawmakers.

On May 18 WPU student organizers made headlines as they demonstrated against Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno, who was this year's commencement speaker. Hundreds of graduates, along with some family and friends in the crowds, turned their backs to the Lt. Gov. for the entirety of her speech. Many more in the audience booed and jeered Guadagno, who left the ceremony right after she concluded her speech.

The Young Democratic Socialists (YDS) chapter at WPU, which is a founding affiliate of NJUS, has been instrumental in organizing the resistance at WPU along with some members of the WPU Student Government Association. YDS has been successful in linking students' immediate self-interest in restoring adequate funding for higher education with a systemic analysis that places the cuts in their broader context – the decades-long neoliberal assault on public education and the welfare state generally. WPU YDS was pivotal to the student resistance before NJUS came on the scene, creating the NJ March 4 group in 2010 with students from New Jersey City University (NJCU) and Hudson County College. Students held large rallies at WPU and NJCU on March 4 and October 7 last year. The chapter also helped to found the short-lived Take Back Trenton Coalition, with two former chapter presidents serving as the co-chairs. The coalition brought together various student organizations, community groups, and unions, which led to two large rallies in Trenton last May. ◘

Alan Stowers is an undergraduate student at William Paterson University of New Jersey double majoring in psychology and philosophy. He is also an active YDS member and a writing tutor at WPU.

Correction: the last issue of the *Democratic Left* was labeled Vol. 27, No. 4; in actuality it was Volume 38 #4. *Democratic Left* regrets the error.

The Assault on CUNY Adjuncts

By Jason Schulman

Being an adjunct employee in the City University of New York (CUNY) system has become ever more difficult. Adjuncts at CUNY – the majority of those who teach – currently earn about half of the standard recommended by the Modern Language Association, which calls for "a salary range of $6,000 to $8,500 per course section, with fringe benefits and cost-of-living increases, as reasonable minimum compensation for part-time faculty members." At the same time, ever-expanding class sizes have increased the teaching burden while – despite adjuncts' best efforts – lowering the amount of attention that students receive.

Over the last several months contingent faculty have seen their courses cut – or their jobs cut entirely – in departments at a range of CUNY campuses. The "first shot" was when adjuncts in the City College of New York English department learned that they could expect no more than one class apiece. Soon, adjuncts across CUNY were losing courses, income, and often even their health insurance. Perhaps the most startling situation occurred at Baruch College, where the administration pushed a plan for new "jumbo" classes in a number of required lower-level liberal arts courses, speeding up the workload while eliminating large numbers of adjunct jobs. Shockingly, it was proposed that class sizes in the English Department's "Great Works" program be increased from a maximum of 34 students per course to a new limit of 110! The intent was clearly for budgetary constraints to be offloaded onto the backs of contingent faculty.

Thankfully, as a result of intensive organizing by adjuncts and vocal opposition to the jumbo class/adjunct layoff plan by a number of full-time faculty, the Baruch administration partially retreated. The "jumbo" attack on the "Great Works" program has reportedly been shelved, at least for the next two semesters. That said, apparently class sizes in some courses will be increased from 28 to 31 students and fewer sections of ENG 2150, a required English composition class, will be offered. Furthermore, the total adjunct budget will likely be cut.

For proof that adjuncts' lack of job security is also an academic freedom issue, one need only look at the case of Kristofer Peterson-Overton. Scheduled to teach a seminar on Middle East politics at Brooklyn College, his appointment was rescinded days after Dov Hikind, an ultra-Zionist Brooklyn assemblyman, wrote the administration to denounce the ostensibly "slanted" political content of the seminar's assigned writings because he deemed them too critical of Israel. A great outpouring of solidarity and counter-pressure against the administration's decision was able to win Petersen-Overton his job back, but as Overton himself has said, "the perpetuation of a two-tier labor system means that, in practice, adjuncts lack all institutional protection. This threat is intimately tied up with the rapid corporatization of the university system and the elimination of tenure. Thus, any defense of public education requires a strong position on all these issues." ◘

Jason Schulman is on the editorial boards of Democratic Left *and* New Politics. *He is active in New York City DSA and teaches political science courses at Lehman College in the Bronx.*

Fighting SB5 in Ohio

By Simone Morgen

It has been several weeks since petitioning for a referendum to overturn SB5, a new state law that severely restricts public workers' collective bargaining rights in Ohio, began. Petitions now cover the state like a blanket. Anti-SB5 trainings have attracted both union and non-union participants. Curiously, the reaction on Ohio's university and college campuses has been rather muted thus far. Tenured and tenure-track faculty, for the most part, have not been involved in the fightback. Graduate employee students are not unionized, though they have been attempting to unionize Ohio State University (OSU) for some time (they are currently forbidden to do so under Ohio law) and have affiliated with the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT). As of June 29th, the "People's Parade" of SB5 opponents, reported to number over 6,000, marched up Broad Street to deliver 1,298,301 signatures to the Secretary of State, approximately five times the 231,149 valid signatures required to put the repeal issue on the November ballot.

There was a Student Week of Action at OSU in the third week of April, with rallies, lectures, teach-ins and a tent city. A letter was sent to the President, protesting the rise in tuition caps and planned transformation of OSU into a "charter" university, and supporting Sodexo food service workers. Many student groups participated in the first rally against recently elected Republican Gov. John Kasich back in January and an anti-SB5 teach-in on May 20 at Otterbein University, a private school in a Columbus suburb. On May 23 United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) planned another support action for the Sodexo workers, and on that day nine people, including seven OSU students, were arrested when they refused to disband a protest at the President's office. They were charged with criminal trespassing, and a Georgia

State University student was charged with resisting arrest. About 50 students and community members staged the sit-in, following a rally and march to protest Ohio State's $10 million deal with the French food-service operator, demanding that they end its contract due to human rights violations on the campus and elsewhere. Also, a new local of USUncut organized two protests in front of Verizon and Fedex and participated in a May 17 action at the shareholder meeting of JPMorgan Chase which drew about 900 people. These efforts were coordinated by National People's Action, with extensive endorsements, including the Columbus DSA local.

Some of the worst aspects of Gov. Kasich's program are not in SB5 but in his proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which cuts aid to both higher education and public elementary schools. The governor is also enamored with privatization, funneling money to charter schools despite their generally poor performance. Some think the changes in the budget are designed to benefit a company called White Hat Management, which operates many poorly performing charter schools and is a large Republican campaign donor. Relatedly, the Ohio Education Association union says that nearly 3,800 teacher and support staff jobs in Ohio won't be filled next year through layoffs, retirements or resignations, and more cuts are expected. Some projected layoffs are already taking place due to expected budget cuts. Gov. Kasich has also proposed charter universities, which would receive less state money in return for less regulation. Opponents fear a swift increase in tuition following from less state aid for public colleges.

Kasich also plans to privatize many functions of the Department of Development by creation of a new non-profit, funded partly by funds from the Division of Liquor Control; he would also like to sell and/or privatize some of the state's prisons. Evoking right-wing faith in private ownership, he speaks of "moving at the speed of business." ◘

Simone Morgen is chair of Democratic Socialists of Central Ohio, and a long-time volunteer and activist with Jobs with Justice and numerous other groups, including more recently USUncut and immigrant support groups.

Stop Digging: The Case Against Jobs

By Peter Frase

Much of the left has, mostly without debating it, coalesced around "jobs" as a unifying political demand. The motivation for this is clear: one of the biggest problems the country faces is that there are 20 million people who are unsuccessfully seeking full time employment. But while it may seem obvious that the solution to this problem is to create millions of new jobs, this is not in fact the only possible solution – and there are major drawbacks to a single-minded focus on increasing employment. For one thing, it may not be feasible to create that many new jobs. Moreover, it's equally debatable whether, from a socialist perspective, it is desirable to create these jobs even if it is possible.

We should differentiate three separate reasons why it might be desirable to create jobs. One is that a job provides a source of income: we often talk about the need to create jobs when what we really mean is that people need income. Most of the unemployed don't actually want jobs – that is, they don't just want a place to show up every day and be told what to do. The real problem these people have is not that they need jobs, but that they need money. We've just been trained to think that the only way to solve this problem is to get people jobs.

A second argument for creating jobs, and not just handing checks to people, is that having a job gives a person a greater sense of self-worth than getting a handout. To the extent that this is true, however, it's largely because we, as a society, treat wage labor as though it is a unique source of dignity and worth. The left has historically perpetuated this view, but we should be challenging it. We should point out that there is a lot of socially valuable work that is not done for pay. The biggest category of such work, as feminists have long pointed out, is household labor and the care of children and elders. But today we are seeing the growth of other categories of valuable unpaid work, in everything from community gardens to Wikipedia.

This is not to say that all of the socially necessary labor of society could be performed by volunteers. The third reason to create jobs is that some useful things won't get done unless someone is paid to do them. But it's difficult to make the case that there are enough socially necessary tasks out there to make up our job shortfall and also replace the destructive jobs that we need to eliminate.

Some argue that if we could build the manufacturing sector and start "making things" in America again, we could solve our unemployment problem. The reality is that we already make plenty of things, and the decline of manufacturing jobs is due more to technology than to off-shoring. The U.S. economy produces more physical output now than at any time in American history, but with fewer workers.

Public works are another of the usual suspects. Our infrastructure is indeed in a pretty sorry state, but repairing bridges is not going to create 20 million jobs – and in any case, it's a short-term fix, since eventually we'll clear out the backlog of neglected infrastructure projects. Then what?

Finally there is the call for "green jobs", based on the laudable idea that we need to put lots of people to work moving us away from our dependence on fossil fuels. This may be a source of some new jobs, like people making

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solar panels or weatherizing buildings. But the more common pattern is that old jobs are turning into different, greener jobs. The construction worker is now a green construction worker, and the corporate lawyer is now a corporate environmental lawyer, and so on. These are positive changes – but they don't create new jobs.

On top of all this, many of the jobs people are currently paid for are socially destructive: forget job creation, we need to do more job killing. Cutting the military budget, reining in the financial sector, and dismantling the prison-industrial complex will destroy many jobs. So, too, would a single payer national health care system; the Republican attacks on Obama's "job-killing" health care law were lies, but only because Obama's plan is so inadequate. As long as the left remains fixated on more wage labor as the solution to our problems, we'll always be vulnerable to the argument that the socially beneficial changes we want will "kill jobs."

What, then, should the left support, if not more jobs? Shortening the work week disappeared from labor's agenda after World War II, and we need to bring it back. We should also make unemployment benefits more generous in order to ease the pain of joblessness. Ultimately, though, we need to get more radical than that, and move away from tightly linking jobs and income. To reiterate, the real problem of the unemployed isn't their lack of jobs, it's their lack of money. That's why some on the left are coming around to the idea of just giving people money: a guaranteed minimum income, which everyone would be entitled to independent of work.

The objections to these ideas are typically: "how do we pay for it?" and "how do we achieve it?" Finding the money shouldn't be a problem where the will of a powerful political coalition is present – the richest country in the history of the world can guarantee a decent standard of living for everyone. But building that political coalition is a harder question. The first step is to admit that the current consensus around job-creation is unworkable, and not really any more "realistic" than the ideas I've just proposed. The next step is to highlight existing proposals that are being ignored because of the obsession with job creation. For example, Congressman John Conyers recently proposed legislation to subsidize employers that reduce employee hours, a policy that has been effective in Germany. This is an inadequate policy in many ways, but it's still a more useful focus than just obsessing about how to create new jobs.

John Maynard Keynes famously observed that "If the Treasury were to fill old bottles with banknotes, bury them at suitable depths ... and leave it to private enterprise on well-tried principles of laissez-faire to dig the notes up again ... there need be no more unemployment". One of the things that ought to distinguish socialists from liberals is that we think it's possible to do better than this. Today, it seems that hole-digging has come to occupy a central place in the imagination of the left. But socialism should be about freeing people from wage labor, rather than imprisoning them in lives of useless toil. ◘

Peter Frase is a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at the City University of New York Graduate Center. He was active in YDS while an undergraduate at the University of Chicago and is now a member of the executive committee of the New York City local of DSA.

For a different perspective on the jobs question see Bill Barclay, "Jobs and the Economic Crisis," Democratic Left, *Winter 2010, p. 9-12.*

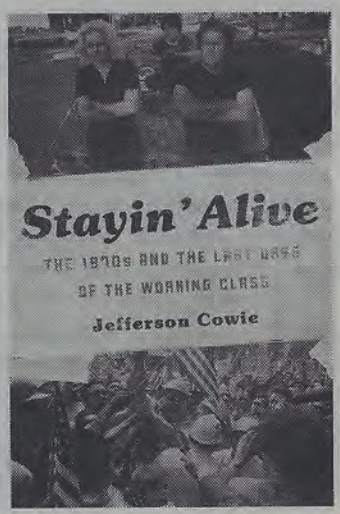
We invite responses from our readers.

The Long Exception: An Interview With Jefferson Cowie

Interview by Chris Maisano

Jefferson Cowie is a teacher, historian, and writer at Cornell University. As a social and political historian, his work focuses primarily on how class, inequality, and work shape American politics and culture. Professor Cowie was gracious enough to conduct an email interview with the *Democratic Left* about his great new book *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, the life and death of the New Deal order, and the prospects for reconstructing the labor movement in tough times.

Democratic Left: Recently, you have argued (with your colleague Nick Salvatore) that the New Deal and the postwar order constitutes a "long exception" in U.S. history and that we on the left shouldn't be framing our demands in terms of a "new New Deal." Why?



Jefferson Cowie: We argue that the New Deal rose out of pretty extraordinary circumstances and, therefore, makes a bad political metaphor for the future. It does not make me happy to argue that the biggest social democratic achievements in American history were an aberration, but I think it's right.

Not only did FDR take office three and a

half years into an ever-deepening crisis with a Congress ready to pass anything that came its way, but a host of other issues were in play. Immigration, largely suspended in 1924, no longer played its divisive role in American politics; religious fundamentalism had gone underground since Scopes; and individualism was at bay. When we look at race, one of the other key factors in American working-class history, we can still see that the price of every piece of New Deal legislation was the exclusion of many African-Americans, making this issue less threatening than a truly integrated progressive politics.

Even then, FDR's first round of reforms largely failed, and it wasn't until 1935-1937 that everything we associate with the New Deal took root: the National Labor Relations Act, Social Security, Fair Labor Standards Act, and, of course, the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). We often forget how tenuous it was even then. The CIO and the New Deal Democrats were on the ropes in the late thirties. It then took the war to solidify the gains of the union uprising. Today, it's impossible to get anything through Congress, let alone survive trials like the 1930s.

The coalitions and political achievements remained, casting a long political shadow, until the seventies when they broke apart. But it's pretty remarkable how well the system worked when it worked – at least for the white, male, industrial working class. Yet it was inherently fragile. Graphing a variety of indicators in the postwar era creates an exceptional hump or trough: inequality goes down, then up; union density goes up then down; value of the minimum wage goes up then down, etc. By the seventies, religion was back, individualism was back, race was back, immigration was back. We now live in the new Gilded Age, it is often said, which suggests connections to a much darker past than the New Deal era.

So, we're on our own to figure out a way out of this mess. I don't think it's a matter of reinventing everything, but we need our own story, our own counter-narrative to what's going on. We can't just look to some stale old story from 75 years ago.

DL: Your latest book tells the story of what we might call, riffing on E.P. Thompson, the unmaking of the U.S. working class during the 1970s. What makes the seventies so important? And who exactly was part of that working class anyway?

JC: Everything that was built in the thirties and forties – the policies, the social architecture, the institutions, the way of making sense of the world – were falling apart. In the confusion, in rushed the power of capital, which established its counter-revolution to the New Deal. What's interesting is, if we see class as a "happening" rather than a "thing" as Thompson argued, the working class failed

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to happen. Rather than the emergence of a new identity out of the maelstrom, one that could meld the new social movements of the sixties with the class movements of the thirties, we see the end of both an idea and an ideal. Today, there is no longer a countervailing identity, let alone a movement, that can provide a different kind of stakeholder besides finance capital. That's the story of the seventies– the foundation of our own time.

DL: Michael Harrington [the founder of Democratic Socialists of America/Young Democratic Socialists] figures largely in your account of the seventies. This interested me because as one of the intellectual forces behind the War on Poverty, he tends to be strictly associated with the sixties in modern U.S. historiography. What is it about Harrington that makes him so important to our understanding of the decade?

JC: We all know the Michael Harrington of *The Other America*, but the seventies Harrington reveals a very complex intellectual struggling with a world he was not expecting. He could see the creeping rise of the right, but continued to pursue an optimistic agenda despite his own read on the situation. His observations tended to be very keen and complex, and I often followed his leads when I was writing the book. I also learned a lot about remaining positive, but not unrealistically so, about prospects for social change in hard times as I watched Harrington confront the decade. I even named one of my chapters, "A Collective Sadness" after a brilliant, melancholy, essay he wrote for *Dissent* in 1974.

A few examples stand out. He put a lot of energy into the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act, but was also pretty critical of its prospects (he wrote a piece called "Two Cheers for Socialism" in *Harper's* that was very revealing). Unlike many leftists at the time, he understood that the left depended upon liberalism being strong in order to build upon it. Others saw it differently, operating from the idea that if activists tore down liberalism then people would move to the "true" left. Wrong! Similarly, he realized the left had made a mistake by thinking it could "liberate" people from traditional crutches like nationalism, God, flag and the like. Yet they failed to put another story in their place besides vague ideas of "freedom." The negative or "anti" positions of the New Left had been stronger than the positive alternative vision it put forth. He believed this created a space for the right rather than the left by the early eighties.

DL: Many people on the broad left are fairly uncritical of the U.S. labor movement, and focus almost exclusively on the external factors that have helped to drive union decline – deindustrialization, globalization, technological development, employer opposition, the broken labor law regime – the list goes on. But you argue that internal flaws within the movement itself have been just as important, and perhaps more important, as the external factors. What were they? How did they undermine the strength of the labor movement?

JC: The level of complacency among what C.Wright Mills called "the new men of power" in the postwar era was extraordinary. They thought the game was over, that they had won a new seat at the table and would forever be respected. Yet as I suggested earlier, they were in a temporary and shaky class truce, not the end of the fight. Labor missed all of the political energies of the sixties rather than tapping into it. By the early seventies, there was so much rank-and-file energy but labor leaders fought against rather than alongside them. What wouldn't the unions do for that kind of energy now? Then, however, the movements appeared to upset the apple cart of postwar labor relations. In fact, however, it was the last great chance for a reformation. Organized labor has always had a minimal place in American life as compared to other advanced countries, of course, but it simply doesn't have to be this bad.

DL: In your book and in your recent conversation with *Salon's* Joan Walsh, you argued that the labor movement needs to move away from being so focused on collective bargaining and move toward a more universal politics that embraces a much wider constituency than just its members. But it seems difficult to imagine, however, most currently existing unions giving up the things that allow them to provide current and potential members the "union premium." Take that away, and you take away most unions' reason for existing. Do you think there's any possibility this shift toward universalism can come from within the labor movement as we know it, or is it going to require the foundation of an entirely new set of institutions and organizations founded on a different basis?

JC: Labor, warts and all, has been the greatest advocate for social reform. Yet today we are in a sort of pretzel logic situation. We can't win health care without union strength, but union strength often means a private welfare state for union members. A major advance in union organizing is unlikely, but we can't move forward without it.

What I'm looking for, though, is a new narrative, a new story, new metaphors for understanding our situation. In the postmodern age, nothing is the same as it was, so why is the left looking at things through the same set of lenses? The right has come up with its own stories about god, flag, whiteness, individualism, and patriotism. There's a lot of suspect logic in all of it, but they win the discussion because they own the story. The left has no other story besides either extreme wonkishness or abstract notions of justice. Neither of those build the needed bridges between individuals and a large sense of what we could be as a people. In all of my work, I'm trying to clear the decks of all of the leftover intellectual baggage in order to try to understand that set of problems more completely. □

Marx Was Right...Again!

By Michael Hirsch

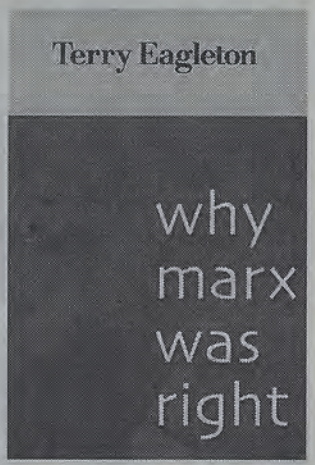
Review of Terry Eagleton, Why Marx was Right *(Yale University Press, 2011), $25.00*

At a time when plutocracy goes beyond a description of the American upper class to a prescription proffered by hired-gun editorialists and corporate flacks, or when the barely centrist Barack Obama is named a DSA flunky or when the parlous international economic order can be safely described as Greek socialists bearing debts, it's time for the left to get back to basics. There's no better way to start than by tackling Terry Eagleton's engaging and pitch-perfect new book *Why Marx was Right.*

But why another book on Marx? Writing in Britain's *The New Reasoner*, the estimable predecessor to *New Left Review*, historian Eric Hobsbawm claimed with some justification way back in 1957 that everything worth saying pro and con regarding Marx had already been said both by his Victorian critics and his contemporary defenders, only to have the cycle repeat when some social or economic crisis occurred or some plucky researcher unearthed the old arguments. Among the reasons Hobsbawm gives for the Marx-Contra-Marx debate's periodic resurfacing, much like Marx's Old Mole, is a political one:

"Ideas do not become forces until they seize the masses and this, as advertising agents have recognized, requires much repetition, not to say incantation. Those of us who think Marx a great man and his teachings politically desirable must keep on shouting it from the rooftops, including the modest ones of *The New Reasoner*. Those who are opposed to his ideas must do the same. It does not matter that it has all been said before, in some instances by ourselves."

Eagleton, the doyen of British literary scholars, doesn't incant. His is a straightforward corrective, chapter by chapter, to a garbage pail of fantasies routinely trotted out to traduce Marxism – namely, that it fetishizes industrial workers, presaged Stalinist tyranny, is utopian in the face of a rapacious human nature, reduces human existence to a soulless economic determinism and individuals to worker ants, obsesses about class conflict when social mobility and cooperation are paramount and easily obtainable, and discounts any meaningful social change that isn't accompanied by revolutionary violence. To all this prattle – Eagleton calls them a series of "travesties" – the author does a smashing job of demonstrating that Marxism is hardly past its sell-by date but is in fact an irreplaceable tool for describing the death's head that is Capital and pinpointing the social forces that can move the world from "the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom." Or as Eagleton puts it, away from "the dreary cycles of class society" to one bent not on inventing ever more human "needs" but on truly fulfilling them. This review will just touch on some of the book's contributions to the cause of clarity.



For Marx, scarcity is the real brake on individual creativity. In words reflecting Bertolt Brecht's own precept, "First bread, then ethics," Eagleton argues that "you cannot be free to become what you want when you are starving, sorely oppressed or stunted in your moral growth by a life of endless drudgery." That's also a society in which "virtue, so to speak, is left to the vagaries of individual character" or as an occasional corollary of wealth, where "the free development of the few is bought at the cost of the shackling of the many."

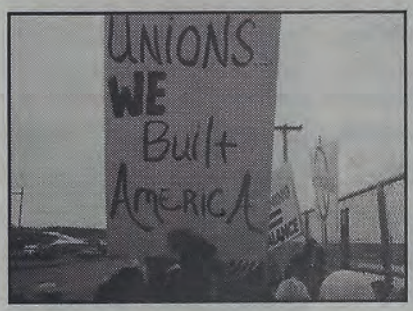
Eagleton is also on point in warning that Marxism offers no blueprint for the good society, but only "a feasible extrapolation from the present." Marxism's only claim is understanding Capital's Janus face: its genius and possibilities confounded by its limits and the depredations, along with its "gravediggers," the social forces capitalism itself creates that would democratize social as well as political life.

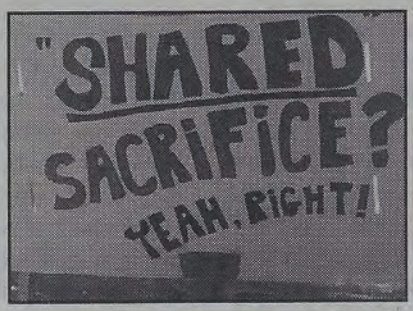
Unlike the words of "The Internationale," there is no "final conflict" for Marx, just as there is no end to history for today's left. In a socialist world, there would indeed be "plenty of problems, a host of conflicts and a number of irreparable tragedies. There would be child murders, road accidents, wretchedly bad novels, lethal jealousies, overweening ambitions, tasteless trousers and inconsolable grief. There would also be some cleaning of the latrines."

So Marx didn't flatter himself to think he could anticipate the better society, though he did think that socialism meant deepening democracy and allowing for greater diversity, and not for a dreary uniformity. A better society? Sure. One with better problems? Probably so. Certainly those not caused by class or enforced scarcity. As Isaac Deutscher once remarked to an audience at the original Socialist Scholars Conference when asked if psychoanalysis would still be practiced under socialism, he responded that he couldn't say for sure. All he could conclude was that "socialist man would make a better patient." ◘

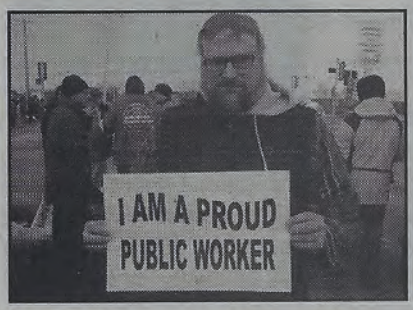
Michael Hirsch is a New York-based labor journalist, a member of the New York City DSA local and an editorial board member of New Politics *and* Democratic Left

Locals in Action





Minneapolis, MN



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Ithaca, NY

Steve Oliver

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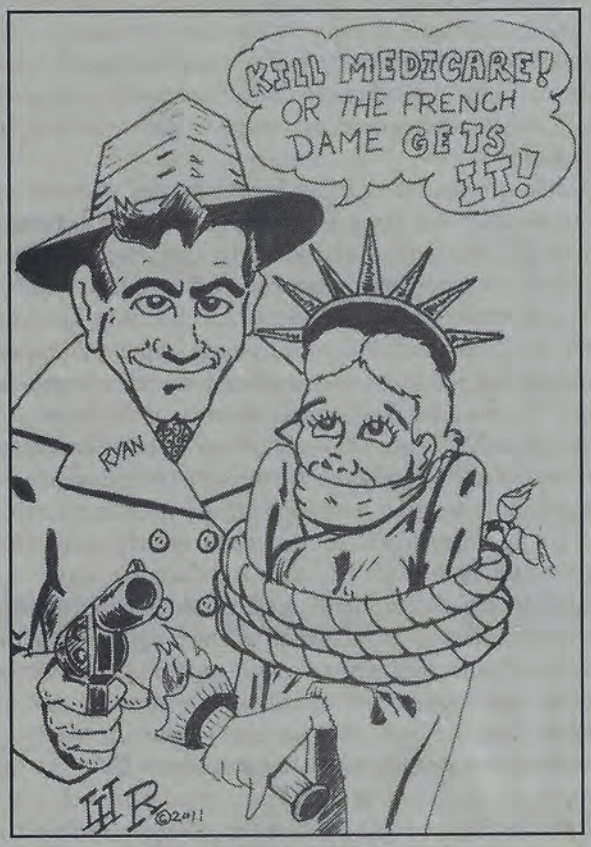
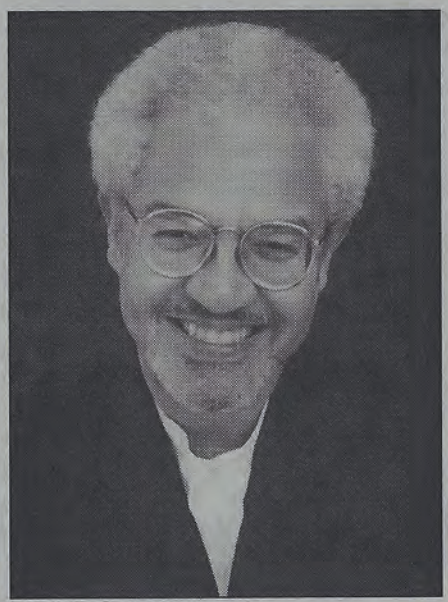


GOP Debt Threat
by Walter Reeves



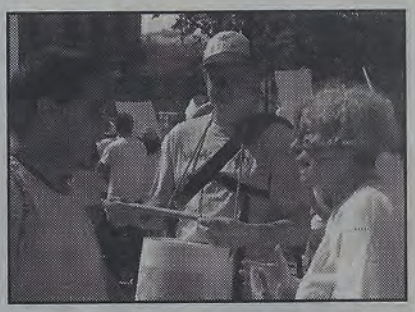
Manning Marable
May 13, 1950 -
April 1, 2011

Locals in Action



New York, NY





Atlanta, GA

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Beginning as *Michael Harrington's Newsletter of the Democratic Left*, then just the *Newsletter of the Democratic Left*, and finally *Democratic Left*, the magazine has been both an independent voice for the broad left and the magazine that DSA members get four times a year.

We are asking our friends to join our celebration of half a lifetime's work by making special contributions to support the magazine. For just a dollar or two or five or ten for each year of our publication, or just a hundred bucks, your name can appear in the pages of *Democratic Left*. And to make sure we receive the maximum bang for your buck, this campaign will only be conducted on line and in the pages of *Democratic Left*, saving us the cost of printing, postage and phone calls. Every contributor to this campaign will be listed in *Democratic Left* in the first issue published after we receive his/her contribution. The next issue will be published in September, but don't wait too long or you will have to wait until the December issue to see your name in *Democratic Left*; in order to publish your name in the next issue we need to receive your contribution by this August 15.

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Thank you in advance for your consideration and support.

In solidarity

Frank Llewellyn

National Director

Young Democratic Socialists Chapter Reports

This academic year, Young Democratic Socialists (YDS) chapters have been focused on fighting back against the neoliberal push for budget cuts in state legislatures across the country. From New Jersey to Califorina, chapters have been organizing students to stand up to the assault and fight back. Here are a few examples of YDS chapter activities this spring.

William Paterson University (New Jersey): The William Patterson University chapter has been focused on resisting the deep spending cuts to core public services like higher education pursued by Republican Gov. Chris Christie. In coalition with student groups at campuses across the state, they have created New Jersey United Students, a state-wide student organization to coordinate protests and resistance against Christie's cuts. In each of the last two years, they have held a number of high-profile actions, including mass walkouts, at their school to draw the public's attention to the dire situation confronting students in New Jersey's public colleges and universites.

The College of Wooster (Ohio): The College of Wooster YDS chapter spent this spring focusing on building the fightback against the savage austerity agenda of recently elected Republican Gov. John Kasich. Much like Wisconsin, Ohio adopted a bill known as SB5 that will severely limit collective bargaining rights for state employees. They have been working with a local coalition of progressive groups on the Repeal SB 5 campaign. They have also held several outreach events including a successful talk by the YDS national Youth Organizer, Andrew Porter.

Pennsylvania State University: Penn State YDS has focused on resisting the rising cost of public higher education in Pennsylvania. Penn State YDS held several protests at the school this academic year. The first was a rally in front of the administration building that called on the administration to push Gov. Kasich and state legislators to adequately fund higher education. The second was a two-day occupation of the student union called Corbettville that highlighted the destructiveness of recently elected Republican Gov. Tom Corbett's budget. The students also participated in a Lobby Day at the state capitol and spoke to state legislators about rising tuition and student debt. ◘