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Building a New Generation of Socialists; Revitalizing Socialist Strategy

By Maria Svart, DSA national director

The 2013 DSA convention, held in Emeryville, Calif. from October 25-27, brought together socialists from across the country to rejuvenate DSA's organizing capacity and reorient our strategy. Neoliberal capitalism's attack on unions and the social safety net has weakened working people and the public programs we demanded and won from government during the New Deal. But the dramatic rise in inequality caused by bipartisan policies of austerity and upward income redistribution has given rise to grassroots resistance by low-wage workers, immigrants, and indebted former college students. Convention sessions focused on how socialists can strategically help build these new movements. The convention also marked the beginning of a generational transformation within DSA, as those under the age of 35 constituted almost one-third of the 100 attendees.

The Friday plenary session on "Understanding Power and Oppression" introduced a series of caucuses in which delegates reflected on issues of class, gender, age, race, and sexual orientation. To accelerate the recruitment of younger members, convention delegates committed to expanding DSA's "Drop Student Debt" campaign. The campaign works for a short-term alleviation of the student debt burden through an expansion of the Obama administration's Income Based Repayment program, while raising the long-term transformative goal of free and universal higher education. DSA local chapters using the campaign have increased their visibility and recruited younger members into their activist core.

The convention also began a two-year, organization-wide grassroots strategy discussion designed to build on DSA's historic strengths while reshaping our politics so as to respond to 21st century neoliberalism. Introductory talks by me, DSA Honorary Co-Chair Gus Newport, and National Nurses Union Political Director Michael Lighty (who served as DSA national director from 1990-1993) set the context for the "strategy reboot." I addressed the need for the socialist movement to root itself among a young generation that is skeptical about capitalism. Newport, the former mayor of Berkeley, Calif., and a veteran civil rights activist, urged socialists to join mass struggles against the prison-industrial complex and voter suppression. Lighty argued that neoliberal capitalism's belief that "there is no society, just individuals" yields a politics of austerity and environmental degradation that impoverishes children, guts pensions, and threatens the future of the planet.

DSA National Vice-Chair Joseph Schwartz's Saturday morning plenary address set the stage for small group discussions. He argued that DSA's founding strategy assumed that socialists would be the left wing of a revitalized New Deal coalition grounded in the traditional labor movement.

But since DSA's 1982 founding, the Democratic Party's national leadership has embraced a bipartisan consensus favoring "the four Ds of neoliberalism": deregulation, de-unionization, decreasing taxes on the rich, and defunding social services. Thus, DSA strategy, Schwartz argued, has to both defeat the anti-democratic far right and build ties between a weakened labor movement and movements of the dispossessed: immigrants, low-wage workers, victims of the prison-industrial complex, and indebted recent college graduates. Finally, Schwartz held, DSA should be more militant in its critique of capitalist injustice, while offering a visible socialist alternative.



Maria Svart chats with delegates.

The East Bay DSA chapter hosted a packed house of delegates and Bay Area supporters for a public event featuring rousing speeches by *Nation* writer John Nichols, LeftRoots co-founder Steve Williams, and Catherine Tactaquin, executive director of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (see excerpts from and links to videos of their speeches beginning on page 3 and online at www.dsaua.org/convention_2013_report).

Author, photographer, and immigrant rights activist David Bacon illustrated the grim results of global capitalism run amok with his moving presentation and slideshow at the convention banquet. Remarks by Tom Hayden, the other banquet keynote speaker and veteran social-change activist, were well-received and are excerpted on page 4.

Our convention affirmed that to take on the capitalist oligarchy, DSA chapters must be rooted in their local grassroots resistance movements. Only by building an international movement that prioritizes human and labor rights over the accumulation of profit can we accomplish that task. Building DSA at the local and national level, delegates affirmed, will contribute to this project of a lifetime. ❖

From the Convention: a Taste of the Speeches

For videos of speeches, go to www.dsausa.org/convention_2013_report

JOHN NICHOLS

John Nichols, the Washington, DC correspondent for The Nation, writes The Beat, a blog, and is cofounder of Free Press and author of many books, including The S-Word.



John Nichols

“A. Philip Randolph was a socialist. Bayard Rustin was a social democrat. Others who were involved [in the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom] had been socialists or social democrats or radicals or progressives from different groupings, and the fact of the matter is, John Kennedy and even Lyndon Johnson accepted them into the White House and said

“You’ve got ideas.”. . . Ideas of economic and social justice were once invited into our political discourse. Now, at every turn, they are pushed out. And when a crisis occurs, the social democratic proposal to repair it is the first one taken off the table. . .

“Concentrated economic power knows that they’re on the losing end of the discourse. The only way that they keep themselves in the game is by flooding the messaging and the politics of this country with an absolute lie. The absolute lie is that America is broke, that America doesn’t have the resources to provide school lunch programs

or Women, Infants and Children nutrition programs or maintain the basic infrastructure of civil society, but somehow we have the money to go to war in Syria, or we have the money to bail out a bank. That lie is starting to fray at the edges. And activists who are willing to step up and speak truth to power now have an opening that they have never had in my lifetime.”

STEVE WILLIAMS

Steve Williams is a long-time community organizer in San Francisco and the cofounder and executive director (1997-2012) of People Organized to Win Employment Rights (POWER). He recently completed a listening project with N’Tanya Lee in which they interviewed 150 organizers and activists from around the country. Williams now coordinates Left Roots, a national organization of leftists engaged in various social movements.



Steve Williams

“I would say that there is a particular task for leftists at this particular moment that is similar to but distinct from the task of progressives, those who are engaged in mass organizations. And I would say that there are two tasks that leftists at this particular moment have to take up. The first is very clearly articulating what is

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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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Cover pictures by Stuart Elliott and Reid Jenkins

our vision of a better world. I think that's a particular role and responsibility of the Left, and I think that we need to take that up and take it seriously . . .

"The second aspect I think of our tasks is to engage in the fights. Ultimately, as leftists we have to think about the task of shifting the balance of power. And that's a task that doesn't necessarily happen on the scoreboard of policy legislation and electoral victories, right now. Some of our fight has to be taking place on the ground, building up the capacity of people in everyday neighborhoods . . . to develop organization and to develop capacity that allows us to be able to exercise the power to be able to construct a very different world . . . I would encourage each and every one of you to take up the project of actively building democratic fighting organizations of people, whether it's fast food workers, domestic workers, undocumented folks, unemployed workers, what have you, but our task at this moment is to develop vision, and develop the capacity to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that are standing in front of us . . ."

CATHERINE TACTAQUIN

Catherine Tactaquin is executive director and cofounder of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights. The daughter of an immigrant farmworker from the Philippines, she was involved for many years in grassroots organizing and advocacy in the Filipino community. A founder and steering committee member of Migrant Rights International (MRI), a global alliance of migrant associations and nongovernmental organizations, she sits on the board of the Poverty, Race and Research Action Council in Washington DC.



Catherine Tactaquin

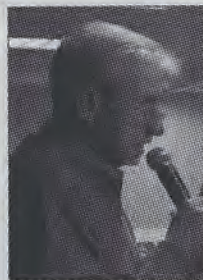
"I think the question of immigration is actually a great window to look through in terms of the task that the Left and I think all progressives have . . . Comprehensive immigration reform basically is a package deal of compromises that was cobbled together, a lot by the leadership of the Democratic Party, based on focus groups on what the bottom line is that the public will support and endorse, and frankly has a lot of bad stuff in it. Unfortunately that's what's on the table now . . .

"So this has been the problem – you know – legislation cannot build a movement. And when your strategy is so tied to the election, it's not an environment which is very useful for us in terms of immigration. We have a long way to go to do the kind of transformative work that's needed to effect real changes that are even minimally possible through Congress, not just on immigration, but on any other issue . . . It's a real limitation to, not just thinking out of the box, but it's a constriction on the kind

of work that needs to be done to build a movement that in fact can be transformative, that can have our own boots on the ground, while at the same time have the capacity of the institutional sophistication and political know-how to move on a scope and scale that we need . . . For those of us who grew up and became active before there was foundation support, where you had to depend on stipends and good old grassroots organizing and fundraising for survival, that's a mystery to a lot of young activists. They're used to being a paid activist; they're used to being part of a non-profit organization, and it's a real limitation. So there are some things that I think we need to break out of."

TOM HAYDEN

Tom Hayden was a leader of 1960s peace, justice, and environmental movements. In 1962 he drafted the "Port Huron Statement," expressing the idealism of the New Left, and cofounded Students for a Democratic Society. He participated in civil rights work in the South and in Newark, N.J. and in efforts to end the Vietnam War. Elected to the Calif. State Legislature in 1982, he served for ten years in the Assembly and eight years in the state Senate. The author of 20 books, including The Tom Hayden Reader, he founded and directs the Peace and Justice Resource Center in Culver City, Calif.



Tom Hayden

"It's quite often that the radicals, including the socialists, do the organizing work and do the consciousness-raising to get the project to the table, to the mainstream, and then are ambivalent or disappointed about the results of their own work, as if they could have done more. . . When you go from the margins to the mainstream, you get caught in the muck of the middle. And you fight the fight as far as you can go, until you achieve all you can achieve. You leave nobody on the battlefield, but you use up all the energy at your disposal, knowing that the final phase will be memory, looking back to see what was achieved and what can be built upon. . .

"I think that's the challenge and the opportunity for democratic socialists, whose tradition has been a long one, an up-and-down one, in which many achievements have been eliminated from our memory. Your work is to revive a tradition, but also restore it to our memory, because if you imagine a society with a political spectrum from right to left that doesn't even include mention of socialism, you've already tilted the spectrum to the right. You've eliminated something which may not be a majority agenda, but something which has a long tradition of impacting society for the better, on issue after issue." ❖

Priorities Resolution for 2013–2015, Passed by the 2013 DSA National Convention

BUILDING THE NEXT LEFT

DSA's main task in the coming two-year period is to develop a plausible democratic socialist vision for social justice in the 21st century. We will challenge the attacks of neoliberal capitalist austerity on the rights and freedoms of citizens and on key government programs. We will elaborate this critique and vision in dialogue with fellow social-movement activists and organizations that oppose neoliberalism and seek a better life for all. A discussion of the changed political terrain and DSA's basic strategic orientation in the coming two years will educate, empower, and grow our current activist core, while equipping DSA with intellectual tools appropriate to this century.

Right-wing assaults on voting rights, reproductive and sexual freedom, and union rights, as well as the sanctioning of vigilante actions and police harassment of communities of color, threaten the very basis of democracy. In addition, the privatization and deregulation of publicly controlled services further aggravate inequality and poverty. To respond to these challenges, DSA will prioritize working with disenfranchised groups that are actively struggling for economic and social justice.

We recommit to activist work around both formal (electoral and legislative) and informal (work-based and community-based) power with a new emphasis on state- and local-level fights, because the Right controls many state and local governments and the next Left is likely to take shape in fights in these arenas.

Thus, over the next two years,

1. DSA will expand our grassroots educational capacity to make democratic socialist ideas accessible and applicable to a wide audience, and clearly communicate their economic and personal benefits. We will develop discussion groups, informational literature, social media, and local events to enable activists to produce critical and practical knowledge for our work and participate in informed and inclusive debate about our strategy.

a. We want DSA members to be critical thinkers, creative communicators, and competent organizers who can infuse education into our activism. To develop a critique and vision in dialogue with fellow activists, we will investigate the processes of neoliberal capitalism, especially in our local situations, as well as the numerous experiments in democratic socialist alternatives from our society and around the world. We will use information about workplace cooperatives, public banks, and participatory budgeting, for example, to educate ourselves and others about practical alternatives to capitalism as embodied in a solidarity economy.

b. We will explore the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity, and other forms of subordination and exclusion and the uses of an intersectional approach to foster a next Left that is accessible, diverse, inclusive, and participatory.

c. We will continue our public education work of Grassroots Economics Training for Understanding and Power (GET UP) and our 50th anniversary project defending the War on Poverty as a partial success whose work remains unfinished.

d. We will reexamine our political and organizational strategy from the ground up, inviting members to use readings and their own experiences as DSA activists to evaluate political conditions and possibilities and contribute fresh ideas and perspectives, for the purpose of producing an updated official political statement at the 2015 Convention.

e. We will commit to producing some DSA materials in both English and Spanish, and other languages where appropriate, to extend the reach as well as content of our educational capacity. This will depend at least initially on the talents of DSA members and friends at the local level.

2. DSA will engage in one unified national campaign, Drop Student Debt. Education is a basic need that should be guaranteed by the government, not a financial instrument with which to generate surplus value. The campaign demands in the short term government lowering of the debt burden facing most college graduates (and often their parents for their own as well as their children's debts), while also advancing the transformative demand for publicly financed, free higher education (and equivalent technical training) as a universal right. Like all bubbles, the student debt bubble endangers our future economic well-being. The campaign also enables DSA locals and YDS chapters to talk politics with younger members of our communities through tabling and petitioning.

a. We call upon President Barack Obama to issue an executive order to expand his administration's income-based 10-year payment plan for retiring student debt. DSA seeks to amend the current Income Based Repayment Plan to allow all borrowers to have the remainder of their student debt forgiven after 10 years. In the current plan, borrowers who work in the public sector (or for a 501c3) for 10 years have their debts forgiven after 10 years, but most borrowers have to wait 20 years for their remaining student debt to be forgiven.

Continued on page 6

b. The project advances a democratic socialist analysis of the student debt crisis as the outgrowth of a “market individual” neoliberal capitalism that curtails social provision and forces individuals to “invest” individually in their own “human capital.”

c. We will seek to connect our campaign to the broader struggles for quality public education for all, for equal access to public higher education regardless of citizenship and immigration status, and for the rights of teachers to organize, bargain, and strike. Like our campaign, all these struggles support education as a human right and a common good, not a privilege or a commodity.

d. By addressing both the long-term burden of student debt and the lifelong need for quality education, the campaign can help DSA become a tri-generational organization composed of growing numbers of under-30 and middle-generation members as well as over-60 members.

3. DSA locals and YDS chapters will be active in the struggles they identify, based upon unique local conditions, to be most helpful to defending democracy and building the popular movements needed to overcome neoliberal capitalist control of our country and world. We will partner with other organizations in issue coalitions whenever feasible to build these social movements that will constitute the next Left. The national office will continue to promote and help coordinate local/chapter involvement in the following issues at whatever capacity possible, given staff and national volunteer resources:

a. We will defend basic civil liberties and democratic rights, such as voting rights, immigrant rights, reproductive rights, and LGBTQ rights, and push for the expansion of rights, especially around government and corporate transparency and individual privacy.

b. We will work to reverse the upward redistribution of income and wealth by supporting low-wage justice and “alternative labor” campaigns; by fighting for full employment; by resisting austerity budget cuts that victimize working people and the poor; by opposing the defunding of Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid; by calling for higher income taxes on high incomes and a financial transactions tax and by fighting for universal health care and relief from foreclosures. We recognize and support the greater involvement of organized labor in working together with other progressive organizations to fight for the interests of the entire working class, whether members of organized bargaining units or not. To

supplement our local campaigns for raising the minimum wage, we support the establishment of a national living wage, defined as the minimum income necessary to meet basic family needs (housing, clothing, nutrition, utilities, transport, healthcare, etc.).

c. We will fight against racism through campaigns against racial profiling, ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council)-derived “Stand Your Ground” laws, and the massive imprisonment of nonviolent youth of color.

d. We will defend the future of our planet and develop a democratic socialist alternative to capitalist exploitation of the environment as well as of people. We will infuse an understanding of climate change into our work, ally with climate and environmental justice activists, and support efforts in our communities to build just and sustainable alternative local economies.

e. In pursuit of a peaceful world as well as a just society, we will press for major cuts in the military budget, a pivot from an aggressive to a truly defensive strategic posture, and conversion from a war to a peace economy, as well as continue our own people-to-people efforts for peace, friendship, and solidarity, such as international work with fellow democratic socialists.

f. To build the next Left we will consider all options from electoral campaigns to nonviolent direct action.

4. Alongside our commitment to a more nimble activist program, which truly recognizes that “all politics is local,” we will expand our organizational capacities.

a. We will continue to strengthen locals. We will encourage them to draw in more under-30 and middle generation members and especially to be supportive of young members. We will encourage locals to work together on a state-wide basis.

b. As a major DSA priority, we will build YDS through financial and social support.

c. We will create a new generation of democratic socialist activists and leaders.

d. We will make fundraising an integral part of our grassroots organizing.

e. We will build upon and expand our social media work.

f. We will upgrade our members’ organizing skills through webinar and other trainings.

g. We will raise funds to increase the organizing capacity of the national office.

h. We will institute conference calls to discuss issues raised in our publication *Democratic Left*, with a priority given to participation by members who do not reside within the boundaries of a DSA local or YDS chapter. ❖

Calling Religious Socialists

If you’re involved with a faith community and would like to be part of a renewal of DSA’s Religion and Socialism Commission, please get in touch with Maxine Phillips: maxine.phillips@gmail.com

AUTHORS

If you’re a DSA member who has had recently or will soon have a book published (2012–2014), please drop us a line so that we can list it. We can’t review all books by our members, but we do want to let our readers know about them. Please send title, publisher, author, and publication date to maxine.phillips@gmail.com by February 10.

PUTTING OUR HEADS TOGETHER: Starting to re-think our strategy

DSA has launched a two-year organization-wide internal strategy discussion to take account of the changes that have occurred since we last updated our major position papers in the 1990s. Below are the opening paragraphs of a Q and A about this process, which introduces a set of initial readings and other information that can be found in full at dsausa.org/strategy_project_overview.

1. *What is an organization-wide strategy discussion?*

It is a comprehensive and unhurried review of DSA's political and organizational strategy. [This process began] prior to the 2013 convention and [will] continue through 2015, resulting in an updated official political statement by the 2015 convention.

2. *Why is this strategy discussion needed, and why now?*

The last such discussion occurred in 1990-1995, culminating in the 1995 convention issuing "Where We Stand" (itself an update of the 1982 DSA founding statement). The 1995 document grew out of years of discussion by locals and among individuals, with viewpoints disseminated in discussion bulletins. In the two succeeding decades, the global political economy, the nature of US politics, and underlying trends in American society have substantially changed. We have maintained many continuities in our political and organizational practices, although these have slowly been altered over time with the development of new communications technologies. A renewed discussion of DSA's basic strategic orientation

in the coming period could both educate and empower our current activist core, while equipping DSA with some intellectual tools appropriate to the present political scene.

3. *Are we proposing to scrap DSA's previous political documents, strategies, and history and start from scratch?*

No. Re-reading and re-evaluating DSA's major statements and examining the four decades of organizational history (including those of predecessor organizations DSOC and NAM) has to be an integral part of the process. DSA's current strengths and weaknesses are rooted in that history. At the same time, we propose to include readings and reflections upon a wide variety of concepts and experiences outside the current DSA ambit. We have much to learn from social movements and political traditions originating in other cultures and other social circles. Any viable Left in this country and in the world at large will have to be built upon the pooled experience and learning of the broadest possible spectrum of people striving for revolutionary and progressive changes.

4. *This sounds pretty ambitious. How do we do it?*

Nothing replaces face-to-face discussions or study circles based on preparatory readings in DSA and YDS local chapters. At the same time, new communications technologies multiply the possibilities for exchanging ideas and interacting with persons too distant to meet with regularly face-to-face. We will put resources in staff and volunteer time to experimenting with webinars, hangouts, etc. ❖

We appreciate these members and friends who supported our 2013 campaign to keep *Democratic Left* strong:

DL Writers

Marcia and Oded Borowski

DL Boosters

Reverend Eugene Birmingham
Ed McConnell
Maxine Phillips and Tom Roderick
Bill Yates

DL Supporters

Louise B. Brown
Judith Gardiner
William Gellermann
Terrence T. Lewis
Jim Middleton
Donald Miller
George A. Misner
Ed Nol, M.D.
Carl H. Schwartz
Jeffrey Tarbox
Evan White and Erica Chahal

Other Contributors

Logan Mitchell
James H. Westfall

We also wish to acknowledge the generous bequest from the estate of Raymond H. Dearden, Jr. Raymond was a faithful member of DSA for over 18 years. We are proud when a member like Raymond chooses to prioritize our organization and our work building a democratic socialist movement when making decisions about how to share his or her estate.

DSA values bequests of all sizes. To learn more about investing in solidarity for the future and putting DSA in your will, contact us at (212) 727-8610 or see www.dsausa.org/bequests.

National Political Committee Members Elected at the 2013 Convention

JARED ABBOTT

Treasurer, Philadelphia DSA, member DSA Strategy Discussion Committee. Active in education, student debt, prison justice, other fights against neoliberalism in Philadelphia. Ph.D. student at Temple University and president of AFT local 6290.

THERESA ALT

On NPC since 1992. Secretary, Ithaca DSA. Community Access Cable TV and community radio producer. Active in Tompkins County Workers' Center and electoral politics. Retired from clerical day job.

DAVID DUHALDE

Treasurer, Boston DSA. Former National Youth Organizer active in DSA and YDS for over a decade. Currently finishing his dual masters at Brandeis University's Heller School. Active in local labor support and workforce development projects.

STUART ELLIOTT

Serves on the editorial team for Talking Union, DSA's labor blog. Member, Wichita, Kansas DSA and the American Postal Workers Union. Senior U.S. correspondent for LabourStart.

AMBER FROST

Writer. Member, NYC DSA. Former national DSA employee. Member of YDS Coordinating Committee for many years, serving as co-chair and feminist issues coordinator.

PAUL GARVER

Redeployed global labor agitator. Co-edits DSA labor blog Talking Union. Sings in community choruses, practices tai chi, hikes and swims when not agitating. In solidarity with other left organizations, active in Jobs with Justice, PDA, and Progressive Massachusetts.

DAVID GREEN

Chair, Detroit DSA for over 15 years. Single-payer national health insurance activist. Neurologist.

JOSÉ A. GUTIERREZ

Co-chair of Metro DC DSA since 2011. Active in the DSA strategy discussion, student debt, coalition work with progressive allies, and political education in the DC metro area.

BARBARA JOYE

Secretary, Metro Atlanta DSA. Helps edit *Democratic Left* and DSA blog. NPC since 2007, activist since early SDS at Vassar. Active in Jobs with Justice, progressive media. Semi-retired: nonprofit communications.

SIMONE MORGEN

Co-chair, Columbus DSA. Active in low-wage and labor organizing, working to create worker's center and, hopefully, worker-owned cooperative. Works with Jobs with Justice and various labor organizations.

MAXINE PHILLIPS

Vice chair, DSA; former executive director, DSA; former executive editor, *Dissent*. Former co-editor, *Religious Socialism*. Areas of interest and activism: religious left, immigrant rights.

DAVID RODDY

Membership Chair, Sacramento DSA. Editor of *The Activist*; former YDS western regional organizer. Active in low-wage labor organizing, housing rights, and student debt.

JOSEPH M. SCHWARTZ

Teaches political science at Temple University and is a DSA vice-chair. Has served on the NPC's *Democratic Left*, Budget, and Political Education committees, and has chaired its Steering Committee. Active in Philadelphia DSA and in his faculty union.

PEG STROBEL

Treasurer of Chicago DSA, co-chair of DSA's Feminist Team, co-developer of Grassroots Economics Training for Understanding and Power (GET UP) workshops. NPC since 2012. Historian and feminist activist since late 1960s.

Voices from the Convention

Deanna Wooten, 28, studied in Japan for three years before enrolling at William Paterson University, where she is a junior majoring in political science and pre-law. She joined YDS this spring after meeting member Daniel Santiago and attended the summer conference. At the DSA national convention Wooten commented, "I like that in DSA everyone is really friendly and has realistic goals. At William Paterson we're doing the 'Drop Student Debt' campaign, to educate people about how it's affecting American society. We put photos up



Deanna Wooten

all over school." Observing that a lot of people don't understand what socialism is, she added: "They say 'How can you be a democrat and a socialist?' I say, 'Well, how do you feel capitalism is working for you? A democracy ruled by capitalism? The system is not working.' I try to make them understand that we're for equal rights for workers, people of color, students, immigrants etc. and show what we've done. I want to take a more active role in DSA in the future."

Travis Reid, treasurer of Metro Atlanta DSA, volunteers at many events and spearheaded MA-DSA's Pride 2013 committee. At 39, Reid considers himself part of "Generation X," between the boomers and the millennials, a "bridge" generation in DSA. Reid moved to Atlanta from Tulsa in 2010 to keep his airline job after a merger. He had studied and worked in France, where he observed that "every working person has dignity because they have access to free or very low-cost healthcare and education, six weeks' vacation and a 35-hour workweek. I had meningitis, and the healthcare system there saved my life. I started to question



Travis Reid

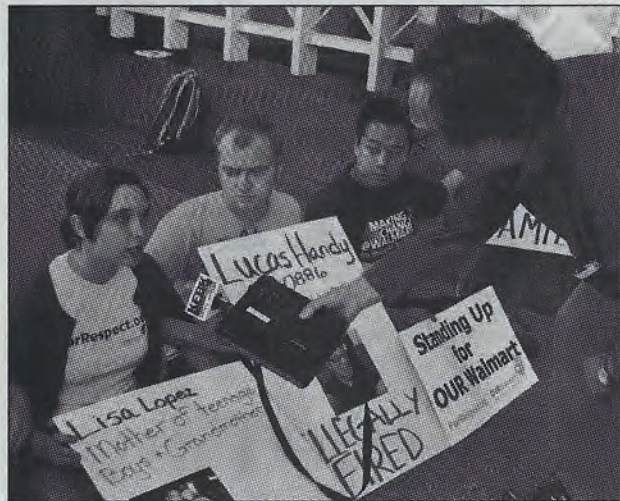
why we have so much misery here, with all our resources." He joined DSA after meeting a member at an event in 2011. "This was my first convention. It was a wonderful educational opportunity for me as I had never organized before and I had never met that many DSAers in one place, with many different backgrounds and a lot of organizing experience. I learned a lot, especially in the workshop on strong locals where we heard what the groups in Philly, DC, and Detroit are doing." ❖

YDS on the Front Lines of the Student Movement

By Neal Meyer

The school year got off to a strong start for the Young Democratic Socialists. More than 40 YDSers and 10 DSA and outside speakers gathered in August in Washington, DC for our annual summer leadership retreat. We heard from writer and activist Bill Fletcher, author and DSA honorary chair Barbara Ehrenreich, DSA vice-chair Joe Schwartz, and DSA National Political Committee member Peg Strobel, in addition to many others.

Alexandra Deane from Vassar YDS was elected to her first term as YDS co-chair, and Matt Porter was re-elected to serve as co-chair. The full list of new members of the Coordinating Committee is available on the new YDS website. The conference was also an opportunity for YDSers to thank outgoing national organizer Jackie Sewell for all her hard work and to welcome the new national organizer, Neal Meyer.



Andee Sunderland, David Roddy, and Ian Lee from UC-Davis YDS/Sacramento DSA being interviewed about their civil disobedience in support of striking Walmart employees. They were arrested a few minutes later.

Toward the end of a long weekend of lectures, debates, and partying, YDS passed two new Activist Agenda items. The first calls for YDS to organize with DSA on the anti-student debt campaign and to organize against tuition increases on campus. The second directs chapters to build stronger connections with unions on campuses and to organize students in solidarity with organizing campaigns.

Matt Conklin, a new member from the University of Alabama-Birmingham, said, "This conference has completely reinvigorated my interest in political activism. Nothing else could have better prepared me for the organizing we are planning for this year. Reading socialist news and literature has its place, but sometimes you just

have to see it to believe it."

Since the start of school in September, chapters have been hard at work putting these Activist Agenda items into action. YDSers at the University of California-Davis are building a solidarity campaign with campus AFSCME workers who are fighting for a new contract this year. Davis YDS was out in force at the end of October when workers called for a strike vote. Ian Lee, a Davis YDS leader who was one of the 11 students pepper-sprayed by Lt. John Pike during Occupy UC Davis, was also recently interviewed by Al Jazeera America.

At Vassar College in New York's Hudson Valley, YDSers are organizing a student-labor dialogue to support campus workers. Vassar YDS also continues to play a critical role in Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson, a community organization resisting foreclosures.



Neal Meyer



Members of Vassar YDS in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. and their allies in the Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlán (MEChA) take a break from tabling for a group photo.

YDS is on the march in New Jersey as well. William Paterson University democratic socialists demonstrated outside the gubernatorial debate, demanding that Chris Christie sign the New Jersey Dream Act to give undocumented students in-state tuition. This was part of a long series of actions led by a coalition of New Jersey student groups, including William Paterson YDS. A week after the October demonstration, Christie announced that he would finally sign the Dream Act.

Continued on page 10

This year, democratic socialism is making inroads in the South. Our chapter at Lindsey Wilson College in Kentucky is leading a series of political education discussions on campus. YDS leaders at University of Alabama-Birmingham have also started organizing a chapter. They've been gathering petition signatures to support DSA's Drop Student Debt campaign. And in Tennessee, students at Sewanee: The University of the South are organizing a new YDS chapter and are working with Latino/a student organizations on campus to inform undocumented immigrants about their legal rights. New chapters are also being organized at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas and St. Joseph's College on Long Island.



YDS 2013 Summer Conference attendees gather with guest speaker Barbara Ehrenreich.

At the end of October, a strong contingent of YDSers attended DSA's National Convention in Oakland, California. We were especially proud to see David Roddy, our blog editor and Coordinating Committee member, elected to the National Political Committee. The large

youth contingent at the convention and David's election are proof that in the last few years a stronger bond has grown between YDS and DSA, and that YDSers are starting to make the transition into DSA and to take on leadership and responsibility.



Temple YDS (Philadelphia, Pa.) President Evan Hoskins recruits another member.

Looking ahead, we're excited about our winter conference in New York City in February, and we're looking forward to advancing the campaigns our chapters have decided to tackle. At the moment, we have 15 chapters and allied campus groups, four new organizing committees, and around 150-200 activists. It's a strong start, and we'll be working on growing that number this year.

Our generation, according to polls, is the first American generation to have a more favorable view of socialism

than capitalism. There is enormous potential for us to take the democratic socialist message to new campuses and to build solidarity with low-wage workers, undocumented immigrants, victims of police brutality and racism, LGBTQ people fighting for their rights, and women struggling against patriarchy. We've just got to organize – and that's exactly what we'll be doing. ❖

Neal Meyer is national organizer for the Young Democratic Socialists.

For a Feminist Socialism

By Simone Morgen

Why a Feminist Socialism?

Why, indeed? Isn't Rosa Luxemburg a socialist icon? Don't socialism's core values of equal treatment of all persons, without prejudice or disparate treatment, address feminist concerns?

Formally, yes – but a cursory examination of the ways in which issues are addressed even within socialist circles brings this into question. Even in these more favorable environs, the need for an explicitly feminist view remains. After all, patriarchy as a sex/gender system of organizing society existed long before the capitalist mode of production revolutionized society and colored its directives.



Simone Morgen

How would feminism change our common vision?

Most obviously, feminist socialism recognizes that work and economics are different for men and women and takes that into account. Too often, socialists overlook the fact that women's earnings trail men's for many reasons. These include 1) their greater representation in low-wage jobs; 2) greater numbers in government jobs, which have been getting cut due to the recession and attacks on public sector workers; and 3) lifetime lower earnings, due to a pay differential that has hardly moved in the past 10 years. Outside the formal economy, women also do the vast majority of un-waged work, whether in the home or the informal economy. A feminist socialist vision recognizes the immense unpaid labor that sustains the capitalist economy and the need to address it when developing an alternative, so that the burden of holding

up family and community doesn't fall disproportionately on women yet again.

Why is this critical fact so often overlooked by socialists who lack a feminist analysis?

First, because identifying specific disadvantaged groups based on color, country of origin, ethnicity, etc., involves defining those groupings by their characteristics and often by location and/or proximity. Women, by contrast, are a worldwide group that encompasses any or all characteristics, and are always present – that is, they are visible and not visible. This results from their daily interaction with men as wives, mothers, employees, etc., in both public and private life, rather than as a discrete racial or ethnic group that specific people may not encounter on a regular basis. Women are thus not recognized as a class, either economically or politically.

Second, many socialists think in terms of economics but not culture, whereas feminists understand that in a patriarchal society, assumptions regarding women's inferiority to men become so deeply embedded that they are an unconscious part of our dominant worldview, introduced in childhood and enforced throughout life. The economic and cultural limitations under which women live their lives are often simply not noticed by men and are frequently policed by both men and women (often subconsciously, sometimes not).

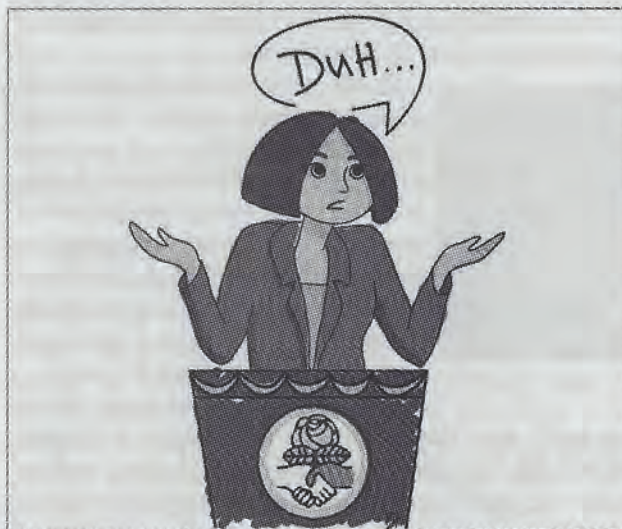
One instance that may illustrate this is the incredibly misogynous jokes directed at Hillary Rodham Clinton in the 2008 presidential election. Racist comments were rightly denounced, but sexist ones didn't evoke the same reaction. While Clinton and New York mayoral candidate Christine Quinn are neoliberal capitalist women, their treatment demonstrates that women have still not achieved the (admittedly insufficient) first stage of making people uncomfortable with openly misogynous remarks, in the same way that people often make sure to hide or disguise racial prejudice.

What does this mean for the struggle for democratic socialism?

Much as we simply cannot understand class without understanding race, no understanding is complete without an analysis of how patriarchy intersects with capitalism. Under the continuing brutal economic assaults of exploitative capitalism, many economically disadvantaged men need to have a "lesser" that can enhance their feelings of worth in an economy and society that provides limited pathways for their success. Long-established cultural norms and the needs of the capitalist class combine to reinforce this devalued position and set expectations for woman's role as helpmate and supporter rather than as an equal economic actor. Socialists undercut our own movement by not speaking to the needs of women, who are, after all, more than half the world.

But an adequate feminist socialist analysis would move beyond simply identifying the varying levels of gender disadvantage to a more rigorous identification of how

society is constructed. As feminists, we would pay attention to the underlying and unexamined expectations that shape gender-related questions such as who does caregiving, how we organize family and private life, what kind of work confers respect on the worker, etc. We would subject economic, historical and social patterns to socialist analysis and measure them against socialist ideals. Finally, we would analyze how gender intersects with other categories of identity such as race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and citizenship.



Cartoon by Betsy Avila

The appropriate response to "Why a feminist socialism?"

The struggle to integrate women's experience thoroughly into socialist theory and practice and to de-emphasize male experience as *the* paradigm will not be achieved immediately. We cannot erase thousands of years of deeply absorbed assumptions and widely distributed cultural attitudes in a few generations. We have little awareness of how ingrained and unconscious these barriers are except for when that still, small voice occasionally says in a woman's ear "that's not fair!" But socialists cannot allow half of the population to be an afterthought. While DSAers discuss reproductive justice in the context of the recent surge in punitive activity, that and other feminist issues tend to trail low wages, immigration, the continuing recession, etc., as a focus of discussion, and the feminist take on each of these issues is not fully explored. This must change.

With our socialist commitment to a more egalitarian distribution of the world's rewards, we are in a prime position to make this a reality. The way will be long, but as capitalism is built on a foundation of women's subordination, undermining patriarchy should help us undercut capitalism as well. Pushed by socialist feminist activists, DSA (and the rest of the world) has made progress on the gender front; let's move forward with purpose and a sense of urgency. ❖

Simone Morgen is a member of DSA's National Political Committee and co-chair of Columbus DSA.

MAJOR R. OWENS

THE PEOPLE'S CONGRESSMAN

1936 – 2013

By Marsha Borenstein

Major Owens was an unconventional political leader – a librarian not a lawyer, a work horse not a show horse – and not one to court the press rather than his constituents. He would seem quiet or unassuming at times, but in fact he was a fiery speaker, advocate, and organizer whose accomplishments were well known and appreciated by the people whose lives he touched.



Major Owens

Owens got his first lesson in organizing when his parents wrote to the White House praising FDR's work programs while pointing out that the men in their poor, segregated Memphis neighborhood were turned away when they showed up for work. How surprised his folks were when someone from the administration actually came to their home – and signed up all the men on his block for jobs!

Subsequent battles were not always that easily won. Having resettled in Brooklyn, he became active in the Brooklyn Congress of Racial Equality, working to fight racism and employment discrimination and becoming active in local community action. As the vice president of the Metropolitan Council on Housing, he orchestrated a rent strike that included placing tenant rents in escrow accounts, a tactic that he is reputed to have invented.

He perfected the political tool of blocking traffic. As a state senator he orchestrated a five-borough action that would have closed all the bridges entering Manhattan to protest proposed massive cuts to the city's anti-poverty programs, forcing the administration to relent.

A master of the "inside/outside strategy," he sat on Mayor John Lindsay's side of the table as his commissioner of the Community Development Agency that oversaw all of the city's anti-poverty programs, when activists came to the table to discuss forming a college in central Brooklyn. At night he would meet with the same activists to plan strategy for their next meeting with the Mayor.

After 24 years, Owens retired from Congress in 2007, 37 years after the founding of Medgar Evers College. The then president of the college immediately recruited Owens, one of his school's key founders, to teach in the Department of Public Administration, a job that Owens loved and was perfectly suited for, providing him access to a new generation of young radical organizers. He was a master teacher, and his students loved him.

Fifty percent of the omnibus Americans with Disabilities Act was drafted in one of Owens' congressional committees. He counseled Justin Dart, a national disabilities rights organizer, to develop a 50-state grassroots advocacy campaign to bring pressure on every member of Congress. He was particularly fond of a photo of himself leading the Washington Wheel Chair Protest March that is featured in his book *The Peacock Elite, A Case Study of the Congressional Black Caucus*. Hint: Major was not one of the "Peacocks." The book's dedication reads like a list of Friends of DSA.

Before I became his congressional aide, before he retired from Congress, before he became my best friend and we went into business together, I was DSA's liaison to Owens' congressional office in Brooklyn. I wrote and called his office when we wanted him to speak at one of our events. He never turned us down. Having once paid dues, he believed himself to be a lifetime member of DSA and never let me forget my affiliation with the organization, interrupting me from time to time when I said something that surprised him, with, "Is that the official position of DSA?"

His work in Congress focused on the need for peace at the international level, ending apartheid in South Africa and restoring democracy to Haiti. Domestically, his focus included the power of education and the need to extend the civil rights struggles to include the less educated, Americans with disabilities, and the economically disenfranchised. Some of his accomplishments revolved around funding for historical black colleges and dedicated funding in Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act for parent involvement.

Early in his political career, Owens and other elected officials in Brooklyn formed the Coalition for Community Empowerment (CCE) that is credited with elevating the term "community empowerment" to historic heights. Its spirit was never far from his heart. He frequently called for civil disobedience as the appropriate action for today's problems – it is what he taught his students. And it is why he kept a banner near the entrance of his office that proclaimed, "Enter Here for Peace and Empowerment." ❖

Marsha Borenstein is a former chair of New York DSA and a former member of DSA's National Political Committee. She was an aide to Congressman Owens from 2003 to 2007, and remained his partner in community action.

An Invitation to Our Readers:
If you would like to participate in a discussion of this issue – and other issues
– of *Democratic Left*, please email info@dsausa.org or call 212-727-8610

New Growth: Organizing Committees Spring Up

Compiled from reports and interviews by Barbara Joye

This year, seven new organizing committees (OCs) were chartered: Houston, Little Rock, Memphis, Portland (Ore.), Providence, Puget Sound, and Tuscaloosa. They sprang up in diverse communities, ranging from the west coast to the deep South to New England, in college towns and big cities. Some were started by former YDS members or DSAers who moved from an established local chapter, while others were initiated by members who realized that they could not bring about real change in isolation. Here are some of their stories:

Little Rock, Ark.

Most of the Little Rock OC founders met each other in labor campaigns for the Employee Free Choice Act and the Affordable Care Act. Others were with the Democratic Party or were community organizers. "There isn't much in this area with an explicit anti-capitalist critique, so we have to get together," says organizer Kenny Grand. Starting a year ago, the diverse group of young professionals and workers began to meet.

They do a lot of media work, including emailing a quarterly electronic newsletter to members called "The Arkansas Worker," soon to be followed by a blog and a print publication with articles from the newsletter and members' blogs for free distribution around town. They are also on Facebook and Twitter. Members take turns writing articles and blog and social media posts.

A study group has focused on coalition and movement building, starting with Chris Crass's *Towards Collective Liberation: Anti-racist Organizing, Feminist Practice and Movement Building Strategy* and readings on Bayard Rustin and civil rights leaders from the South. The group is also very interested in Arkansas radical history, and they hosted Bill Barclay for a GET UP (Grassroots Economics Training for Understanding and Power) workshop.

Grand acknowledges that it takes a lot to be in an explicitly socialist organization in a place like Little Rock. "People worry about their reputations. But as we continue on we are accepted more. One of our founding members came from the YDS in Conway, Ark., where I was also, and others in our area knew about that YDS, which made it easier."

Little Rock OC members are renovating a space for an evening café, which will be a meeting place and a worker/producer cooperative, housing four small food and beverage producers. They are looking for a name for the café that will probably evoke the agrarian movement in the region, which has roots in early 20th century socialist, populist and syndicalist movements.

They also just launched a microfinance co-operative, "Puddle," and they are considering eventually starting a

housing co-op and a furniture-making co-op. They are connected to the Central Arkansas Cooperative Development Initiative, and consider Charles and Shirley Sherrod's Southwest Georgia Rural Development Project a model.

"In a conservative area like ours, it feels like you're the only one at first," observes Grand, "but lately, folks have been willing to take on responsibility for media content and cooperative development. It's not just me now."

Providence, R.I.

The Providence OC was born when former YDS co-chair and Philadelphia DSA activist Sean Monahan transferred to graduate school at Brown University, where he met up with Remeike Forbes, a graduate student at the neighboring Rhode Island School of Design who designed the new DSA website and is a designer for *Jacobin* magazine. A third Brown graduate student had known Philadelphia DSA activist Jared Abbott as an undergraduate and was looking for DSA on the Internet.



Providence YDS member Silvina Hernandez, a Brown freshman, at a protest against NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly's talk at the university in October.

The three decided to form a campus-based, youth-oriented OC before reaching out to the area's 120 paid DSA members. They tabled on Brown's campus and at a student activities fair to publicize a visit by Maria Svart, signing up 30 interested people. In the nearby neighborhood where a lot of young professionals live, they put out fliers reading "So-and-so [naming a historical figure like Martin Luther King] was a socialist, maybe you are too! Come to this meeting and find out." Twenty-five people came to hear Monahan and Svart talk about the history and importance of democratic socialism.

Continued on page 14

“Because we started with three men, we prioritized feminist issues and designed our program to reach beyond white men,” says Monahan, “starting with escorting at a Planned Parenthood downtown. Women did join and are members of the OC today. Our other campaign for repeal of Rhode Island’s voter ID law was selected because it defends democracy, it speaks to people of color, and it’s winnable. That was a good call, because we forged a close relationship with the Brown Immigrant Rights Coalition and they adopted our campaign as their principal campaign. We’re about to have our first big event about that, a panel with local progressive politicians and a professor who studies the history of voting in Rhode Island.”

The OC also has a bi-weekly reading group, which started with the Joe Schwartz/Jason Schulman paper “Towards Freedom: Democratic Socialist Theory and Practice,” followed by socialist feminist readings.

Puget Sound, Wash.

The Puget Sound organizing committee formed this past summer as a result of several meetings around the visits of National Member Organizer and Chicago Political Economy Group member Bill Barclay and National

Political Committee member Peg Strobel in June, and National Director Maria Svart in July. They are now organizing in Seattle and Tacoma as well as in the outlying areas to the north and south.

The OC has had several meetings to discuss the local political scene and to start the process of developing a program leading to forming a fully-fledged local. It was the general consensus to focus on the living wage issue, as it is being pursued by a large coalition of progressive groups in the area, including labor unions. The group is looking for sponsors and coalition partners for a spring event addressing that issue. Also, several DSA members will be working on the student debt campaign, and the group is putting together an event around the film *Shift Change* that deals with cooperatives.

The growing interest in DSA is reflected in the addition of several new younger members this fall. The biggest obstacle they face is focusing what energy members have to devote to DSA activities after all the other groups and issues they are involved in, the age-old “donut hole” problem.

“The Seattle area is awash with groups and organizations focused on single issues,” says OC member Bill Yates. “The one bright spot has been Kshama Sawant, a Socialist Alternative candidate for

Continued on page 16

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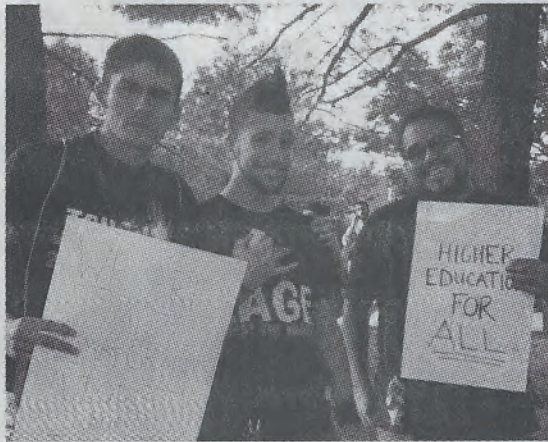
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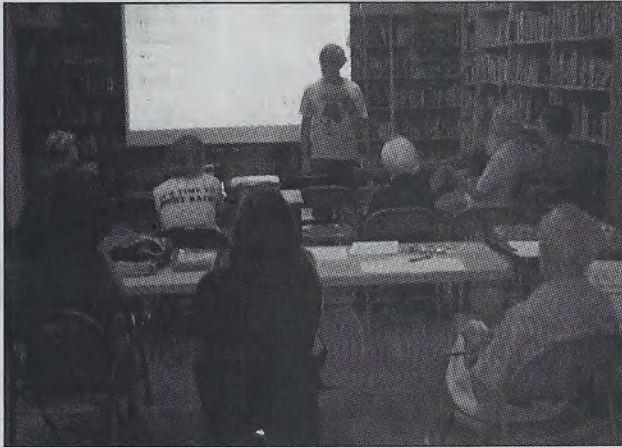
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For more information contact Neal Meyer, YDS National Organizer,
at yds@dsausa.org or at 212-727-8610.

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the City Council who got a large percentage of the vote in the primary, and some national press including an



Bill Barclay presented a Grassroots Economic Training for Understanding and Power workshop to Puget Sound OC members in Tacoma, Wa.

attack in *Forbes* magazine. Almost all the progressive forces in the area were behind her in her bid to win the nonpartisan city council position." Puget Sound's DSA members contributed to Sawant's winning campaign and volunteered alongside the Green Party, several local labor unions, and other progressives in a very close race. "These activities have given us some visibility that we can build on," says Yates. "We need to grow our membership and take on bigger tasks." ❖

TO KSHAMA SAWANT

Congratulations on your election to the Seattle City Council. It is wonderful to see that the voters recognize that our economic system is undemocratic and felt confident voting for an openly socialist candidate. We look forward to having your voice on the City Council and working with you to push through reforms which benefit and empower working people in Seattle. (Sent from the DSA national office and Puget Sound DSA.)

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