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THE CAPITALIST STATE

& SOCIALIST STRATEGY



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THIS MOMENT

3 The Uprising and the Challenge Facing Socialists

UPRISING FOR BLACK LIVES

10 Unreformable: Police & the Capitalist State

19 Seattle's Police-Free Zone

26 Labor Chooses Black Lives Over Blue Solidarity

POLITICS & THEORY

30 COVID-19 and the Racist Disparities Fueling the Uprising

34 Working-Class Power and the Road to Socialism: A Review of *Bigger Than Bernie*

DEBATE: SOCIALISTS AND THE ELECTION

43 Resolution to Seattle DSA

45 DSA Should Not Support Howie Hawkins

47 DSA Should Oppose Biden and Recommend a Vote for Hawkins in Safe States

FEATURED ARTICLES



10 **Unreformable: Police & the Capitalist State**

ANYA MAE LEMLICH argues that the fight to abolish the capitalist police is interwoven with the fight to replace the capitalist state with the self-organization of the Black, brown, and multiracial working class. At the same time, fighting for radical demands, like defunding, demilitarizing, and dismantling police departments, is crucial both to improve conditions in our communities today and to prepare our class to take power and transition to a socialist society.

34 **Working-Class Power and the Road to Socialism**

BRANDON MADSEN reviews Meagan Day and Micah Uetricht's recent book, *Bigger Than Bernie*, outlining three key strengths and three points of debate. The book offers a bold vision for building a mass socialist movement, promising a strategy that avoids both the opportunist pitfalls of Social Democracy and the self-marginalization of some trends from the Leninist tradition. Yet, this review argues, the authors repeat mistakes of theoreticians like Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch, and of Social Democracy's left wing in years past.



43 **Debate: Socialists and the Presidential Election**

Should DSA advocate a protest vote for Howie Hawkins in "safe states"? How can DSA best prepare the ground today for a new workers party in the years ahead? We republish three contributions from a sharp but comradely debate over these questions in Seattle DSA in the run-up to a vote at their August membership meeting.





**WHAT
CAN WE
GROW
FROM
CRISIS**

BY PETE RAILAND

The Uprising and the Challenge Facing Socialists

BY TY MOORE

The mass uprising for Black lives is, in many ways, a perfect response to the cascading crises of global capitalism. Arising out of the horrific yet all-too-familiar racist murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and then George Floyd, the protests erupted in Minneapolis just 47 days after Bernie Sanders' conceded defeat, which temporarily disoriented and atomized the US left. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic and devastating economic crisis meant the need for an independent working-class political response was more vital than ever.

With Sanders and other left leaders attempting to channel the "political revolution" behind Biden's empty corporate campaign, it was left to the youth of America—with Black youth in the lead—to seize the initiative and organize a serious challenge to both Trump and the Democratic establishment.

The uprising for Black Lives delivered a powerful body-blow to the Trump administration, already deeply weakened by its bungled response to the pandemic. Of course nothing is certain, but with the intertwined public health and economic disasters still raging, Trump and the Republicans appear headed toward defeat in November. Under these conditions, it is the Democrats' race to lose. Yet given the complete lack of enthusiasm for Biden and the party's corporate establishment, millions remain fearful they will again blow it, with devastating consequences.

The outcome of this election does matter. While we completely disagree with those on the left who, fearing Trump, are actively disorienting left-wing workers by whipping up illusions in Biden/Harris and the corporate Democrats, we do agree that the terrain of the class struggle will be significantly different depending on which of the two deeply divided wings of the US capitalist estab-

lishment emerges victorious in November. In this context, the debate on the left over tactics for the 2020 presidential elections remains consequential.

At the same time, no matter what the exact outcome, mass disgust with both wings of the capitalist establishment is set to grow. While the year ahead will be thick with tragedy and widespread suffering, the potential exists for the US left to re-emerge as a bright ray of hope for millions. Especially in Black and other communities of color, the uprising has already begun to achieve this. To carry out the necessary transition from mass protest to mass politics, and to fully tap the wider potential, the initiative and decisions of the 70,000-strong Democratic Socialists of America could prove decisive.

This third print edition of *Reform & Revolution*, dedicated largely to the BLM uprising, aims to provide a clear Marxist analysis of the historic events we are passing through and, flowing from that, contribute to developing a program and a guide to action to help DSA seize the time. After skipping a planned Spring issue of this magazine due to the disruptions of the pandemic, this edition of R&R is packed with substantially more content than our previous issues, and includes more in-depth articles.

Uprising Enters a New Phase

The uprising for Black lives may be the largest in US history, both in numbers and geographic spread since the Civil War, the second American revolution. Less measurable, but central to the movement's impact, is the intensity and duration of the protests. Following the initial uprising, marked by police riots and widespread property destruction, many cities have now seen over two months of ongoing protests. While the largest wave was mid-June, another crested in late July in response to Trump's announcement that federal agents were moving into cities across the country to violently attack and kidnap protesters who the president dubbed "terrorists."

Beyond the street protests, every institution in society is being shaken to its foundations. Challenges to the deep structural racism embedded into the fabric of US capitalism are emerging everywhere, as millions declare themselves in solidarity with BLM and challenge the silence or complicity of those around them. With the pandemic hitting Black and brown communities hardest, which we explore further in this magazine, anger is growing at the racism embedded into our for-profit healthcare system.

"To carry out the necessary transition from mass protest to mass politics, the initiative and decisions of the 70,000-strong Democratic Socialists of America could prove decisive."

Professional sports, from Nascar to the NFL, have been forced to embrace the BLM movement, with the NBA organizing an impressive display of solidarity as its season re-opened in late July. From corporate boardrooms to meatpacking plants, the anti-racist upsurge is leading to a profound shift in mass consciousness and deep questioning of US society.

For the new generation of activists, the need to link mass protests to a strategy to build political power is among the main lessons from the first wave of the BLM movement from 2013–2016. The same conclusion was drawn by the veterans of the 2011 Occupy movement, the climate strikes, #MeToo, Dreamers, and the whole wave of mass protests following Trump's election. This understanding was given clearest expression in the mass support young people offered to Bernie's 2016 and 2020 campaigns. This sharpened political consciousness is also a central reason why DSA is growing so rapidly, as the rising generation attempts to construct a political organization capable of a sustained challenge to corporate power.

This is part of the background to the new phase the uprising appears to be entering. Protests and campaigns are increasingly focused around demands for city government to defund the police, among other policies to end police brutality and the systemic racism of the carceral state. One of our feature articles in this issue, "Unreformable: Police & the Capitalist State," grapples with how to both win every reform possible within the framework of capitalism, while rooting campaigns to defund and dismantle repressive police machinery in the deeper fight for fundamental and lasting change, including police abolition, the overthrow of capitalist rule, and a socialist transformation of society.

That article is, in part, the product of the important debate within DSA—including within our own caucus—over how to link



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"DSA is growing rapidly as the rising generation attempts to construct a political organization capable of a sustained challenge to corporate power."

the growing calls to abolish the police to a wider socialist strategy. Reflecting a somewhat different emphasis on these questions, we're also publishing an analysis of CHOP in Seattle, which many saw as an attempt to establish a police-free zone.

A central challenge facing DSA is how best, as a predominantly white organization only just beginning to establish a base in Black working-class communities, to offer effective solidarity and to bring our experience and socialist ideas into the living debates on the way forward.

While the protests will continue to force through important reforms, socialists are far from the only activists to warn that the Democratic Party politicians who run most city governments—and who have overseen police departments for decades in many cases—cannot be relied upon. This harsh reality is opening huge possibilities for DSA to initiate or support movement-based election campaigns that link calls to re-allocate police budgets with a wider program of wealth redistribution to address the economic and public health crises.

From Mass Protest to Mass Politics

The huge potential to translate the mass scale of the movement into working-class political power is already apparent, as is the potential role that DSA could play. On July 23rd, a slate of five openly socialist candidates, backed by NYC DSA's developing electoral machine, won their seats for New York state legislature. They all included the fight to defund the police and to end evictions in their platforms, and the uprising was clearly a factor fueling the energy of NYC-DSA campaigns.

"We couldn't have done it without NYC-DSA," explained Zohran Mamdini, one of the candidates. "They were the first organization to endorse us and helped build every aspect of the campaign, from the field program to the communications strategy, that allowed us to overcome everything the establishment threw against us. I'm incredibly honored to have earned their support, and so proud to have run alongside a slate of comrades like Jabari, Phara, and Marcela. Together, we will tax the rich, heal the sick, house the poor, defund the police, and build a socialist New York."

The impact of the mass protests were also reflected in the decisive victories for "the Squad" against their corporate-backed Democratic challengers for Congress, alongside Jamaal Bowman's victory over the powerful Democratic incumbent Eliot Engel.

Even where the left has not built as strong an electoral machine as NYC-DSA, the political power of the uprising for Black lives was on display in the successes of left-wing challengers across the country. In Missouri, a local Black Lives Matter activist from the Ferguson uprising, Cori Bush, won her congressional primary against long-standing incumbent, William Lacy Clay. She received endorsements from Bernie Sanders, AOC, and DSA. Included in her program are calls for housing and health care for all.

DSA-backed Marquita Bradshaw, an environmental activist who's been calling out the racist inequalities in healthcare and the pandemic response, became the first Black woman to win a Tennessee primary for US Senate. Her main opponent, James Mackler, was backed by the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee and out-fundraised Bradshaw 250 times over (\$2 million to \$8,000) and still lost!

The success of these and other candidates underscores the potential role DSA can play in linking mass protests to building working-class political power. They add to DSA's impressive chain of electoral victories in recent years from the six Chicago city councilors elected last year, to the successive waves of socialist triumphs in New York, broadening the horizons of what is possible for activists across the country. How effectively DSA connects with and fights for the demands emerging from the uprisings for Black lives remains a crucial question.

The organized left has a lot to learn from this movement, and we also have rich experiences and socialist ideas to offer the new wave of youthful activists awakened through the uprising. More clearly than ever, the protests again demonstrated that mass action and movements in the streets must be at the very core of any serious socialist strategy to build power, including our electoral strategy. Let's seize this moment with both hands, and fight to establish the kind of mass multi-racial working-class movement needed to mount a serious challenge to the capitalist system.

Toward November

More immediately, the dumpster fire that is the 2020 presidential elections looms over everything. Despite mass hatred of Trump, millions are correctly worried that Biden's weak and thoroughly establishment campaign could still lose.





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With COVID-19 adding new obstacles to voting for millions of working people, and Trump’s campaign against mail-in balloting, a cloud of uncertainty surrounds this election. Trump’s immediate threats to undermine mail-in balloting through “cost-cutting” measures at the US Postal Service seem to have been paused under intense public pressure. But the episode reveals the lengths Republican leaders are prepared to go to suppress the vote in progressive working class constituencies—especially in communities of color.

Hearings in Congress are not enough. We need to be ready for coordinated mass direct action to defend voting rights. In this political moment, with a bold lead from figures like Sanders, AOC, and especially the postal workers’ union, millions could be drawn into the streets.

Trump clearly remains very dangerous, but we should also be clear that his recent antics all reek of desperation and reflect the political tides turning against him. Barring a dramatic new political turn, a Biden/Harris victory alongside significant Democratic gains in Congress remains likely.

After Bernie’s defeat, the instinct of many socialists and BLM activists is, understandably, to simply avoid the terrible choice in front of us and focus our efforts on movement building. Yet up through November, the elections will increasingly dominate the discussion among tens of millions. In this context, if the organized left fails to publicly engage in the mass debate unfolding, the main impact is to simply leave the field clear for left-liberal Biden apologists to strengthen support for their mistaken strategy.

Alongside their display of broad establishment opposition to Trump, including from many Republicans, the Democrats’ virtual convention was effectively one long infomercial to whip up illusions in Biden, Harris, and the party leadership. Even in Sanders’ opening night address, he promised Joe Biden would really “fight” for a broad suite of progressive policies.

Former Sanders Campaign Manager Faiz Shakir claimed Biden “envisions a massive public sector role for job creation” (*Vox.com*, 7/18/20). Similarly, Waleed Shahid, the communications director for the Justice Democrats, argued Biden is

running on “the most progressive platform of any Democratic nominee in the modern history of the party.” Shahid continued: “the most transformative presidents in our nation’s history — Lincoln, FDR, LBJ — were not ideologues fully aligned with the most radical movements of their time.”

This is a dangerously superficial spin on history, aimed at bolstering the growing idea that our movements have a potential partner in Biden, even if a half-hearted and tepid one. While there is no doubt that mass pressure from below can force Biden to the left, the ability of our movements to achieve this will be deeply undermined if we peddle the idea that Biden is a potential ally rather than a trusted representative of our class enemy (more specifically, of its liberal wing).

This same mistake is also a central lesson from the labor upsurge of the 1930s and the Civil Rights movement, when movements were undermined as liberal leaders preached false hopes in FDR and LBJ, even as these presidents ordered the National Guard to suppress strikes and protests. The attempt to draw a parallel between Lincoln and Biden is even more ludicrous: the former was the candidate of a new “third” party, shaped both a mass multi-racial abolitionist movement and the still-rising bourgeoisie, who combined to carry out a radical social revolution to destroy the Southern slavocracy.

Many on the left are also celebrating Biden’s pick of Kamala Harris for VP. It’s a reflection of the depths of US sexism and racism that Harris is the first Black woman on a major party presidential ticket, but tragic that they chose a prosecutor for the war on drugs to fill that role. In reality, this choice represents a careful pivot away from Biden’s short-lived series of empty gestures to win over Sanders’ young, diverse base. As *The New York Times* observed (8/11/20),

Harris is a “pragmatic moderate who spent most of her career as a prosecutor,” and “among the safest choices available to Mr. Biden. She has been a reliable ally of the Democratic establishment, with flexible policy priorities that largely mirror Mr. Biden’s.”

Unless these illusions in Biden/Harris are actively combatted now, they will act to disorient and demobilize protest movements at every level: fights like defunding the police or stopping budget cuts require confrontation, not accommodation, with

the Democratic Party establishment in order to win.

In this context, we are publishing a debate among members of Seattle DSA over a proposal for DSA to support the strongest left protest candidate in “safe states.” As Jacobin editor Bhaskar Sunkara argued, in a debate published in *The Nation*, a vote for Howie Hawkins, a democratic socialist, pushes back against the dominant strategy on the US left, including from Bernie and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, that “would have a young democratic

socialist movement use its finite resources to defuse frustration with corporate party leaders and whip votes for Joe Biden. How is this a better choice for socialists than pursuing their own agenda, which envisions transformation rather than accommodation with the status quo, and which does not benefit Trump in any way?”

This debate among socialists over how to engage in the presidential election is just one feature of a wider debate over how DSA, and the working class more generally, can organize a more serious political challenge to the rule of big business in the years ahead. For DSA, which agreed to a “dirty break” strategy at our 2019 Convention, including the goal of building a mass workers’ party, Democratic control in Washington in 2021 will offer unprecedented opportunities to grow our movement.

Biden and the Democratic leadership in Congress would enjoy a very short honeymoon, presiding over the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression and an ongoing public health disaster. Attempts to lay blame at Trump’s feet would ring hollow with big majorities of their base who are demanding Medicare-for-All, a Green New Deal, defunding the police, abolishing ICE, and big hikes in corporate taxes to expand, not cut, education funding and social programs. There would be growing tensions and conflicts between an emboldened Left and the Democratic Party leadership, who are tied to corporate America and believe appealing to middle-class moderates is the key to electoral success. Already, establishment Democrats at the city and state level have enraged much of their base by authorizing police repression of the protests and deepening austerity as the economic downturn worsens.

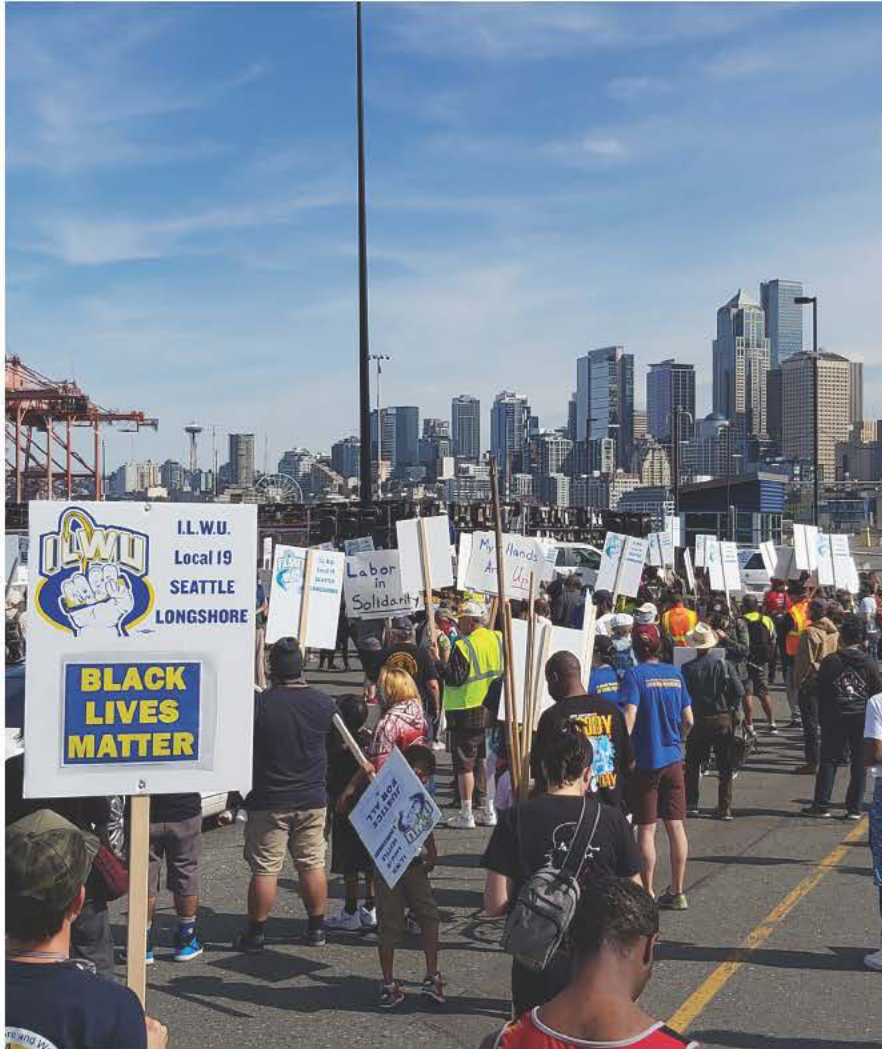
What We Learned in the Great Recession

It’s worth looking back to 2009-2011, when the Democrats controlled the White

“Unless these illusions in Biden/Harris are actively combatted now, they will act to disorient and demobilize protest movements at every level.”



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“The failure of labor and left leaders to organize mass resistance to Obama and the Democrats meant that the Republicans emerged as the main political beneficiaries of the popular revolt against Wall Street.”

House and both houses of Congress, only to carry out the bailout of Wall Street even as foreclosures, budget cuts, and the demolition of living-wage jobs devastated working-class communities. Under Obama and Democratic rule, Black wealth in America was literally cut in half, mainly due to Wall Street’s illegal subprime loan schemes. Yet bank executives walked away with bonuses instead of jail time. The wave of popular revolt that propelled Obama and the Democrats to power was left deeply demoralized, disoriented, and disorganized.

In a grand historic irony, the failure of labor and left leaders to organize mass resistance to Obama and the Democrats meant that the Republicans—the most ferocious defenders of big business—emerged as the main political beneficiaries of the popular revolt against Wall Street. In the form of the populist Tea Party, the Republicans made sweeping gains in the 2010 and 2012 state and Congressional elections (though a weakened Obama still held onto the White House). The rise of Trump’s brand of far-right populism can be traced directly back to the Tea Party, and to the failure of labor and progressive leaders to

provide working-class people a fighting lead against the entire political establishment in the first years of the Great Recession.

It was left to the Occupy protests of 2011 and the Ferguson BLM uprising of 2014 for the left to regain some initiative, to begin a real fight-back. And it wasn’t until Bernie’s historic 2016 campaign that the left found a real political expression to begin translating our power in the streets into sustained political power.

The experiences and mass struggles of the last decade means the working class today is politically in a much stronger position than it was when the last economic crisis washed over the country. But that is no guarantee the US left will successfully seize the moment. Even if Trump is defeated, in the tumultuous years ahead we can be confident the corporate Democrats will disappoint working people and offer endless opportunities for right-wing forces to regain the initiative. Amid the worst economic crisis in living memory, the only path to cut across an even more dangerous revival of the right is for the organized forces of the left and labor movement to construct a coherent, mass political challenge to corporate America. A sharp and sustained confrontation with the corporate Democrats at every level of government and society is therefore required to avoid the terrible mistakes labor and left leaders made after Obama’s election.

The Challenge Facing DSA

With DSA’s growing electoral strength, and with increasing numbers of socialist union activists joining our ranks, we have a growing responsibility to help ensure the left succeeds in the year ahead. The present uprising for Black lives is reshaping popular consciousness and bringing millions more into active struggle, but it remains an open question how effectively this mass movement will be sustained. Similarly, despite Bernie’s losses, the proud legacy and mass base built out of Sanders’ 2016 and 2020

“With the Democrats presiding over the economic crisis, popular anger at the party will rapidly grow and the need for the left to sharply distinguish itself will become more urgent.”

campaigns offers tremendous potential to organize a mass political force in the years ahead. But what shape should this force take?

There is a lively and healthy debate in DSA around these exact questions, which already is a tremendous step forward compared to the position in which the left found itself at the onset of the Great Recession. Among other contributions, the widely read recent book by Jacobin’s Megan Day and Micah Uetricht, outlines a broad roadmap for our movement. In this third edition of our magazine, we review *Bigger Than Bernie: How We Go From The Sanders Campaign to Democratic Socialism*, laying out both the great strengths of the strategy outlined in this book as well as key points of disagreement.

In particular, we take up differences over what a “dirty break” strategy should look like, and the need for DSA to more actively, consciously, and publicly prepare the ground for a working-class socialist party. While the left and working class are not yet strong enough to immediately launch such a party, we should anticipate that the massive shocks of 2020 are only a precursor of events to come. Capitalism is in deep crisis, economically, ecologically, and politically. The global wave of revolt in 2019 and 2020 is set to grow larger in the years ahead, and the more conscious layers of the working class, especially the youth, are looking to get organized on a larger scale than ever.

Rather than pointing to a viable long-term strategy, it is exactly all the important gains made by DSA and the left within the framework of the Democratic Party since 2016 that point to the looming limits of this strategy. As the decades-long crisis of capitalism deepens, the sharpening class contradictions within the Democratic Party cannot be extended indefinitely; at a certain stage these contradictions will burst the diffuse Democratic Party coalition asunder. Especially with the Democrats presiding over the economic crisis, from Washington D.C. to our City Halls, popular anger at the Party will rapidly grow and the need for the left to sharply distinguish itself will become more urgent.

More broadly, to offer genuine answers to the existential economic and ecological challenges of our time, socialists will need to consistently agitate, educate, and organize for the working class to take the largest corporations that dominate the economy into democratic public ownership. Only in this way can we break the economic power of the billionaire class, and open up the possibility of democratically deciding what we produce and how. Rather than being at the mercy of the blind forces of the “free market” and capitalism’s insatiable thirst for profit, we can rationally reorganize society to democratically develop an economic plan to meet our collective needs. This would finally allow us to guarantee jobs for all, Medicare for all, free education, a just transition to a carbon neutral economy, and measures to overcome centuries of racism, imperialism, and gender oppression.

Running through all of this must be the need for a revolutionary strategy, clearly aiming for the multiracial working class to take power; to take over the running of society from a destructive and oppressive capitalist class. An essential first step along this road is for working people to organize ourselves into a mass political party which is independent from the ruling class politically, ideologically, and organizationally. Such a force would need to be far more than a simple electoral machine. To win serious reforms within capitalism, much less prepare our class to take power, such a party would need to be a democratic, mass membership organization that actively supports and helps lead mass movements from below.

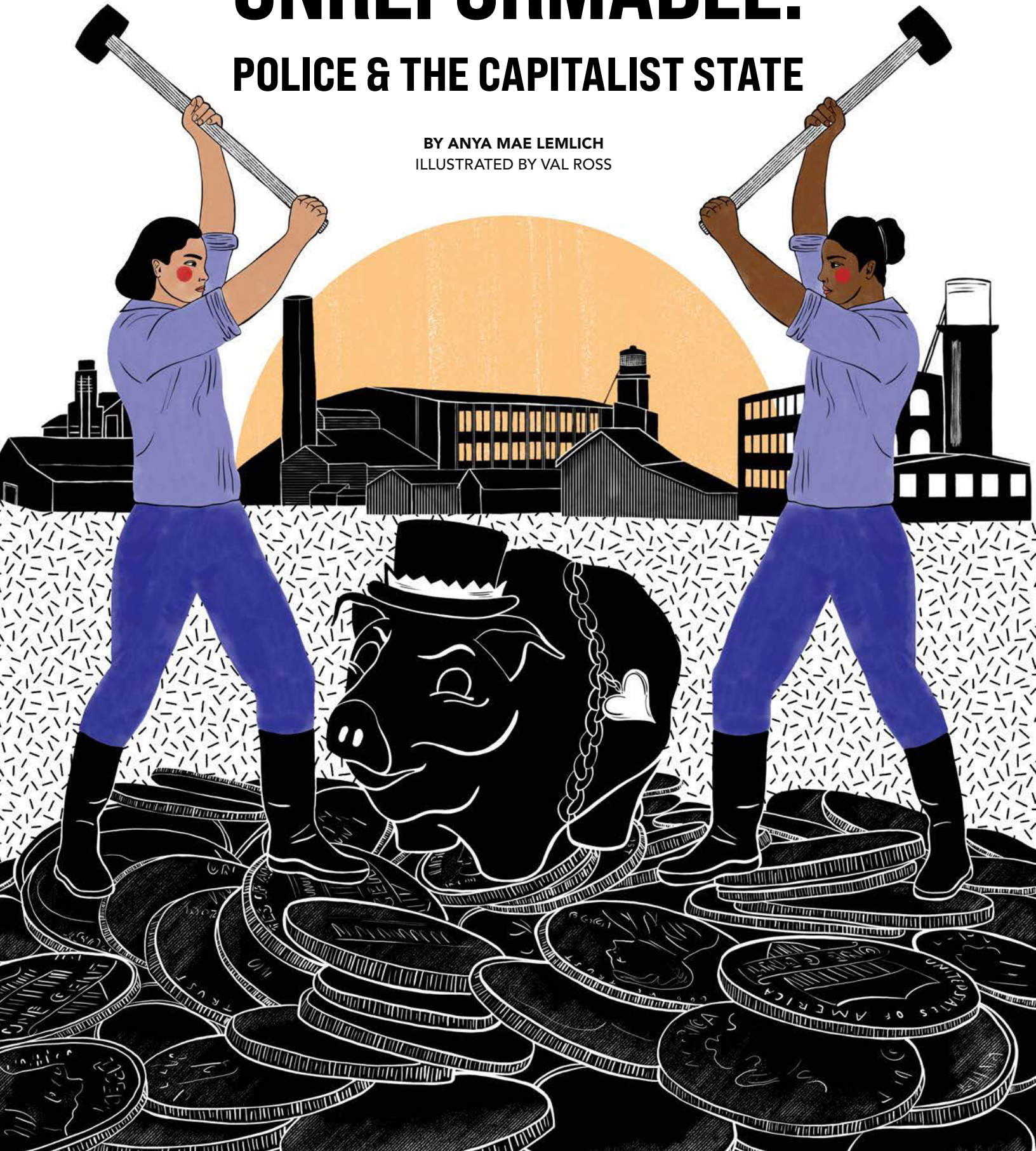
The main question now is whether or not the left will be prepared when history comes knocking at our door. Unless DSA consciously, pro-actively prepares its ranks now for this perspective, the danger exists that events will overtake us and DSA could find itself disoriented and in crisis, providing new opportunities for both right-wing and left-liberal forces to once again co-opt working-class political anger. Despite the profound challenges of our era, we see more reasons for hope than at any time since the global wave of working-class revolt in the late 60s and early 70s. A new generation of activists has been politically awakened and inspired by the uprising for Black Lives. The present debates in our social movements carry the seeds of future successes, of building a mass socialist movement in the historic heart of global capitalism, capable—alongside the global working class and oppressed majority—of fundamentally remaking our world. ■

Ty Moore was the National Organizer of 15 Now from 2014-2015 and helped lead the successful campaign to win a \$15 minimum wage in Minneapolis. Before that, he drew national attention on the left after narrowly losing his campaign for Minneapolis City Council in 2013, running as an independent socialist with significant union backing. Ty now lives in Seattle and is active with DSA.

THE UPRISING

UNREFORMABLE: POLICE & THE CAPITALIST STATE

BY ANYA MAE LEMLICH
ILLUSTRATED BY VAL ROSS



How do we create a society free from a police force that harasses, imprisons, and murders Black people, that represses working-class movements? As we fight for every reform possible under capitalism to decrease the repressive powers of the police, we must link this to building a mass socialist movement. For the fight to abolish the capitalist police is interwoven with the fight to replace the capitalist state with the self-organization of the Black, brown, and multiracial working class.

In early June 2020, two weeks after Minneapolis police murdered George Floyd, protesters marched to Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey's house, demanding that he commit to defund and abolish the police. "Will you defund the police?" asked Kandace Montgomery, one of the march organizers. When Mayor Frey responded "No, I won't abolish the police," the crowd erupted, booing him out of the protest and shouting "shame!" National media and news outlets picked up the story immediately. Now, as the uprising for Black lives—the largest protest movement in US history—enters its third month, calls to both defund and abolish the police continue to spread across the country.

While debate continues over how much the goal of a police-free future is bound up with the struggle to overthrow capitalism and end class society, abolitionist organizers unite around the need to upend people's notions about the inevitability or naturalness of the criminal punishment system. "As a society, we have been so indoctrinated with the idea that we solve problems by policing and caging people that many cannot imagine anything other than prisons and the police as solutions to violence and harm," says abolitionist Mariame Kaba.

As Angela Davis said recently:

Abolition is really about rethinking the kind of future we want, the social future, the economic future, the political future. It's about revolution... I am convinced that the ultimate eradication of racism is going to require us to move toward a more socialist organization of our economies, of our other institutions... an economic system that is not based on exploitation, and on the super-exploitation of Black people, Latinx people and other racialized populations.

Davis and others have pointed out that the movement's scale and fierce urgency is not just due to the political system's failure to change after past protests against police racism. It reflects a broader revolt against the crisis of capitalism: deep racial and class inequalities, the rise of Trump and the far-right, and the failure of the corporate-controlled Democratic Party to offer a real alternative. It is an uprising in the context of the wrenching, unequal, and racist impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the failure of the US political elite and for-profit healthcare system to respond.

The uprising takes place as the worst economic crisis in living memory ravages working-class people, hitting communities of color the hardest, and coming on the heels of the last economic crisis which wiped out half of Black wealth in the US between 2008 and 2013. All this dramatically worsens the already bleak future facing young people. In this context, openness to fundamental societal change is rapidly growing.

Opportunities exist for the current uprising for Black lives to win far-reaching reforms that decrease the repressive powers of the police, not just cosmetic changes aimed at reinforcing and legitimizing them. Campaigns to defund the police point towards this, and must be linked to the fight to dramatically reallocate wealth in this society toward Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities especially and toward the working class in general. It is through a mass fight for these demands that people will build the confidence, self-organization, and determination necessary to fundamentally transform society.

What could that fundamental socialist transformation look like? What would real public safety look like? How will we get there? Connecting the goal of a police-free future to the police's particular function within capitalist society can help us understand what it will take to get rid of police, as well as clarify what sort of government and society we want to replace the police. But to start we need a clear-eyed view of the world we live in today.

CAPITALIST SOCIETY & THE STATE

**"The rulers of this country have always considered their property more important than our lives."
— Assata Shakur**

We live in a capitalist society. As a class society, we experience a constant battle between the capitalist class (people who own the economy, control the government, and use money to make more money for their own private profit) and the working class (all of us and our families who must work to survive, whether currently employed or unemployed). The latter, this vast majority of people, must sell their labor power and their time to the former, corporations and the rich—where they are undemocratically subject to the will of their employer—at the expense of spending their lives with family and community, engaging in creative activity, and doing what they enjoy. The working class must do this in order to simply survive—without selling our labor we are left unhoused, unfed, and without any means of subsistence. This is horrifying and brutal, yet accepted as completely normal: a key ideological tool to discipline the working class into accepting its own exploitation.

But working-class people are constantly engaged in different struggles to better their condition. Organized as a class, the working class is the force that can overthrow capitalism. It is in the interest of working-class people to put an end to this irrational and immoral system, and to class society as a whole.

The global working class is multiracial and multigender, but disproportionately made up of people of color and women. In the US, Black people are over-represented in the multiracial working class, alongside Latinx and Indigenous people. Black working-class people are some of the most exploited—or, as Manning Marable puts it in *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, “generally more subject to the violence of American capitalism than whites.” The Black working class is concentrated in the lowest paid sectors of the labor force, make up much of the “reserve army of labor,” and are the “historic target of brutality within a racist culture and society” (p. 95). While seeing working-class people’s shared interests across identity lines is necessary, it should not be mistaken for glossing over deep differences. In fact, uniting the global working class is the single greatest challenge facing any revolutionary movement.



It is also the biggest threat to the capitalists’ rule. They purposely keep us divided: racism is baked into the system of capitalism in order to do this. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore says, “capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it.” While racism is a product of capitalism, this is “not to deny or diminish its centrality to or impact on America society,” writes Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor in *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. “It is simply to explain its origins and persistence. Nor is this reducing racism to just a function of capitalism; it is locating the dynamic relationship between class exploitation and racial oppression in the functioning of American capitalism” (p. 206).

Capitalists defend their rule with a whole system of repression, starting with the capitalist controlled media and the production of pro-capitalist ideas. As Marx and Engels wrote in *The German Ideology*, the ruling class “among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch” (p. 64).

For example, in asking why there was little public outcry over the proliferation of prisons in the 1980s and 1990s, Angela Davis turns to the role of the media and Hollywood. In *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, she writes: “It is virtually impossible to avoid consuming images of prison... the prison is one of the most important features of our image environment. This has caused us to take the existence of prisons for granted.” The idea of prisons as natural, just, and as a solution to society’s ills is normalized as one aspect of capitalist rule.

In the US, the capitalist class fortifies itself with a two-party system that has so far managed to deny genuine working-class representation. Since its beginning as the party of slaveholders, big business has dominated the Democratic Party. The rise of the labor and civil rights movements last century forced a political realignment, and Democratic Party leadership shifted to sometimes pay lip-service to working-class people, particularly poor communities of color. But at almost every turn party leaders side with big business; concessions made are most often in response to working-class movements or left-wing challengers, like Bernie and AOC. In fact, current police brutality against Black people and protesters takes place in large Democrat-controlled cities like New York, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Seattle, where Democratic city government consistently sides with police, and allows them to get away with murder and brutality with impunity.

In capitalist society, what we call “the state” — police, prisons, military, legislature, the executive, the judiciary, and the administration of regulations, Social Security, education — often seems to be neutral, or above the class struggle. But the state is *not* a neutral body. The state inevitably emerges out of huge contradictions in society to mediate and regulate what would otherwise be either open class warfare or, under conditions of scarcity and desperation, an anarchic brutal battle over resources in society. For the capitalist state, regulating class society means that it maintains and normalizes the violence that is used to oppress and divide the working class: the violence of racial oppression but also that of gender violence and discrimination. Under capitalism, the state has developed historically out of the class conflict and has been shaped at every turn by the dominant class. While it has to reflect, to some extent, the movements of the working class, it is firmly on the side of the capitalists.

The state uses armed forces for repression and social control: police, prisons, national guard, and the military. These repressive apparatuses are the final and decisive way the capitalists maintain their rule. Horrifyingly, the profit the working class creates for the capitalists through our own labor is used to pay for the very apparatuses that are used to repress us.

THE POLICE AS A RACIST ARM OF THE STATE

“In the days of chattel slavery the masters had a patrol force to keep the negroes in their place and protect the interests of the masters. Today the capitalists use the police for the same purpose.”

— George Washington Woodbey

Police, as an arm of the capitalist state, exist to enforce the rule of the capitalists: to repress and discipline the working class. They protect private property over working-class people’s lives. When there are uprisings against the capitalists rule—whether in mass protests, strikes, or occupations—the police are there to break us.

The police maintain order not only through violence, but also through other means of social control. As Mariame Kaba points out, “they spend most of their time responding to noise complaints, issuing parking and traffic citations, and dealing with other noncriminal issues.” In fact, as Taylor writes, “twenty-first-century municipalities, urban and suburban, increasingly rely on revenue generated by fines and fees that either originate with or are the products of arrests” (p. 126). Not only are these fines and fees one way that the police enact social control over the working class, but they also fleece working-class people, and Black people in particular, to pay for city budgets, including the expanding militarized police force, all while lowering the financial burden on billionaires and corporations whose tax rates have dropped year after year.

In the US, standing police departments were created during the rise of industrial capitalism. In the mid-1800s in the North, the police were used to suppress popular unrest and riots, particularly strikes and labor unrest during burgeoning industrialization. Looking at histories of police in Northern cities from 1865-1915, Sidney L. Harring writes in *Policing a Class Society*: “In city after city the police institution was reorganized and strengthened as part of a more general effort to control and stabilize potentially explosive class violence in rapidly developing cities.”

In the South, slave patrols are often considered to be the precursors of the modern police force. In fact, some of these patrols simply turned into standing police departments. And Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, in *An Indigenous People’s History of the United States*, writes that militias in the North American colonies, created “for the purpose of raiding and razing Indigenous communities,” (p. 80) were later used as slave patrols, confirming a deep connection between colonialism, expansion, and capitalism in the US, and its use of racism as a means of violently securing profit and rule.



1. sting ball: to carryout the super-exploitation and oppression of BIPOC 2. baton projectiles: to exert brutal force to keep the poorest and most oppressed layers in check as a warning to the rest of society 3. pepper spray: to enforce the rules of the capitalists 4. baton: to break protest, strikes, or occupations 5. tear-gas grenade: to repress and discipline the working class 6. flash-bang grenade: to administer violence and social control

It is no accident that the US police force is one of the most militarized, violent, racist, sexist, and transphobic in the world. The conditions of their work organically create an environment for racist, sexist, and reactionary ideas to flourish. Many departments across the country have been infiltrated by white supremacists. A substantial portion of cops are domestic abusers; family violence by police is 2-4 times higher than in the general population.

The contradictions and inequalities in US society are bigger than in any other capitalist country: obscene wealth on one side of society and the lack of major reforms on the other (like nationalized healthcare, pensions, and free education won by the working class in other countries), together with the super-exploitation and oppression of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people. The capitalist class relies on a brutal police force to keep the poorest and most oppressed layers in check as a warning to the rest of society.

The police cannot be used in the interests of the working class. We can't rely in any way on the police, not even a significantly reformed force, to protect our communities or be deployed in support of working-class movements, even where they are under the formal control of more left-wing politicians or civilian oversight boards. But to abolish the capitalist police we must get rid of capitalism—and create a new society in its place.

A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT STATE & SOCIETY

“That is the prognosis of the future. In Africa, in America, in the West Indies, on a national and international scale, the millions of Negroes will raise their heads, rise up from their knees, and write some of the most massive and brilliant chapters in the history of international socialism.”
— C.L.R James, “*Revolution and the Negro*,” 1939

We are fighting for a socialist society. We want the multiracial working class to take power, and organize the economy and society to meet the needs of humanity and nature, not for the profit of a few billionaires. We think the working class can run society, with democratic decision-making bodies in all of our workplaces and communities, deciding what and how we produce the things we need, and how we organize our lives.

But how do we get there? We disagree with the view of many on the left that the capitalist state can be reformed into a tool for the working class to use or transformed into its own democratic socialist state. The working class will not be able to elect our way into control over the capitalist state and then gradually transform it. The limits of democratic control over the existing capitalist state is most starkly revealed when examining control over the police, army, and other core repressive arms of the state. Even liberal capitalist politicians who try to reign in or regulate these bodies quickly face resistance and find them to be deeply unaccountable and autonomous from formal democratic oversight, as Democratic politicians from Seattle to New York are now experiencing.

The attempt to use the capitalist state for socialist purposes has been tried with disastrous results: socialists in Chile in the 1970s found that the armed bodies of the state ultimately responded to the capitalist class, not to the democratically elected socialist president. More often, the capitalist class has not needed to resort to military coups, instead defeating socialist governments through economic pressures like “capital strikes” or by economic threats and extortion. This was recently demonstrated in Greece after Syriza came to power in 2015, but history is thick with similar examples including the well-documented capitulation of the Mitterand government in France in the 1980s.

For the working class to establish genuine democracy, we must dismantle, or “break-up, smash” (in Lenin’s words) the existing capitalist state, and replace it with our own self-organized, democratic institutions. Most crucially, this means getting rid of the repressive features of the capitalist state: the capitalist police, courts, and military, as well as the “bureaucracy” of the executive governing bodies, the “deep state” within the administrations.

Experiences of revolutionary upheavals, workplace takeovers, general strikes, and attempts at working-class revolution show working-class people’s tremendous creative potential. Throughout history, working-class people in revolt have organized mass assemblies of struggle to deal with the crises at hand and to challenge capitalist state institutions for power. The names change, but the idea is the same: workers councils, soviets, *cordones* (in Chile 1973), *shoras* (in Iran 1979), communes, street assemblies. Linking these bodies up as the basis for a new workers government is at the core of revolutionary socialist strategy for the working class to take power.

A socialist revolution cannot jump from capitalism to completely abolishing classes overnight: we need a democratic workers’ state to get us there. To transition to a classless, stateless society, the organized multiracial working class needs to create a radically democratic workers’ state that is able to defend the rule of the majority over the tiny but powerful dethroned capitalist class. With deep networks of entrenched power, ideological grip, and influence over the capitalist state machinery, the old ruling class will not simply give up their billions the day after working-class people take power. As every attempted revolution proves, capitalists will fight as hard as they can to restore their power and profits, and we will need to defend against this in an organized way.

This defense is the core function of a democratic workers’ state: a state controlled by and defending the vast majority of people against the old ruling class, a true democracy with the clear aim of moving decisively toward a classless society. Under these conditions, the capitalist police, prisons, and military can be replaced with new, fundamentally different public safety institutions that must be strictly overseen and democratically controlled by the working class.

Unlike the capitalist police and state, public safety forces run in the interest of the majority of people will actually be able to ensure people's safety and well-being. Instead of using abuse and punishment, we can develop restorative ways of holding community members accountable when they engage in violent antisocial behaviors. Since these forces will be fully accountable to a democratic workers' state, the working class will have control over what safety and well-being measures look like—which is also why ensuring that a socialist government remains fully democratic and accountable to the majority of people is crucial; democracy is at the heart of socialism.

Replacing the capitalist state with a democratic workers' state is not, by itself, enough to immediately end exploitation and oppression. Poverty, alienation, and antisocial behavior will not just disappear overnight, nor will racism, sexism and transphobia. Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people in particular will undoubtedly be key leaders in a democratic workers' state in the US, as well as in the multiracial revolutionary movement that gets us there. Much of the fight against racist ideas can happen within that movement: for it must take up the fight against racism, white supremacy, and settler colonialism as it sets its sight on overthrowing capitalism itself.

A democratic workers' state, with working and oppressed people holding the reigns of power, would prioritize those most marginalized by capitalism—Black, Latinx, and Indigenous working-class people in particular—in investments and social programs. It would acknowledge historic wrongs and the colossal robbery of Indigenous lives and land, of Black lives, and of lives worldwide through US imperialism and militarism. It would honor Native treaties and restore sacred sites, like the *Paha Sapa* (Black Hills), to Indigenous people. It would include massive education programs about the history of the US, capitalism, and imperialism. And with the incentive and motive for a racist state gone, what's left is to root out the vestiges of racist ideas that last past their end date.

THE FUTURE WE FIGHT FOR

"In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

**— Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels,
The Communist Manifesto**

Under socialism, the economy will not be run in the interests of a few billionaires and corporations, but in the interest of the entirety of the people. In this society *the working class collectively owns* the means of production, not just a few individuals. A *democratically planned* economy, run by elected decision-making bodies of the

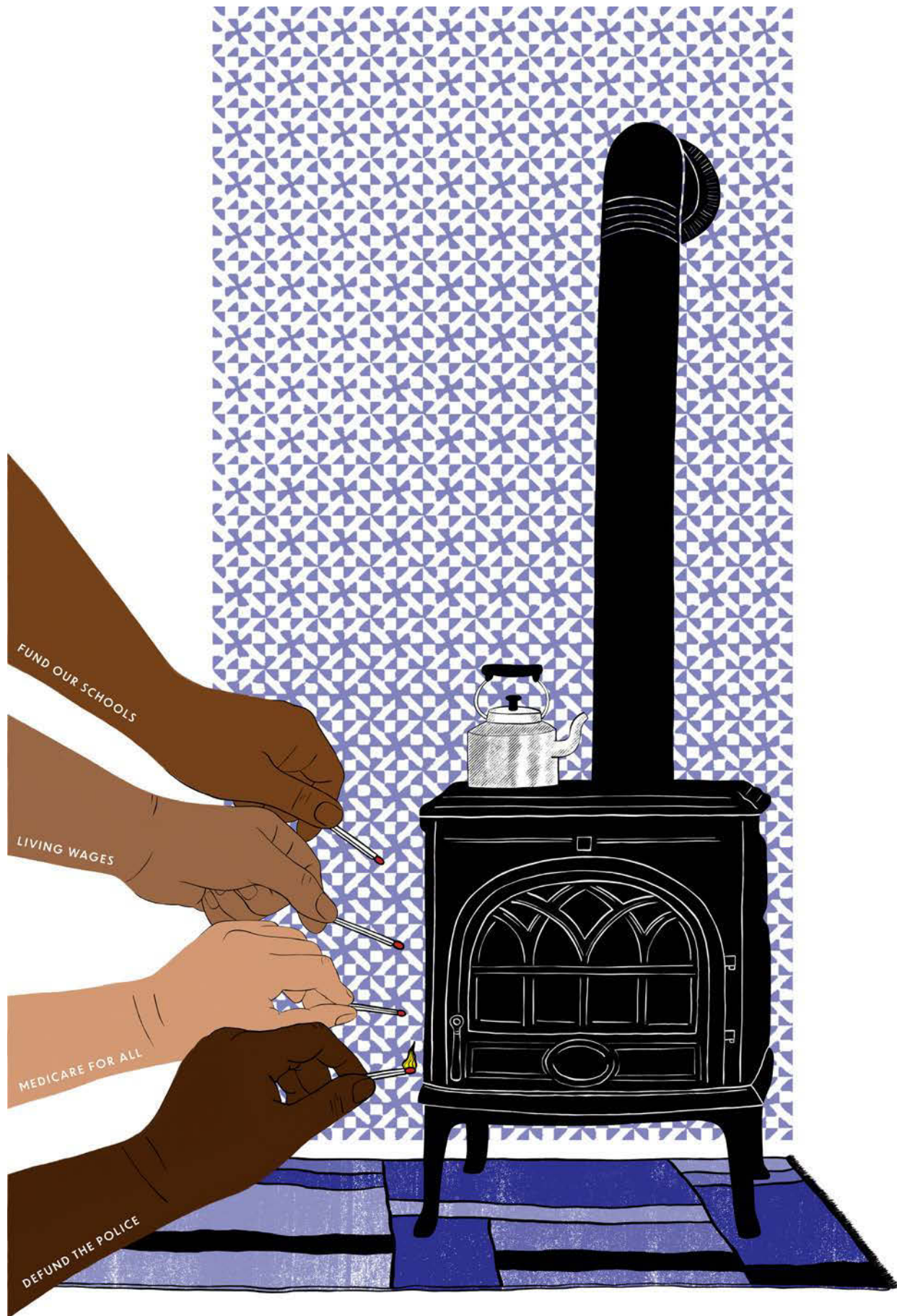
working class, will be able to meet human needs and wants, while guaranteeing full, equitable employment with a reduction in labor time and preserving ecological equilibrium.

An ecosocialist transformation of society, in which we can put an end to extractive and nature-destroying industries and work quickly to stave off the effects of climate change, is our only hope at avoiding complete climate disaster—one that will hit poor communities of color globally the hardest. This new society must also seek to heal and transform our relationship to the land and nature: from a capitalist society divorced from the land and ravaging it, to a classless society working truly *with* the land and in mutual relationship with it.

Under capitalism, billionaires hoard resources, and corporations produce cheap goods made to break and waste food and commodities when not profitable to sell them. With private corporations, billionaires, and the ability to make private profit all abolished, we won't have to fight over resources. People possess the ingenuity, skill, and resources to produce enough for the world's population, done in symbiotic cooperation with the natural world—but production and exchange will no longer be the driving force of society; rather we'll organize society in order to, in the words of Michael Lowy, "give human beings free time to fully develop their potentialities." We can create a society based on genuine connection with both humanity and nature, as well as plenty of time and the creative freedom to do what we want with our lives—free from the violence of the capitalist state and the ideologies of white supremacy that capitalism continues to stoke.

This building of a new society can only happen as a global revolutionary project. Capitalism is global, and the history of the 20th century teaches that capitalist powers will destroy any revolutionary attempt that threatens their power. Socialism is international or nothing. Revolutions in one country often inspire those in another; new revolutionary governments can support one another. A revolution in the US, for example, would cut off US imperialism, creating global conditions in which a flurry of revolutionary movements would have a much higher chance of succeeding. And as socialist society becomes necessarily global, it will work to erase the vast inequalities between advanced capitalist countries and those in the global South (inequalities purposefully maintained by advanced capitalist countries today) and destroy neo-colonialist structures such as the IMF, World Bank, and massive debt.

A socialist state and society would work to abolish classes once and for all. Once the socialist state has successfully defended the decisions of the majority, and new decision-making structures over the processes of production are set up, then the socialist state can "wither away" (a term coined by Frederick Engels, Marx' closest collaborator). In its place, we can finally reach a stateless society of



FUND OUR SCHOOLS

LIVING WAGES

MEDICARE FOR ALL

DEFUND THE POLICE

freely associating individuals building community with each other and collectively organizing to democratically administer society, with no need for a state apparatus. In more classical Marxist terms, this is what is meant by communism.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

“Between social reforms and revolution there exists for [the Marxist movement] an inseparable connection. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim.”
— Rosa Luxemburg

As Rosa Luxemburg would argue, the daily struggle for reforms is how the multiracial working class becomes organized and educated *in order* to carry out the end goal, that of taking political power for the working class to usher in a completely new society. Fighting for reforms—or what the movement today might call radical demands—like defunding, demilitarizing, and dismantling police departments, is crucial both to improve the lives of Black working-class people now, and in order to prepare our class for the battles ahead.

As long as capitalism exists, we want to limit the ability of the police to use violent force against the working class, and replace the current regime of racist over-policing with expanded social programs. We should support all demands that restrict the repressive powers of the police, including: cutting police budgets, rolling back over-policing and expanding social services to address social problems, demilitarizing, banning rubber bullets, tear gas and other chemicals, dismantling special units like SWAT teams, firing all cops who are found to have engaged in racist policing and excessive use of force, and electing civilian oversight boards with real power over police. These demands protect Black lives and all working-class lives today and will make it harder for the police to be used to suppress a revolutionary working-class movement when the time comes.

Of course, we don’t have illusions in these reforms themselves: any reforms to the police under capitalism, including creating alternate models of public safety, would not change their core function as a capitalist force. Any force tasked with maintaining order within a fundamentally unjust society would still be forced to take the side of the rich and corporations, and to maintain huge inequalities along economic, racial, and gender lines.

For example, “dismantling” police departments will likely amount to little more than a rebranding—a re-launch of a capitalist police force, just with a different name. For example, according to

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, after Camden, New Jersey disbanded and replaced its police department, the city had the most complaints of excessive force in New Jersey, and “broken windows” policing (fining low-stakes crimes) wildly increased (p. 133). In Minneapolis, the City Council pledged to dismantle the police department following weeks of protests, but in the words of one Democratic council member, the Council will “work alongside our amazing police chief” to “build new systems of public safety”—the same police chief under whose watch George Floyd was murdered.

Without addressing underlying inequalities, even “community-led public safety” might start as a completely different model of public safety, but will eventually devolve into a force maintaining the capitalist status quo. Unless organized as one arm within a wider anti-capitalist movement—controlled and checked by the organized multiracial working class and clearly taking sides in the class struggle—it would still defend capitalist property relations and would not be on the side of the working class.

In Greek mythology, the monster Hydra developed two new heads whenever the struggling heroes who confronted it cut one off. The capitalist state has a similar ability—if it’s not replaced by new and completely different institutions created and democratically controlled by the organized multiracial working class.

But fighting for these reforms is how the working class can become organized into a mass socialist movement, the decisive factor in the overthrow of capitalism. Right now politically advanced sections of the US working class, especially Black working-class youth, are organizing and educating themselves through the fight to defund the police.

BUILDING A MAJORITY

“Not through a majority to revolutionary tactics, but through revolutionary tactics to a majority—that is the way the road runs.”
— Rosa Luxemburg

For this uprising for Black lives to both win meaningful reforms of police, and transform into a movement that can defeat the capitalist class, even more people, particularly Black and brown working-class people, must be brought into struggle. The uprising for Black lives has already won broad popular support for Black Lives Matter, but unless we can translate that into mass involvement and hardened support for far-reaching changes, the political establishment will have plenty of opportunities to try and isolate activists from the broader working class. So what demands we emphasize today, and how we fight for these demands, matters.

While flawed, polls can help assess popular consciousness. A recent Washington Post-ABC News poll showed that a majority (63%) of people support the Black Lives Matter movement, but there was opposition (55%) to reducing funding for police departments and spending that money on social services instead. A recent Gallup poll, however, expressed support (58%) for other “major changes” to police policies, and even stronger support (82%) for “community-based alternatives such as violence intervention.” It should be no surprise that Black people, people of color, and young people are much more likely to support all of these.

Yet currently, only 15% of people support the call to abolish the police; including just 22% of Black people and 33% of those younger than 35. Of course, people’s perspectives shift dramatically through the power of mass movements, as shifts in public opinion of the BLM movement and of understanding racism over the past ten years has clearly shown. Within the movement, we can do the political education work needed to collectively raise one-another’s horizons about what is possible and necessary to win real liberation. But our immediate demands should be geared towards bringing more and more working-class people into action.

The current hesitancy around redirecting police department funding, and clear opposition to demands to abolish police, reflect a genuine concern over public safety. For decades, working-class people have been inundated by ruling-class ideology that crime is the biggest threat to their communities. And violence in many poor, working-class communities is a real issue that affects people’s lives in serious, tangible ways.

Policing in poor neighborhoods is often contradictory: police are hyper-present for stop-and-frisk and “broken windows” style of fines and arrests, representing a dangerous and sometimes murderous force, but absent when real harm prevention is needed. While working-class people, Black people in particular, often understand the deeply violent and racist nature of the police and their notorious ineffectiveness at preventing or solving crimes impacting working-class people, many have historically supported maintaining or increasing policing—because what other alternative is there? The power of this movement lies in opening up the conversation about what those alternatives could be.

The approach by liberal Democrats to creating these alternatives represent some real dangers. Of course, the opportunities are clear: if we can keep up the pressure on Democratic politicians, substantial budget cuts and other reforms can be won in the months ahead. Transferring police functions to other groups is necessary, and popular: 61% of people are open to shifting emergency calls about addiction, mental illness, and homelessness to other service providers, and letting police focus on crimes like burglary and murder. In Seattle, the movement pressured a majority of the City Council

to commit to defund the police department by 50%, including transferring 911 operations to a civilian-controlled system. It would be dangerous, however, for the movement to trust that promises made at the height of protests will be honored as protests in the streets recede. Councilmembers are already backsliding in Minneapolis and Seattle.

But if cities do begin substantially cutting police budgets—but fail to address the underlying conditions of poverty and desperation that lead to violence—the door is left open to right-wing forces to whip up a popular backlash. Especially as the economic crisis increases the pressures and misery in our communities, we can count on the corporate media to amplify public safety fears, blaming police budget cuts rather than capitalism. Additionally, defunding the police without fully funding social services might lead to a privatization of police forces, where private forces will have even more impunity than our current police force.

Instead, a socialist strategy is far more capable of building and sustaining a popular majority than the approach of liberal Democrats, whose politics hinge on shifting popular moods rather than on a systematic effort to build a conscious majority for real liberation. A socialist strategy towards defunding the police means we don’t just stop at shifting police budgets around. It means we take seriously the safety concerns of Black and brown working-class people, and wage a fight to radically redistribute funds from the capitalist class towards the Black and brown communities they exploit and oppress.

Activists in Seattle, for example, have taken up housing for all as a key demand for public safety. The movement should take this up around the country, and expand defunding demands to include massive investments in working-class communities—Black and brown communities in particular—in healthcare, housing, education, childcare, public transit, and other social services that have been purposefully underfunded and privatized for decades, and pay for these programs by dramatically raising taxes on the wealthy and big businesses.

A socialist strategy also means that we fight for these major police reforms and work to bring new working-class people into struggle without losing sight of the end goal. The police are unreformable, and nothing short of replacing capitalism with our own democratic workers’ state, leading decisively towards a stateless, classless society, will be able to bring about genuine safety and well-being for ourselves and our communities. ■

Anya Mae Lemlich is a member of DSA and its Reform and Revolution caucus.

Visit ReformandRevolution.org for the full text of this article, including sections on the history of capitalism and racism in the US.

Seattle's Police-Free Zone

The Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHOP) inspired activists across the country, even as Trump and Fox News used the Seattle zone to whip up confusion and fear. Discussions about the experience, including the huge pressures CHOP faced, will help strengthen the movement against racist police violence in the years ahead.

BY STEPHAN KIMMERLE

During the height of the uprising for Black lives in June, Seattle protesters succeeded in forcing the police to abandon their East Precinct Police Station. This victory resulted in protesters occupying the blocks around the police station and part of Cal Anderson Park in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood. The occupation became a flashpoint of national discussion and media attention.

Initially called the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ), and later renamed the Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHOP) to emphasize its purpose, the occupation was a lively hub of resistance. Thousands came out every day to discuss politics, listen to speeches, plan activities, and build community together with gardening, tents, free food, and free medical services.

However, three weeks later, CHOP had turned into a political liability which was starting to undermine political sympathy for the protest movement among the broader public. An increasingly tense atmosphere, punctured by right-wing attacks and a number of shootings which resulted in the death of three people, led to CHOP's decline even before the police regained control of the area and reclaimed their police station.

What started as an "autonomous police-free zone" saw an increase in different kinds of policing. A number of armed activists declared they would take responsibility for patrolling CHOP. This happened in response to real and rumored threats

of attacks by far-right groups as well as conflicts within CHOP, but without democratic agreement or formal accountability to the CHOP community. At the same time, there was a "Pinkertonization" of the area with businesses, big and small, hiring their own private security forces, even less accountable to the public than the police.

The problem was not that the police were kicked out, as media and establishment politicians claim, but that they were not replaced with a well-organized force held accountable by the protest movement. Unfortunately, there were no democratic structures and no democratically accountable peacekeeping force which could enforce principles of solidarity, anti-racism, and anti-sexism, which is unavoidably needed given the conditions of the racist, sexist, alienated, and deeply unequal class society we live in.

This points to a much larger task within the struggle to defund the police and the efforts aiming to get rid of the police. In the end, a mass movement of the multiracial working class, fighting for a democratic socialist society, will need to develop its own self-defense forces that take on the organization of public safety.

The Start of the "Police-Free Zone"

When Seattle police barricaded Pine street on June 1 and blocked a march against George Floyd's murder from getting close



to the East Precinct Police Station, they initiated a week-long stand-off with protesters. Night after night the protestors stayed, despite the violence of the police being on full display. The police used massive amounts of pepper spray, tear gas, rubber bullets, flash-bang grenades, and even stationed snipers on rooftops.

Police and the political establishment (all Democrats) waged a fierce war in the media to delegitimize protestors (such as displaying a broken candle and labeling it an "incendiary explosive"). Nonetheless, support for the protests continued to grow. Facing widespread public opposition, the authorities felt compelled to pull the police back temporarily and even abandon the East Precinct Police Station in order to try to defuse the situation.

The police, angry at having to abandon their police station, spread rumors in the media that protestors were going to burn down the station. Instead, something wonderful happened. Using donated resources, they turned the previously militarized block into a peaceful nexus of anti-racist organizing, discussion, and expression. It was a largely celebratory atmosphere with daily speak-outs, street murals, and free food.

None of the organizers chose the terrain or the timing. The diverse group of protestors did the best they could facing all the complications that a "police-free zone" entails, staffed only by volunteers in the middle of a highly unequal city. At every turn,

activists were under a national spotlight, with Donald Trump and the right-wing media intent on weaponizing every single issue to demonize the entire protest as violent. Fox News infamously photo-shopped the same photo of one armed participant into multiple shots.

Under these circumstances, as the situation developed further over the next three weeks, three main factors were at play:

1. The Threat of the Police against CHOP

Protesters, including those in the autonomous zone, were never truly autonomous from the threat of violence by the Seattle Police Department and other security forces of the state.

Seattle Mayor Durkan, needing to distance herself politically from Trump's attacks, defended CHOP at first as a kind of carnival with a "block party atmosphere," while also working behind the scenes to try to dismantle it. On multiple occasions, the mayor and the police signaled they would reclaim their police station, but for weeks public support was too high to actually execute the sweep. It wasn't until July 1 at 2 a.m. that Durkan signed the official order for the police to forcefully sweep the area. A White House spokesperson declared "Seattle has been liberated."

2. The Threat of Nazis, White Supremacists, and the Far Right

Far-right activists represent a very small part of society, but they have been emboldened and empowered by Trump, and they are increasingly a threat.

There were multiple attacks by far-right groups before and after the establishment of CHOP. Shortly before CHOP was established, one person drove their car into the protests and, after being stopped, shot at demonstrators.

The day after CHOP was established, several police officers talked on unencrypted communication "scanners" (which

the public can listen to) about a group of 30 white nationalists marching toward the area. Protesters got ready to defend each other, but it turned out the white nationalists were a hoax. Even though no violence occurred, the media took many photos of protestors equipped to defend themselves and circulated these images nationwide to portray CHOP as militarized and violent.

A sign that read "You are now leaving USA" broadcasted widely by the media, inflamed real far-right groups who came at various points to "re-take it for the US," sometimes carrying giant American flags, other times coming in vans without license plates, and attacking protestors with bats.

There is no known record of any arrests resulting from these far-right assaults.

3. The Violence within CHOP

The police were constantly waging a propaganda war against CHOP with made-up stories about CHOP violence. The day after police abandoned their police station, the mayor and police chief held a press conference where they claimed protestors had set up ID checkpoints and were extorting local small businesses. These claims were spread far and wide by the corporate media. Yet when pressed on who had reported this, the police chief contradicted herself, saying "We haven't had any formal reports of this occurring."

Although many of these claims were manufactured, CHOP was also never a violence-free utopia. Over the weekend of June 20–21, three people were shot at or near CHOP, and one black 19 year-old tragically lost his life. In response, Police Chief Carmen Best claimed "that if the Seattle City Council hadn't banned less-lethal weapons like rubber bullets and tear gas, officers could have responded sooner" (*The Stranger*, June 22). She also claimed that protestors had stopped police from reaching that first victim. This was a powerful tool in turning public opinion against CHOP, although later review of video evidence showed this claim was a lie. The Capitol Hill Blog

reported about further gun violence on June 23, with one teen killed and a 14 year-old wounded in another shooting in the early morning hours of June 29. One of the outbreaks of violence was reported to be linked to domestic violence, and a number of sexual assault allegations were raised.

We do not have complete information and—as outlined above—the mayor and the police continuously spread misinformation, which was echoed by national media. Nonetheless, after these deaths, the atmosphere at CHOP completely changed.

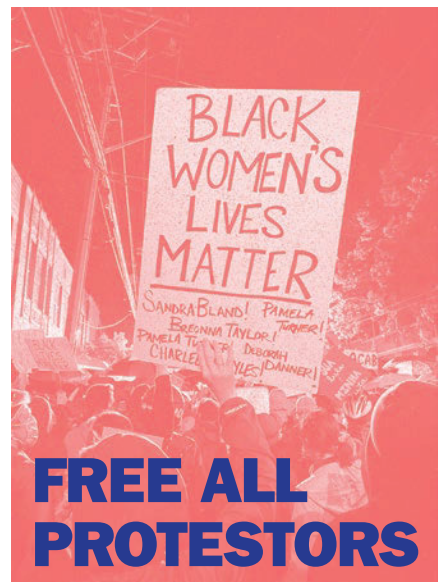
The ability of the movement to respond in an organized way to these challenges and threats was limited. With no regular decision-making general meetings at CHOP to discuss a way forward, and without a democratically elected leadership, it was difficult or impossible to make necessary adjustments or implement changes.

The End of Policing?

The self-declared police-free autonomous zone crumbled not only because it was dismantled by the Seattle police. Unfortunately, it was already imploding. The media—including the liberal media—were happy to seize on this. CNN claimed on July 5 that "human nature" made it difficult to create a world without police, adding:

Protesters wanted to end police violence against Black people by defunding the department by 50 percent. They argued armed officers shouldn't be called to respond to issues of mental health, homelessness, poverty. But once they created a police-free zone, they immediately had to deal with all those issues and more — with only the donated time and supplies of fellow protesters, who still had day jobs. With police absent from the 6-square-block area, the experiment spun out of control, with accusations that it ended up causing exactly what it had aimed to stop: more violence against Black people.

Rather than demonstrating some permanent feature of "human nature," CHOP showed it was impossible to create a sustainable island of peace surrounded by an ocean of capitalism with all its violence and



inhumanity. Many CHOP organizers and participants sensed from the beginning the very real limits of what could be sustainably built in CHOP.

Activists in the “Occupy Wall Street” occupations in 2011 had similar experiences: The encampments, born out of protest against the conditions created by capitalism, suddenly had to manage the worst outcomes of capitalism — without the necessary resources to do so. Some of the people camping in tents were there to protest; others were homeless people who gained a more stable place to live.

All the features built into this society — poverty, racism, sexual assault, homophobia — are challenges that social movements and left-wing organizations have to deal with all the time inside their own ranks. With a situation like CHOP, with no overarching plan, tensions rose between organizers about what the space should look like, and how to deal with those mounting difficulties.

The police are used by the ruling class to enforce the laws of their exploitative system, but also to keep a certain “order” or lid on the pressure cooker of conflict and tension that runs throughout this society. Our collective liberation will require lifting this lid, but the movement must raise itself up to the task of dealing with the pressure cooker itself, by addressing the underlying social conditions that systemat-

ically generate tension, conflict, anti-social behavior, and violence.

The demand to defund the police points in the right direction, and the left in Seattle has to fight tooth and nail to ensure the seven (out of nine) city councilmembers fulfill their promise to cut the SPD budget in half. (Eight members of the Seattle City Council are Democrats. Only one, Socialist Alternative’s Kshama Sawant, is not.) However, even if the \$200 million that makes up half the SPD budget would be completely reinvested to meet the urgent needs of communities of color and the wider working class, it would only be a drop in the bucket compared to what is truly needed.

A violent and repressive police force is a cheaper “solution” for the corporate elite rather than actually solving the underlying social problems, which would require investing a massive amount of resources to meet the needs of working and poor people. The inevitable economic and social tensions of this crisis-ridden capitalist society create the need to “keep things under control” (of course, a “control” favorable to the interests of the ruling elite, achieved by right-wing methods necessary for such “control”). Almost all people who argue for “abolishing the police” acknowledge these societal tensions and are trying to come up with other ways of creating “public safety” with some kind of replacement for the police.

Different Ways to Defund the Police

There are different ways to defund the police:

A *left-liberal* approach to defunding the police isolates and separates the question of police violence from other social problems, arguing to reduce the harm done by the police while dire racial and class inequalities remain intact for the most part. This left-liberal approach fails to fully address the underlying issues of inequality, exploitation, oppression, and alienation, which give rise to crime. With this approach, fears that defunding the police will cause a lack of “public safety” will gain traction, not only among white relatively better off working-class people, but also among communities of color and poor people.

This left-liberal approach overlaps with an *anarchist approach* which argues that, after dismantling the state, the door would automatically open up for fundamental economic and social change. In contrast to this belief, the experience at CHOP showed how quickly policing was reestablished not just by the businesses around CHOP who hired their own armed private security, but by protesters themselves out of the desperate need to deal with the contradictions that arose.

On the other hand, there is a *socialist approach* that also vehemently argues to

defund the police. However, socialists link defunding the police to the need to fundamentally change society, for example with Medicare for All, jobs guarantees, reparations, and a huge redistribution of wealth to communities of color and the wider working class. Within this approach, *revolutionary socialists* argue that this must be part of a struggle to end the rule of the capitalist class and dismantle their police and other repressive agencies. Revolutionary socialists believe this requires the multiracial working class taking over the running of society, including organizing public safety.

“The challenge is instead to unite the multiracial working class — not some notion of a classless “community” — in the struggle against inequality, oppression, and poverty in general.”

The Movement’s Own Ability to Create Places of Solidarity

CHOP developed out of the uprising for Black lives – and it was a beautiful attempt to build the movement. Future movements could attempt to build upon this by grappling with two main questions:

a) Can there be a democratically elected and accountable leadership?

Multiple Black leaders have led the movement for Black lives in Seattle. Community organizer Nikkita Oliver, in particular, has played a very valuable leadership role. Early on, Nikkita was one of the driving forces, helping to unify and build the

movement by organizing over 300 organizations to sign onto a statement in support of three key demands: (1) defund SPD by 50%, (2) redirect those funds to community-led health and safety services, and (3) free all the protesters without charges. Nikkita also publicly called out Mayor Durkan for attempting to hand-pick “leaders” that the mayor wanted to serve as “spokespeople” for the movement.

When Nikkita has been asked to speak on behalf of the community, she has often responded that the community will speak for itself. The movement has a healthy skepticism of anyone claiming to speak on its behalf. However, mass movements of thousands of people will inevitably need some leaders to serve as spokespeople to represent the movement’s views in the media, to articulate demands, and to organize mass actions that can unify the movement.

Since the movement is inevitably going to need such leaders and organizers to play these indispensable roles, it should be done in a democratic way. For example, general assemblies could be held to discuss key issues facing the movement and democratically elect leaders that the movement actually supports, as opposed to those claiming to speak on their behalf. To ensure the leaders carry out the will of the majority of the protesters, the leaders should be subject to a recall election at any time and participate in regular mass meetings of protesters where all viewpoints could be aired.

b) Can the movement develop its own peacekeeping stewarding force to defend itself from violent right-wing and police attacks, and to deal with any anti-social conduct that would put the safety of participants at risk?

The experience of CHOP illustrates it is not enough to kick out the existing police or abolish them. The task facing the movement was to get organized, to become strong enough to defend the principles of solidarity on the ground at CHOP. In effect, the movement would need to successfully replace the police, but with completely different intentions, methods, and tools. CHOP needed to elect a democratically accountable peacekeeping (or

stewarding) force to deal with all the questions arising from both external threats and internal challenges.

One of many inspiring developments in the Seattle uprising was the bike brigades that protesters spontaneously organized to protect protests and marches. Dozens of bikers, and sometimes car caravans, collectively shut down traffic and blocked police and other potential disturbances to peaceful protesters. This is a glimpse of the kind of force needed to collectively protect our movements in the future.

Could the bike brigades be expanded to overcome the challenges CHOP was facing? That would have been great, but at the end of the day, the question is how to keep these new stewards accountable. How could democratic control over such forces be exercised and sustained?

Many argue today for “community control of the police.” That sounds much better — and in many ways might be better — than keeping such forces under the control of the present mechanisms of repression. But any attempt to implement local community control of the police could also easily pit different working-class communities against each other, and more middle-class neighborhoods against poorer people. The challenge is instead to unite the multiracial working class — not some notion of a classless “community” — in the struggle against inequality, oppression, and poverty in general.

A united movement of the multiracial working class could overcome those divisions and create a force that radically contrasts with the present tools of oppression and repression. It could aim to reorganize society, using its wealth and resources to overcome class, racial, and gender oppression. This is how capitalism and the capitalist police can be abolished once and for all — by establishing a democratic socialist society with an alternative public safety force, which would be accountable to, and run in the interests of, the multiracial masses. ■

Stephan Kimmerle is a Seattle DSA activist and a member of DSA’s Reform & Revolution caucus.



BY SEAN CASE

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MRS. ANGELA DAVIS
FROM CAPITTALE

--ANGELA DAVIS--

DEFUND
POLICE
INVEST IN
COMMUNITIES

King County Labor Chooses Black Lives Over Blue Solidarity

On June 17, 2020, under pressure from union activists in the Black Lives Matter movement, the labor council representing over 100,000 workers in the greater Seattle area voted by 55% to disaffiliate from the Seattle Police Officers' Guild (SPOG).

BY WHITNEY KAHN

ILLUSTRATED BY BENJAMIN WATKINS

"I want you to think about what inspires you throughout history," said local educator and Seattle Education Association member Jesse Hagopian. He was speaking to a thousand people gathered at the Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHOP) zone for the SPOG Out Now rally on June 17th. "What are the social movements that you look to in moments like this when we need to make change?"

The rally was organized by rank-and-file union workers, many of us socialists, trying to change our union labor council from below. We planned for it to be on the same night that the Martin Luther King County Labor Council (MLKCLC) was voting on whether or not to expel the Seattle Police Officers Guild, something that just weeks before no one had thought possible. "And then I want you to think about what side the police were on in that struggle," Jesse finished.

In 2014, the same year that the Ferguson uprising ignited the modern Black Lives Matter movement, the MLKCLC, representing 100,000 workers in the greater Seattle area, welcomed the SPOG into their ranks. In 2018, the year after Charleena Lyles, an expecting mother, was killed by the police in her own home by the very police she had called to assist her, the

MLKCLC vocally championed the police contract which removed limited accountability measures that Seattle had recently adopted. But this year, during the height of the wave of protests following the murder of George Floyd, the MLKCLC voted to kick SPOG out of the labor council with 55% of delegates voting in favor.

It's worth noting just how disgusting the actions of SPOG have been over the past few years. As the Seattle DSA statement on this vote says:

SPOG has consistently played a reactionary role reinforcing the racist and unaccountable character of the Seattle Police. In their 2018 contract SPOG fought to overturn the very limited police accountability the City of Seattle had recently established. SPOG also pushed for the City and County to spend hundreds of millions of our tax-dollars on a new police bunker and a new youth jail. SPOG has a long history of publishing racist material in their union newspaper. Now SPOG is trying to overturn the ban on rubber bullets, tear gas, and other chemical weapons that the protests pressured the City council to pass.

The Seattle DSA statement also points out that SPOG did all this with the backing of the past and current leadership in the labor council.



[MLKCLC Executive Secretary-Treasurer] Nicole Grant said at the time [of the 2018 police contract], 'It's time for supporters of police reform to back off and allow workers to have their raise.' The Labor Council leadership criticized the socialist, Kshama Sawant, for being the only city councilmember to vote against the 2018 SPOG contract... the majority of labor leaders opposed other left-wing candidates in recent years like Nikkita Oliver, Shaun Scott, and Jon Grant, who ran on platforms opposing SPOG and police racism... the Labor Council nominated SPOG for its "Volunteer of the Year" award at the "Labor Oscars" in 2018. This led Seattle DSA to turn down the Labor Council's request to endorse and donate to the event.

But now, after years of consciousness-raising Black Lives Matter protests with no meaningful reforms to show for it, this wave of the movement has finally broken through the "hold the line and admit no wrongdoing" establishment resistance. This wave of rebellion is shaking every institution to its core, achieving what recently seemed impossible. Fueled by the power of this mass movement, it took only two weeks for the demand to go from a petition started by Highline Public Schools educators to a done deal.

The petition to kick SPOG out was started by Highline educators of color in a caucus they call HiCORE (Highline Caucus of Rank-and-file Educators). As HiCORE member Rupika Madhavan recalled:

When unions go on strike, who's brought in? It's the police... so getting SPOG out of the Labor Council was not a brand new idea. Folks in HiCORE were in relationship with people who have been doing that work and were told that there was more movement around getting SPOG out now, and that now would be a prime time to act because of the labor of DefundSPD organizers. So we started working on a petition for BIPOC union members that basically said police are not labor, they do not belong in the labor council, and that the MLK Labor Council had to choose between us (BIPOC union members) or SPOG.

Their caucus is modeled after the Chicago Teachers Union caucus, CORE, which won a leadership election in 2012 against a conservative establishment that “led” the union by accepting and overseeing school closures and budget cuts.

So it's not a coincidence that the Highline district workers who started this petition were organized as a similar rank-and-file caucus, even borrowing the name from Chicago. There's power in being organized around a class-struggle strategy, and the battle over SPOG's role in the MLKCLC is a small reflection of the same sort of conflicting visions for the labor movement that has played out in Chicago.

Even though the rank-and-file caucus in Highline was small, the fact that these educators were already organized allowed them to give a lead to other workers. Their petition was spread through many channels, including through a HiCORE member who was also a member of Seattle DSA which is how I and others in DSA first heard about the petition. The next day at the Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHOP) police-free zone, I ran into a fellow rank-and-file educator, Anna Hackman from AFT 1789, whom I knew from previous organizing.

Anna would later describe our thinking at the time. “We really had a very small part in the grand scheme of things. A lot of people were already doing a lot of work... HiCORE had circulated this petition calling on BIPOC union workers to sign to vote to expel. The delegates were already talking... All of these different pockets were trying to find their way in... So rather than trying to find our way in, [we wanted to] try to find a way to bring the MLK Labor Council out to the movement, and hold itself accountable to us. So if they're going to do those same kinds of backroom deals, they have to do it in front of us.”

A week later, reaching out to rank-and-file members we knew in other unions, we would host a rally of over one thousand right there in the CHOP led by unionized workers from across the city.

Our ability to exercise power depends on being politically organized in our unions and more broadly. Because the Highline educators were organized, they were able to pull together a petition that sparked this battle and was a beacon for union activists across the county to demand accountability from their union representatives. Because DSA members were organized across unions, we were able to pull our connections together quickly. Because a group of teachers at Seattle Central College had begun organizing as rank-and-file members of AFT 1789, they were able to act collectively as core organizers of the rally.

The power to do all of this came from the movement, and that power was able to be harnessed because small pockets of anti-racist rank-and-file union members were organized. There was much more organizing that went on beyond this rally, but the rally shined a spotlight on the vote, brought the public in, and labor council delegates were even watching the live-stream of the rally during the meeting. It all turned out to be just enough of a push

to force the MLKCLC to vote 55%-45% to expel SPOG from the labor council, making Seattle the first area to do so since the murder of George Floyd.

One thing that kept ringing out in the speeches by union members at the rally was that this had been a push from below, and that showing SPOG the door was not enough. As Manuel Carrillo, a barista, a member of UNITE/HERE local 8, and a DSA member, said at the rally:

“Kicking out SPOG is not enough to turn our labor movement into the anti-racist movement we know it can be. It is important to not forget that SPOG was aided in all of this by the majority of the leadership on the Labor Council. The majority of the Labor Council leadership actively supported SPOG in passing their 2018 contract that overturned very modest accountability measures. So we must keep pressure in our unions and in the labor council after we kick them out.”

Labor unions have the potential to be powerful fighters in battles against institutional racism and oppression, but that's far from a given. Without an activated, organized membership—and under the pressure of the capitalist class—unions tend to become dominated by business-friendly leaderships that rely on a timid strategy of limiting demands to what is acceptable to the rich and powerful. In practice, this means upholding the racist status quo of capitalism.

This decision to kick out SPOG was a U-turn by the MLKCLC leadership so intense you could almost smell the burning rubber. This movement for Black lives was able to kick SPOG out of the labor council, but the same leadership that invited SPOG in the first place is still in charge. We should celebrate this victory, but we should also soberly assess that this is one small battle in a much larger debate within unions between two opposing strategies — class conciliation and class struggle.

The Movement Keeps Moving

This same coalition that built the rally to get SPOG out of the MLKCLC is now organizing to promote resolutions in our unions to endorse the demand for defunding 50% of the Seattle Police Department and reallocating those funds to community-led social services in Black and brown communities. With intense COVID-related cuts coming to vital departments, there can be no neutral voices in this debate — it's either cutting the militarized police that oppress working-class communities of color, or cutting necessary social services that working people depend on. And what happens in Seattle doesn't stay in Seattle. Local victories like this are building pressure for bigger change. On a national stage, unions are now calling for the AFL-CIO to disaffiliate from the International Association of Police Unions altogether.

Even as we fight to deepen labor's commitment to the movement for Black lives and for reforms that partially lift the repressive police lid on the explosive social inequalities of capitalism, it is vital that labor fight against the inequality itself that the police are there to enforce. This must include bold calls for affordable housing for all, free universal healthcare, quality free education from pre-K through college, and guaranteed living wage jobs for everyone as well as reparations for slavery and institutional racism. Real public safety is only imaginable on the basis of these and other socialist policies aimed at fundamentally ending the deep racial and class inequities built into the fabric of this capitalist system.

These battles to pressure established union leaderships can win real gains for social movements, but they should also be seen as opportunities for rank-and-file activists to get further organized. We need to understand that, although establishment leaders can be pushed somewhat on this or that issue when they're under huge amounts of pressure from below, we can't just accept their concessions to mass pressure at face value

and think we've turned them into the leaders we need. One hundred years ago, the labor council led a 5-day general strike in Seattle. Today, it's a body that gets together once a month to passively vote on resolutions. These different forms reflect fundamentally different conceptions of what and who unions should fight for.

As Sundar Sharma of PROTEC-17 city workers' union, also a DSA activist, said at the June 17th rally: "The COVID crisis and mass unemployment right now are highlighting the gaping inequalities that are felt acutely by black and brown workers everyday." More than ever, as we barrel towards what could be the deepest crisis the capitalist system has ever faced, we need a union movement ready to fight against all forms of oppression. This should be connected to a strategy for building working-class power to transform society into one that serves human needs, rather than bowing down to corporate profiteers.

Pushing reluctant, conservative leaders has a limit — whether in unions or politics. Rank-and-file union activists should be using these opportunities to fight for a political revolution in our unions. That means rank-and-file caucuses that are boldly anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and with a movement-building strategy to fight for the needs of the entire multi-racial working class. That doesn't just mean to have radical faces in high places, but to fundamentally transform how our unions are organized and function, so that they can become the boldly anti-racist, class-struggle vehicles we need. ■

Whitney Kahn is a paraeducator, a member of the Seattle Education Association, and Seattle DSA (Reform & Revolution caucus).





COVID-19 and the Racist Disparities Fueling the Uprising

“Unless public spending is restored and coupled with access to high-paying employment, preventive and emergency health care, and safe, secure, and affordable housing, then it is hard to take seriously the expressions of outrage at the poverty and racism in this country.”

-Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

BY ROBERT SHIELDS

Over 790,000 people have died from COVID-19 around the world with over 170,000 of those deaths occurring in the US, though a *New York Times* analysis suggests the real death toll surpassed 200,000 in July. This pandemic has shown how unprepared our society was for a deadly virus to spread throughout the globe. We are now into our seventh month of the pandemic, and some horrifyingly familiar trends have started to emerge.

Black and Latino communities have the highest rate of COVID-19 cases and deaths. Black people are dying from COVID-19 at a rate three times higher than whites. In the early weeks of the pandemic, testing failed to show these disparities for exactly the reasons the disparities exist in the first place. When it came to testing, there were many more tests available in richer, whiter areas, and testing centers were in drive-thru centers that lower-income people were not able to access easily. New Orleans had to shift to mobile testing sites, as have many other cities, in order to reach into working-class communities.

At this point, the terms “income inequality” and “racial inequality” are household phrases, and now we have the dystopian phrase “testing inequality.” Testing is still wholly insufficient and inconsistent. This is a disgusting reflection of the structural racism built into our system, and it

is very likely that the data we have access to is still significantly understating the actual injustice that exists. As people die without healthcare access in this country, we may never know the true depth of the inequality.

“Health disparities are as much markers of racial inequality as mass incarceration or housing discrimination,” explained Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. The data make this clear. Black people in the US have diabetes at a rate 56% higher than whites, and for Latinos it is 67% higher. Black people have the highest infant mortality rate, 138% higher than whites. One of the worst examples of this disparity is the fact that Black people have the highest rate of mortality in 8 of the top 10 leading causes for death.

Racial disparities exist in just about every aspect of social and economic life in the US. Even during this pandemic, Black and Latino people are often forced into working low-wage essential jobs where social distancing can be impossible. Access to much-needed paid sick time is often lacking in these jobs. People of color also disproportionately face evictions and homelessness, are more likely to live in “food deserts” where healthy produce is not available, and are less likely to be believed by doctors about their health concerns.

It is also impossible not to mention the scale of mass incarceration in a conversation about racial disparities. One out of every 10 Black men in their 30s is sitting in prison on any given day. With COVID-19 rampaging through these institutions, the disastrous effects of the racist mass incarceration system are even more brutal as crowded prisons, jails, and detention facilities are becoming a death sentence. The Marshall Project has been following the impact of COVID-19 in prisons and found that over 78,000 prisoners tested positive, and over 700 have died. Black people get locked up in state prisons at a rate 5 times higher than white people. This has led to renewed calls by activists to release all non-violent prisoners and immigrant detainees.

These disparities and the lack of a social safety net during the pandemic has exposed how vulnerable we all are, as well as how racist the entire system is. This was a central factor in the reaction to the racist murder of George Floyd. The scale of mass support centered around racist police violence grew into a mass uprising against the systemic racism deeply rooted in US capitalism. It’s also exposed just how bad things have been already, especially for oppressed communities in the US. Fighting back effectively requires fighting back against the logic of the capitalist system — the social system that perpetuates these hierarchies.

Hazard Pay for Workers or Record Profit

In the early stages of the pandemic many workers, particularly Black and Brown workers, did not have a choice to stay home as stay-at-home orders were implemented. Under pressure, many corporations offered hazard pay. Among the places that offered hazard pay were Kroger, Walmart, Target, Costco, CVS, and Amazon. All have since ended the hazard pay program despite push-back from workers and unions. In particular, Kroger continues to receive pressure from UFCW—the largest union representing grocery store workers—to bring back hazard pay which Kroger ended in May.

Did Kroger end hazard pay because the company's bottom line was hit hard by the virus? Absolutely not. Kroger's profits have soared 50% more than this time last year. Was it because the company thought the threat of the virus was over? No again—Kroger held its June 25th annual shareholder meeting online, presumably to avoid the health dangers that it forces its low-wage workforce to risk everyday. In the midst of the rising costs of healthcare and housing, corporations continue to put their profits literally over the lives of the workers who are risking their lives daily to produce that wealth.

Since hazard pay was ended, cases of COVID-19 have reached record-breaking numbers, and deaths continue to occur disproportionately in communities of color. This is in stark contrast to the record-breaking profits corporations are reeling in right now. Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon, added \$13 billion to his wealth on July 22nd alone, the highest single day increase of wealth ever recorded, and he has added over \$74 billion in wealth since the beginning of the year.

“Crowded prisons, jails, and detention facilities are becoming a death sentence.”

In August, the two major political parties failed to reach a deal on extending unemployment benefits or a stimulus bill. Instead, Trump signed an executive order which he claims will give unemployed workers \$400 per week. In order to receive the benefit, states will have to pick up 25% of the tab. Furthermore, the majority of this funding will be taken out of the Disaster Relief Fund right before hurricane season. Even if it was deemed constitutional, this new program could take weeks or months just to get up and running while the eviction crisis looms. Neither President Trump nor the Republicans' recently proposed HEALS Act mentions hazard pay. The Democrats have requested \$200 billion for hazard pay in their Heroes Act, but they have failed to mobilize the working-class pressure needed to force the Republicans' hand. The situation is crying out for a political party that would fight to overcome the Republicans' resistance by calling mass protests and sit-ins to force the Republicans' to back down.

Reopening Schools

Teachers and teacher unions have entered the fight to protect students and themselves. The United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) drafted a report for safely opening schools called “The Same Storm but Different Boats: The Safe and Equitable Conditions for Starting LAUSD 2020-21.” They list Medicare for All, a wealth tax of 1% on billionaires, defunding police, and housing security among other demands to safely reopen schools. They correctly point out that their district, the second largest in the US, has a student population which is over 70% Latino, who are already 5 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than whites in California.

After the union made its demands known, the Los Angeles Unified School District school board quickly decided to shut down schools at the beginning of the semester, seemingly deciding that the board would prefer schools to be closed than to either meet the demands of the union or face another confrontation like they did with UTLA's recent victorious strike. Chicago's School District made a similar assessment to keep schools closed when the Chicago Teachers Union threatened to strike.

In other areas, students and teachers have not been so lucky. When a Georgia student posted a picture of crowded, maskless hallways in her newly reopened school outside of Atlanta, she was suspended—and then *unsuspended* after public pressure. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos has threatened to defund school districts that don't reopen in the fall. “If schools aren't going to reopen and not fulfill that promise, they shouldn't get the funds,” she said. “Give it to the families to decide to go to a school that is going to meet that promise.” She clearly wants to use this crisis to fuel her for-profit charter school agenda. We should expect this fight over whether and how to reopen schools to spark intense battles.

“12.5 million people in July were unable to make rent, and twice as many did not feel confident they would be able to make rent in August.”

Delay or Cancel the Rent

According to the US Census Bureau's Pulse Survey, 12.5 million people in July were unable to make rent, and twice as many did not feel confident they would be able to make rent in August. Over half, 56%, of respondents were Black and Latino. Without any action by local, state, or federal governments, we may experience the biggest wave of evictions and homelessness in US history. The most vulnerable renters are people of color, especially women of color.

The approach of corporate-friendly Democrats is to limit their proposals to a 'moratorium' (a pause) on evictions and rent payments, which only kicks the can down the road. Left-wing Democrat Ilhan Omar starkly rebuked this, proposing instead to cancel all mortgage and rent payments during the COVID-19 crisis. The Democratic leadership restricts its proposal to what's acceptable to large landlord companies, whereas Omar based her proposal on the needs of working families, especially in communities of color.



MAGA or Masks

A July 10th ABC poll showed Trump's approval rating on the handling of the pandemic at an all-time low of 33%. This comes months after he called COVID-19 the "Chinese flu" and "Wuhan flu," which whipped up conspiracies that the pandemic was a planned intervention by the Chinese government.

To divert attention away from his colossal failures, Trump constantly attempts to divide the country and stir up racism and conspiracy theories. In July Trump sent federal agents to multiple cities to clamp

down on Black Lives Matter protests rather than focusing resources on addressing the pandemic. Activists, on the other hand, have united around calls to defund the militarized police and redirect that money toward vitally needed social services.

When Trump's approval began slipping and Biden's began rising, Trump shifted slightly on his approach to the pandemic. He called wearing masks "patriotic" and cancelled the Republican National Convention which had previously been moved to Jacksonville, FL. It is clear his support declined in a country that agrees the pandemic should be a top priority. But would Biden do much better?

COVID-19 for All or Medicare for All

Biden hasn't denied the significance of COVID-19, as Trump has, nor fanned the flames of anti-mask conspiracy theories, but that's not enough to address a pandemic. This virus has exposed how a for-profit healthcare system that denies healthcare as a human right puts us all at risk, insured or not. But even in the face of this, Biden and the corporate wing of the Democratic Party continue to vehemently oppose Medicare for All.

The Democratic National Committee Platform Committee overwhelmingly voted against including Medicare for All in its party platform. Judith Whitmer, who spearheaded a petition to vote against the DNC platform was quoted in Politico stating, "This pandemic has shown us that our private health insurance system does not work for the American people. Millions of people have lost their jobs and their health care at the same time. There's people leaving the hospital now with millions of dollars in medical bills. What are we going to do about that?"

The COVID-19 pandemic has left the working class to fend for itself amidst uncertain times. Medicare for All would provide universal free healthcare access and a nationwide system to distribute healthcare resources quickly and efficiently, which would have dramatically changed the governmental response to this crisis. The racial disparities in health care and in this pandemic are enough evidence alone to show any reasonable person that we must do better, but to do so would require stripping large healthcare capitalists of their power.

By shooting down Medicare for All during a pandemic, the DNC has sent a clear signal that they are more loyal to private insurance companies than they are committed to protecting the lives of the people they claim to serve. If the Democratic Party leadership truly believes that Black and Latino lives do matter, then Medicare for All would be front and center in their platform.

“This is less a COVID-19 crisis than a crisis of capitalism.”

While we must also fight against other aspects of our healthcare system that lead to differential outcomes, from unequal exposure to environmental toxins to physicians’ racist biases, universal healthcare is an absolutely indispensable part of addressing healthcare racism. Given the Democrats’ opposition, what’s needed is an independent working-class fight-back.

It is no surprise we are in the middle of the biggest wave of socialists, progressives, and BLM candidates taking office. Just one of the many exciting victories was Marquita Bradshaw’s campaign for US Senate. The DSA chapter of Memphis endorsed Bradshaw, an environmental activist who supports the call for Medicare for All and an end to racist policing. She won the Democrat primary race despite her opponent raising \$2.1 million compared to her meager \$8,400.

Unprecedented Crises Require Unprecedented Solutions

This pandemic requires more than incremental change can deliver. We face an oncoming flood of the largest housing crisis in US history, a higher unemployment rate than during the Great Depression, more inequality than during the Gilded Age of the Robber Barons, a planet on fire, and mass preventable death from COVID-19 in Black, Brown, and low-income communities. This is less a COVID-19 crisis than a crisis of capitalism. The largest Black liberation movement and this new wave of successful socialist candidates in decades are rays of light in these dark times. They are bringing the demands, energy, and power of a movement that is exposing the system as one based fundamentally on exploitation and oppression.

We need a society and economy that ensures everyone receives high quality healthcare, housing, and an education. A democratic socialist system would be as stocked with medical supplies as this system is with nuclear warheads. It would provide as much free healthcare as this system provides free handouts to for-profit corporations. It would kick corporate board members out of their undemocratic positions of power, but never kick families out of their homes.

The capitalist system has failed us, but it has not stopped our will to fight. We must fight against every racist component of the COVID-19 response, and doing that will require fighting against the capitalist system that underpins it. ■

Robert Shields is a member of DSA in Los Angeles and a DSA Neighborhood Captain. He is also a member of DSA’s Reform & Revolution caucus. Robert works as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker.



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Working-Class Power and the Road to Socialism

A Review of *Bigger Than Bernie*

Bernie Sanders' 2016 and 2020 Democratic primary campaigns for President of the United States exposed millions to bold progressive policies and democratic socialist ideas, with both experiencing a surge in public support, especially among young people. But in the end, Sanders was never able to secure the nomination, leaving activists and supporters with the question: where to go from here?

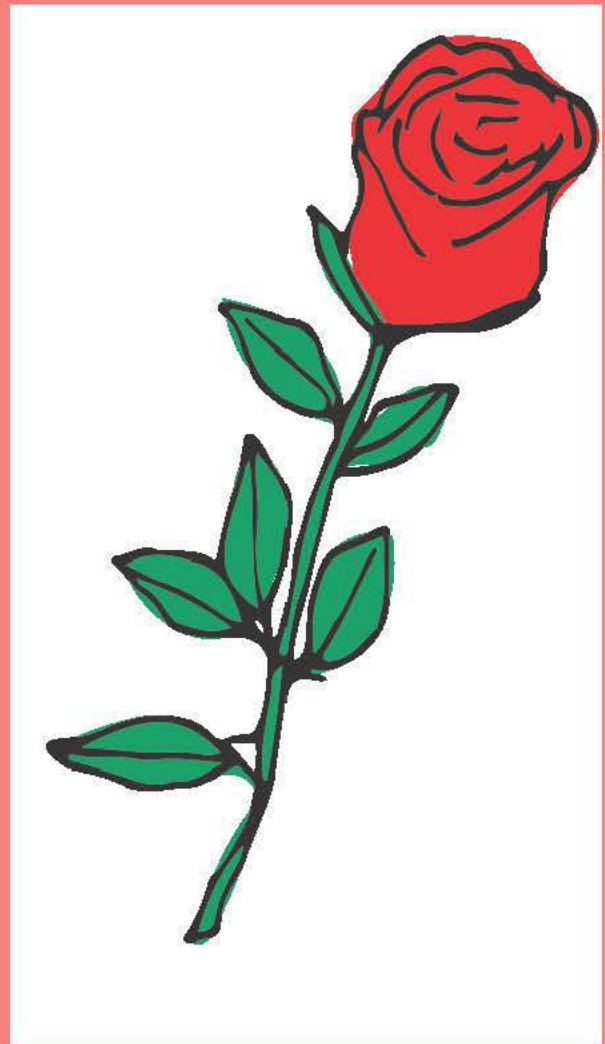
Bigger Than Bernie, written by DSA Bread & Roses Caucus members and Jacobin staffers Meagan Day and Micah Uetracht while the 2020 Sanders campaign was still unfolding, is a book that faces that question head-on, attempting to draw out the lessons not only of the 2016 and 2020 Sanders campaigns up to that point, but of other attempts over the past 100+ years to build political formations, policies, and movements capable of taking the fight for socialist change to the next level.

One of the most laudable aspirations present in *Bigger Than Bernie* is that it attempts to answer, in a contemporary and accessible way, a number of the important theoretical questions Marxists have historically faced—questions which the authors correctly say must be answered if we want to achieve a socialist transformation of society. In their search for answers, they borrow heavily from the political tradition that emerged historically from left-wing opposition trends within European social democracy around figures like Ralph Miliband, and which has been advanced since by thinkers such as Leo Panitch and Vivek Chibber, promising a “democratic road to socialism” (p. 99) that supposedly avoids both the opportunist pitfalls of social democracy and the self-marginalization of most of the trends hailing from the Leninist tradition.

In borrowing from Miliband, Panitch, and others, however, Day and Uetracht take on board not only these thinkers' insights, but many of their political and historical blind spots as well. This review focuses on three key strengths of the book and three important areas that necessitate further debate.

3 key strengths and 3 points of debate from Meagan Day and Micah Uetracht's recent book

BY BRANDON MADSEN



3 Key Strengths

1. It really is bigger than Bernie.

The book genuinely delivers on the promise of its title. It really is bigger than Bernie, both in its aspirations and in the recognition that Bernie is leaving behind a movement much bigger than any one individual. The book's subtitle boldly reads: *How We Go from the Sanders Campaign to Democratic Socialism*. This broader vision and recognition of the need to look beyond Sanders and beyond the election is all the more commendable given that the book was written at a time when the outcome of the 2020 Sanders campaign was still uncertain. The authors present a sober, clear-eyed vision of the future when they write in the introduction:

If [Sanders] loses, the old problems remain, and the fight continues. If he wins, the fight is far from over: in fact it dramatically escalates, as the capitalist class will immediately seek to undermine our attempts to remake society. In both scenarios, the ability of the movement that has cohered around Sanders to stand on its own two feet and strategically exercise its power is the ultimate decisive factor.

2. Movement-building is given center stage.

Early in Chapter 2, "Class Struggle at the Ballot Box," is this passage, which succinctly demonstrates the way that building mass movements is given top billing throughout the book:

Yes, the capitalist state is arranged against our project. And, yes, it is powerful—so powerful, in fact, that the only way to prevent annihilation at its hands is to give our movement a mass character that can fight the forces that seek to bury it. (p. 34)

But not only does the book advocate mass movements in general; it also names the working class as the key agent capable of carrying out the socialist transformation of society. Unions and labor organizing are justifiably given special emphasis, and the authors really stand out for how seriously they take the role of socialists in rebuilding a mass labor movement. They correctly tear down the failed strategies of focusing on labor law reform, too-clever campaigning gimmicks, and electing Democratic politicians.

Instead they point to the "rank-and-file strategy" of shop-floor-level organizing and emphasize the importance of training new layers of seasoned militants through encouraging an approach of active struggle and solidarity based on the ranks of regular workers, not an over-reliance on the labor officialdom.

The authors also draw out the deep connection between the labor movement and the wider struggle for socialism:

The rank-and-file strategy is fundamentally about winning socialism. If the working class is the key agent of change to win socialism, then the only way to get there is to expand the number of class-conscious worker organizers and activists—and rooting the socialist movement in this layer. Given the enforced decades-long divorce of socialists from the working class, reconnecting labor and Left is a particularly urgent task. (p. 184)

How does electoral politics fit into this picture? Day and Uetrict convincingly argue that when socialists participate in elections, our primary obligation is to use our campaigns and elected positions to build the power of the working class and mass movements. They correctly point out, in the "Not Me, Us" spirit of the Bernie Sanders campaign, that it is only through this type of power that socialists will be able to win meaningful reforms once in office.

The authors also make clear that we can't settle for social movements simply coexisting alongside socialist elected officials; there need to be direct links between the two, both formal and organic. Socialists in office need to see themselves as agents occupying office on behalf of the movement, and accountable to it.

Crucially, the book correctly highlights the need for socialists in elected office to be in open opposition to the political establishment—not willing to tone down their politics to stay in its good graces. We need to rely on the power of our own movement, not on cutting deals with the powers that be.

3. It highlights the critical role of socialist organizations—particularly DSA.

Bigger Than Bernie really shines when it comes to underlining the central importance of building strong socialist organizations:

We think that socialist organizations have a special role to play in building an independent working-class movement and eventually a party. They offer invaluable education, a coherent direction and common analysis for organizing around the most pressing issues of the day, a strategic orientation toward the working class, and a deep sense of comradeship and purpose. Right now, there's no better political home for those who want to join the fight than the Democratic Socialists of America, the country's largest socialist organization. (Introduction)

Day and Uetrict, both DSA members themselves, trace out how the organization was essentially reborn after Trump's election in 2016 as at least tens of thousands of people—overwhelmingly young people—felt an immediate need to not only fight back but also get organized. DSA has experienced several additional growth spurts

since then. In fact, just since this book was written less than a year ago, DSA has added more than 10,000 new members to its ranks.

The authors correctly argue that the main assets that allowed DSA to grow so rapidly were its lack of sectarianism, its democratic structures, and its big-tent nature, allowing many different trends to unite under a common banner of socialist struggle even while maintaining full rights to organize into separate caucuses to campaign for their ideas and approach within the wider organization.

The book makes the case for how being organized helps socialists get a level of training, experience, and political education that can allow them to play a disproportionately valuable role in the wider struggles they participate in, which in turn can help bring the whole movement forward.

3 Important Points of Debate

1. What is the relationship between reforms and socialist revolution?

One of the central theoretical and practical questions Day and Uetrict explore throughout *Bigger Than Bernie* is the nature of the connection between struggles for partial reforms under capitalism and the end goal of achieving a fundamental socialist transformation of society.

They make very strong points about how every struggle for a given reform can and must be used as an opportunity to build the consciousness, organization, and fighting capacity of the working class and social movements. In doing so, they direct the reader to the arguments of Rosa Luxemburg, including this excellent seminal quotation from her 1899 pamphlet *Social Reform or Revolution* (the same quotation, incidentally, that serves as the key inspiration for the name of our caucus):

The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to [socialists] the only means of engaging in the proletarian class war and working in the direction of the final goal—the conquest of political power and the suppression of wage labour. Between social reforms and revolution there exists for [socialists] an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim. (quoted on p. 149; substitutions in square brackets are Day and Uetrict's)

The authors also correctly point out how the working-class consciousness, organization, confidence, and strength that are built through fights for reforms are precisely what will eventually allow us to make a socialist world a reality.

This idea of approaching existing movements for reforms in a way that forges a path toward a real socialist transformation is sometimes known in Marxist theory as the “transitional method.” A list of demands that lead the way from the struggles of today toward what is objectively needed for a socialist transformation is called a “transitional program.”

The intent of the name is to differentiate from classical European social democracy's division between the “minimum program” of immediate reforms within the bounds of capitalism and the “maximum program,” which is the set of steps that would constitute the creation of a socialist order. Even before those social-democratic parties were turned into instruments of neoliberalism and renounced altogether the goal of abolishing capitalism, their minimum program was what would be used outwardly for campaigning and elections, while the maximum program was kept high up on a shelf, and only dusted off for use on special occasions like internal conferences.

In general terms, *Bigger Than Bernie* does advocate to link the struggles of the present to the aim of a future socialist transformation of society—a kind of transitional approach (though the term is never used explicitly). However, whenever they go on to speak about today's struggles concretely, there is no mention of what socialists can do to build a bridge toward this radical democratic socialist change. That is why, in its concrete application, where it matters most, the authors' approach comes out looking more like a minimum program. They seem to believe that the farther-reaching components of the program will flow automatically from the struggle for reforms, as long as socialists can help get the ball rolling in the right direction. For instance, the authors approvingly quote Jacobin's founding editor, Bhaskar Sunkara: “The route to a more radical socialism will come from the crisis of social democracy our very success initiates. Class-struggle social democracy, then, isn't a foe of democratic socialism—the road to the latter runs through the former” (p. 148).

They welcomingly greet the crisis that a militant strategy in the struggle for reforms will provoke, but offer no advice on how to prepare to resolve this crisis in favor of the working class. This sort of omission throughout the book gives the impression that on some level the authors believe the movement is capable of simply improvising its way through such a crisis, or perhaps that the crisis will resolve itself in some predetermined fashion. They write in the abstract about being prepared for such moments, but never articulate what such preparation entails.



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2. How should socialists approach the issue of state power?

Perhaps the richest, deepest, and most fascinating issue that *Bigger Than Bernie* grapples with—and one which is necessarily deeply intertwined with the previous topic—is the question of how socialists should relate to the existing capitalist state.

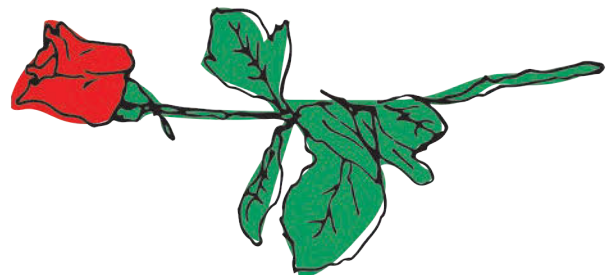
The book starts out strong in this area, by putting a marker down early that “the state isn’t neutral territory: under capitalism, the state is fundamentally biased toward capitalists and pro-capitalist policies,” and that “[b]ecause of these structural constraints, we can’t simply vote the new world into being” (p. 35). They also correctly balance this observation by stressing how important it is to nonetheless “make good use of the democratic structures and processes available to us (and to improve and expand them) in order to advance our cause” (p. 99), affirming that “socialists can engage in electoral politics in a way that democratically builds the working class’s capacity for self-organization” (p. 36).

The authors identify themselves as advocates of “the democratic road to socialism” (p. 99). The selling point for this strategic framework is that it supposedly avoids the pitfalls of both reformist, sellout social democracy on the right and what they see as hopelessly insurrectionary Leninism/Bolshevism on the left. This concept is expanded upon at length and somewhat defies brief citations, but the most succinct explanation in the book is when the authors quote the description given by Chris Maisano: “a strategy that pursues ‘election of a left government (likely over multiple contested elections) mandated to carry out a fundamental transformation of the political economy, coordinated with a movement from below to build new institutions and organizations of popular power in society’” (p. 102).

What the authors neglect to mention is: in order for the struggle for reforms to lead *in practice* to the political and organizational strengthening of the working class for a future revolutionary rupture, those who have drawn more far-reaching conclusions about the next stages of the fight need to organize and campaign to win the wider layers of the movement to that outlook explicitly. Such an approach means always pointing beyond the present struggle to what comes next, preparing and representing the future of the movement.

No matter how exciting or positive any individual reform or set of reforms may be, it will never be enough on its own to prepare the movement for the next stage. Day and Uetricht seem to ignore that there will always be forces within the working-class movement (disproportionately in the leadership) that represent and reflect the pressure of the ruling class and its ideas on the movement. These forces will seek to settle, go slow, or sell out sections of our movement in exchange for vague promises of a seat at the table, which can have the effect of confusing, disorienting, or demoralizing the movement. As socialists, we must be prepared to identify and counter those forces and their ideas within the movement. To delve into the nature of this task and how to go about it would be one important step towards concretizing the book’s correct-but-abstract prescription that socialists should fight to keep the wider movement’s focus on building independent working-class power.

"[T]he state isn't neutral territory: under capitalism, the state is fundamentally biased toward capitalists and pro-capitalist policies... Because of these structural constraints, we can't simply vote the new world into being."



If I were to attempt to summarize the authors' description of the "democratic road" myself, I would say it involves an extended period where socialists, through elections, win and hold positions of substantial power within the capitalist state, using those positions in combination with mass movement pressure from below to enact reforms that erode the repressive power of the capitalist state and widen its sphere of democratic involvement ("democratizing the current state," p. 101), until eventually the socialists have enough formal state power to stop the capitalists from carrying out the full scale of repression they'd like to against the mass movements—and from running off with the country's capital.

According to this theory, the combination of two crucial ingredients—formal government power from above ("the project of wielding state power," p. 102) and informal mass-movement power from below—will at last "clear the path for those movements as they confront their class enemies" (p.102) and implement the types of transformative socialist policies we all aspire to. This combination is what will deprive the capitalist class of sufficient power to stop us—though, as history shows, they will still try, and when they do we must defend ourselves.

The authors explicitly laying out this theory constitutes a welcome step forward compared to the overall lack of clarity on these questions in the wider socialist movement today, and in doing so they are making a valuable contribution to the discussion. The theory itself, however, falls short in key places. For me, the fact that the authors repeatedly use the phrase "contesting for state power" (pp. 52, 72, 89, 102) as the technical term for running in elections particularly set off alarm bells that there is something amiss in their conception of what "state power" really entails.



Attribution: Marchers for Salvador Allende, photo by James N. Wallace, licensed under Wikimedia Commons
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Elected in Chile in 1971, Allende's socialist government failed to replace the capitalist state machinery with organs of workers' democracy.

One very positive thing about the book is that the authors attempt to root their arguments about the state in the historical experience of the working class. Unfortunately, however, I believe the authors base themselves on a selective and impressionistic view of history that overlooks the sharp limits to how much the capitalist state can be "democratized," and which fails to draw the necessary conclusions from the consistently ruthless and antidemocratic record of the capitalist class and their state machinery toward every serious attempt at socialist change.

Karl Marx developed his theory of the state based on the first attempt of the working class to take and hold power, the Paris Commune of 1871. He saw brutal, relentless repression, with the French bourgeoisie preferring invasion by the German military over allowing the workers to gain the upper hand. He saw the workers, recognizing the capitalist state was not a viable vehicle for achieving their aspirations, form their own fundamentally different apparatus to meet the needs of their struggle, to beat back the state military forces of both France and Germany, and to start to reorganize Parisian society around them in accordance with their vision of a more just world.

Watching all this and more play out, Marx recognized the nature of the capitalist state as an armed body specially honed to be used by the bourgeoisie for repressing the resistance of the workers. Accordingly, he drew the conclusion that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes" (*The Civil War in France*). Marx and Engels considered this lesson so crucial that they added this passage as a correction in the 1872 edition of the *Communist Manifesto* (no small matter, as it was already considered an important historical document by that time). This confirmed and built upon Marx's earlier hypothesis, also based on the experience of revolutionary developments in France, that "the next attempt of the French Revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to *smash* it, and this is the precondition for every real people's revolution" (Marx's summary of the last chapter of his *Eighteenth Brumaire*, from a letter to Dr. Kugelmann, April 12, 1871; italics are Marx's).

The question is: has subsequent history—especially the development of more advanced capitalist democracies—disproved Marx's original theoretical conclusions, or at least made them obsolete? On the contrary, historical evidence has only continued to mount in support of Marx's theory of the state. For instance, dynamics similar to those of the Paris Commune led to Russian workers creating soviets (which were not, as some seem to think, the brainchild of the Bolsheviks) in the natural course of their class struggle, and to analogous workers' councils (and precursors to them, like popular assemblies) springing up in a wide variety of countries and across different historical periods since then.

We have also seen again and again that when faced with anything resembling a real political threat from the working class, the capitalists will rip up democratic reforms and cast them aside like so many scraps of paper, leaving just the bare bureaucratic-military repressive apparatus that is always lurking at the heart of the state. All the “formal” power in the world means very little in a period of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary upsurge.



“Socialists must recognize that there can be no question of an extended period of stable, prosperous rule under a left government, during which the repressive power of the state can be chipped away at... This strategy is like trying to battle a tiger by pulling its teeth out one-by-one.”

This is one of the key lessons to be learned from the 1973 coup against socialist president Salvador Allende in Chile—an event which the book mentions, but from which it merely draws the general conclusion that the mass movements needed to be stronger. It is not a wrong conclusion, *per se*, but it leaves unanswered the question of specifically *what* the movement was lacking and *how* this might have been corrected. The mass movement in Chile certainly was not lacking in size or militancy. What it lacked was its own organ of class power capable of challenging the dominance of the capitalist state. What Allende lacked politically was any plan or inclination for building such a force.

In reality, Allende essentially sought to carry out the authors’ proposed strategy: using the formal power of the existing state combined with outside pressure from mass movements to democratize the state and carry through what some might call “non-reformist reforms.” Formally, Allende could hand-pick the leadership of the Chilean armed forces, yet that did not stop those very same state forces from taking up arms against him in a bloody coup, suspending the constitution, and carrying out ruthless repression against the whole working-class movement. This should lead us to question whether the inside-outside strategy toward the state advocated by proponents of the “democratic road to socialism” is really sufficient for carrying out a revolutionary transformation of society.

Socialists must recognize that there can be no question of an extended period of stable, prosperous rule under a left government, during which the repressive power of the state can be chipped away at. Capitalist reaction will come long before any serious chipping away can be done. This strategy is like trying to battle a tiger by pulling its teeth out one-by-one.

If socialists find themselves in the position of wielding executive power within a capitalist state, there are three key things to do to uphold their role as unambiguous fighters for the multiracial working class: (a) consistently base themselves on the power and democratic structures of the mass movements; (b) take away the economic power of the capitalist class and turn over the key corporations to democratic public ownership, with workers’ control and management; and (c) overcome the resistance of the whole old state bureaucracy by quickly dismantling as much of it as possible, while rapidly transferring all essential functions to organs of working-class power in preparation for an imminent life-or-death struggle with capital.

To give one concrete example: on his first day in office Allende could have moved to fire the entire general staff of the military, then distributed arms to the workers’ movement (which actively marched to demand them as a defense against a coup), and arranged for officers to be elected democratically out of the mass of ordinary workers and soldiers. These measures, combined with the leftward political momentum at the time, would have made it much more difficult for the capitalist class to successfully stage a coup. It is no accident that, even without these measures, it took them almost three years to accomplish it. They needed time to reclaim the political initiative. By not taking the approach outlined above, Allende allowed them the time and space they needed to prepare for success.

Instead of attempting to wield the unwieldy capitalist state, the working class needs to replace it with its own apparatus, designed to represent the interests of the working class and repress the reaction from the capitalist class. This type of apparatus has been called a “workers’ state,” but this name can lead to misunderstandings. The only thing it has in common with the capitalist state is that it is a means for one class to repress the resistance of another. But a workers’ state represents the majority—not a tiny capitalist minority—and the instrument the workers will need for this task is of a fundamentally different design than the one used by the capitalists to repress workers.

It is essential for socialists to be aware that a capitalist state cannot be converted into a workers’ state by means of its own built-in processes and structures. This would be like trying to change out the engine of a car while in the middle of driving it—using only the steering wheel, pedals, and gear shift to do so.

3. How can the obstacle of the Democratic Party be overcome?

The biggest weakness of *Bigger Than Bernie* lies in its approach to the question of how to overcome the obstacle posed by the electoral monopoly of the Democratic Party over the left. The authors advocate for Eric Blanc’s “dirty break” strategy, which they summarize as follows:

The strategy aims to go beyond the two-party system by going through it. We can use the Democratic Party ballot line strategically, for our own purposes: to wage campaigns that heighten the level of class consciousness in society, encourage people to take militant action in the form of strikes and other kinds of protest activity, and even raise awareness of and interest in socialism.

In the meantime, we can sharpen the contradictions between the Democratic base—the working-class and generally progressive rank-and-file members of the party—and the wealthy Democratic Party funders who don’t want anything to do with the base’s demands... The idea is to agitate within the party, in full view of the party’s base, in order to engage as many people in the discussion as possible, making it harder to ignore. As conflicts between the base and the funders grow, the aim is to build up and cohere a powerful working-class pole, whose growing strength will eventually pose the practical question of a split with the Democrats and the creation of a party of our own. (p. 123)

I agree with the basic premise of a dirty break from the Democratic Party. This is a strategy that is clearly having some wonderful effects, most recently with the “DSA for the Many” slate of five candidates in New York City sweeping their elections. But, in my opinion, the weakness in the authors’ approach is the lack of intermediate steps to build party-like structures or to lay the organizational groundwork today for a new party of the future.

We are entering a period where there will be a major battle opening up to break from the Democrats. A Biden presidency will bring all the built-up contradictions of an uprising for socialism within the framework of the through-and-through pro-capitalist Democratic Party to the forefront. (The less likely scenario, where the Democratic Party manages to lose to Trump again, would also put the question of a party able to fight Trump and Trumpism much more sharply on the agenda.) The dirty break as outlined in *Bigger Than Bernie* does not include sufficient preparatory steps for that battle.

Day and Uetricht mention the intense pressures Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez came under after being elected, but they don’t fully draw out the conclusions: namely, that we need structures for DSA to begin holding its elected officials accountable *now*; otherwise, we will even further increase the likelihood of losing democratic socialist candidates to these pressures, to the sticks and carrots of careerism and pragmatism. This line of thinking is not seriously

explored. Also absent is a clear recognition of the simple reality that there will never come a “perfect storm” moment where everyone agrees that the time has come to break from the Democratic Party. The dirty-break strategy argued for in this book, while containing a number of broadly correct points, is not elaborated concretely enough to effectively grapple with and meet the needs of this moment in history. Instead, while recognizing in the abstract the necessity of a break from the Democrats and of building a new party, it effectively relegates these tasks to the eventual, long-term future.



Attribution: Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez speaking at a rally for Bernie Sanders by Matt Johnson, licensed under CC BY 2.0
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It is important to recognize that the relationship between the Democratic Party and the working class is not a straightforward linking-up of base, party, and leadership, as the authors seem to imply. Most working-class people, including millions within the camp of Bernie Sanders supporters, do not at all see the Democratic Party as “their” party. Nonetheless, with the help of the sophisticated two-party system and the looming threat of a bigger evil (Trump), these millions are held in check—so far, at least. But being trapped like this breeds increasing hostility and resentment on the part of the prisoners, and there are limits to what this cage can contain.

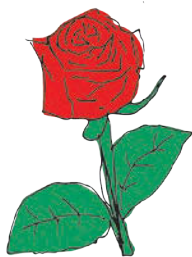
No doubt, Day and Uetricht are absolutely spot-on when they say that the focus of our fight must be to actively break *millions* away from the Democrats; we cannot confine ourselves to abstract propaganda or shouting from the sidelines in an effort to keep our hands clean. However, the Democratic Party itself represents a much smaller proportion of the total battleground in this struggle than the authors seem to suggest. The main challenge lies not in exposing the Democratic Party and heightening its contradictions (the party often does quite an impressive job of that on its own) but in posing a viable alternative. In the effort to develop a new mass working-class party, democratic socialists need not plant our seeds in the hostile soil of the Democratic Party; we can root ourselves in the already-existing anger of millions who, in their hearts, already see themselves as “outside” the two-party system, and who long for the opportunity to be free of it in reality.

In a context where the key figures the movement looks to are people like Sanders and AOC (who *don't* call for a break with the Democratic Party, dirty or otherwise), it is necessary to take steps now that will put a special emphasis on clarifying the need for a break. If we truly see a workers' party as a key strategic goal on the road to socialism, then we need to be asking whether and how any proposed tactic furthers consciousness and organization toward that goal. Without this component, the approach advocated in *Bigger Than Bernie* will have a *de facto* tendency to feed into and strengthen the forces invested in "realigning" the Democratic Party—a prospect which Day and Uetracht correctly identify as unrealistic.

This tendency is especially clear in moments like the present, where Sanders and AOC have both endorsed Biden and participated in the "task force" for drafting his platform. They are regularly giving interviews where they provide cover for Biden from the left, with Sanders attempting to sell voters on the idea that a Biden presidency might be the most progressive since FDR.

The only way we can avoid being knocked off course by the forces in our movement intent on sowing illusions in realignment is by clearly articulating an alternative, taking steps now to hold elected officials accountable, and proposing ways to build toward that alternative in the present moment.

Underlying the book's lopsided emphasis appears to be a belief in a mechanical notion of how change happens, where all that our strategy must accomplish is to "sharpen the contradictions" (p.123) within the Democratic Party and broader society. Little or no attention is devoted to the direction in which these contradictions might develop, or to what we can do to increase the chances that the crises caused by these contradictions are resolved in a way that strengthens the socialist movement rather than sets it back. The timing for when these crises occur might not be of our choosing. Shouldn't we as a movement ready ourselves for those crises now?



“DSA should organize conferences on how we move toward the formation of a new Democratic Socialist political party.”

There is an implicit fatalism and mysticism, as if, under the right conditions (enough socialists in elected positions, high enough union density, big enough movements, etc.), all the tensions will simply resolve themselves. Therefore, the logic goes, we just need to mature the conditions to a riper state. It's not our role to *plan* for a break; only to foretell it in the abstract, as something that is bound to happen when the conditions are right.

Even if we were to decide against launching a new party in the short term, there would still be a need for DSA to start acting increasingly party-ish in the meantime, starting today. A slate with a joint platform, like that of the New York City DSA candidates mentioned above, is a good start and should be replicated. All voter information should be pooled within DSA, and not fed into the Democratic Party databases like VAN or Act-Blue. In 2021, DSA members in Congress and in state legislatures should form their own Democratic Socialist Caucus with its own banner and messaging.

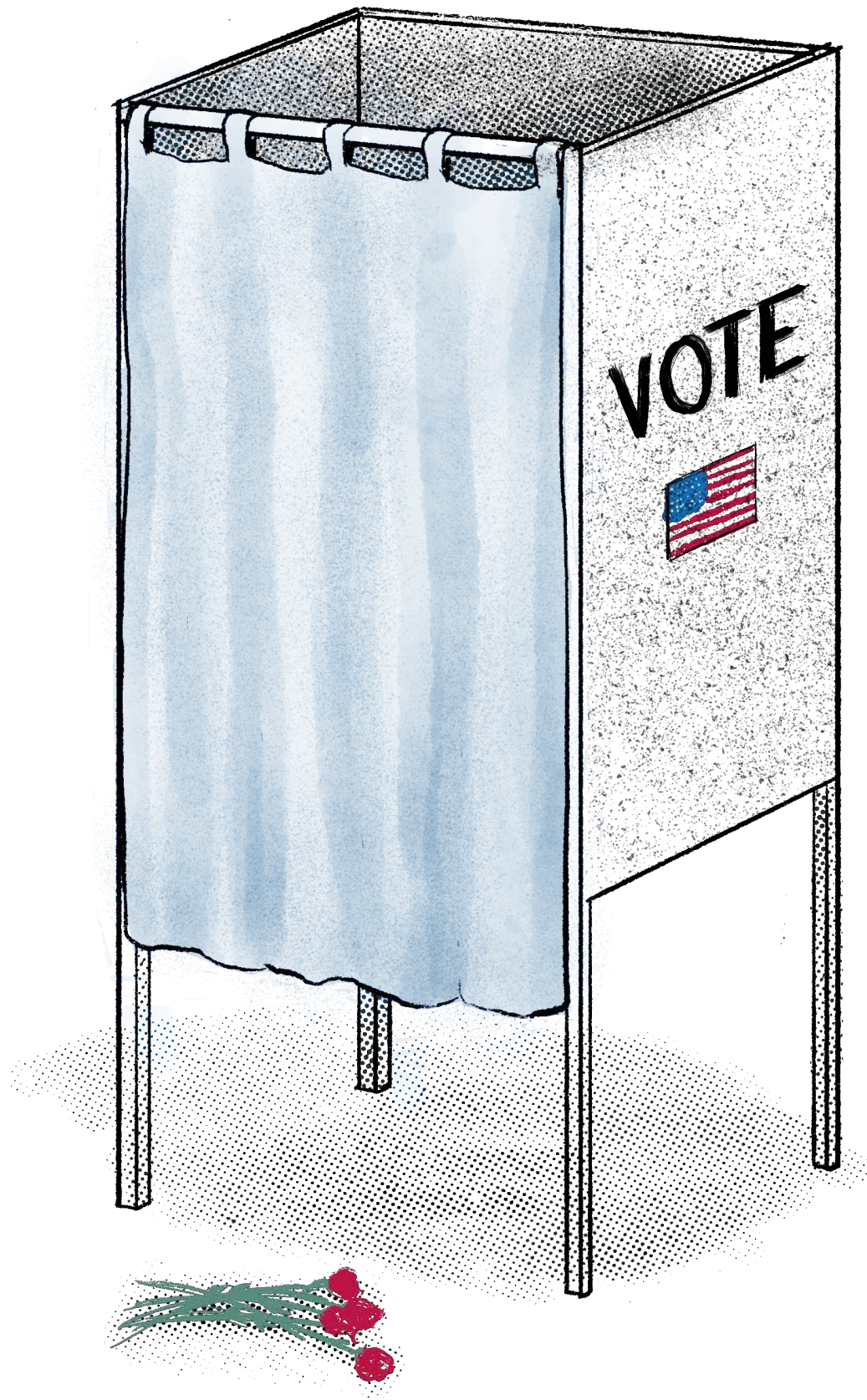
DSA should also urgently organize conferences on the question of how we move toward the formation of a new Democratic Socialist political party, as one petition currently circulating has suggested. We could invite prominent activists who have also called for a new party, like Michelle Alexander and Naomi Klein; left-leaning unions that endorsed Bernie, like the NNU, UTLA, CTU, ILWU, CWA; as well as the various left groups that have sprung up since the Bernie Sanders campaign and during the Black Lives Matter movement. Initiating these discussions as part of the process of launching a new party of 100,000 or more would give an important lead in the direction of a wider break with the Democrats, and could be used to popularize the idea of the need for a party of, by, and for the working class as a whole.

There are many local and state-level elections where only one of the two corporate parties stands a chance (or even bothers to field a candidate), and in those cases there's clearly no need to run on the Democratic ballot line. We will often be better positioned to reach more people and gain more exposure by running in the general election under our own banner rather than restricting ourselves to the Democratic primary electorate.

The dirty break strategy, if it is to be implemented successfully, must not be separated into a "dirty" part now, and a clean break at some vague stage in the future, as socialists of old attempted to separate a transition to socialism into a minimum program for now and a maximum program for later. The dirty break requires a constant push and pull at the limits of what's possible.

The fact that all of these more nuanced possibilities are concretely posed in front of the socialist movement today, but are rejected out of hand by the authors without any serious consideration, instead being relegated to the "eventual" future, constitutes the single biggest weakness in what is on the whole a very well-written, thoughtful, and valuable book. ■

Brandon Madsen is a member of Portland DSA, American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 2157, and DSA's Reform & Revolution caucus.



ILLUSTRATED BY BENJAMIN WATKINS

DEBATE: SOCIALISTS AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Should DSA advocate a protest vote in "safe states"? How can DSA best prepare the ground for a new workers' party?

Since Bernie Sanders was defeated, there are no great choices for socialists in this presidential election. Nonetheless, fear of a second Trump victory and debate over what a Biden/Harris victory would represent will more and more dominate political discussion. How can socialists navigate this complicated terrain?

So far, the only position the national leadership of DSA has put forward is that DSA does not endorse Biden. While this position represents an important stand against the corporate establishment, it does not answer the question of who working people should vote for. In Seattle DSA, a resolution was circulated before the August 4th DSA membership meeting proposing that DSA advocate a vote for Howie Hawkins in "safe states" as a small but important protest vote. The resolution was co-signed by nine DSA members, including several Reform & Revolution members, and it sparked a healthy, comradely debate. Revolutionary Power members proposed a similar resolution to the YDSA Convention last month. Hawkins is a union activist with the Green Party, as well as the Socialist Party, and although he completely lacks the support Sanders has, he is the strongest socialist candidate still running.

We reprint here part of the debate in Seattle DSA — the resolution and the two main statements. (Additional contributions to the debate are published on ReformAndRevolution.org.) The YDSA debate on a similar resolution can be found at y.dsausa.org. (The key articles are "On the Biden Resolution" and "Reject the Democratic Party, Embrace Democratic Socialism.")

Seattle DSA voted its resolution down 44-110, and YDSA delegates voted its resolution down 23-82. Despite their failure, we believe these resolutions nonetheless contributed a valuable viewpoint to the growing debates over DSA's relationship to the Democratic Party.

Resolution to Seattle DSA: Joe Biden, Howie Hawkins, & a Class Struggle Strategy to Fight Trumpism

WHEREAS we are completely opposed to the right-wing agenda of Donald Trump and are committed to seeing him defeated in November, while also recognizing that Joe Biden represents the interests of big business;

WHEREAS getting rid of Trump is a top priority for many working-class people. Many people we will meet in our various activities will be thinking about the presidential election, as it will be the dominant political issue this fall;

WHEREAS in the undemocratic system used in US presidential elections the president is not elected by a national popular vote but by an electoral college decided by a “winner take all” vote in each state. It is therefore useful to distinguish between “safe states” (the majority of states where the winner is clear in advance, such as Washington) and “swing states” (the minority of states where the election is closely contested such as Ohio). Exactly which states are “safe” vs “swing” states will become clearer in September and October;

WHEREAS Bernie Sanders, AOC, Rashida Tlaib, and union leaders have endorsed Biden, are calling for a vote for Biden in all 50 states, are largely uncritically promoting Biden, and are thereby providing left cover to Biden;

WHEREAS the DSA National Political Committee took an important step in announcing that DSA will not endorse Biden (ti.nyurl.com/DSABeyondBernie);

WHEREAS, given the importance of the 2020 presidential election and the support for Biden by the most prominent representatives of the US left, it is important that DSA leave no doubt that while we understand why people vote for Biden in swing states, we will not be complicit in covering up for Biden;

WHEREAS DSA taking a political stand of advocating a vote in safe states for the strongest socialist candidate for President would be an important way to demonstrate that there is at least a section of the left that is publicly refusing to support either Trump or Biden, while also signaling our desire to see Trump defeated by limiting this call to voters in safe states;

WHEREAS the 2019 DSA Convention agreed to a strategy of a “dirty break” with the Democratic Party, using the Democratic ballot line where this provides a real advantage to build working-class power and promote socialist ideas (i.e. supporting Bernie) but also taking opportunities to run independently from the Democrats and promote the future formation of a mass, working-class, democratic socialist party;

WHEREAS the 2019 DSA Convention agreed in Resolution 31 that our goal is to create an independent working-class party in the future; and

WHEREAS whether the Democrats manage to lose again against Trump or whether the Democrat gets elected as the lesser evil, millions are likely to be increasingly disillusioned with the Democratic Party in the period following the 2020 election; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

- 1) Seattle DSA’s focus for the rest of 2020 is on building movements of working and oppressed people like the uprising for Black Lives and the labor movement, and building DSA to play a growing role in organizing resistance against whoever will occupy the White House in 2021.
- 2) To engage in discussions around the presidential election and point toward building the left, Seattle DSA recommends DSA members and socialists vote for Hawkins in safe states, including Washington State, as the strongest socialist candidate in this presidential race.
- 3) Our support for Hawkins is a political stance, not a commitment of DSA’s resources. Our approach toward Hawkins will be very different from Bernie’s campaigns, where DSA contributed lots of time, money, and volunteers. Furthermore, Seattle DSA will not put energy into building the Green Party; instead, we will use this election season to build DSA while calling for a protest vote for the strongest socialist presidential candidate.
- 4) Seattle DSA requests that the DSA National Political Committee organize a national discussion in DSA about whether to call for a vote for Howie Hawkins in safe states. ■

DSA should not support Howie Hawkins

BY JUSTIN ROLL

(Originally published on Medium.com, 7/25/20)

By now, you've most likely read the Howie Hawkins resolution, titled "Joe Biden, Howie Hawkins & the Presidential Election — A Class Struggle Strategy to Fight Trumpism" that will be voted on at the Seattle DSA business meeting in August. The resolution would have Seattle DSA encourage DSA members and socialists to vote for Howie Hawkins in safe states, to point towards "building the left," while not committing money or volunteers to the Hawkins campaign. It would also request the DSA National Political Committee to organize a national discussion around voting for Howie Hawkins. This resolution not only hurts our credibility with the working class, but also our ability to build power. As such, it is harmful towards the Democratic Socialists of America's stated goals of building a mass working-class organization. **We encourage you to vote NO on this resolution.**

At the national level, DSA recognizes the importance of electoral contests and is committed to the "Dirty Break" strategy. This means that, broadly speaking, we support candidates tactically using the Democratic Party ballot line, while at the same time building power and working towards an independent political organization and party. Some left political organizations, such as the Green Party, have utilized the "Clean Break" strategy, which involves an immediate, complete separation from the two dominant political parties, including a separate ballot line. The DSA has correctly rejected the Clean Break strategy of the Green Party and other organizations as an idealistic, rather than materialist, strategy. DSA's pursuit of the Dirty Break strategy is both a response to left political movements being absorbed and dulled by re-alignment strategies, as well as to the consistent failure of the Clean Break strategy to build power in any meaningful way. The Class Struggle elections resolution, passed at the DSA National Convention in 2019, lays out how we can stick to our principles and run candidates as open socialists that engage the working class, despite tactically using the Democratic Party ballot line.

Supporting Howie Hawkins changes nothing materially for the working class, and accomplishes none of our organization's stated goals. In the polling data we have for the 2020 election, most of it shows Howie Hawkins at or near 1% of the vote. This could change, and there is danger in over-reliance on polls.

But, simply put, Howie Hawkins is not a viable candidate, has no labor support, and has no working class base of support. The Howie Hawkins campaign is doing very little to engage working people, and, though the afore-mentioned Howie Hawkins resolution has "Class Struggle" in its title, you can't be a Class Struggle candidate if you aren't engaging the working class.



Attribution: 2019 DSA Convention in Atlanta by Steve Eberhardt
Link: <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/dsa-convention-sanders-atlanta-socialism/>

DSA's 2019 Convention agreed not to endorse any Democratic presidential candidate other than Bernie.

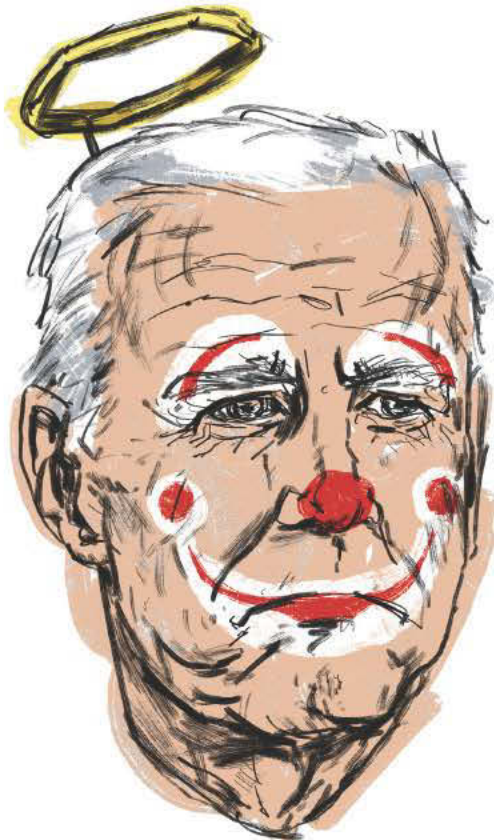
The proposed Howie Hawkins resolution states that "Our support for Hawkins is a political stance, not a commitment of DSA's resources" and then in the next resolution clause, calls on DSA national to use its resources to request that "the DSA National Political Committee organize a national discussion in DSA about whether to call for a vote for Howie Hawkins in safe states." These discussions at the national level would constitute time and labor on behalf of the NPC and our general membership, as well as time from paid organizers and infrastructure to support the debates, and outreach with members to promote support for Hawkins. While our movement is growing every day, our resources are still limited. **DSA has too much important (and winnable) work to do for Black lives, viable electoral campaigns, housing, Medicare for All, etc, to spend time and money arguing about whether to support a candidate who has no chance of winning.**

“At best, we accomplish nothing, and at worst, we damage our credibility with the working class.”

In addition, if our goal is to move towards a strong and viable workers’ party, supporting non-viable third-party candidates makes us seem un-serious about this effort. If we want to build a workers’ party, we should be reinforcing that open socialists can win elections, not tying ourselves to a fringe candidate that will only get 1% of the vote. At best, we accomplish nothing, and at worst, we damage our credibility with the working class. Like others, I am inspired by the DSA For The Many slate’s clean sweep of state legislature in New York. Though they made use of the Democratic party ballot line, they all ran as open, working-class socialists against a hostile Democratic establishment, and will use their office to build power for the multi-racial working class — inspiring working people across the country. Locally in Seattle, supporting a winning independent campaign like Kshama Sawant’s, or a viable independent campaign such as Nikkita Oliver’s, points to the legitimate possibility of a worker’s party. Supporting a fringe campaign like Howie Hawkins’ does not.

So what’s the alternative to supporting Howie Hawkins? Consider this. In 2016, only 55% of the ~250 million voting population voted. This means that over 110 million people, and the overwhelming amount of the working class, stayed home. Though some will be galvanized to vote against Trump, I don’t expect this to change much in 2020. Working people have correctly identified that their vote in the Presidential election has very limited power as it stands, and their major choice will be between voting for Biden, or not voting at all. In fact, working people have already lost the 2020 Presidential Election — we all lost the minute Bernie Sanders dropped out. The best way to engage with working people about this election is to agree with them — neither major candidate will bring about the kind of change we need, and it’s unfortunate that Bernie isn’t the nominee. As Bernie said, “we need a mass political movement”, and we should focus our collective energy on the fights that will bring material change to our families and communities. At the 2019 convention, DSA National Delegates passed a Bernie or Bust resolution, and we meant it. With its strong endorsement and campaign for Bernie Sanders, the DSA showed its commitment to real, material changes for the working class of this country. Lending any support to the Howie Hawkins campaign would accomplish the opposite, and signal to working people, unions, and other left-leaning organizations that we are un-serious about gaining and wielding power.

Please vote NO on “Joe Biden, Howie Hawkins & the Presidential Election — A Class Struggle Strategy to Fight Trumpism.” ■



Why DSA Should Oppose Biden and Recommend a Vote for Hawkins in Safe States

BY M.HARRIS, RAMY KHALIL, AND PHILIP LOCKER

(Originally published on ReformAndRevolution.org, 8/1/20)

Seattle DSA will vote on a resolution for DSA to advocate voting for Howie Hawkins in “safe states” at our August 4th chapter meeting. Seattle DSA Vice Chair Justin R wrote a response, co-signed by a number of comrades, arguing against the resolution. We truly appreciate this exchange and believe it helps us foster a culture of comradely debate in DSA.

We agree with Justin that the left was dealt a setback when Bernie was defeated in the Democratic primaries. A presidential race dominated by Trump and Biden is, no doubt, unfavorable for DSA and the left.

Nevertheless, this election will increasingly dominate politics over the next months. In our workplaces, families, and in progressive struggles people are discussing it, and will do so even more as we approach November. Our members will face increasing pressure to take a side. **To build the socialist movement within the multiracial working class, we believe we have to engage in the actual discussions taking place, even if it’s not our preferred debate.**

We fully support DSA’s decision to not endorse Biden (April 12 Tweet and May 12 statement). But what does not endorsing Biden look like — how should DSA members vote?

Should we vote for Hawkins like Jacobin Editor Bhaskar Sunkara announced he will do (without building the Green Party), but unlike Bhaskar not publicize it? Or should we vote for Biden to get rid of Trump, even in safe states? Or will comrades not vote at all in the presidential race?

What should DSA members say when we’re asked who we’re supporting by co-workers, friends, family, at BLM protests, or when campaigning for socialist candidates in down-ballot races? Justin’s response does not answer these questions, and argues against DSA spending time or resources to have a national discussion about it. We respectfully disagree. We think DSA can deal with this difficult election most effectively if we, as a collective organization, take some time to consciously discuss it, rather than leaving it to

members to figure out in isolation. We believe this is a modest but important use of DSA’s resources.

Furthermore, DSA’s silence on how to vote doesn’t take place in a vacuum. The most prominent representatives of the left publicly associated with DSA — Bernie Sanders and AOC — are campaigning for Biden. **If DSA maintains its non-endorsement policy we expect, in practice, it will contribute to many DSA members voting for Biden in safe states, or not voting at all.**

Socialists Should Vote for Hawkins in Safe States

Writing in *The Nation*, Bhaskar Sunkara explained his support for Hawkins in safe states: “I’m going to vote for Howie Hawkins, but I don’t believe in building the Green Party as an institution. Like millions of voters, I am frustrated with what feels like a ‘shoot me or stab me’ choice between two corporate puppets.”

Sunkara pointed out that “millions of people are rightly alienated and angry at the Democratic Party. Joe Biden, owing to both his long history of right-wing policy positions and the credible accusations of sexual assault that have been directed at him, is an especially unpopular figure... Is this mass anger at the Democratic leadership a problem for the left, or an opportunity? That’s what this debate is about—whether one should vote for Howie Hawkins as a moral gesture.”

The resolution to Seattle DSA clearly acknowledges the justified fears of a second Trump term, encouraging DSA members in battleground “swing states” to vote to ensure Trump is defeated.

But in “safe states” like Washington state which will clearly go to Biden, there is very little risk of swinging the election to Trump. Voting for Hawkins is the best way in the presidential election to register a protest against Biden and to register support for defunding the police, Medicare for All, and a Green New Deal. Some have instead suggested not voting, but this is a far less effective way to make visible a left-wing opposition to Biden.

Building Working-Class Power

The comrades argue that voting for Hawkins, a marginal Green Party candidate, does not build working-class power.

There is no disagreement that Hawkins' campaign will be marginal. (In 2016 the Green candidate Jill Stein received 1,457,216 votes, 1.07% of the vote.) We agree with the resolution where it says DSA's support for Hawkins should be a political stance, not a commitment of resources for a public campaign, in contrast to how DSA contributed lots of time and money for Bernie's campaigns. It also says we should focus on building social movements and DSA, not the Green Party (like how DSA supported Sanders without building the Democratic Party).

But there is a far larger dynamic impacting workers' power that Justin's response does not address. It is the policy of supporting Biden, of telling working people that Biden is on our side, which is the policy of unions and most progressive organizations. We strongly believe that this policy materially *weakens working-class power* by *lowering consciousness* and promoting illusions in our class enemies. This will have the effect of undermining the building of social movements to fight back under a Biden administration.

Bernie and AOC have contributed enormously to building a new socialist movement, but their current position of covering up for Biden is preparing the ground for frustration among left-wing activists.

To build workers' power, we must directly address this damaging policy. In this context we believe it is not enough for DSA to not endorse Biden. Calling for a vote for Hawkins would help DSA make clear our refusal to go along with other left forces who are promoting illusions in Biden.

As an important and growing part of the left, DSA supporting Hawkins would spark a debate about the damage created by progressives and union leaders' support for pro-corporate Democrats like Biden. We believe this would be a contribution to building working-class power – right here, right now.

“We do not expect Hawkins to have as much impact as Debs had and especially Sanders eventually had. But we raise these examples to highlight that there are races where the left will receive a low vote, but can still be used to promote ideas like Medicare for All and the need for independent working-class organization.”

This Is Not a Debate Between a “Dirty” or “Clean” Break

Justin's contribution portrays the resolution as arguing for a “clean break” from the Democratic Party. It is true that Hawkins wants a clean break. However, we understand the resolution as being consistent with a dirty break strategy.

We support a dirty break strategy that is serious about breaking with the Democratic Party in an effective fashion. We believe using the Democratic ballot line is a justified tactic if it helps build working-class power — as long as we are openly arguing for socialism and a working-class party. That is why we energetically argued for DSA to endorse Bernie in the Democratic primary, but with its own independent DSA socialist campaign.

However, we face a very different situation now that Bernie dropped out. The resolution recognizes that in swing states many socialists will feel it is unfortunately necessary to vote for Biden to defeat Trump. This is clearly a flexible approach towards the Democrat ballot line.

But for DSA to be silent on who to vote for in safe states for president, and silent about Sanders and AOC's support for Biden, does not help build toward a future break – however dirty it will be. **It instead points, in our opinion, toward a “dirty” strategy that loses sight of the “break.”**

Since the 2019 DSA National Convention set the goal of building a mass workers' party, DSA's National Political Committee has unfortunately been silent about working toward such a party. While it would be premature for DSA to immediately launch a new party, DSA could be raising the idea in its political material, as this petition advocates. Supporting a vote for Hawkins in safe states is another tool, although a limited one, to take a step in this direction.

“We support a dirty break strategy that is serious about breaking with the Democratic Party in an effective fashion.”

A Distraction?

Is this a distraction, as Justin argues, from “important (and winnable) work to do for Black lives, viable electoral campaigns, housing, Medicare for All, etc”?

We don’t think so. The resolution argues that Seattle DSA’s focus for the rest of 2020 should be on “building movements of working and oppressed people like the uprising for Black Lives and the labor movement, and building DSA to play a growing role in organizing resistance against whoever will occupy the White House in 2021.”

In the course of these campaigns that we all agree should be DSA’s priority, the question of the presidential election will come up. **Recommending a vote for Hawkins in safe states, even where DSA is a minority, can help politically prepare workers in these struggles for the opposition they are, and will be, facing from Biden.** For example, Biden not only opposes defunding police; he is arguing to increase police funding!

Justin also writes: “if our goal is to move towards a strong and viable workers’ party, supporting non-viable third-party candidates makes us seem un-serious about this effort.”

We disagree that electoral campaigns are only helpful if they have a clear path to electoral victory. Independent candidates — like Bernie in his early days, or Eugene Debs who ran for president four times, winning between 0.6% and 6% of the vote — helped popularize socialist politics.

Of course, this is a limited comparison. We do not expect Hawkins to have as much impact as Debs had and especially Sanders eventually had. But we raise these examples to highlight that there are races where the left will receive a low vote, but can still be used to promote ideas like Medicare for All and the need for independent working-class organization.

Hawkins is not a DSA candidate, and alongside calling for a vote for him (not endorsing him), we can make clear, where relevant, that we disagree with the Green Party’s strategy. We recognize that Hawkins’ low vote will be used by some to try to discredit the potential for building a left party. Nonetheless, when faced with the choices we have in front of us, however imperfect, DSA should not be neutral. As we grow, DSA needs to develop nuanced positions, and our members are capable of explaining the value of a protest vote in safe states today, while also promoting our “dirty break” strategy for moving toward a mass workers’ party.

Another concern we’ve heard is that the national DSA convention decided to only endorse Bernie. However, the convention agreed “should Bernie Sanders fail to win the Democratic Party

nomination the Democratic Socialists of America will **not endorse another Democratic Party presidential candidate** for the 2020 general election” (our emphasis). Hawkins is clearly not a Democratic candidate, which is what this resolution precluded.

Bernie, AOC, and the union leaders’ largely uncritical support for Biden is having a demoralizing effect on many of the most left-wing activists. It lowers the expectations and consciousness of sections of the working class.

A vote for Hawkins is a public statement of defiance. It would make people aware that, under the unfavorable conditions of the current presidential election, DSA is opposed to the left trailing behind corporate Democrats.

If Biden is elected, or in the worst case, if the Democrats lose again, we expect debates about forming a new party to heat up and social movements to erupt. Let’s prepare today for this more favorable tomorrow by fanning the flames of revolt in every way we can – building social movements, growing DSA, and calling for a vote for Howie Hawkins for President. ■



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Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bernie_Sanders_January_2013.jpg

The Reform & Revolution caucus of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) stands in the revolutionary socialist tradition which fights to end economic inequality, racism, sexism, and all forms of oppression.

The resurgence of socialist ideas and the explosive growth of DSA represent the biggest opportunity in decades to build a mass socialist movement in the United States. Our caucus stands for building DSA into a mass socialist party rooted in the struggles of the working class and the oppressed. We also seek to contribute to the construction of an organized Marxist current within DSA which is committed to international socialism.

Our magazine strives to provide a forum for lively debate on the program and strategy that social movements need, drawing on lessons from past struggles. We seek to contribute to a living Marxism that analyzes new developments in society and engages in the ideological debates facing the left in the 21st century.

A central question activists are grappling with is the relationship between fighting for reforms and the need to fundamentally change the whole system. Our name is taken in honor of the answer that the famous Marxist Rosa Luxemburg gave to this question: "Between social reforms and

revolution there exists for [the Marxist movement] an inseparable connection. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim."

We view the capitalist system—with its nonstop global competition for profits and power—as the main driver behind inequality, oppression, and the climate crisis. We stand for bringing the major corporations that dominate the economy into public ownership and replacing the anarchy of the market with democratic economic planning in order to meet the needs of people and the planet.

Capitalism is fundamentally undemocratic because the real levers of power are in the hands of billionaires who control the economy, the mass media, the government, and the state, including the army, courts, and the police. We advocate for a dramatic expansion of democracy where all aspects of society—including our workplaces, neighborhoods and schools—are democratically run by popular assemblies and workers councils that are elected and subject to recall.

If you want to resist Trump and the whole billionaire class, if you want to fight all forms of oppression, join DSA at dsausa.org! If you also want to find out more about joining the Reform & Revolution caucus of DSA, please email us at Info@ReformAndRevolution.org

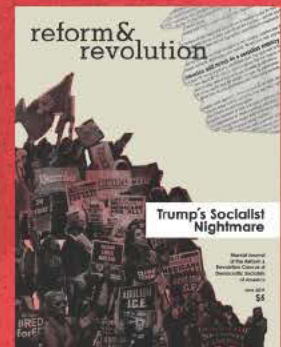
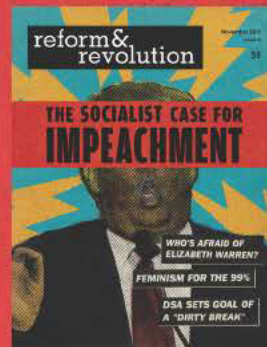
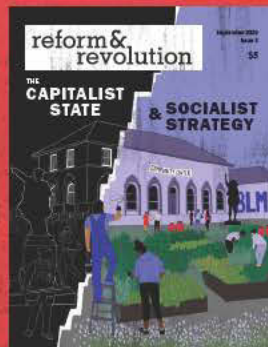
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