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Biden's 'Paradigm Change'

A Neoliberal After Neoliberalism

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reform & revolution

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Recently Bernie Sanders's supporters in the DSA swept the elections for the leadership of the Nevada Democratic Party. The establishment responded by moving \$450,000 out of the party's accounts into the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. In addition, all the state party staff resigned, and all consulting contracts were severed. They literally took the money and ran.

What does this reveal about the potential for a “realignment” strategy to reform the Democratic Party? Philip Locker argues that the left needs to build its own organizational structures with an independent financial base—in the form of DSA. Most importantly, Locker argues, the left needs to promote a fighting political alternative to the Democratic Party machine.

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Has Joe Biden, the establishment neoliberal politician, turned into a working-class fighter? Is this the beginning of a new era of social democratic policies by the Democratic Party?

Not quite, says Stephan Kimmerle—who argues that neoliberalism, as a regime of capital accumulation, has reached an impasse, and that Biden and the ruling class are struggling to find a way forward, resorting for now to neo-Keynesian measures to stimulate the US capitalist economy.

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This article examines the connection between the exploitation of both women and nature under capitalism. Jess Spear argues against the dominant idea within ecofeminism “that women’s connection to nature is rooted in their reproductive biology.” She makes the case that “[t]he essentialism of some strands of ecofeminism leads us down a path of biological determinism that so much of second wave feminism was fighting to destroy, and we are still struggling against,” including the very idea of “women’s work.”

Instead, Spear argues for a Marxist basis for ecofeminism, pointing to the material conditions under which both natural resources and women’s social reproductive labor are treated as “free gifts” to capital.

Three Challenges for the Left

EDITORIAL BY TY MOORE

Just a few months ago, many establishment liberals hoped that Biden's election and the end of the pandemic would bring a "return to normalcy." Indeed, this was the central promise of Biden's campaign. Yet the events of the last year brought several deep contradictions of global capitalism to a boiling point.

US society is at a turning point — a shift manifested by three major developments:

- (1) A turn away from four decades of neoliberalism, forced by both popular discontent and a long-developing crisis in the neoliberal regime of capital accumulation.
- (2) An ongoing social upheaval against systemic racism, currently the sharpest expression of a wider process of radicalization in society.
- (3) A humanitarian crisis at the US southern border where Biden has continued many aspects of Trump's border regime, alienating immigrant rights groups and the left, while allowing the right wing to double down on their war against immigrants.

(1) Biden Pushed to the Left

This edition of our magazine deals heavily with the first of these, examining the underlying social forces which have seemingly transformed Biden from a staunch lifelong hack for neoliberalism into a pragmatic president implementing certain neo-

Keynesian policies.

Biden and the Democratic Party leadership are struggling to develop a new policy framework to manage the fallout from the pandemic. As it became apparent that their "free-market" neoliberal policies had failed, the government has been forced to intervene and spend trillions of tax dollars to stimulate the US capitalist economy.

Democratic leaders' political calculus for their stimulus packages and liberal measures is rooted in a fear of repeating the mistakes they made during the Obama administration when they alienated working-class voters by bailing out Wall Street, spent too little to stimulate the economy, and made rotten compromises with Republicans. These "mistakes" were fully consistent with the neoliberal orthodoxy that had dominated the Democratic Party since Bill Clinton's administration. But against the background of the Great Recession, they opened space for the Tea Party Republicans and then Trump to make dramatic electoral gains from 2010 - 2016. And on the left, they fueled the rise of Bernie Sanders, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA),

and protest movements.

The huge growth of socialist and left-wing ideas are now an important factor haunting the Democratic Party's corporate leadership. In several articles, we argue that this situation is opening big possibilities for DSA to grow in both size and influence, if we recognize the political space that has opened up and offer a clear political alternative to the corporate Democrats who won't be able to satisfy working-class people's raised expectations due to the party's loyalty to their corporate backers.

Shortly before our magazine went to print, Biden

"On one hand, Biden's climate plan is a victory won by the climate justice movement in the US and abroad, which shows that we can win significant reforms. But on the other, the Biden plan is still very far from what is actually needed."

announced his proposals to address climate change. His plans are in line with what other governments around

the globe have been promising and include the aspirational goals called for by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2018 report—a pledge of net zero emissions by 2050 and major cuts by 2030, which are required to keep global warming at or below 1.5 degrees.

However, the baseline used by the Biden administration is 2005, whereas most EU countries use 1990. This means the US is pledging less than others, around a 40% reduction from a 1990 baseline.

Nonetheless, this is a big shift, not only rejecting Trump's policies but substantially exceeding Obama's as well. The US has always blocked international agreements and defended their "right" to pollute. This continued under Obama, shocking people who were looking to him for a different approach. But at least now, there appears to be some measure of significant change.

On one hand, this is a victory won by the climate justice movement in the US and abroad, which shows that we can win significant reforms. But on the other, the Biden plan is still very far from what is actually needed.

The IPCC target is a global target, which means wealthier countries have a responsibility to set bolder targets. In addition, the US, as the top emitter of greenhouse gas emissions historically, has a special responsibility to marshal its vast wealth and resources to rapidly decarbonize and assist former colonial countries in reaching zero

emissions by 2050.

The IPCC target of net zero by 2050 also relies on negative emissions (carbon removal), yet the technology to remove carbon and safely store it does not even exist on a mass scale. So they are gambling on aspirational solutions that might not materialize.

And even if we meet these targets and had the carbon removal in place, it only gives the world a 66% chance of keeping global warming below 1.5 degrees. Nor do these targets take into account feedback loops—warming of the permafrost and release of huge amounts of methane (which is already happening), further deforestation, etc. And the truth is, most governments rarely meet their stated goals because they succumb to the pressures of global capitalist competition, prioritizing the profits of "their" companies over the ecological needs of the world as a whole.

To put things in perspective: To stick to the goal of limiting global warming to a maximum of 1.5 degrees, the IPCC calculated a budget of between 420 and 580 gigatons of carbon dioxide emissions left to be produced starting in 2018. The world uses around 40 gigatons of carbon dioxide per year at the moment. At that pace, the budget will be used up in roughly 10 years, or even less since emissions are still rising every year.

DSA's ecosocialist working group is calling for decarbonizing the economy

fully by 2030. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's proposal of a Green New Deal demands a ten year plan to achieve zero emissions. This is what's needed, at the very least. The movement for climate justice and DSA should view Biden's announcement as a confirmation that a fighting mass movement can win concessions, but recognize Biden's plan is still very far from what's needed, and we need to continue the fight for more radical policies.

(2) Upheaval Against Racism

A second major development in the US is the historic wave of Black Lives

"Many people rightfully celebrated the conviction of Chauvin, an important victory achieved by determined mass protests and years of BLM organizing. At the same time, the on-going police killings have reinforced the sense that the whole system is guilty, not just Chauvin and 'a few bad apples.'"

Matter protests, which recently won a rare conviction of a police officer who murdered a Black person. Much of the ruling class hoped that convicting police officer Derek Chauvin for murdering George Floyd would quell some of the anger and reinforce the idea that "the justice system works." Yet throughout Chauvin's trial, police continued to kill on average three civilians a day, as evidenced by the horrifying murders of Daunte Wright in a Minneapolis suburb and



“Daunte Wright protest at GAP” by Andrew Ratto, licensed under CC BY 2.0

13-year-old Adam Toledo in Chicago.

Many people rightfully celebrated the conviction of Chauvin, an important victory achieved by determined mass protests and years of BLM organizing. At the same time, the on-going police killings have reinforced the sense that the whole system is guilty, not just Chauvin and “a few bad apples.”

On a similar note, Biden has appointed a historic number of people of color to his administration, and yet he and other centrist Democrats have openly opposed calls to defund the police. The fact that Biden and many Democrats are so resistant to defunding the police and reinvesting funds in social services quite clearly reveals the ruling class’ commitment to maintaining wealth

inequality and the system of

police repression needed to maintain their social order. Out of these experiences, a section of BLM supporters and activists are increasingly seeing the connection between racism and a political and economic system dominated by a mostly white capitalist elite.

The growth of DSA during the BLM uprising reflects the increasing understanding among activists and young people that we are confronting an entire system of racial capitalism, not just individual cases of police injustice. Many young people are increasingly realizing that only a democratic socialist society can end such a system, pay reparations to heal historic wounds inflicted on Black, Indigenous, and other

communities, and provide a decent life for everyone— from high quality Medicare for All to living wage jobs for all.

However, right-wing and establishment forces have made some headway dividing activists from the wider community by whipping up fear that protestors’ calls to defund and abolish the police would lead to a rise in crime. A key challenge facing the BLM movement is coalescing around a clear set of policy demands capable of translating mass sympathy for the protests into a sustained mass movement.

As outlined in the feature article of our September 2020 magazine, “Unreformable: Police and the Capitalist State,” we believe that winning active popular support for the demand to defund the police requires consistently linking this demand with wider demands to end poverty, housing insecurity, and unemployment—the conditions that lead to crime in working-class communities.

As new gut-wrenching police murders create further waves of outrage under Biden, the search for the most effective demands and political strategies will grow. In this context, the potential exists for DSA, in coalition with other community forces, to popularize specific demands around police accountability linked to anti-poverty measures and socialist solutions.

(3) “It’s Not a Border Crisis. It’s an Imperialism Crisis”

A third major development is the wave of migrants

fleeing extreme poverty, drought, and pervasive violence in Central America, which has emerged as a serious political challenge for Biden. On the right, Republicans are exploiting working people's deep economic anxieties to whip up nationalist fears over immigrants taking jobs, affordable housing, and other services. On the left, anger is rising at the overcrowded detention centers, the limited number of refugees granted entry, and the militarized response to asylum seekers.

Biden is being widely criticized for continuing many of Trump's anti-immigrant policies, and among more politically conscious people, there is a clear memory that the Obama administration deported more undocumented immigrants than any previous president. In March, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez pointed to the root causes of the problems: *"It's not a border crisis. It's an imperialism crisis. It's an imperialism crisis. It's a climate crisis. It's a trade crisis... And also, it's a carceral crisis... even during this term and this president, our immigration system is based and designed on our carceral system."*

AOC is right. Farmers are fleeing their homelands because of droughts caused by global warming, neoliberal imperialist trade policies that bankrupt domestic farmers, right-wing coups backed by the US, and the resulting poverty that has led to a terrible rise in gang violence. Who wouldn't try to escape such unbearable conditions? DSA stands in solidarity with these migrant workers, and

we oppose racist attempts to turn them away.

To be able to win basic rights and resources for immigrants, the left should demand that rich corporations who super-exploit immigrant workers pay for decent wages, working conditions, housing, and healthcare—not only for immigrant workers but for all working people, including workers born in this country. Only a strategy that unites the working class across ethnic, racial, and national lines against our common exploiters is capable of defeating arguments that this country does not have enough resources for everyone.

Tackling these racial, economic, and environmental challenges requires building a socialist organization rooted in working-class communities and combining day-to-day activism with political education, including the study of Marxism. We are excited to see DSA grow to nearly 95,000 members, and we hope this magazine helps DSA activists grapple with the changing political and economic trends we face and the Marxist strategies we need to succeed in fighting for a better world. ■

Before joining DSA and serving as Editor of Reform & Revolution, Ty Moore was a member of Socialist Alternative's Executive Committee for 16 years and National Director for 15. Now, among other organizing projects, he currently lives in Tacoma, WA.

DSA Pre-Convention Discussions

DSA is having its biannual National Convention August 1 - 8, 2021, when delegates from around the country will convene on videoconferences to debate and decide the policies and direction of the US socialist movement. With a number of resolutions out for debate as well as the first draft of DSA's platform, the pre-convention discussion period has begun.

The National Electoral Committee proposed a resolution that continues the discussion about our electoral strategy where the 2019 Convention left off—DSA should maintain the goal of forming a new working-class party but will largely run candidates on the Democratic Party ballot line for now. No immediate concrete steps that DSA could take to work toward breaking with the Democratic Party are provided. Amendments could help. But overall, it's a good start. See: dsanec.github.io/resolution/

Our Reform & Revolution caucus supports 3 key resolutions to move DSA toward "putting the break in the dirty break." Find out more on page 13, and sign our resolutions at tinyurl.com/PrepTheBreak

In preparation for the National Convention, DSA is organizing a series of pre-convention conferences online. Make sure to sign up for one and get ready to run as a delegate for your chapter or at-large: tinyurl.com/2rnmhhrw

In this magazine, we provide our take on the first draft of DSA's platform. Let us know what you think! Share your resolutions and/or your thoughts, perhaps as a Letter to the Editor, at info@reformandrevolution.org

The Road from Nevada

Bernie Sanders's supporters recently swept the elections for the leadership of the Nevada Democratic Party. The centrist machine took the money and ran. What does this reveal about the potential for a “realignment” strategy to reform the Democratic Party?

BY PHILIP LOCKER

ILLUSTRATED BY BENJAMIN WATKINS

On March 6, “The NV Dems Progressive Slate,” a coalition of left-wing candidates, swept the elections for the leadership of the Nevada state Democratic Party, winning all five seats. Four of the candidates were members of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), and all five were supported by DSA. The left-wing victory was the culmination of a wave of organizing since Bernie Sanders' 2016 campaign.

This was a blow to the “Reid machine,” the party apparatus assembled by former US Senate Majority leader Harry Reid. A leader of the establishment wing of the Democratic Party, Reid still plays a central role in Nevada politics.

In an attempt to stop the Berniecrats, Reid and his establishment allies formed a so-called “Progressive Unity Slate” for the party leadership election, claiming the Berniecrat and DSA forces were divisive. Yet even before the election, fearing defeat, the establishment moved \$450,000 out of the party's accounts into the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. Then shortly after the left won the leadership elections, all the state party staff resigned, and all consulting contracts were severed. So much for “unity.”

The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* quoted “one operative with close ties to the party” revealing the strategy behind these moves:

“The Reid machine is not the central committee. It's the operatives, volunteers, fundraising, and organizing capacity, all of which can be accomplished outside of the state party organization.”

Jon Ralston, founder of the *Nevada Independent*, explained to CNN: “Reid folks have vowed to set up a separate entity because they have no faith in the party to do what they have done successfully for more than a decade: launder (legally) money through the party to pay for voter programs.” This shows that Reid's people—and the Democratic establishment in general—will not just hand over their big-business electoral machine if the left wins a majority in party elections.

What does it mean to take over a state party?

“Did Democratic Socialists seize the means of Nevada's political production?” asked David Colborne, a member of the Libertarian Party writing for the *Nevada Independent*. He explained that the reality is far from the hype in much of the media:

“Did the Democratic Socialists of America actually take over the Nevada Democratic Party? Will Senator Cortez-Masto suddenly come out in favor of Medicare for All? Are elected Democrats in Carson City going to start quoting Das Kapital, or will Gov. Sisolak write fundraising appeals quoting

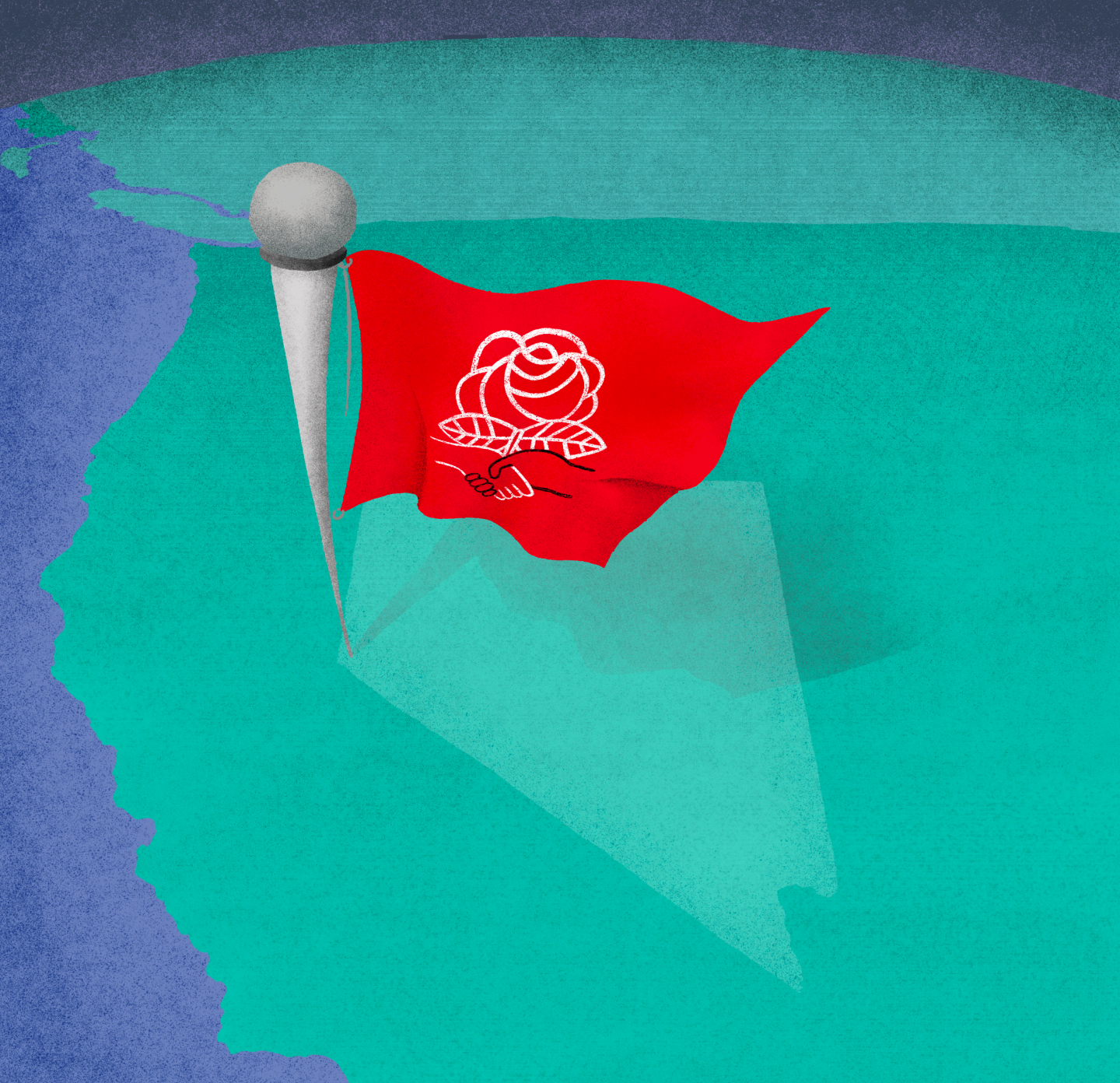
directly from The Conquest of Bread? Will Murray Bookchin's The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years become a blueprint for Nevada's politics over the next few years? Are Nevadans going to have to learn the difference between a Dengist and a Maoist, or between an anarcho-syndicalist and a mutualist? Will our families be organized into book club affinity groups and forced to read some theory?

Absolutely not.”

He went on to point out that “state parties don't guide policy or messaging. State parties also do not exist to elect candidates; in Nevada, they don't even exist to select candidates, unless your party is small or you're running for president... The most meaningful prize Democratic Socialists won in Nevada last weekend was the state party's social media accounts.” And he concludes:

“That's why, if you've been wondering why the so-called “Reid machine”... let a bunch of amateur activists seize control of the state party, there's a simple explanation. Only clueless amateurs would think the state party was worth fighting for in the first place.”

There is undoubtedly a lot of truth in Colborne's description of the very limited power of the official Democratic Party structures. However, that is only one part of the larger picture. Colborne



underestimates what the left has achieved, and more importantly, he ignores the potential these new positions and legitimacy could offer the radical left to promote their policies, build their base, and organize campaigns. Three illustrations of this are:

(1) The left's success in winning the leadership of the state party is a reflection of the real strength that they built in Nevada through

Sanders' 2016 and 2020 campaigns and, crucially, their use of these campaigns to build a sustained membership organization in the form of DSA. In 2020 the Sanders campaign won a hard-fought primary battle, including a majority of Las Vegas unionized hotel workers, *despite* the union leadership actively campaigning for Biden. This appears to have been a defining battle, and the recent DSA takeover is a result of

years of intensive organizing work behind Bernie's 2020 victory.

To be able to build influence in Nevada, to win electoral races, and win positions in the Democratic Party, the progressive slate had to build its own organization, its own financial resources, and its own grassroots political base. All of this was done independently from the official Democratic Party structures even though the struggles took

“It was only by building DSA—an independent organization with its own membership structures that democratically decide its own political policies—that the left was able to build the power to successfully win the state party leadership elections.”

place on the terrain of the Democratic Party, like the Sanders campaigns. The backbone of this work was DSA, a rapidly growing force in Nevada politics over the past several years. It was only by building DSA—an independent organization with its own membership structures that democratically decide its own political policies—that the left was able to build the power to successfully win the state party leadership elections.

Reid's people have argued that the real Democratic Party is not the official leadership committees but their network of influence and connections. The left also needs to be clear about a similar point, but from the opposite class standpoint—the real “party” that the left has been leading is DSA and the activist forces they have organized since 2016 rather than the formal Democratic Party leadership positions they now occupy.

(2) The victory in the Democratic Party elections can be used to further build DSA as an independent, democratic,

membership organization. In an interview on the Deconstructed podcast, Keenan Korth, an organizer with the progressive slate was asked: “How many of the five-person slate are DSA members?” Korth responded,

“I believe four of them are formally dues-paying DSA members and one of them located in Carson City County simply does not have a local org to join. But we are certainly trying to get DSA up and running in every county here in Nevada, so that our inside-outside strategy works in every county.”

(3) The Berniecrats and DSA in Nevada have built their forces by using a fighting, movement-building approach. There will be a huge pressure on the new left-wing leaders to tone this down now that they have to run the state Democratic party. To succumb to this would be a serious mistake; instead the victory in the state party elections should be used by the new leadership as a platform to step up their grassroots, movement-building efforts.

From this point of view, the comments of Judith Whitmer, the new state party chair and DSA member, following the resignation of all the state party staff could be promising. Speaking to the *Deconstructed* podcast, Whitmer said, “now that we are faced with a clean slate, to me, that’s nothing but an opportunity to rebuild the party even more quickly, and build a team out of staff, and volunteers, and rank-and-file members, and consultants that have been doing incredible work to engage new constituencies. It was a big part of the Sanders campaign, the outreach to Latino and Hispanic communities, to Muslim communities here in Nevada; in particular, we had an extraordinary engagement with the broader Muslim communities.”

The danger, though, is that too many left liberal Democrats use similar rhetoric without doing the real work of activism, struggle, and

movement-building. Some basic first steps would be to publicly demand that the Nevada Democratic Party state organization and all Democrats elected cut off all financial ties with big business and instead appeal for donations from the working class and middle class, and campaign for progressive policies that would benefit ordinary people.

Nevada and the Dirty Break Strategy

At its last national convention in August 2019, DSA set the goal of building a new working-class party in the future, while tactically running candidates on the Democratic Party ballot line for now where it’s advantageous. Though different comrades place varying amounts of emphasis on how much independence to aim for in the short run, this is generally understood as a “dirty break” strategy. This strategy is in contrast with a “clean break” from the Democratic Party, just announcing a new party immediately, because the forces consciously supporting independent left politics are currently too weak. Instead, the idea is to build DSA and a stronger working-class base in preparation for a meaningful break, to form a mass organization that can challenge the Democratic Party.

Other comrades in DSA argue for a “realignment strategy”—a long-term strategy of trying to reform the Democratic Party and move it to the left. The successes of Bernie Sanders and the Squad around Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, as well as the shift to a more Keynesian approach by the Biden Administration, has put wind in the sails of these forces. The recent Nevada wins will also be used to reinforce their case.

But a closer look at the experience in Nevada reveals a different picture. It shows how quickly the “big tent” of the Democratic Party (a coalition between a wing of the capitalist class, labor, and a progressive electoral base, with capital in the dominant position)

will tend to break down if the left actually gains even limited power. “Unity” in the eyes of the Democratic establishment means the left has to line up behind pro-corporate Democrats as the lesser evil to the Republicans. If the left were to exert meaningful control over a significant section of the party, it would lead to a split between the big-business and working-class wings. In effect, this would mean an end to the Democratic Party as we know it and the emergence of a new, independent working-class party.

Other left-wing activists across the country are attempting to carry out the same strategy as in Nevada, working to take over local and state Democratic Parties. Their success will be determined by their ability to build an organized independent political base much more than winning formal positions within the Democratic Party. Like in Nevada, this means building DSA (or other democratic, left-wing membership organizations) into a strong, well organized, movement of working people. Such a project—building a member-run, democratic, working-class, socialist organization—is in reality a *political party*, whatever name one calls it.

Where the left succeeds in winning positions of leadership within the Democratic Party, they will come under huge pressure to moderate their policies and be co-opted into the liberal capitalist framework of the Democratic Party. To overcome this the left will need a determined oppositional approach to the Democratic establishment and a willingness to stand against appeals for “party unity.”

The Corbyn Experiment

Asked about Nevada Democratic Senator Catherine Cortez Masto, who is facing re-election in two years, the Nevada Democrats’ new leader Judith Whitmer expressed disappointment. Whitmer believed she had really great conversations with the Senator prior to state party elections, but “suddenly, everything sort of seemed to

change or go off track.” As it turned out, Cortez Masto was a key figure in recruiting Whitmer’s opponent for state party chair and even tried to put pressure on Whitmer to drop out of the race.

Whitmer continues in the interview with *Deconstructed*:

“So I’m not really sure about that or why, because I thought we had a fairly decent relationship. And I reassured her that we weren’t going to primary her and we were planning on going all-in on making sure she got reelected. So it seems kind of strange to me that you wouldn’t see the value of what we’ve been able to do, and how well we organize, and how we’re winning these elections by keeping everybody actively engaged. It seems to me like she would see the value of that and want to utilize that.”

Unfortunately Whitmer’s hopes for unity with establishment politicians like Cortez Masto sounds very similar to the mistakes made by Jeremy Corbyn and his close supporters in the British Labour Party. When the socialist was elected leader of the Labour Party with an upswell of support from young people, hundreds of thousands joined the party, doubling its size, and pushing for the most left-wing electoral platform in recent history.

Unfortunately Corbyn made a serious mistake of trying to appease his establishment opponents in the party. He did not support running primary challenges against them, instead allowing sitting Members of Parliament to continue to be the Labour candidates, no matter how anti-Corbyn they were and regardless of the opinions of the rank-and-file members of the party. The Labour politicians rewarded Corbyn’s appeasement with an unrelenting campaign against the left wing of the party, eventually succeeding in removing Corbyn as the party leader after a grueling five-year war of attrition, while thousands of Corbyn supporters were expelled, demoralized, or left

the party.

The Reid machine was just as ruthless in their approach—take the money and run. They are very clear that they will use that money to continue working through their own structures to back corporate candidates. Attempting to negotiate with forces like that because they have formal membership in the same organization is useless. The left would be wise to learn the lessons from this experience.

Peaceful coexistence between the left and the big-business wing of the Democratic Party is a pipe dream. Either big business or the left will dominate the party. If the left secures control and breaks the influence of corporations over the party, the establishment will revolt. The left must not allow this threat of a split to pressure them into watering down their policies or strategy. Instead we need to be crystal clear that the only viable way forward is an all-out struggle against the establishment and their corporate backers.

“A party [in the socialist sense] will not just be a tool to run successful candidates but will need to use those campaigns and elected officials to build the organized power of working-class people, build movements, and the strength of its own party.”

Clear Political Program Needed

It’s a bit hard to find out what the progressive slate actually stood for in concrete political terms. Dr.

Zaffar Iqbal, now Second Vice-Chair, wrote in the election campaign:

“In the face of the worst pandemic in living memory, we need healthcare as a human right. In the midst of a financial crisis, we need an economy that serves working people. As we grapple with the legacy of bigotry, we need to dismantle systemic racism and fight for true justice, true inclusion, and true change.”

On February 12, Judith Whitmer emphasized

“everyone deserves a right to a job with livable wages. The promise of healthcare as a basic human right. The promise of affordable housing, education without the threat of debt, equal treatment under the law, and a society that values people over profit.”

Alongside this there was a lot of rhetoric about party unity, diverse voices, and fresh ideas, but few specifics about what those fresh ideas are. It's important to clearly and explicitly call for concrete policies: Medicare for All, \$15 minimum wage, tuition free higher education, taxing the rich, a Green New Deal, slashing the bloated budget for police and the criminal justice system, abolishing ICE, legalization of undocumented immigrants, etc. Unfortunately, the progressives have not put forward a clear program like this, which makes it harder for their working-class base to hold them accountable, even as the pressure they face to water down their policies will grow dramatically.

We will see which direction the new leadership moves in. At the moment, it appears that there is a lack of a fighting approach that Bernie Sanders used with his audacious call for “a political revolution against the billionaire class,” paired with bold and concrete demands. Without a call to working-class people to get involved, to build movements, to get organized in unions, to join DSA, the general calls for healthcare as a human right will

shatter when confronted with the power of the pharmaceutical and insurance industries.

To be most effective the new leaders will need to name the specific capitalists and establishment figures to organize against, and put forward a strategy to fight them. If the new leaders do not educate and prepare their supporters by openly explaining the need to challenge the framework of the capitalist system with a fundamentally different democratic socialist society based on gender, racial, and economic justice, the Nevada DSA and the newly elected leaders of the Democratic Party will disappoint their supporters, leaving room for a return of establishment leadership.

In her February 12th statement Whitmer also wrote “United, we can make the promise of this country a reality at last. When we fight together, we win together!” Statements like this run contrary to what the new left leadership needs to do—develop a clear public profile that is fundamentally different from traditional politicians who so often repeat similar empty rhetoric.

“Uniting” with the members of Congress who fill their coffers with donations from the pharmaceutical industry will not win us Medicare for All. Will the new leadership of the Democrats in Nevada spell that out and primary incumbent Democrats who represent big business?

The Struggles Ahead

As we referred to earlier, DSA's August 2019 National Convention adopted an electoral resolution that stated:

“DSA is committed to building a political organization independent of the Democratic Party and their capitalist donors... In the longer term, our goal is to form an independent working-class party, but for now this does not rule out DSA-endorsed candidates running tactically on the Democratic Party ballot line.”

This approach can include the possibility of taking over various Democratic Party local chapters or even the machinery of various Democratic state parties. However, winning these positions does not mean we have now built a party as a real organized force capable of meeting working-class needs.

A party in the socialist sense of the word, an organized political force of the multiracial working class fighting for our own class interests, needs to be a democratic membership organization of activists rooted in workplace and community struggles, in labor, the movement for Black Lives, and the environmental movement. A party will not just be a tool to run successful candidates but will need to use those campaigns and elected officials to build the organized power of working-class people, build movements, and the strength of its own party.

DSA in Nevada has been doing much of this by organizing grassroots campaigns and using recent successes in the Democratic Party to build DSA. The successful takeover of the Nevada Democratic Party opens new opportunities to build DSA and social movements, which could be an important contribution to building the forces of a new party in reality—a political alternative to the corporate-controlled Democratic Party. However, it also brings new challenges for DSA and the left in Nevada and pressures to water down their policies and strategy in order to maintain unity with the Democratic establishment. Resisting these pressures will require keeping the focus squarely on building up the independent and organized forces of the left to wage an all-out struggle against big business and its representatives in the Democratic Party. ■

Philip Locker was the Political Director of the first three campaigns to elect Kshama Sawant, the first independent socialist on the Seattle city council in 100 years. He is a member of DSA's Reform and Revolution caucus.

Putting the Break in the Dirty Break

RESOLUTIONS SUPPORTED BY THE REFORM & REVOLUTION CAUCUS FOR THE DSA CONVENTION IN AUGUST 2021

DSA's National Convention is fast approaching: August 1 - 8, 2021. A major issue facing DSA is how it relates to the Democratic Party and its strategy for independent working-class politics. As the 2019 DSA National Convention stated, DSA can play a role in taking steps toward building an independent working-class party. In our view, this includes a “dirty break” strategy.

We need to build a powerful base which can include running candidates on the Democratic Party ticket, if tactically necessary. However, if we do not also take the necessary steps to break free of one of history's most enthusiastic capitalist and imperialist parties, we run the serious risk of just reinforcing the existing power of the Democrats over labor and other social movements. This would allow them—once again—to funnel our energy into “lesser evilism.”

That's why we are asking you to support the following three resolutions. You can find links to the full text of the resolutions here: tinyurl.com/PrepTheBreak

Campaign for a Democratic Socialist Party

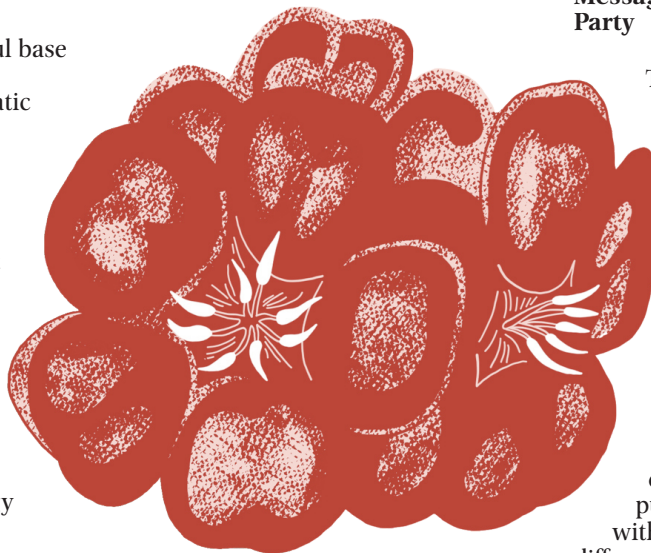
This resolution reaffirms DSA's goal to build toward forming an independent working-class party. As AOC said, “We don't have a left

party in the United States. The Democratic Party is not a left party. The Democratic Party is a center, or a center-conservative, party.” As a step in this direction, this resolution would create a campaign for a Democratic Socialist Party focused on growing the DSA to 150,000 members and providing political education on the need for our own party.

the Democratic ballot line). DSA would promote these 10 independent electoral candidacies nationally, and the National Political Committee and the National Electoral Committee would ask DSA members elected to public office to endorse and promote these candidates.

DSA Candidates' Political Message about the Democratic Party

This resolution urges all DSA candidates to clearly promote a consistent socialist message about the big-business character of the Democratic Party, regardless of which ballot line the candidates are running on (Democratic, independent, or third party). The resolution spells out key aspects of that message, including: DSA candidates clearly publicizing their affiliation with DSA, clearly differentiating themselves from corporate or centrist Democrats, and campaigning to build working-class organizations. While not a hard rule, this would help move DSA candidates politically toward a more consistent, cohesive, socialist message in their campaigns regardless of which ballot line they tactically decide to run on.



Running 10 Independent Candidates in 2022

This resolution asks the DSA National Political Committee to identify the 10 most promising 2022 races around the country where it is possible and effective to run DSA candidates independently from the Democratic Party ballot line (in addition to other races where DSA candidates do run on

Let's Talk About Building Power

DSA's draft platform is a good starting point to unite our broad, multi-tendency, democratic socialist organization in the fight for socialism. It would be stronger if it outlined how the working class can build the power to get there.

BY STEPHAN KIMMERLE

A Platform for a Big-Tent Organization

DSA is a democratic, membership-run, big-tent organization fighting for democratic socialism. It is sometimes chaotic, not always efficient, often lacking a unified focus, with different forces pulling in different directions. Yet, it is also the best tool we have to bring a wide array of activists together, to impact the class struggle in the US and internationally, to test out our ideas in practice, to have meaningful debates on how to change the world, and to attract even more people to the socialist cause.

It would be a mistake for any one tendency within DSA to approach this platform discussion, culminating at the DSA national convention in early August 2021, with the aim of "winning" this competition of ideas, once and for all. Any platform has to preserve the fundamental character of DSA as a broad umbrella socialist organization for a process of organizing and political clarification that will play out in the future. Fortunately, the first draft published by the DSA Platform Subcommittee is clearly written with that intention.

A Program of Actionable Demands

In contrast, a program like *The Communist Manifesto* from 1848 set out to explain the world in a cohesive way as the basis for a

distinct revolutionary strategy to change it. The current first draft of the platform subcommittee does not. Is this a weakness? Not if we accept that a multi-tendency socialist organization has a different role than the Communist League that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were writing for when they penned the *Manifesto*.

In fact, Marx and Engels themselves proposed a different approach than the one they applied in the *Manifesto* during the discussion about a unifying program for a multi-tendency organization in 1875 in Germany after a merger between two trends of the German workers movement—the Social Democrats Workers' Party, heavily influenced by Marx and Engels' ideas, and the "Lassalians," a workers' party led by a more opportunist trend. Rather than attempting to impose a worked out "Marxist" program, they proposed a more limited "action program" for this broader socialist party, which was still in the process of clarifying its views and bringing activists together.

When they saw the first draft of the Gotha Program, heavily influenced by Lassalle's theoretical confusion, both Marx and Engels criticized its political weaknesses, while seeking an approach that would preserve the unity of the new party. Engels wrote to August Bebel in March 1875: "Generally speaking, less importance attaches to the official programme of a party than to what it does. But a *new* programme is

DSA's Platform Subcommittee is asking for feedback on their initial platform draft. However, that link takes you to a page with a form that asks you to rate the individual sections of the first draft. You can score each section between zero—"needs work"—and ten—"support as written." In my view, the discussion needs to be a bit wider, beginning with a discussion about the role of a socialist program today. In this critique, I try to contribute in a constructive way to this discussion. I very much appreciate all the hard work that comrades put into drafting this platform, and my heartfelt thanks goes out to all comrades who have been involved in the process so far.

Resources:
[convention2021.dsausa.org/
platform-development/](https://convention2021.dsausa.org/platform-development/)

after all a banner planted in public, and the outside world judges the party by it."

Referring to the unification when writing to Wilhelm Bracke, Marx stressed that "Every step of the real movement is more important than a dozen programmes." Nonetheless, he went on to argue that if it wasn't possible to have a clearer rounded out revolutionary program,

"one should simply have

concluded an agreement for action against the common enemy. But by drawing up a programme of principles (instead of postponing this until it has been prepared for by a considerable period of common activity) one sets up before the whole world landmarks by which it measures the level of the Party movement."

From this point of view, the DSA national platform subcommittee made the right choice in drafting a platform of actionable demands rather than a program of fundamental principles.

The draft of DSA's platform does not read as clearly as *The Communist Manifesto*, and lacks its sharpness of analysis and historical perspective. It might not end up in the hall of fame of socialist literature like the Manifesto definitely has. Nonetheless, it is well suited for its purpose: to offer a unifying program of demands for democratic socialists from different political tendencies to move forward together in discussion and united action.

Recent campaigns by the National Political Committee (NPC)—for example, the 100k recruitment drive and the PRO Act campaign—point in a great direction. They helped overcome some of the chaotic appearance of DSA, though not through top-down dictates by the leadership that artificially constrain which activities members and chapters are officially supposed to take part in. Instead, these campaigns provided a lead as an offer to engage, to use the organization's resources, and to discover what we can achieve together if comrades voluntarily take part in joint campaigns that the national leadership puts forward. If the platform points even further in this direction, giving campaigns more of an edge and putting up sharper demands, then that's great.

Transitional Approach?

Each section of the draft platform is separated into three subsections: immediate, medium-term, and

long-term demands. Unfortunately, this points in a direction of separating today's concrete struggles from the need to fundamentally transform society. There is a danger that our engagement in the real struggles of the working class and oppressed people will not be linked simultaneously to striving to raise people's level of consciousness and pushing the struggle forward to the need to abolish capitalism.

It would be good to explicitly clarify within the platform the interaction between short-term and long-term goals. This brings up the relationship between reforms and revolution, a question which has long been debated inside the socialist and workers' movements. As Leon Trotsky argued in the Transitional Program (1938):

*Classical Social Democracy, functioning in an epoch of progressive capitalism, divided its program into two parts independent of each other: the **minimum program** which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society, and the **maximum program** which promised substitution of socialism for capitalism in the indefinite future. Between the minimum and the maximum program no bridge existed. And indeed Social Democracy has no need for such a bridge, since the word **socialism** is used only for holiday speechifying.*

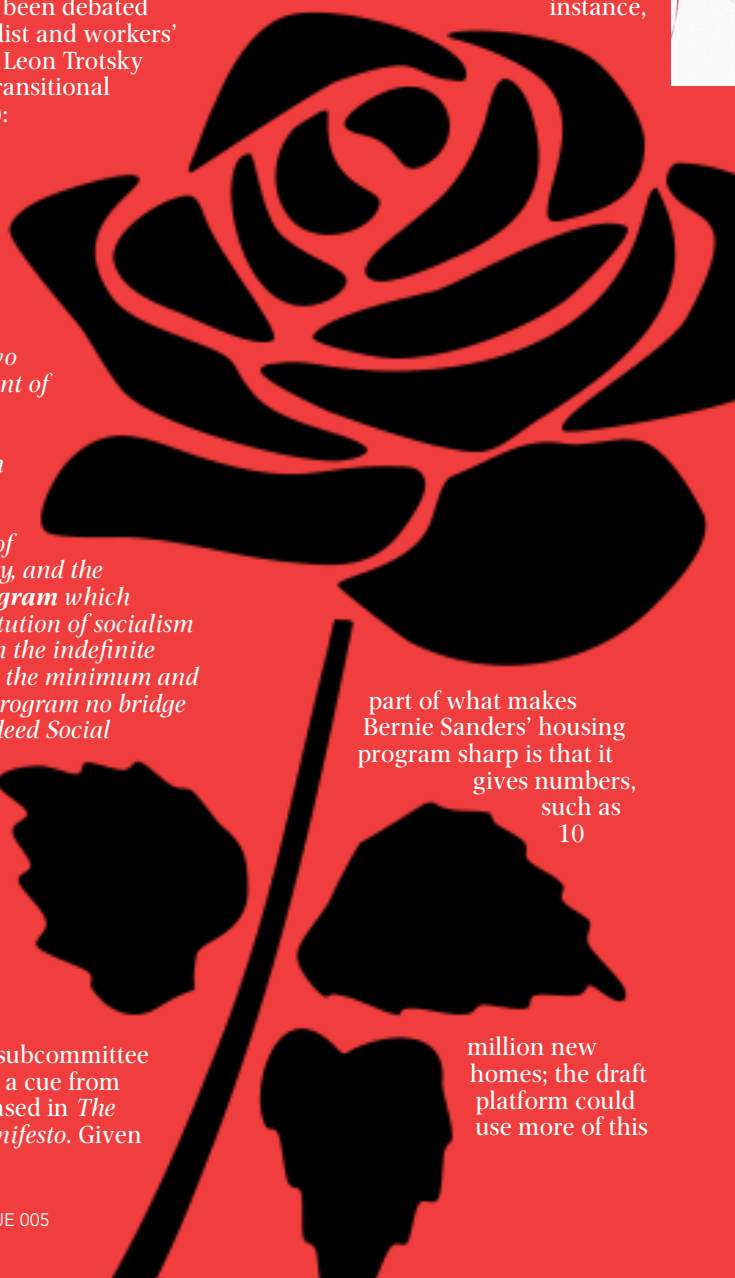
DSA's platform subcommittee might well take a cue from how this is phrased in *The Communist Manifesto*. Given

the way in which DSA supports movement work, it would be worth it on this question to mirror the bold language from the *Manifesto*, so that we are not only "against the existing social and political order of things" but we combine our immediate working-class struggles with an outlook that represents the future, one where we can directly challenge the ruling capitalist class' position in society. The *Manifesto*, in its essence, builds that bridge between today's demands and a socialist future.

This could also be more clearly expressed if the platform makes our demands more concrete. For instance,

part of what makes Bernie Sanders' housing program sharp is that it gives numbers, such as 10

million new homes; the draft platform could use more of this





type of *radical concreteness*.

Separating demands into the “long term” can rob us of the opportunity to inspire people to fight for them in the here and now. For example, today we are talking about the fight for \$15 in down-to-earth practical terms of how to win. But when that fight started, it was a very bold, even startling, demand. That boldness helped to raise people’s sights and imaginations, inspiring visions of a life where work has real dignity and security. That inspiration moved mountains and led to the wholesale transformation of the political situation, which is what now allows us to talk in practical terms about winning a federal \$15 minimum wage.

How Do We Fundamentally Change Society?

The platform omits a lot of questions or refers to them only *implicitly*. This may stem potentially from a desire not to overreach or go beyond what DSA can legitimately declare in its platform at this point in time (given the current status of discussions and debates and its status as a multi-tendency organization).

Reading between the lines of the draft platform, one can surmise that DSA regards the global multiracial working class as the decisive agent for the fundamental, democratic socialist change, which is positive. But it’s not until you reach page 5 of the 16-page document that it is spelled out *explicitly*, buried under a subpoint about the carceral state: “The power to create a truly democratic society is found in the organization and self-activity of the working class.” This is an essential point; we should find a way to emphasize this.

One can also infer from the draft that DSA promotes and bases its activism on organizing working-class and oppressed people in movements to build the power needed for social change. There are references to the power of movements and the central place of demands around labor, but, again, we should make that plain.

One critical point is that the platform is deeply unbalanced on the question of how to change society. It starts with a set of democratic demands, which in themselves are good and absolutely needed. It’s true that the working class and the socialist

movement have been, and continue to be, unconditional fighters for democratic rights, to win the best possible conditions in which to carry future struggles forward (union rights, free speech, voting rights, etc.) However, to frame the way forward *entirely* in terms of such demands comes off sounding essentially electoralist and, in effect, means accepting the official institutions of bourgeois politics as the only “legitimate” arena in which to advance our causes. Within those demands, the language is quite legalistic and the proposals are very much oriented to what appears “doable” in a legalistic setting (for example: short term, DC statehood; long term, a new constitutional convention).

The platform would benefit from a clear statement about the fundamental class character of the capitalist state. DSA could explain that the institutions of this state cannot just be taken over and welded in the interest of the working class and the oppressed.

And this leads to a significant shortcoming of the draft platform—it does not deal enough with the question of *power* and where it comes from. Working-class power

“Working-class power develops as day-to-day struggles and social movements train the class collectively and inspire individuals to evolve into effective fighters for socialism.”

develops as day-to-day struggles and social movements train the class collectively and inspire individuals to evolve into effective fighters for socialism. This is key. Progressive change is not something that is voluntarily handed down by the capitalist state. Democratic reforms are granted as concessions or attempts by the ruling class to pacify social movements. We do not (and cannot) depend or rely upon the capitalist state. The platform should make clear that substantial progressive change results only when working-class people organize and build our own independent mass movements.

Listing the different issues under different subchapters of the draft *without* a framework of building working-class power siloes each issue. The draft neglects to explain how all these issues and demands are interconnected under capitalism and how a socialist fight for them requires a broad, united working-class movement on these issues at the same time. Adding a clear preamble or a conclusion to the draft could help overcome this weakness and put the demands into a better framework.

Fight the Power

The power of the ruling class is mentioned as a description of the status quo, rather than a challenge

to overcome. But how can we discuss a full implementation of the Green New Deal without any idea of how to take hold of that power, which would require taking the big energy companies into democratic public ownership? How can we convert the most powerful parts of the economy over the last decades—the fossil fuel industry, the automobile industry, and the military-industrial complex—without openly addressing the need to take these corporations into public

ownership?

At the moment, these corporations hold “their workers” hostage as entire communities depend on them for their livelihoods. How can we guarantee good, plentiful jobs and a decent future for workers that depend on these industries for employment if not by taking over the material wealth in those industries, the means of production, and converting that infrastructure to clean energy? Some may argue that we do not want to own these corporations since they are inherently unfit to play a role in any environmentally sustainable future. But without dealing with their *power*, without dealing with the jobs they control and the wealth they privately own, we will not develop a system of production that *is* fit for the future.

There is no need for a debate on the best terms to describe how *exactly* the working class should own the means of production. The draft platform speaks about “worker ownership of every workplace,” demands to “nationalize and socialize (through worker and community ownership and control) institutions of monetary policy, insurance, real estate, and finance” and more. So far, so good. But the question of taking the top 500 corporations into democratic, public ownership is not just an economic question of

reorganizing society to meet the needs of the masses and a sustainable environment. It is also a political question. We must break the *centralized power of the capitalist ruling class* to make it possible for the overwhelming majority of people to democratically implement the fundamental changes our society needs. This needs to be spelled out.

A Little Bit More Fire, Please

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author of *The Little Prince*, said:

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.

The inspirational dignity of working-class struggle, of socialist internationalism, of solidarity without borders, is a political issue. The DSA platform needs to focus more clearly on the global multiracial working class joining together to build a new society based on economic, gender, and racial justice. The social force for change—social movements and working-class organizations, from labor unions to tenants unions and a future independent party of the working class—needs to be strengthened. The platform can still be a short and action-focused outline, but it should also be something that serves to inspire people to join us in the struggle to change the world. ■

Stephan Kimmerle is a Seattle DSA activist and a Co-convenor of its District 2 group. He's been involved in the labor and socialist movement internationally—from being a shop steward in the public sector in Germany to organizing Marxists on an international level. He visited and wrote about the revolutions in East Germany and Serbia, the struggles in Palestine/Israel, as well as Turkey and Kurdistan. Now, he is working part-time jobs while being a stay-at-home dad of two wonderful children.

COVID Shines a Light on Women's Struggles

BY SARAH WHITE KIMMERLE

As we begin to see glimmers of light at the end of the tunnel of the global pandemic, many are taking stock of the impact of the past year. Who carried society through these difficult months? Who risked their health to care for children and elders? Who risked their lives to make sure the grocery store shelves remained stocked? The answer is, primarily, women.

In many key sectors of “essential work,” women make up the majority of workers who have been at the forefront of confronting this crisis. Most visibly, it's been nurses and environmental service workers making their own PPE out of trash bags and sharing photos of themselves on social media, with faces bruised and sores on the bridges of their noses from wearing tight masks for 12-hour shifts. Seventy-six percent of health care workers are women. Fifty-three percent of building cleaning service workers are women. But it's also the checker at your local supermarket who has hundreds of people streaming past her in the checkout line during an 8-hour shift. It's the women who care for the children of essential workers in daycares and preschools, 85% of whom are women. According to the Center for Economic Policy Research, 64% of all frontline industry workers are women. Despite the odds, women have kept society functioning.

Yet—and this is the cruel logic of the capitalist system—women have also borne the brunt of the COVID recession. Over four million workers, most of whom are

women, have left the workforce, either through job loss or leaving to care for children or elders (*NY Times*, 3/15/20). Women's participation in the labor force fell to 57%, the lowest since 1988, according to government data and the National Women's Law Center. This represents a historic setback for women financially, but also socially.

In the midst of a global pandemic and a healthcare crisis, a time when our society should be investing in hiring more healthcare workers, many nurses have been laid off, while billionaires grew their fortunes to the tune of \$1 trillion (*Forbes*, 1/26/21).

And with increased social isolation came an increase in the prevalence of intimate partner violence and child abuse. Under stay-at-home orders, many women and children, cut off from their support in the community, were unable to access services or get away from violent family members. This has been further exacerbated by women's loss of income as they left the workforce because, as the *New England Journal of Medicine* noted in 2020, “economic independence is a critical factor in violence prevention.”

As we come out of this crisis, it is time to boldly demand fundamental changes to what many recognize as an untenable situation for women. We need free childcare for all, paid staff to provide family support services, a \$15/hr minimum wage, Medicare for All, paid family and sick leave,



Eleonora Hulsof, nurse anesthetist" by Alberto Giuliani, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

an extended eviction moratorium, and cancellation of rent and student debt.

We are the essential workers who are keeping things moving throughout this pandemic, if not in the workplace, then at home, unpaid, caring for elderly family members recovering from COVID or children who've been out of school for a year now. *We* are essential, not the bankers and the billionaires, and we want what's ours!

Jobs for All

The COVID economic recession is unique from past recessions in that the sectors which have been hit predominantly employ women, whereas typical recessions have hit male-dominated industries like construction and manufacturing. Over five million women are unemployed as a result of the pandemic, according to the National Women's Law Center report.

As women stream out of the labor market, decades of progress for women are threatened. These job losses occurred in low wage, insecure, and service sector jobs which primarily employ women, disproportionately women of color. In addition, in healthcare, as

profitable elective surgeries were delayed, hospitals' profit margins took a big hit. The resultant furloughs and layoffs came as the need for patient care, albeit less profitable care, surged due to the pandemic. There are numerous reports among healthcare and education workers of burnout, PTSD, and many are leaving, or considering leaving, their fields because of the working conditions.

The job losses in healthcare highlight how capitalist society isn't designed to take care of you and me and our communities' health. During a healthcare crisis, a rationally planned economy would invest in hiring more nurses, but under capitalism you saw layoffs and services being cut. And as people delayed non-urgent healthcare and elective surgeries, in 2020 insurance companies posted "earnings... twice as large as the previous year" (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, 2020). Billionaires increased their profits by a staggering \$1 trillion over the course of the pandemic, while hospital nurses worked double shifts and nursing home nurses worked short-staffed. We need an economic system that provides living-wage jobs for all based on the needs of society, not the profits of the billionaire class.

Childcare is Not a Private Matter

The childcare crisis in the US existed well before the pandemic. Plagued by low wages, high turnover, limited availability, and high tuition, neither childcare workers nor families were well served. And now as a result of the pandemic, it's expected that 4.5 million slots will be permanently lost from daycares. The failed response to COVID, which prioritizes corporate profits over public health, has only exacerbated these problems, which come at the highest cost to mothers.

And while unemployment has hit women hard, the crisis is much deeper than this one problem. Tens of thousands of women have been forced out of the workforce to care

for elders or children who have been out of school for a long time, without access to their usual social support network. Without free high quality childcare for all, many women are forced to choose between a paycheck and leaving their kids home alone with nothing more than a TV to babysit.

It's past time for a solution to the childcare crisis. The recent stimulus plan from Biden is a step in the right direction. But it needs to be made permanent and expanded to include free high quality child and elder care for all, with no means testing, and high quality public sector union jobs for educators, day care workers, and all staff.

End Violence Against Women

At home, many women also endured an isolation of increased time spent with violent partners. A *New York Times* writer likened intimate partner violence to an "opportunistic infection, flourishing under conditions created by the pandemic" (4/14/20). And as women face worsening economic prospects, their ability to leave abusive situations without the threat of homelessness has narrowed. One in three women experience intimate partner violence—an astonishing number that demands radical and immediate action.

Economic aid to women will have an immediate impact on their ability to leave violent situations when they feel ready to do so. But beyond temporary aid, we need living-wage jobs to provide ongoing economic security for women. We need Medicare for All so women don't have to fear losing healthcare for themselves and their children if they need to leave violent partners. We need full abortion rights to remove an unwanted pregnancy being used as a means of control by abusive partners. The #MeToo movement is emboldening many women to stand up against violence; now it's time for a thoroughgoing

"Who carried society through these difficult months? Who risked their health to care for children and elders? Who risked their lives to make sure the grocery store shelves remained stocked? The answer is, primarily, women."

reckoning of the sexism that plagues our communities once and for all.

Time for a Change

The unique tragedies of the pandemic borne by women demand bold and transformative change. While more directly lethal to men, COVID's impact on women has been devastating, even more so for women of color. Most women's pay and working conditions don't match the essential role our labor plays in keeping society functioning, but the pandemic revealed just that. One thing has become clear—we are not all in it together; the billionaires have padded their pockets while women have struggled to keep their families and communities' heads above water.

Biden's first relief package was a big step forward, despite failing to raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour or provide relief checks for undocumented workers. We need to use the momentum to make these gains permanent and expand the social safety net, both to better the lives of women and our communities. Let's use this crisis to fight for a better world for all, for a socialist society! ■

Sarah White Kimmerle is a member of Service Employees International Union 1199NW (writing in a personal capacity). She is also a member of DSA's Reform & Revolution caucus and a working mother of two children.

A Strategy to Eradicate COVID-19 - Interview with Paul Murphy

BY ALEX MONI-SAURI

Paul Murphy is a member of the Irish Parliament elected in 2014 on the basis of his firm opposition to the government's attempts to impose water charges. Alongside 27 other activists, he was charged with the False Imprisonment of Joan Burton at a water charges protest in 2014. However, the #JobstownNotGuilty campaign proved victorious—7 defendants were found not guilty, the attack on the right to protest was defeated, and the trumped up charges against all the other activists were dismissed. Paul is also a member of RISE (Revolutionary Internationalist, Socialist, Environmentalist), which is a network of People Before Profit, Ireland's eco-socialist party, RISE is also the Irish sister organization in political solidarity with DSA's Reform & Revolution caucus. Alex Moni-Sauri from Reform & Revolution spoke with him about a socialist strategy for eradicating COVID-19.

Alex Moni-Sauri: To start with, what is Zero COVID? Is that a misleading name?

Paul Murphy: So zero COVID means zero community transmission of the virus. A good alternative term for community transmission is mystery transmission. So when a case arises and you can't say you got the case from your brother or your partner or whatever and you don't know where someone got it, that's a mystery transmission, that's community transmission. And that means there could be a whole bunch of other people who got it from the same place, and they haven't been traced.

So a Zero COVID policy is about getting the numbers of total cases down and establishing the public health infrastructure to find, test, trace, isolate, and eliminate community transmission. It doesn't mean that you will never have community transmission again, but it means you can get to that. A good example is Ireland and the US have zero fire policies. It doesn't mean that we don't have any fires, but, when we have a fire, we don't say, "Oh, sure, there's just fire everywhere." Instead, we try and stop the fire and aim to have zero fire.

And so what policies would it entail to meet that

goal? What would that look like?

In countries where you have transmission out of control like Ireland and definitely the US, zero COVID does entail lockdowns, but effective ones, and because they're more effective, they're relatively shorter lockdowns. To give the Irish example, right now we have a lockdown that's very hard on ordinary people. So we've all been confined to five kilometers from our homes since December and will be for another month. People can't visit, it's extremely hard, but 40% of the construction industry is still open. The meat factories, they kind of have to stay open, but there's huge outbreaks there because the meat factory owners are cutting corners. About twice as many people in this lockdown compared to the first lockdown are being forced to travel into work when they could be safely working from home.

So employers are able to flout this lockdown very widely. And so, we say this lockdown should be enforced on employers, trade unions should be empowered to have inspections, and we should fine employers who aren't complying. And so, there is an element of lockdown in zero COVID, but we do it sharply and effectively. And then it's about establishing the infrastructure so you can actually find, test, trace, and isolate the virus.

And then linked to that, people need to be supported to be able to do that. And that, in our opinion, means you need to have socialist policy. For example, we need to build a proper quality national health service, which in the US, you'd call Medicare for All. That's an important thing to do. Secondly, everyone's incomes and homes need to be protected. So you need to

"There are many countries which have implemented policies which approximate zero COVID: Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Vietnam—in those countries, basically life has gone back to normal."

cancel rents, mortgages, etc. to make sure people can get through this together.

Are there any examples of these zero COVID policies being successfully implemented?

Yeah. There's certainly much more positive examples than Ireland or the US. The US is really down to the bottom of the world's list. Ireland now, out of the whole European Union, has the most days of lockdown over the past year. And it's not because they're doing some effective zero COVID strategy; it's because they are repeatedly opening up for businesses and then things get out of control. And then they've got no other weapons apart from lockdown. And so, there are many countries which have implemented policies which approximate zero COVID: Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Vietnam. In those countries, basically life has gone back to normal.

A few weeks ago, there was an outbreak in New Zealand. In Ireland, because a big section of the media is very anti-zero COVID, they try to make this big news to say, "Oh, zero COVID doesn't work." But the response to the outbreak was that they had three days of lockdown in New Zealand, and then they had dealt with the community transmission and then the country reopened. Whereas in Ireland, we're now in our third month of lockdown—of just this most recent round of lockdown. And we've been in lockdown for most of the last year. Because that's the funny thing, they tried to say zero COVID equals lockdown, when in reality, the name of the official government policy in Ireland is "Living with COVID." That's just a disaster. You can't do that.

What do you think has led to the successful implementation of those policies in near zero COVID countries? Was it done in a socialist way?

The biggest factor is that the public health infrastructure in those countries is substantially stronger, in particular because of the outbreak of SARS, so they have experience with pandemics and responding to them. And they have, certainly compared to Ireland, and definitely compared to the US, better public health infrastructure. You can read books from 20 years ago saying a pandemic is going to happen at some stage, but the investment wasn't put into this infrastructure in places like Ireland and the US, which means we're completely underprepared.

There are parallels between the COVID crisis and the climate crisis. And we know that the political establishment and the capitalist class in Ireland are going to try to live with climate change as opposed to actually trying to stop this catastrophe—the same sort of approach. And a big factor stopping us from doing what is necessary is just really short-term profits. It was really incredible in Ireland. We had a lockdown from the start of November to the start of December. We saw very high case numbers and then, against the

advice of the public health team, they opened pubs and restaurants for three weeks, supposedly to give people "meaningful Christmas." And it was just very blatantly done, lobbying for the private sector to open up, and 2,000 people have died as a result of that one decision. So very short-term profit thinking is a big reason this hasn't been pursued.

What if only advanced capitalist countries could achieve zero COVID? Is that an effective strategy?

No. And I think this closely relates to the vaccine question. A crucial part, actually, of the zero COVID strategy is the idea of a people's vaccine. Because, as it currently stands, in the poorer countries of the world, nine out of ten people will not be vaccinated this year. Many countries may not be vaccinated until like 2024. And the reason, pure and simple, is because the big pharmaceutical companies are hanging onto their intellectual property rights and are saying that the vaccines can't be manufactured on a generic basis. That is completely immoral. The UN said it really bluntly, as we would say, that these companies are preventing production of the vaccine to enhance their profits. That's what's happening. So the idea of a people's vaccine is that intellectual property rights should not apply to any pharmaceuticals. They should be suspended to allow these vaccines to be produced on a generic, not-for-profit, public basis around the world. Preventing production of the vaccine due to intellectual property rights is immoral, but it's also a public health risk for the entire world because every single time the virus jumps from one person to another, there's a chance it mutates.

People of color are being hit much harder—vaccine rollout is leaving out huge sections of people of color, there are higher percentages of deaths, greater economic tolls. How does zero COVID address that?

Yeah. The traveler community, which is like an ethnic minority within Ireland, people who historically have not lived in houses, they have lived in caravans and travel around the country and have their own culture and language and are an extremely oppressed group. Racism against travelers is extremely widespread, relatively low levels of life expectancy, education, etc. Just as oppressed groups are being hit hard by COVID around the world, in Ireland incidences of COVID and outcomes of COVID for travelers are significantly worse. So for vaccination rollout, that needs to be taken into account. For example, travelers need to be put into higher-priority groups because of their vulnerability to getting it, and also their likelihood of more negative outcomes, if they do get it.

The other factor is the general policies to support people. So the government in Ireland was forced in the first lockdown, when COVID first hit, under pressure from below, to implement something called

a “pandemic unemployment payment,” which has a higher rate than the normal rate of unemployment payments. But since then, the government has been trying to cut the number of people who got the higher rate, as well as bring down the higher rate. Traditionally, unemployment benefit is about 200 euros a week. The pandemic unemployment payment is 350 a week.

But the government started on a strategy of suggesting that some people were making loads of money, loads more than they were previously when they were at work, blah, blah, blah. And so we have tried to campaign, to oppose any attempt to divide workers. The reason 350 euros was chosen is because that's the minimum you need to live a somewhat decent life.

What about the burden of social reproduction during lockdowns, which disproportionately falls on women? How does the zero COVID strategy deal with that? Should women just continue to carry the burden even longer?

That's a good question. This is a big issue. For example, in Ireland, as a result of COVID, unemployment rates of women have risen and gone higher than unemployment rates for men, which hasn't been the case for 10 or 15 years. That's partially because a lot of women are considered to be outside the workforce and, therefore, aren't considered unemployed. The impact of COVID is gendered. And one of the things happening is women are being forced back into the home, to care for children, because of schools being closed.

So we introduced a proposed law for what we call “childcare leave.” It's a measure that has been partially implemented in other European countries where they've increased the amount of parental leave, which in Ireland, parental leave is really bad. We've introduced this measure, proposing that if your child has to be at home because of COVID, either because their school is closed, or because they have COVID, or because they have to self-isolate because someone else has COVID or whatever, you are entitled to “childcare leave,” which would be the equivalent of sick pay, full pay, paid by your employer. So people are able to say, “Well, I simply cannot work because the schools are closed. You cannot expect me to work from home and to do everything else all together, and I'm entitled to childcare leave.”

This is in the law that we wrote, this is a specific COVID measure, but then we will try to make it more general, to establish the right to childcare leave in the future, to counteract some of the effects of COVID.

If we do achieve zero COVID and eventually reopen again, what needs to change for the future of mutations and possible future global pandemics?

“One thing that is clear, or really should be clear to people, is who is essential and who creates wealth. Who produces stuff? And it isn't Jeff Bezos.... it's the worker in the factory, it's the delivery person, it's the nurse, it's the person in the grocery store.”

Yeah. It's not something nice to talk about, but we're likely facing more pandemics in the future. That's what all the epidemiologists say. In a sense, we've been lucky to get away without a global pandemic until now, or in recent decades. I think there is a fundamental question about humanity's relationship to nature. The practices of capitalist agriculture are a big accelerating factor in the risk of pandemics emerging. That is one thing we need to address as socialists. We need a different sustainable model of agriculture, which doesn't pose the same risks.

One thing that is clear, or really should be clear to people, is who is essential and who creates wealth. Who produces stuff? And it isn't Jeff Bezos, and it isn't the Irish equivalent of Jeff Bezos, it's the worker in the factory, it's the delivery person, it's the nurse, it's the person in the grocery store. The establishment and the media try to avoid that conclusion, but I think that's out there, the idea that workers are really essential, and that's very positive.

The other thing is, I do think we should draw out the connections to climate change. In a way what we've been through, that's only, unfortunately, a glimpse of the nightmare of the climate catastrophe within our lives, if we don't follow the science the way we should be following the science. The organization of society for profits, stands in the way of doing what is necessary to avoid catastrophic climate change. Therefore, the conclusion is not to allow our society to be run for short-term profit, which means, taking over the fossil fuels, taking them out of the hands of Big Oil and saying, “We're going to control them, and they're going to stay in the ground.” It means taking the airline industry and other industries out of the control of the current owners and taking them in the hands of ordinary people and then enabling us to plan the economy based on human needs. ■

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The K-shaped Recovery: The rich got richer, the rest of us got screwed

The economic pain wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic has been unprecedented, with unemployment numbers showing pandemic-induced job losses far steeper than in any recession dating back to the 1980s.

BY TOM BARNARD

With the Biden recovery plan and a few economic indicators, it is tempting to assume the overall economy is well on its way back to normal. But what has actually been occurring is what economists refer to as a “K-shaped recovery”—the unequal distribution of economic pains and gains. Unlike the usual letter-shaped descriptors—V, U, or others—which are defined by economy-wide macroeconomic variables like Gross Domestic Product or total employment, a K-shaped recovery essentially splits an economy in two, with winners and losers broken down economically and socially, exposing differences between industries, class, race, and gender.

For people in upper income brackets, the pandemic recession caused little pain, especially once the initial shock passed. Roughly 86% of upper income adults report their finances are in good, or even excellent, shape. The same survey found this to be true as well for about 6 in 10 adults with at least a four-year college degree, white and Asian Americans, men and those who are 65 and older.

For the super-rich, it was a bonanza. As of last month, after 11 months of pandemic misery, total US billionaire wealth increased \$1.3 trillion since mid-March 2020, an increase of 44 percent. As of the market close on February 19, the country’s 664 billionaires now

have combined wealth of \$4.3 trillion, up from just under \$3 trillion on March 18, 2020.

According to a recent article in the Guardian, the world’s billionaires grew their already-huge fortunes to a record high of \$10.2 trillion. An earlier report by Swiss bank UBS found that billionaires increased their wealth by more than a quarter (27.5%) just during the height of the crisis from April to July. Billionaires in the United States increased their total net worth \$637 billion during the COVID-19 pandemic through October. In fact, according to a recent Oxfam report, the world’s 10 richest billionaires—which include Amazon’s Jeff Bezos, Microsoft’s Bill Gates and others—have collectively seen their wealth grow by \$540 billion over this period. The UBS reported that billionaires’ wealth had hit “a new high, surpassing the previous peak of \$8.9tn reached at the end of 2017.”

Part of this was because of the money that the billionaires gained from the recovery of global stock markets from their nadir in March and April. The S&P 500 is up more than 65% since the March low, and closed 2020 with a 16.3% gain for the year. The Nasdaq is 44% higher for the year, posting its best one-year performance since 2009. Tech was by far the dominant sector in 2020, surging more than 42% for the year, as the pandemic forced

more people to work from home. This shift drove up demand for cloud services and computer equipment. Consumer discretionary spending, meanwhile, jumped 32.1% this year, boosted by more people shopping online. Amazon shares alone skyrocketed 76.3% in 2020.

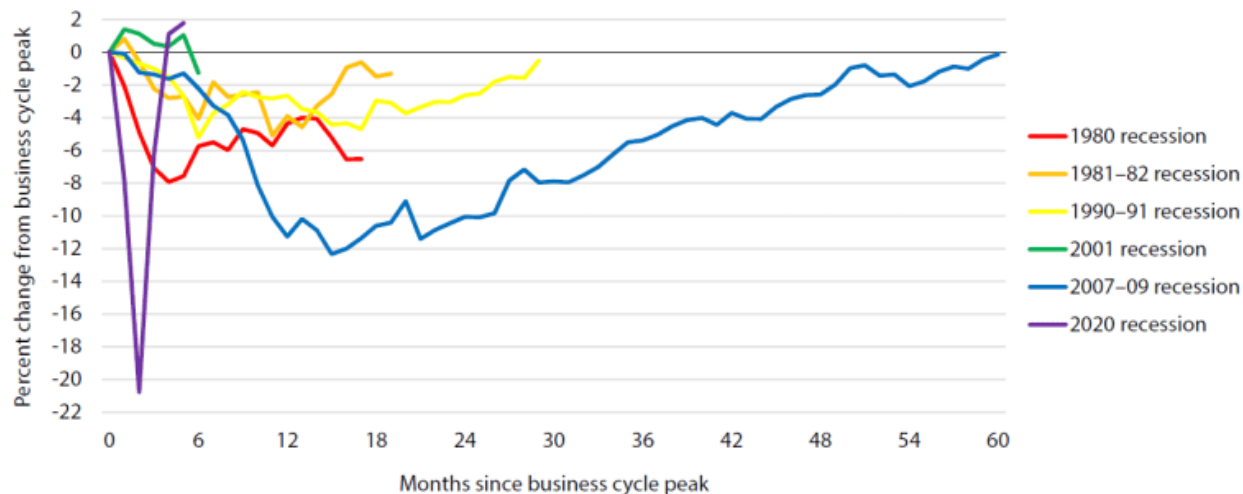
Although this surge was unprecedented, it is not unusual for financial markets to recover faster than the overall economy. This phenomenon simply underscores the fact that the market is a playground for the rich, who despite a temporary dip in the economy, can invest large sums of money in stocks when they are at a low point, in expectation of gains as it recovers. Working people, having no such resources, are largely shut out of the global financial casino.

Unprecedented job losses for workers

There were 9.5 million fewer workers on payrolls in February 2021 than a year ago before the pandemic took hold. At the current pace of job growth, it would require more than two years of job growth just to get back to pre-pandemic levels. Over this same time period, more than 4 million workers have dropped out of the labor force. Official statistics rarely mention this issue, but it is an open question as to how many of these people will ever return. Regardless,

FIGURE E.

Percent Change in Retail Sales Relative to Business Cycle Peak by Business Cycle



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1980-2020; NBER n.d.; authors' calculations.

Note: The figure shows the percent change in advance real retail and food sales from the peak of a business cycle until sales return to the level of the previous business cycle peak. Data are deflated using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (1982-84=100). Data are adjusted for seasonal, holiday and trading-day differences.



the real unemployment rate is considerably higher than the official rate. More importantly, official statistics published in the media rarely reveal the disproportionate effect of race and gender.

Unequal Job losses in the pandemic recession

Job losses in this recession present a vastly different picture from previous recessions. Job losses in low wage industries like restaurants, hospitality and retail went far deeper than in better paying occupations. Also the changes in lifestyle—less eating out, less traveling, no live entertainment—have allowed some Americans to make their financial lives healthier. In the poll, roughly 4 in 10 say they've been saving more money than usual, and about 3 in 10 have been paying down debt faster than usual. The majority of jobs lost in the crisis have been in industries that pay low average wages, with the lowest-paying industries accounting for 30 percent of all jobs but 58 percent of the jobs lost from February to December, according to Labor Department employment data. Jobs in low-

paying industries were down more than twice as much between February and December 2020 (11.3 percent) as jobs in medium-wage industries (4.9 percent) and nearly four times as much as in high-wage industries (3.0 percent). The leisure and hospitality industry alone accounts for around 36 percent of all jobs lost during the pandemic.

Women and minorities hit hardest

The largest sections of workers who lost their jobs were Black and Latina women. Women were overrepresented in job losses for a variety of reasons. Apart from job losses in certain industries, women have also been kept from employment by their need to provide care for their children, especially at-home virtual schooling, underscoring the traditional inadequate access to childcare in the U.S.

The intersection of class, race and gender are also illustrated by the unemployment crisis. Michelle Holder, an economist at John Jay College, noted that the two biggest sources of job losses among Black women have been cashiers at

stores and restaurants, including fast-food, and in child care. She said she fears that many of those jobs likely won't return even as the pandemic fades as some shifts in the economy become permanent. Business travel won't likely return to its previous levels as more meetings are conducted remotely. Many health care appointments are now held online, thereby reducing the need for some staffers in doctor's offices. Losses like those may bring to an end a decade-long narrowing of the Black-white unemployment gap, given that many lower-paid jobs are disproportionately held by Black workers.

"There are significant changes coming in terms of where we work, what jobs will be available," Holder said. "All this will hit women, low-wage workers and people of color."

Hunger and unpaid rent and utility bills stalk the poor

Between past due rent, late fees and unpaid utility bills, Americans owed \$70 billion by the end of January, when the federal eviction moratorium was set to expire. Back rent owed by about 11.4 million



"As of last month, after 11 months of pandemic misery, total US billionaire wealth increased \$1.3 trillion since mid-March 2020, an increase of 44 percent."

renters averages about \$6,000 per household, or around three-and-a-half months' rent, according to Moody's Analytics.

According to a report by Feeding America, at least 35 million people faced hunger in the US before Covid-19. That figure includes more than 10 million children, according to the report. But with the pandemic, 18 million more children could become food insecure because of the pandemic, bringing the total to more than 52 million people in the country. Although lack of wages is a large part of this, hunger among children has also been increased by lack of access to free school lunches, as K-12 schools have been shut down. And a recent survey found some 22 million adults — 11% of all adults in the country — reported that their household sometimes or often didn't have enough to eat in the last seven

days, according to Household Pulse Survey data collected March 3-15. This was far above the pre-pandemic rate: a survey released by the Agriculture Department found Black and Latino adults were more than twice as likely as white adults to report that their household did not get enough to eat: 20 percent and 19 percent, respectively, compared to 7 percent of white adults.

The Biden plan will help; the question is, how much?

The American Rescue Plan Act, as the Biden recovery plan is officially named, is projected to dramatically begin reducing poverty and narrowing disparities by race. Any reduction in hardship, particularly among children, would be a step forward. The latest stimulus will reduce poverty by a third, lifting nearly 13 million Americans out of it, according to an analysis by Columbia University's Center on Poverty and Social Policy. Black Americans, Hispanic Americans and poor families with children are set to benefit the most. Child poverty would be reduced by more than half, the researchers predicted. Evidence suggests that reducing childhood hardship and poverty would yield improvements in education and health, higher productivity and earnings, less incarceration, and other lasting benefits to children and society.

Nonetheless, in a recent Pew Research Survey, 44% of respondents say it will take them three or more years to get back to where they were financially from

when the pandemic started, and one in ten said they would never get back there.

Another question to think about when the country's economy would get back to normal is: what is normal? As Fed Chair Janet Yellin said in a message to her department's staff recently, "People worry about a k-shaped recovery to the pandemic -- and that is a cause for concern -- but long before Covid-19 infected a single individual, we were living in a k-shaped economy, one where wealth built on wealth while certain segments of the population fell further and further behind."

A substantial indicator of that was home ownership — 75% for whites, only 44% for Blacks, according to Census Bureau figures. And wage inequality has been rising since the late 1970s in America, as the post-war economic growth burst slowed down. Since the turn of the millennium, wage growth has been strongest for higher-wage earners, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

So while stimulus checks and aid for the unemployed (many of them part of the rising percentage of long-term unemployed) and assistance to families will be welcome, the fundamental inequalities that exist under capitalism will be at best ameliorated, but not disappear. Mass struggles for such things as increases in the minimum wage, unionizing drives, and measures to ensure that there will be no tsunami of evictions when Federal and State moratoriums end will be more vital than ever. ■

Tom Barnard is a published writer, professional policy analyst and former chef. He is an activist with deep roots in the Puget Sound region, having resided there for over 40 years. His research, writing and activism includes work in the antiwar movement, as well as on housing issues, mass transit, and campaign finance. He is a revolutionary socialist, currently a member of Reform & Revolution.

Biden's 'Paradigm Change'

BY STEPHAN KIMMERLE

ILLUSTRATED BY BENJAMIN WATKINS

The end of neoliberalism and the difficulty of developing a new, stable regime of capital accumulation

"It changes the paradigm," Joe Biden said on March 12, celebrating the passing of the \$1.9 trillion stimulus package in Congress. "For the first time in a long time, this bill puts working people in this nation first." The largest part of this package will actually end up in the hands of working-class people. As New York Times columnist David Brooks put it, "the poorest fifth of households will see their income rise by 20 percent; a family of four with one working and one unemployed parent will receive \$12,460 in benefits. Child poverty will be cut in half."

Bernie Sanders praised the package despite being "bitterly disappointed" that raising the minimum wage to \$15 was taken out of the legislation: "[F]or working-class people, this is the most significant piece of legislation passed since the 1960s." In addition, Biden is proposing a \$2 trillion infrastructure investment program ("American Jobs Plan"), partially to tackle the climate crisis. He also wants to make some of the policies such as child benefits in the first \$1.9 trillion package permanent, which could amount to another \$1 trillion.

Combined, these programs total up to \$4.9 trillion. They come on top of the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act passed under Trump in the summer of 2020 and the \$900 billion package last December.

Democrats also passed the PRO Act in the House, which would redefine class relations in favor of working people in multiple ways: it would abolish "right to work" laws at the state level, allow solidarity strikes, ban union-busting (like Amazon's practices in Alabama), make it easier for workers to form a union and negotiate contracts, etc. House Democrats have also sent HR1, a voting rights bill, to the Senate to repeal some voter suppression laws that disenfranchise poor people and people of color.

Is this social democracy?

Has Joe Biden, the establishment neoliberal politician,

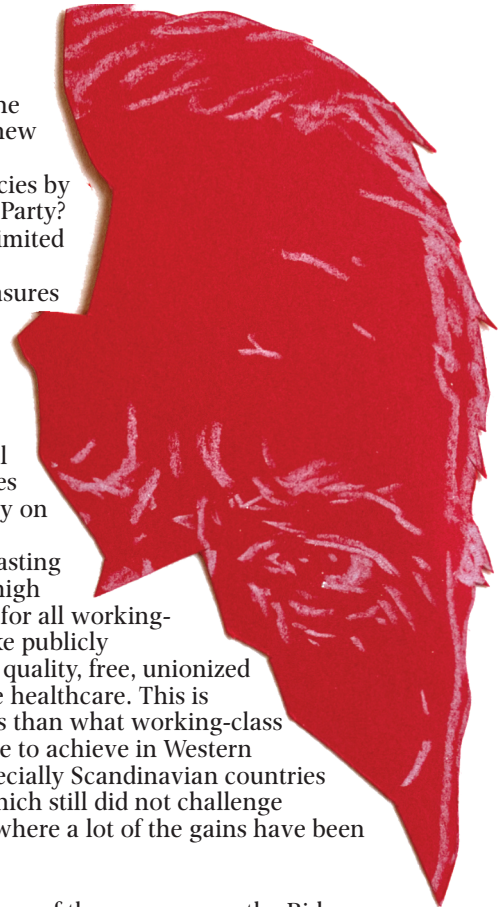
turned into a working-class fighter? Is this the beginning of a new era of social democratic policies by the Democratic Party? Not quite. The limited nature of the Democrats' measures do not justify such an enthusiastic description:

1) These are still "welfare" policies that focus mostly on one-time cash payments, not lasting efforts to build high quality services for all working-class families like publicly organized, high quality, free, unionized childcare or free healthcare. This is significantly less than what working-class people were able to achieve in Western Europe and especially Scandinavian countries in the 1970s (which still did not challenge capitalism and where a lot of the gains have been rolled back).

2) To pay for many of these measures, the Biden administration is borrowing the money, not taking it from the ruling class. The infrastructure policies are designed to make US corporations fit to compete with China and more climate-friendly without seriously encroaching on corporate profits.

3) The Democrats' measures are still limited. It seems very unlikely that the PRO Act or HR1 will pass without a major grassroots rebellion to push moderate pro-Wall Street Democrats to support the bills and abolish the filibuster in order to pass legislation with a simple majority.

In short, Biden is not challenging the power of corporate America. The wealth of the top one percent



in the US, the richest people in human history, remains untouched.

However, it would still be a huge mistake for the left to dismiss the impact of these changes on the short-term living conditions of working people or ignore the openings they provide to fight for lasting, fundamental change and socialist policies.

“This is not yet about a new paradigm. It's about a lost paradigm and the instability that follows.”

Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has been the dominant ideology of all major parties, from the conservative right to the liberal left, in all advanced capitalist countries. Until 2008, neoliberalism was also the dominant means of enforcing a certain regime for accumulating profits. Despite inevitable booms and busts, this regime of capital accumulation worked out for the capitalist class, especially the powerful financial industry.

But this neoliberal model was thrown into crisis by the Great Recession of 2007-09, which went far beyond a typical business cycle. Traditional ruling parties in many countries in Europe have lost their tight control over politics and—as a general trend—social democratic parties are in decline. Trust in established institutions has collapsed. People are searching for new political ideologies and theories. This is being expressed in fundamentally different ways where we've seen successes for populist reactionaries like Trump and Bolsonaro on the one hand and democratic socialists like Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn on the other. These are all expressions of the instability the capitalist system is experiencing now.

Faced with this crisis, Biden and the ruling class are stumbling in the dark, trying to find a way forward. Without a credible political economic paradigm, ruling-class representatives are under pressure, on one side, from the right to embrace economic nationalism. On the other side, Biden is under pressure from the majority of the US population who have been shifting left. He faces demands to deliver policies that benefit the working class from left Democrats like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the semi-independent Bernie Sanders who—in their own distorted way—reflect the aspirations of working-class and oppressed people.

John Maynard Biden?

New York Times columnist David Brooks wrote: “This moment is like 1981, the dawn of the Reagan Revolution, except in reverse.” He argues: “The role of government is being redefined. There is now an assumption that government should step in to reduce economic insecurity and inequality. Even Republicans like Tom Cotton and Mitt Romney, for example, are cooking up a plan to actively boost wages for American workers.” Is this the return of Keynesianism?

Supporters of the ideas of economist John Maynard Keynes, despite major differences among themselves, all agree that the state has an active role to play to make the capitalist economy function in order to maintain the current capitalist mode of production. On one side, right-wing Keynesians want to fix crises of consumer demand through state intervention in the economy, creating better conditions for capitalist economic growth for example through infrastructure projects. Money spent in times of crisis would then be saved in the next period of economic expansion. On the other side, left-wing Keynesians want to transfer resources in a lasting way into the hands of workers through wage increases and social welfare services, to make capitalism function better supposedly for all people, regardless of their class.

Although Biden's initial steps are significant, it is too early to judge where this is heading. Biden has certainly been forced to chart a new course. The political economic paradigm that he served loyally his whole political life was neoliberalism, and that's definitely not working anymore, not even for the ruling class. But this is not yet about a new paradigm. It's about a lost paradigm and the instability that follows.



The State of the Economy: Fictitious

The *New York Times* wrote on January 1, 2021:

The central, befuddling economic reality of the United States at the close of 2020 is that everything is terrible in the world, while everything is wonderful in the financial markets. It's a macabre spectacle. Asset prices keep reaching new, extraordinary highs, when around 3,000 people a day are dying of coronavirus and 800,000 people a week are filing new unemployment claims. Even an enthusiast of modern capitalism might wonder if something is deeply broken in how the economy works.

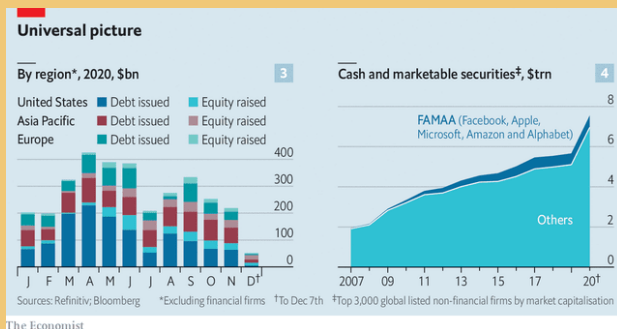
The *Economist* reported on December 10, 2020:

[T]he cash held by the world's 3,000 most valuable listed non-financial firms has exploded to \$7.6 trillion, from \$5.7 trillion last year (see chart 4). Even if you exclude America's abnormally cash-rich technology giants—Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, Alphabet, and Facebook—corporate balance-sheets are brimming with liquidity.

Fictitious Capital

In her book *A People's Guide to Capitalism*, Hadas Thier explains what “fictitious capital” means this way:

“In a simple extension of credit, let's say you lend your roommate \$100 to cover the rent in the beginning of the month. You are then entitled to \$100 from her at mid-month, when she gets her paycheck. But your right to this future \$100 is “fictitious” in that it is based on the anticipation of a forthcoming paycheck. If your roommate should lose her job, or keep the job but need to spend her next paycheck on an unexpected health crisis, or if she's just a flake and blows it on slot machines—that \$100 will never materialize.”



Graphic: Economist, Dec. 9, 2020

How much of this is real?

In the hunt for more money, capitalist investment is based on expected revenue. If stocks of one company promise to return their initial value plus \$1 million in one year, and the capitalist expects a 10 percent return on the investment, then the stocks could be sold for \$10 million, no matter what actual value the stocks represent. If a certain amount of credit, that another capitalist wants to borrow, leads to a return of additional \$2 million and our capitalists still expect a 10 percent return on their investment, any price below \$20 million would be a good investment, whereas anything above \$20 million would not be worthwhile. (Of course, the risks involved would need to be priced in.)

The value of these stocks or these credit bonds are *fictitious*, as they are based on future projections, like the future profits of a corporation. This does not mean that they are not *real*. It just means that they are *not yet real*, and it includes the possibility that they *turn out not to be realizable*.

So what's behind the huge increase in prices of shares and assets? The huge amount of money that was pumped into the markets during the 2007-09 crisis and again during this COVID-19 crisis led to a huge amount of money in the hands of the rich. This policy called “quantitative easing” has resulted in bubbles in stocks, real estate, raw materials, and so on, which some commentators described as an “everything bubble.”

As long as these bubbles grow, the expectation of a certain rate of return on investment of a company's stocks can result in more investors buying those stocks for higher prices with the expectation of future dividends, and the stock price just keeps rising. However, at some point, the question will be posed: Are these corporations actually producing the profits to back up that bet? And if the answer is no, the bubbles burst.

The rise and fall of GameStop shares illustrates the highly speculative character of these bubbles. GameStop's business model of selling video games at retail stores no longer worked as people transitioned to

downloading games online. However, investors who bought the stock were not banking on a long-term return by a profitable company, instead millions of amateur investors decided to buy those stocks in the vague hope that the stock prices would magically continue to rise and guarantee growing revenue. Part of the motivation of those investors coordinating their actions over the social media platform, Reddit, was to punish some hedge funds who had huge bets on falling prices of the GameStop shares. Cheered on by millions around the globe, initially it seemed to work. As long as they found another investor who would pay more for the shares, who cares about the company and its actual business model, right? The share price rose from around \$35 to almost \$350.

However, at a certain point the reality began to set in, and the question was posed: Will others keep buying these shares at ever higher prices? What will these shares actually represent to the owners in the months ahead? Or has this just been a Ponzi scheme? It became apparent that the speculative frenzy was out of control, and the share price fell significantly. Now the actual economic situation of the corporation *did* matter, and people lost a lot of money.

Hedge funds and other “professional” investors looked down on these “amateur” investors who—based on Reddit recommendations—bought shares of GameStop. But far too much of the stock markets today are basically driven by the same motivation: buying in the hope of later selling for more. This makes the capitalist casino economy incredibly unstable.

Even if a crisis were to eliminate only the excesses of financial speculation, it would still disrupt normal business relations. But since fictitious capital plays a big role in driving real investment in productive development under capitalism, a shock caused by the elimination of fictitious capital leads to a generalized credit crunch, a contraction of the economy, and a complete “overcorrection” of the previous excesses. This can completely destroy productive development, causing mass unemployment and poverty.

While the capitalist economy will see a certain recovery after the COVID-19 crisis, these huge bubbles on almost all the various global capital markets will persist into the next business cycle. This will prevent the economy from developing on a sound basis in the medium term and might cause sudden implosions and chain reactions.

What's Next After Neoliberalism?

It is always dangerous to prophesy, particularly about the future.

- Danish proverb

Cuts, privatizations, attacks on wages and unions—these are hallmarks of the neoliberal era. These policies have been used before the neoliberal era, and they will not disappear overnight. However, neoliberalism—as the dominant consensus and a model to accumulate capital—has reached its end. Paul Mason wrote in May 2017 about neoliberalism:

“[Y]ou can put an economy on life support, but not an ideology [...] The human brain demands coherence—and a certain amount of optimism. The neoliberal story became incoherent the moment the state had to take dramatic steps to support a failing financial market. The form of recovery stimulated by quantitative easing boosted the asset wealth of the rich but not the income of the average worker—and rising costs for health care, education, and pension provision across the developed world meant that many people experienced the 'recovery' as a household recession.” (The Nation, May 4, 2017)

On the deeper level of a “long wave of capitalist production,” neoliberalism created a situation that it

cannot overcome. Keeping Mandel's mistake in mind (see sidebar on the following page), it is possible to outline some of these contradictions and where some developments are heading.

1) Transition Periods between Regimes of Accumulation are Tumultuous

The transformation from an old, established regime of accumulation to a new one is a period of uncertainty and conflict. The lack of a viable model of how to move forward economically and politically, the lack of a convincing story of how capitalism can lead to a brighter future, creates an opening and a search for ideas and alternatives that can benefit all kinds of right-wing populist and reactionary ideas, but also a socialist left globally.

2) The End of Fossil Fuel Industries

The fossil fuel-driven complex of capital (oil companies, the automobile industry, military production, etc.) will lose out, one way or another. It's possible that a shift toward renewable energy will be further delayed, with dramatic consequences for the living conditions on this planet. However, even under

this scenario, there's no lasting future for fossil fuels. A reorganization of energy and power production as well as transportation will destroy a significant amount of capital bound up with these dying industries. This could open up a certain outlet for new factions of the capitalist class to come forward and develop new pockets of profit production.

In fact, it has already triggered some shifts within the ruling class as David Harvey described in *Jacobin* (June 2016): "Furthermore, what has been called the 'new capitalist class' of Bill Gates, Amazon, and Silicon Valley has a different politics than traditional oil and energy."

However, new technologies, for example, electric cars or self-driving cars, reduce the number of workers needed significantly. Electric cars are simpler to produce; self-driving cars will lead to a rise of car-sharing and taxi businesses that will reduce the number of cars needed. This could lead, at least in the short term, to mass unemployment, social upheaval, and economic repercussions.

3) Digital Revolution

The digital revolution will continue to have a deep impact on automation, including the replacement of workers. Capitalism seems able to absorb the possibilities of these technologies mainly by reducing human labor, but much less capable of creating new products and markets. So far, many of the new key players have very weak models of profit production: Google sells its users to advertisers—a parasitic way to benefit from the surplus value produced by the working class in other spheres of the economy. Amazon, as a huge sales platform, is not generating much new wealth; it's mainly monopolizing its power as a platform (although the largest part of the company's profits comes from AWS, its web services, which might have more potential to actually create new wealth). Companies like Microsoft and Apple have mostly benefited from branding and monopolizing power.

4) After Globalization Comes Economic Nationalism

Under neoliberalism, profits accumulated in the growing and increasingly parasitic finance sector, far away from the actual production, and centralized in the hands of corporations of imperialist countries. To enable this concentration of profits, capital demanded the ability to move across borders freely—globalization and deregulation became key parts of the neoliberal consensus.

However, all talk of "transnational corporations" ended immediately when the Great Recession hit, and imperialist countries took action to save their own corporations, not any transnational ones. The US government bailed out GM and Ford, and the German state took care of Volkswagen, BMW, and Mercedes-Benz.

The economic crisis of 2007-09 dealt a huge blow to neoliberalism and globalization. Opposition in the form of right-wing populism developed with neo-nationalists like Donald Trump and Boris Johnson and far-right neofascist parties in Europe.

Today, the world is moving away from globalization and toward

Mandel's Mistake

The ideas of Marxist economist, Ernest Mandel, are very helpful in understanding the long waves of capitalist production in general. However, he got it wrong about neoliberalism in particular. Looking ahead, he described the period that we now know as neoliberalism in his book *Late Capitalism* (1972):

The slow absorption of the "industrial reserve army" in the imperialist countries acts as a block to a further rise in the rate of surplus-value despite increasing automation. The class struggle attacks the rate of profit. The intensification of international competition and the world currency crisis work in the same direction. Slow-down in the expansion of world trade.

In other writings, Mandel envisioned an increasing role for state intervention in the economy, policies like the New Deal.

Why did he get it wrong? As Mandel himself explained, such long waves of capitalist production (also known as "regimes of accumulation") do not develop simply out of objective necessity and changes in the technical composition of capital but out of the living struggle between the classes globally and domestically within those objective conditions of commodity production.

Mandel did not foresee the huge setback in the consciousness of the working class and its organizations that followed the fall of the Soviet Union. Social democratic parties moved sharply to the right as soon as the pressure from below, from the working class and from the labor movement, declined. A huge opportunity opened up for capitalists to boost profits by intensifying exploitation of the working class, and they began slashing wages, benefits, and social welfare programs. In the words of David Harvey in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), "The capitalist world stumbled towards neoliberalization as the answer through a series of gyrations and chaotic experiments."

Long Waves of Capitalist Production

“The history of capitalism on the international plane [...] appears not only as a succession of cyclical movements every 7 or 10 years, but also as a succession of longer periods, of approximately 50 years,” wrote the Marxist economist Ernest Mandel in his book *Late Capitalism* in 1972. Beyond the business cycles with their booms and busts, Mandel argued, there are periods of expansions and contractions like Keynesianism from the Second World War until the 1970s or, we could add, Neoliberalism from the 1970s until 2008.

These “long waves of capitalist production” are often associated with the economist N. D. Kondratieff. He analyzed how certain technological conditions of production, their ascent and then their decay, shaped economic development. Kondratieff’s views were criticized as too narrow; these changes, roughly every 50 years, cannot be explained simply as stemming from technological or economic conditions.

It is possible to explain business cycles that last 7 to 10 years by looking at the technological and economic conditions.

Leon Trotsky wrote about these shorter cycles: “The periodic recurrence of minor cycles is conditioned by the internal dynamics of capitalist forces, and manifests itself always and everywhere, once the market comes into existence.” Trotsky then

contrasts this to the longer waves:

As regards the large segments of the capitalist curve of development (50 years) which Professor Kondratieff incautiously proposes to designate also as cycles, their character and duration is determined not by the internal interplay of capitalist forces but by those external conditions through whose channel capitalist development flows. The acquisition by capitalism of new countries and continents, the discovery of new natural resources, and, in the wake of these, such major facts of a 'super-structural' order as wars and revolutions, determine the character and the replacement of ascending, stagnating, or declining epoch of capitalist development. (Quoted from Mandel's Late Capitalism)

Mandel summarizes Trotsky's argument:

[...] while classical cycles can be explained exclusively in terms of the internal dynamics of the capitalist mode of production, the explanation of long waves demands 'a more concrete study of the capitalist curve and the interrelationship between the latter and all the aspects of social life.' In other words, Trotsky objected to a monocausal theory of 'long waves' constructed by analogy with Marx's explanation of classical cycles by the renewal of fixed capital. (Late Capitalism)

Understanding periods like Keynesianism and neoliberalism requires looking at multiple factors at work:

Technological changes in the main spheres of production are one factor. For example, steam power and trains at one time, fossil fuel

based car-chemical-military industrial production at another. Technological changes play an important role in first devaluating amassed constant capital of a previous period and then building up a new mass of constant capital, which then drags down the rate of profit.

Conflict between rival ruling elites internationally is another factor. The ability of the ruling classes of different nations to cooperate and form international alliances (such as in the recent period of globalization), or, alternatively, increases in economic nationalism and imperialist wars (such as the periods before and during World War I and II) impact capitalists' ability to amass profits.

The class struggle—the power of the working class to win higher wages, benefits, and social welfare programs—also impacts the accumulation of profits. In the age of Keynesianism, workers were able to win higher wages and social services, thereby reducing profits; under neoliberalism, workers' power was weakened and profits were restored by reducing wages and cutting welfare.

This is why the phrase “regime of capital accumulation” might be a better description than “long waves of capitalist production.” The question is how different ruling classes can make sure that the accumulation of capital is working for them. The answer partially lies in how much they can impose their interests on other classes internationally and domestically.

In this sense, neoliberalism is more than an ideology or a set of policies; it was the whole regime of capital accumulation for the last fifty years.



currency wars and economic nationalism. Some stronger players attempt to strengthen their economic blocs—such as Germany attempting to keep the EU together and punishing separatists.

Meanwhile others try to balance between different global powers—some countries of the global south try to balance between China and Western imperialists. Overall, the general trend is heading toward a return to protectionism and national conflicts.

One factor of global importance is the failure of the US to play the role of a unifying, dominant force. Past attempts to move forward with more global integration were backed by the authority of the US, like the expansion of the World Trade Organization. The failure of the Doha round of WTO trade negotiations marked a shift. David Harvey wrote:

Geopolitically, the United States is not in a position to call the shots globally as it was in the 1970s. I think we're seeing a regionalization of global power structures within the state system—regional hegemony like Germany in Europe, Brazil in Latin America, China in East Asia. (Jacobin, June 2016)

5) The End of Stable Money

Under neoliberalism, federal banks made their top priority maintaining a low and stable rate of inflation. David Harvey described this in the US:

In October 1979 Paul Volcker, chairman of the US Federal Reserve Bank under President Carter, engineered a draconian shift in US monetary policy. The long-standing commitment in the US liberal democratic state to the principles of the New Deal, which meant broadly Keynesian fiscal and monetary policies with full employment as the key objective, was abandoned in favour of a policy designed to quell inflation no matter what the consequences might be for employment.

The “independence” of federal banks—for example, enshrined in the creation of the European Central Bank to govern the Euro—was a necessary guarantee for the accumulation of capital under the neoliberal regime. But now “quantitative easing,” the process of printing money and expanding the available supply of money, has replaced this aspect of the neoliberal consensus. This has undermined the stability needed to accumulate capital which enabled the neoliberal regime to function. This will cause massive instability in the future.

6) A Working-Class Backlash?

To increase profits under neoliberalism, wages were attacked, and unions were busted. Unionized workers lost jobs as bosses relocated factories either abroad or

in the anti-union South of the US. Republicans passed “right to work” laws in more states, and the low paid workforce expanded significantly.

The intensified exploitation of the working class undercut consumer demand as workers were being paid less and less. Domestic markets were replaced by a global expansion of capitalism. However, this process can only last for so long.

Many countries have seen a dramatic shift in consciousness to the left and periodic popular revolts. Parties expected to organize the resistance like SYRIZA rose to power, formations like DSA were transformed, and new formations like Podemos developed. While union resistance has been relatively weak so far in the US (except for a few impressive struggles like the teachers' red state revolt), there are growing calls for change and policies like a \$15/hr minimum wage.

Under neoliberalism, exploitation was intensified both in the US and abroad. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the slower re-introduction of capitalism in China have brought billions of workers under the control of capitalist production and expanded markets significantly. The restoration of capitalism created new markets, more women have joined the workforce, and privatizations have brought more industries into the sphere of capitalist production.

This worked for the capitalists for decades. But now a new mood of militancy is developing especially in workplaces with a predominantly female workforce, like hospitals and schools. Plans for privatization often meet huge resistance from working-class people who experienced the devastating consequences of these policies over decades.

The working class internationally is slowly recovering from the defeats of the 1980s and '90s. Workers' consciousness and level of organization are on a much lower level now than most of the 20th century. However, the shift to the left in the US and its impact internationally, the ongoing battles in Latin America, and the resistance under the surface in China offer some hope for future battles. This will challenge the neoliberal model on that front as well.

While many politicians might want to cling to neoliberal ideologies, the fundamental way that neoliberalism functioned for capitalist reproduction hit a dead end in the Great Recession—a dead end that neoliberalism itself created. Now Biden and other capitalist leaders are merely stumbling along trying to find a way forward. The question is whether the working class internationally and the socialist movement can take advantage of this situation. ■

Done Right, Mutual Aid Builds Working-Class Power

If DSA avoids approaching mutual aid as a prefigurative project, designed to bypass a direct struggle for political power, socialists can help connect working people's self-organization for immediate survival needs to an effective strategy to win socialism.

BY WHITNEY KAHN

ILLUSTRATED BY SEAN CASE

From the COVID-19 pandemic and record-breaking hurricanes and wildfires, to the recent "Texas Freeze," the capitalist institutions failed to respond quickly and adequately. It's no wonder confidence in the federal government continues to decline. Instead of passively waiting for action from above, millions of people worldwide stepped up to help their neighbors survive amidst deepening crises. As we barrel from one disaster to another, and the systems under capitalism that many people thought would protect us are failing to meet basic needs, interest in mutual aid is growing in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

According to Big Door Brigade, an online hub for mutual aid efforts,

"Mutual aid is when people get together to meet each other's basic survival needs with a shared understanding that the systems we live under are not going to meet our needs and we can do it together RIGHT NOW!"

Mutual aid has borne some of the most hopeful moments in several especially dark years. In a sea of capitalist greed beyond belief, again and again working

people have demonstrated their deep capacity for compassion and community. These experiences have shaped the outlook of tens of thousands of newly radicalized socialists, as DSA rapidly grew to nearly 100,000 members in the Trump era. But they have also provoked a lively debate among socialists over the role of mutual aid initiatives within the wider struggle to end capitalism.

Communities self-organizing in response to crises or the failures of capitalist institutions will rarely describe their actions as "mutual aid." In the same way, millions of workers engage in daily forms of collective resistance to workplace injustices but don't see themselves as part of a wider "class struggle." The job of socialists is to engage in these organic forms of working class self-organization, to help people understand the political significance of their own activity, and to anchor this activity firmly within a wider strategy to win a socialist transformation of society.

There are many types of mutual aid. These include collection of union strike funds, food delivery, fundraising to pay for abortions, putting water in the

"How does mutual aid contribute to a revolutionary strategy to overthrow capitalism and replace it with an egalitarian society based on mutual cooperation?"

desert for migrants crossing the border, tail light repair clinics, ride-share systems, free medical care, and so on. Mutual aid is a vital factor in the lives of many working-class communities, but in times of social crisis and/or mass social movements, mutual aid efforts can take on a more central and organized form.

How does mutual aid contribute to a revolutionary strategy to overthrow capitalism and replace it with an egalitarian society based on mutual cooperation? Within DSA, some members argue that building mutual aid networks should be the central strategy for laying the path toward broader socialist transformation.

The definition on Big Door Brigade hints at the emerging debate around the role of mutual aid and mass protest movements when it comes to

socialist strategy:

“Mutual aid projects are a form of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions, not just through symbolic acts or putting pressure on their representatives in government, but by actually building new social relations that are more survivable.”

While mutual aid has a strong appeal and can be a useful tactic in revolutionary organizing, it cannot be substituted for a strategy focused on winning working-class control over society to abolish capitalist institutions and replace them with bottom-up forms of organization. This means throwing out corporate executives and undemocratic workplace structures, reclaiming the products of our collective labor, reparative redistributions of wealth to countries who have been looted by colonial imperialism, and re-organizing production to sustainably meet human need rather than profit.

Thinking Strategically About Mutual Aid

Dean Spade’s *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity in This Crisis (and the Next)* has become a touchstone for discussions about mutual aid in DSA. He writes:

“Mutual aid is only one tactic in the social movement ecosystem. It operates alongside direct action, political education, and many other tactics. But it is the one that most successfully helps us grow our movements and build our people power, because it brings people into coordinated action to change things right now.”

Though mutual aid strategists like Spade may have respect for other tactics such as strikes,

mass protests, and building electoral political alternatives, they see mutual aid as the core of a successful strategy to change the world. This is in line with the anarchist tradition, which focuses on activities that emulate a classless society within our current framework of a capitalist society (often called “prefigurative politics”) and attempts to provide a vision of what a different world could look like. While they can be powerful examples, mutual aid efforts are inevitably limited by the hostile terrain of capitalist society. In other words, mutual aid must be part of a broader strategy to challenge the capitalist class for control over state power.

Spade is skeptical about the ability of mass movements to lead social transformation by demanding concessions from the state and the capitalist class. He writes:

“[M]ovement organizations could fail to provide any real relief for those whose lives are most endangered and leave newly scared and angry people to the most passive and ineffective forms of expressing their opinions.”

The past 40 years of neoliberalism has undoubtedly reversed many victories of social movements. In the face of huge obstacles and defeats, a romantic belief in the potential of mutual aid projects to lead the way forward which avoids directly confronting capitalists for power is tempting—especially when people are overworked, under-paid, and, especially in many communities of color, subjected to racist state violence.

However, socialists would not be justified in dismissing the revolutionary potential of an organized working class, and no system of oppression and

exploitation has ever been defeated simply through setting up alternatives within the system. Enclosure came for the peasant communes, the Fugitive Slave Act came for those who escaped enslavement, and imperialist armies went after every rebellious corner of the globe. The only way out is through confrontation.

Winning Reforms and State Power

While Spade correctly criticizes the dominant reformist approach of many “movement organizations,” he dismisses the possibility of linking the fight for reforms under capitalism to a revolutionary strategy:

“[R]eforms emerge in the face of disruptive movements demanding justice but for the most part are designed to demobilize by asserting that the problem has been taken care of, meanwhile making as little material change as possible.”

However, even when Spade acknowledges reforms that did significantly lift up poor and working-class people, he seems to focus narrowly on the danger of co-optation. For example, the Black Panther Party fed over 10,000 children at the height of its Free Breakfast Program.

Furthermore, the Black Panther Party was always linking mutual aid back to building support for their revolutionary 10-point program, and unapologetically using it to build their party and support for revolutionary socialism. This strategy helped expose the racist failure of US capitalism to provide basic necessities to low-income communities. But the scale of the Panthers’ program pales in comparison to the 14.5 million that the governmental Free Breakfast Program feeds today—a reform

won by the political pressure the Panthers created. Spade, writing in *Truthout* last October, seems to emphasize only the negative side of the reform:

“The government’s attacks on the Black Panther Party are evidence of mutual aid’s power, as is the government’s co-optation of the program: In the early 1970s, the U.S. Department of Agriculture expanded its federal free breakfast program—built on a charity, not a liberation, model.”

Spade is right to warn that liberal capitalists will attempt to spin every concession working people force out of them as an example that gradual change within capitalism is the only realistic—and acceptable—path to progress. But socialists have often helped millions of working people draw the opposite conclusion through winning battles for reforms—that reforms are only won through struggle, and that if our class organizes on a larger scale and in a direct fight for political power, far more can be won.



Four Questions to Guide DSA’s Mutual Aid Work

Within DSA and among those who agree with a strategy of revolutionary confrontation for state power, there are many who seem to dismiss mutual aid as an inherently liberal and non-revolutionary tactic (see *Regeneration’s* widely circulated article, “Mutual Aid: A Factor of Liberalism”). Any tactic taken in the context of a liberal strategy is a liberal tactic. But that does not make it an essential quality of that tactic.

For example, Marxists have run in parliamentary elections and

created political parties around the world. This does not automatically make elections a “revolutionary” tactic by any means. They can be used in a revolutionary way to demonstrate the limits of reforms, or they can be used in a reformist attempt to use the capitalist state machinery to attempt to legislate our way out of capitalism.

In navigating the complex political pressures and challenges we face, the following questions can help guide socialists in evaluating

whether a mutual aid project fits into a broader strategy of revolutionary transformation.

1. Is the Mutual Aid Project Linked to Clear Demands?

No mutual aid project alone can fully meet the needs of what it’s aiming to do. But if mutual aid is used as a tactic to organize the working-class and oppressed communities, then having systemic demands on those in power is key.

The Black Panther Party tied all

of their projects to building support for their famous “Ten Point Program,” which they understood as a tool to mobilize and unite poor and working-class Black people into a worldwide working-class struggle for socialist revolution.

A more modern example of the power of transformative demands is the way that the Texas DSA Chapters reacted to the devastating winter storm and collapse of the power grid in February. DSA members

were among the first to hit the ground with mutual aid projects to help address neighbors’ immediate needs. They did so openly as DSA members, and linked these projects to demands for a Green New Deal, and called for bringing the power grid in Texas into public ownership.

2. Who Do We Say Should Pay for the Crises of Capitalism?

Mutual aid can take the form of

strike fund contributions or bail support, or offering basic life-sustaining help to neighbors forced out of their homes by floods, fires, or unemployment. But the overwhelming majority of society’s resources are concentrated in the hands of the capitalist class and the state. Asking working-class people to sacrifice in solidarity with those in greater need should be combined with clear calls to make the rich pay.

The Black Panther Party



solicited donations to the Free Breakfast for Children program from local businesses. But they didn't just ask like a corporatized non-profit.

According to Kurt Schaeffer, writing for the Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project:

“Elmer Dixon said that the Seattle Panthers had concluded that Safeway was profiting handsomely due to the patronage of Central Area customers. In return the company should therefore donate eggs and sausage for children’s breakfasts. In July of 1969, Elmer Dixon presented a letter requesting \$100 each week for the breakfast programs. The letter added that if the stores did not comply, the Party would raise the request by \$25 each week. The stores rebuffed the demand so the Party set up pickets and attempted to institute boycotts.”

These tactics caused the Safeway to close and another grocery store to open who did contribute. To this day, there's no Safeway in the Central District.

3. Are We Helping to Build the Confidence and Fighting Capacity of Workers?

In 1912 in Lawrence, Massachusetts, young women who worked as mill workers were forced to work 56 hours a week. Their average life expectancy was 26 years old. When a law lowered the length of the workweek to 54 hours, the mill owners lowered the wages accordingly. But these women, barely surviving as it was, said no. Organized by the radical Industrial Workers of the World, they began what is now known as the “Bread and Roses Strike.” While working mothers stood on the picket lines for two months without pay, sympathetic families cared for many of their children. This

mutual aid kept the strike going, and the mill owners were eventually forced to concede 20% wage increases.

In recent times, Bread for Ed, Tacos for Teachers, DoNut Cut Education, and other DSA-led mutual aid actions supported the educator strike wave of 2018-2019. These efforts strove to help socialists connect with teachers to build fighting rank-and-file groups, popularize a class-struggle program, and campaign to democratize and transform the unions.

Mutual aid needs to complement, not replace, the patient work of building the socialist movement and popularizing socialist ideas within the labor movement.

4. Are We Building DSA Out of Our Mutual Aid Work?

Around the world, most successful mass socialist parties, from the Social Democratic Parties of the late 19th century until today, have linked their wider political demands and their party-building work to projects that meet the immediate needs of working people—from health clinics to sports and cultural centers, from food banks to schools, and so much more. Especially in the early era of socialism, and in countries where the workers movement has not yet won as many social welfare provisions (or where they've been stripped away), such programs can be pivotal to building mass unions and socialist parties.

Given the neoliberal erosion of social programs and the deep poverty facing more oppressed sections of the working class, DSA will need to learn this history if we aim to sink roots in the working class and grow into an organization of hundreds of thousands in the

years ahead. When done well, these mutual aid programs can serve as entry points to recruit people into the struggle for a better world. When done poorly, they're merely a service for a passive “customer” base—or charity. I can't tell you how many “member benefits” and “exclusive discounts” letters I've gotten in the mail from my union, and not one of them that I can remember was ever paired with any call to action.

There's an understandable worry among DSA members that linking solidarity and mutual aid efforts with recruitment will come off sounding like a ‘socialist time-share pitch.’ This leads many organizers to avoid recruiting people into the DSA through mutual aid projects. It's easier to “do the work” and put that aside. But if you believe, like I do, that the only motorforce for change is mass action and political organization by the working class, disenfranchised poor, and oppressed communities, then linking DSA's mutual aid work to an active campaign to build DSA's membership is vital.

Finally, we must reject the idea that working people are simply too busy or overworked to join a socialist organization. While some people may well have too much on their plate to get involved, it is patronizing to assume that's the case for everyone. History is made by mass movements of people who are overburdened and exhausted, yet still find the energy to unite and overthrow oppressive laws, systems, and ruling classes. ■

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Women and Nature: Towards an Ecosocialist Feminism

BY JESS SPEAR

This article examines the connection between the exploitation of women and of nature under capitalism. Jess Spear argues against ecofeminism “that women’s connection to nature is rooted in their reproductive biology.” She makes the case that “[t]he essentialism of some strands of ecofeminism leads us down a path of biological determinism that so much of second wave feminism was fighting to destroy, and we are still struggling against,” including the very idea of “women’s work.” Instead, Spear argues for a Marxist basis for ecofeminism, pointing to the material conditions under which both natural resources and women’s social reproductive labor are treated as “free gifts” to capital.

This article was originally published in February 2021 in Rupture, the eco-socialist quarterly magazine of RISE (Revolutionary, Internationalist, Socialist, and Environmentalist), which is a network of People Before Profit, Ireland’s eco-socialist party. RISE is also the Irish sister organization in political solidarity with DSA’s Reform and Revolution caucus.

It was hot outside that day. In the remote area of KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa a young man watched as five men approached him on the porch. “Could we have a drink?” one of them asked. As they finished the water they asked if they could go inside and thank the woman that lived there. The young man led them in the front door. Moments later shots rang out as the men gunned down the young man’s grandmother and environmental organiser, Fikile Ntshangase, and raced out.¹

The death of Ntshangase removed a thorn in the side of the Tendele Coal mining company. They had been pressing for over a decade to get the small number of remaining families to vacate their land so their mining operation could expand.² Like Berta Cárceres before her, the resistance of Ntshangase and her community is part of a long history of people defending nature as part of defending themselves, their history, their culture,

and their future. The role of women like Ntshangase and countless others in defense of nature and with it, life, illustrates the connection between the exploitation of women and the exploitation of nature.

The rise of ecofeminism

Wherever the forces of destruction attempt to cut down trees, pollute our air and water, and rip away the earth for minerals, women have been leading the resistance. In the cities and communities, women have fought for clean water, air, and land for their families to flourish. From the very first “tree huggers” in the Chipko Movement in India³ (pictured above) and the *Comitato dei danneggiati* (Injured Persons’ Committee) protesting pollution in Fascist Italy⁴ to the peasants in La Via Campesina, the people of Appalachia fighting mountaintop removal and indigenous defenders of the Amazon, women have been and are today

leading communities in struggle against capitalist destruction of our environment.

The rise of second wave feminism alongside environmental movements in the 1970s led to the emergence of ‘ecofeminist’ politics which saw “a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women”.⁵ The term ‘ecofeminism’ was coined by the French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death) published in 1974. One of the first ecofeminist movements is the Green Belt Movement - aimed at preventing desertification by planting trees - in Kenya started by Wangari Maathai in 1977.

Of course, many men are also fierce campaigners against capitalist destruction, organising mass movements to defend the forests and land, like Chico Mendes in the Amazon and Ken Saro-Wiwa in the

Niger Delta, who were both tragically murdered for their activism. However, the most well-known environmental activists today are undoubtedly women: Vanessa Nakate and Greta Thunberg, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Naomi Klein, and Vandana Shiva. Even here in Ireland, Maura Harrington helped to lead the Shell to Sea campaign and today the most well known radical environmental activist is arguably Saoirse McHugh.

That both women and nature are dominated and exploited is undeniably true. The question for ecofeminists and ecosocialists is why and what can be done about it?

Ecofeminism, patriarchy & capitalism

For some ecofeminists, women's affinity to nature comes from 'their physiological functions (birthing, menstrual cycles) or some deep element of their personalities (life-oriented, nourishing/caring values)'.⁶ In this way they "understand" nature, whereas men do not and cannot. Women have a spiritual connection to "Mother" earth. These ecofeminists locate the exploitation and oppression of women and nature in patriarchy, where men control, plunder, rape, and destroy both. Climate change is literally a 'man-made problem that requires a feminist solution'.⁷ The feminist solution in this case is more women's voices, more women in positions of power, and more women at the table discussing their experiences and their ideas on what to do about environmental problems.

Undeniably society is patriarchal (see box). We know it from the statistics and we women know it from the million and one experiences we've had that reinforce the idea

that men are better, stronger, smarter, and overall more capable.

Patriarchal ideas, norms, and behaviours have devastating impacts today on women. Not only from the discrimination, abuse, and violence they face from men as well as the state and state-supported institutions. The highly gendered division of labour in society means women are not only working outside the home to ensure their families have all they need to live, they are also putting in on average three times more hours than men⁸ at home. In Ireland, women labor in the home an extra 11 hours a week⁹ compared to men. This impacts the kinds of jobs they can take, which affects salary and wages, working conditions, and whether they are free to fully develop their interest and talents.

Women are also at the frontlines of environmental destruction, toxic pollution, as well as climate and ecological breakdown. In Flint, Michigan it was the women in the community who raised their voices when the effects of lead poisoning became clear, and who today, six years on, are still fighting for clean water.¹⁰ As subsistence farmers, producing half the food globally, and in the global South, planting and harvesting as much as 80% of the food¹¹, women are forced to reckon with desertification, lack of nutritious food, access to clean water, and destruction of nature in general more than men. In a natural disaster, women are also 14 times more likely to die.¹²

The experiences of these women, who make up the majority of the poorest people on the planet, who have and will be more impacted by the pandemic and its aftermath¹³, should be brought to the center of discussions about solving climate change and ecological breakdown.

Not only because they are most affected, but also because they have unique knowledge and skills that will be key to planning how we can establish a more harmonious interaction between society and nature. Vandana Shiva explains that,

"In most cultures women have been the custodians of biodiversity. They produce, reproduce, consume and conserve biodiversity in agriculture. However, in common with all other aspects of women's work and knowledge, their role in the development and conservation of biodiversity has been rendered as non-work and non-knowledge."¹⁴

The involvement of women in farmer and peasant organisations expanded the struggle for food sovereignty to include combating gender-based violence and equality for women. The women within La Via Campesina for example 'defend their rights as women within organizations and society in general...and struggle as peasant women together with their colleagues against the neoliberal model of agriculture'.¹⁵ They help organizations understand the many obstacles preventing women from joining and contributing to movements, in particular 'the division of labor by gender [which] means that rural women have less access to the most precious resource, time...'¹⁶

Central to ecofeminism is a rejection of human domination and control over nature in favor of a recognition of '...the centrality of human embeddedness in the natural world'.¹⁷ As John Bellamy Foster¹⁸ and other metabolic rift theorists have contended, this is also a central point in Marx's critique of capitalism (see page 72). Marx wrote that "[human beings] live

Capitalism & Patriarchy

Capitalism emerged from a patriarchal feudal society in which male private property inheritance demanded women's bodies and lives were subordinated to the needs of the family. All kinds of sexist ideas supported women's supposed inferiority to men, though the forms of oppression women experienced was of course uneven across class and racial lines. Peasant women certainly weren't forced to learn multiple languages and the basics of etiquette to attract a husband. They worked in the fields and in the home. But they were nonetheless affected by the ideas and culture that emanated from the top of society because as Marx explains, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas...The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas..."²⁰

Patriarchal norms and behaviors, and crucially the laws that enshrined men's right to own property (including the women of their family), meant that men would become the first capitalists, not women. While rich women were confined to stuffy drawing rooms, crocheting and waiting for the day they would marry and ensure property inheritance continued along the male line, working class women and peasant women, who had no property, labored as mothers, carers, and domestic servants, regardless of how much they had to work outside the home to survive. Today this continuation of social reproductive labor by women means that even though in many countries they've gained political and civil rights - through persistent struggle by countless women as well as LGBTQ+ people and men - the ability of working class and poor women to exercise these rights continues to be restricted. It is hampered by both capitalism's dependence on the free labor they perform in the home, the undervalued care work and often precarious, part-time work they do in the formal economy, and the sexist ideas that persist and ensure the gendered division of labor is reproduced year after year, generation after generation.

from nature...nature is [our] body, we must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if we are not to die. To say that [our] physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for [we] are a part of nature."¹⁹ Unless we struggle for a complete transformation of our society-nature interaction, where production is organized in an ecologically balanced way, the rift between nature and humanity will worsen with devastating consequences for human health, environmental destruction, climate disruption, and irretrievable biodiversity loss.

Ecosocialist feminism

While ecofeminists rightly point out the subordination and domination of women and nature as having a common cause, Marxist ecofeminists (or what I would call ecosocialist feminists) disagree that women's connection to nature is rooted in their reproductive biology. The essentialism of some strands of ecofeminism leads us down a path of biological determinism that so much of second wave feminism was fighting to destroy, and we are still struggling against.²¹ We also need to reckon

with the revolution in the gender /sex binary demanded by trans, intersex, and gender non-conforming people who do not and will not fit into the simple male/female categories and all the cultural baggage that goes with it.

While we recognize the unique knowledge women have in care work, for families and for nature, we don't accept that it's inherently female or feminine, as some ecofeminism suggests. Cleaning the house, cooking meals, raising children, farming to feed your family, or gathering the daily water is not "women's work", but rather the needs of society forced onto their backs. "Saving the planet" is not inherently women's work or responsibility either.²² We want to end the gender division in and outside the home and we demand this work is organized amongst the wider community, for example through free public childcare, community laundromats and canteens. This would have the effect of freeing women from this work now, but would also open the door to a society in which the community is responsible for organizing social reproductive work and sexist ideas about "women's" vs. "men's work" can begin to wither away. Women will then be free to choose what work they want to engage in, including the farming, environmental/ecological work so many already perform, enriching all of society by their contributions.

In contrast to "essentialist" ecofeminism, ecosocialist feminism sees women's "connection" to nature and our environment as socially constructed and reinforced for material reasons. "[W]omen are not 'one' with nature...[we've] been 'thrown into an alliance' with it."²³ Capitalism treats nature and women's social reproductive labor

as 'free gifts', completely outside the formal economy (and therefore without value) and yet absolutely central to its ability to generate profits. For example, the value of an old growth forest is not accounted for when the trees are felled and the wood used to make furniture. Under capitalism the value of a commodity (whether it's a shirt or a house) is based on the average amount of labor power used to make it, including the work that went into acquiring the materials, but not the "value" of the raw materials in themselves. It's the same for domestic labor. Labor in the home - the cooking, cleaning, and shopping - ensures workers are fit and able to labor in the workplace day after day; and the labor required in birthing and caring for children ensures a new generation of workers is prepared to enter the workplace and create wealth for the capitalists. This is all done primarily by women and for free as far as capitalism is concerned. These 'free gifts' - from nature and women - are 'expropriated' by capitalism. They are taken and consumed in the process of capital accumulation without compensation, cheapening the cost of production and externalizing the real costs onto the rest of society.²⁴

For Marxist ecofeminists, the domination of men over women in society and nature at large is therefore not a result of patriarchal ideas alone. Their continuation and utilization by capitalism maintains divisions between women and men (alongside black/white, straight/LGBTQ, cis/non-binary) workers and poor people to ensure profits continue and their rotten class system endures.

Most importantly, ecosocialist feminists underscore the crucial difference between working class or

peasant women and women who make it to the top echelons of power. Ecofeminism can sometimes "over-romanticiz[e] women and women's history..." and "[assert] a 'totalizing' image of a universalized 'woman',... ignoring women's differences".²⁵ While all women experience sexism, the needs and demands of "women", even working-class and peasant women, are not uniform. Not all working-class women were forced into the role of housewife. As black revolutionary socialist Claudia Jones explained in her essay 'An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!', capitalism's structural racism meant that black women in the 1940s were often the main breadwinner in the family and had to work long hours, usually cleaning or childminding for white families, before they came home to labor for their own.²⁶

We also need to keep in mind that the call for more women's voices is all too easily met within capitalism with the Josepha Madigans, Angela Merckels and Ursula Von Der Leyens of the world. The new Biden administration in the U.S. is the most recent case in point with the first black and Asian vice president and the first indigenous woman to lead the Department of Interior.

The rise of the new women's movement alongside a growing climate justice movement gives impetus to ecofeminist ideas, which is overall positive (despite the essentialist arguments, which must be strongly countered). Yet, as long as private property rights are upheld for corporations to do basically whatever they want to the forests, land, and water with impunity and as long as states act in their interests against ours²⁷, whether it's by the hands of men or women, nature will con-

tinue to be destroyed, the climate disrupted, and women will disproportionately suffer (with poor, black and brown and marginalized women suffering the worst). We must go much further and demand an ecofeminism that is unflinchingly anti-capitalist and socialist and move towards an ecosocialist feminism that sees our labor as the beginning of the way out. Under patriarchal and racial²⁸ capitalism, working women and peasants labor in and outside the home. This dual role gives them an insight into the unsustainability and destructive character of capitalism. It's why so many movements for radical change are led by women, despite the extra barriers in our way. But it is in our labor in the workplaces and where we produce for capital that we have the most power to fight and win.

Like fuel to the engine, profit is what powers capitalism, and all profit comes from our labor in the workplace. Whether we're cleaning the floors, staffing the cash register, or operating machinery on a production line, our labor is what keeps the capitalist system going. If we decide to take collective action, to slow down our work or even go on strike, for an hour, a day or indefinitely, it would bring businesses, cities, and even whole countries to a grinding halt. This means workers, which comprise the exploited and oppressed majority, actually have tremendous potential power when we are organized. Women workers alongside the men in their workplaces have used their power to fight back against the sexism they experience - as McDonald's workers did²⁹ - and to go after big oil - as teachers in West Virginia did.³⁰ When the INMO went on strike in 2019 they made clear that their demands for pay and retention directly im-

pacted the inadequate healthcare we all receive³¹, and while they didn't win everything they demanded, they won more than the government was originally offer-

ing.³² We need to build on these examples and countless others from history, strengthen our ties in workplaces as well as the community and get organized to challenge

patriarchal capitalism wherever it attacks life, in society and our environment. ■

Notes

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18. See Marx's *Ecology* (2000) by John Bellamy Foster and Karl Marx's *Ecosocialism* (2018) by Kohei Saito.
19. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm
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21. That is, reproductive ability should determine (and in many cases, limit) your role in the home and in the workplace to those deemed "women's" work - childminding, cooking, cleaning, teaching, nursing, and so on.
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reform & revolution

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 in which 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 injustice and fight for an ecosocialist world, join DSA at dsausa.org! If you want to find out more about joining the Reform & Revolution caucus of DSA, please email us at info@ReformAndRevolution.org

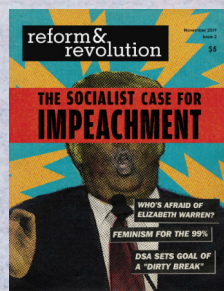
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