

# reform & revolution

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*The Case for Eco-Socialism*



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# reform & revolution

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## Winning an Eco-Socialist Future



BY RAMY KHALIL, TY MOORE

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**DSA's campaign for a Green New Deal must connect the power of the working class with the climate justice movement and build toward a socialist future.**

As billions worldwide experience the worsening impacts of climate change, displacing tens of thousands of climate refugees from formerly colonized countries, a growing climate justice movement has emerged. Millions of students participated in the climate strikes, and the environmental movement is increasingly embracing anti-capitalist ideas.

Crucially, the emergence of the Green New Deal (GND) as the central demand of the US environmental movement represents a historic breakthrough. For the first time, the movement is unified behind a policy framework on the scale needed to end our reliance on fossil fuels.

Equally important, the GND embraces a working-class political strategy with the potential to unite labor, environmental, and racial justice movements. This is quite significant because capitalist leaders have often succeeded in pitting environmentalists against unions.

As Kate Aronoff, the acclaimed climate journalist and DSA member, points out in her new book *Overheated*, "by prioritizing climate policies that make people's lives better in the short run and grow the power of democratic institutions like labor unions, a GND can swell the multiracial, working-class coalition invested in designing ... a fairer, cleaner economy ... What critics of the Green New Deal have tended to miss is that its policy ambitions are one and the same with its political strategy."

At the same time, most prominent leaders of the GND — from Bernie Sanders to DSA's elected representatives — appear to underestimate the ferocious opposition we will face. Alongside the fossil fuel companies, a sprawling industrial complex — spanning from global financial institutions to auto, chemical, and military corporations — have fomented bloody wars and overthrown democratic governments to defend their profits.

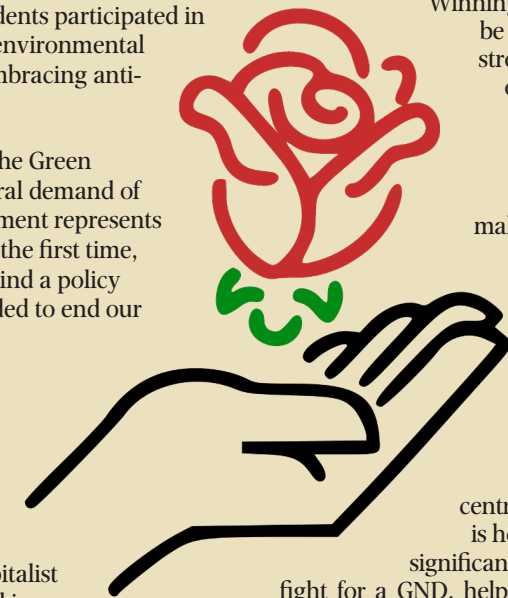
Winning a transformative GND won't be possible without a movement strong enough to break the back of the capitalist class and their state machinery.

The most important political contribution eco-socialists can make is popularizing the idea that the multiracial working class has the power to shut down the capitalist system and ultimately replace the current mode of production with a new democratic system based on economic, racial, and gender equality. Organizationally, the central question for the socialist left is how we can deepen our already significant influence within the growing

fight for a GND, helping to develop it into a mass working-class movement with a revived labor movement at its center.

We've made eco-socialism the central theme of this issue of *Reform & Revolution* to contribute to a Marxist and working-class strategy on these important questions facing the environmental and labor movements. Please contact us if you'd like to collaborate with our caucus within DSA.

**In Solidarity,  
Ramy Khalil and Ty Moore**



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# Historic Defeat for US Imperialism



BY ROSEMARY DODD

IG INSTAGRAM/MARXIST\_BARBIE

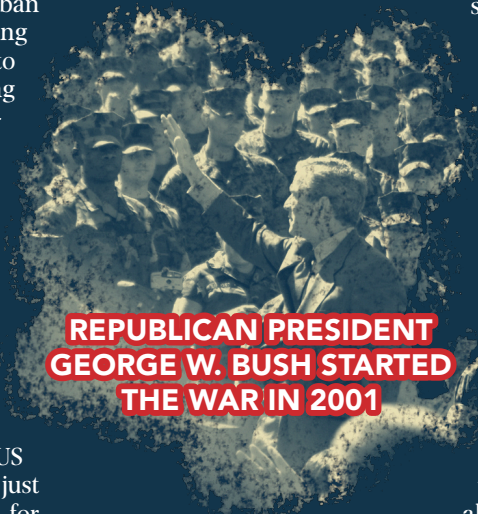
**This was not just a botched exit by Biden, but a stunning failure of US imperialism to build any economic or social roots on the ground — after 20 years of occupation.**

The world has been aghast at the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Afghanistan as the withdrawal of US troops resulted in a large-scale collapse of the US-backed Afghan government. The Taliban rapidly advanced from holding several regional provinces to capturing Kabul and declaring themselves the new government on August 15. Although the takeover itself was surprisingly bloodless due to large swaths of the Afghan military laying down their arms in surrender, heart-wrenching images of terrified refugees and desperate Afghans at the Kabul airport (including some who fell to their deaths after clinging to a US plane), have underscored just how dire the situation is for many in the country.

The Taliban, who were forced to renounce power and quickly melt away after the initial US invasion in 2001, have come back significantly stronger than before after two decades of battling an occupying superpower, which allowed them to grow support and develop savvy military and economic

tactics. Although they claim they will respect women's rights and not seek reprisals against those who assisted the US-backed government, there is little evidence that this "new" Taliban will be fundamentally different from its former repressive, conservative regime.

The 20-year US war has cost over \$2 trillion, the lives of almost 2,500 US troops, around



170,000 Afghan lives, and the displacement of over four million people. The Afghani death toll is often listed as an afterthought in US media, but the people of Afghanistan have paid an unthinkable price for this war in blood, trauma, and economic hardship. Every single one of these lives were spent for nothing, as the obscenely corrupt Afghan govern-

ment proved to be a house of cards waiting to fall as soon as US troops withdrew.

## Elite Panic

The vast majority of the media — from liberal to right-wing outlets — turned on Biden over the withdrawal, playing footage of chaos in Kabul on repeat and trotting out war criminals like John Bolton to argue that we should stay in Afghanistan indefinitely. Of course, the images and tales of human suffering absolutely deserve to be highlighted. But these are the same individuals and news outlets that consistently ignored or downplayed the atrocities committed against civilians by US airstrikes and US allies in the region. Rather than genuine humanitarian concern, this is a defense of endless war profiteering by military contractors and anger at Biden for revealing the shortcomings of US imperialism. There has been pushback from Western powers as well; at the behest of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the G7 convened to plead with Biden to extend the withdrawal past the August 31 deadline.

Despite their hand-wringing over the plight of Afghan women and girls, few capitalist commentators are pointing out how the vast majority of rural women

under the US-backed regime still suffered gender oppression with the additional burden of war and airstrikes. As Adam Nossiter writes in the *New York Times*, "Afghanistan, particularly in its urban centers, may have changed over 20 years of American occupation. But the laws the Taliban promoted — repressive policies toward women — were not so different, if they differed at all, from immemorial customs in many of these rural villages." Additionally, figures demonstrating education for girls were exaggerated — as of 2017, only around a third of girls were attending school. The majority of the capitalist media are not mentioning the devastation caused by the war itself, nor are they arguing for a massive refugee program to alleviate this suffering.

Blaming Biden for the way the withdrawal turned out is an attempt by the ruling class and its media to do damage control — if Biden simply botched the exit, then it was tactical mistakes at the end that are to blame for what we're seeing now rather than the entire war that lasted through four different presidents. They realize how deeply delegitimizing this defeat is for US institutions, and how it reveals the structural weakness of a declining superpower that couldn't mold Afghanistan despite a 20-year occupation. Additionally, both Republican and Democratic elites want to keep the option of starting these kinds of wars in the future.

They claimed after 9/11 that the answer to right-wing Islamic terrorism was invasion, and that the US was "helping" the people of Afghanistan as well as keeping Americans safe. Today, the lie is laid bare, another crack in the already unstable

foundation of the ruling class's legitimacy. As socialists, we unequivocally support withdrawing from Afghanistan and ending all other occupations and imperialist wars.



## A Stunning Failure

The Taliban swept to victory not due to any broad popular support but because they were able to step into a vacuum left by the widely hated puppet government the US set up. According to a 2019 Asia Foundation survey, only 13 percent of Afghans "have a lot or a little sympathy with the Taliban." The regime of the Taliban was not popular and could not put up much resistance 20 years ago when the US first invaded. The fact that they succeeded so quickly and easily now is a stunning indictment of the failures of US imperialism.

The deal with the Taliban to withdraw US troops was initially brokered under Trump, who, like Obama before him, ran on getting the US out of Afghanistan and ending endless wars. Instead, under both administrations we saw troop "surges" rather than draw-downs. Amazingly, Trump criticized Biden for following through with his plan, and Chris Miller, Trump's final Secretary of Defense, even claimed that the Trump Admin-

istration had no intention of actually leaving, instead using the deal with the Taliban as a "play" to manipulate Afghan President Asraf Ghani.

Despite the assurances that the Afghan government was ready to carry on the fight alone, it was an open secret there was no long-term strategy, and most foreign policy experts thought a Taliban victory was inevitable. What was shocking was the speed with which the government fell. Ghani fled in a helicopter, and large swaths of the military laid down their weapons rather than fighting the Taliban's inevitable advance, giving the US no time to quietly withdraw its civilian presence and save some measure of face.

Biden has dismissively blamed the Afghans for refusing to fight for their own country: "We gave them every chance to determine their own future. What we could not provide them was the will to fight for that future." But what exactly would they be fighting and giving their lives for? A foreign-funded government so corrupt it could enrich its top officials and contractors but not provide the most basic services to its people? While it would be inaccurate to paint the Afghan government and the Taliban as equivalent, the fact remains that after 20 years of occupation the puppet regime was not able to offer any prospect of economic and social development to the masses and was not able to build popular support.

## Echoes of Vietnam

In July, Joe Biden said "There's going to be no circumstance where you see people being lifted off the roof of an embassy." Here he was referencing the evacuation of the US embassy in Saigon



upon the fall of the US-backed government in South Vietnam. Images of the helicopter leaving the roof of the embassy in Kabul as smoke poured out the windows from hastily burned classified documents made it clear: this is another Vietnam moment for US imperialism.

In both Vietnam and Afghanistan, the US invested a massive amount of resources in “nation building,” causing untold suffering for the inhabitants, only to be humiliated when those governments crumbled. Both times, the US painted an overly rosy picture of the state of the wars, but the opposition forces (the North Vietnamese and Taliban, respectively), refused to back down and embarked on drawn-out, seemingly uphill battles to ultimate victory. In both cases the local allies the US relied on for support were corrupt with little public backing and were unable to function without foreign military support.

Imperial occupations that prop up domestic corruption and cronyism but offer little to nothing in the way of economic opportunity or political self-determination cannot build a social and economic base for a puppet regime.

There are also major differences between the US interventions in Vietnam and Afghanistan. While the Taliban regime was not popular and lacked deep roots in society, the hopes of millions in Vietnam to abolish capitalism and develop society along the lines of the Stalinist USSR were a real factor in the resistance against US imperialism. Vitaly, the wars were fought in very different ways. While 58,000 working-class American soldiers

(over 30 percent of whom were drafted) died fighting their brothers and sisters in Vietnam, the Afghan war relied heavily on proxies and unmanned drones.

Since the historic defeat in Vietnam, the willingness of the US working class to carry the burden of these imperialist wars collapsed. The ruling class tried to carefully rebuild this willingness over the ensuing decades, and happily used the 9/11 attacks as a pretext to invade multiple countries. However, public support for foreign military intervention, even with few troops on the ground, took a hit after the US defeat in Iraq, and it took an even deeper blow with the unraveling of efforts in Afghanistan. Future anti-war movements can use this as ammunition.



**REPUBLICAN PRESIDENT TRUMP CONTINUED THE WAR AND OCCUPATION**

### A History of Failed Interventions

Afghanistan is merely the latest in a series of failed military interventions in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Vietnam. For decades, direct US intervention was the norm, supported (to varying degrees) by both the Republican and Democratic parties. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, 90 percent of the country supported invading Afghanistan, and Barbara Lee

was the sole oppositional vote in Congress.

Biden has been an active player in this bipartisan war machine. Biden is neither a pacifist nor a non-interventionist. He supported US military interventions in Iraq, Yugoslavia, and Syria among many others. Jeremy Scahill writes in *The Intercept* (April 27, 2021) that Biden “is dedicated to the US as an empire, [and] believes that preserving US national interests and ‘prestige’ on the global stage outweighs considerations of morality or even at times the deaths of innocent people.” However, at least since his stint as Vice President under Obama, he has been forcefully agitating behind the scenes to withdraw from Afghanistan. He opposed the troop surge, and in his memoir, Obama recalls that Biden tried to convince him not to listen to the generals, saying “Don’t let them jam you.”

While he repeats the popular talking points about not sending another generation of Americans to die in an unending, unwinnable war, Biden also hints at another reason to pull out. At a press conference, he claimed that the US’s competitors in Beijing and Moscow would “love nothing more” than for the US to be “bogged down” in Afghanistan. Biden, like Trump before him, has been talking up the threat China poses to US hegemony. In defending his proposed withdrawal from Afghanistan in April against Republican Representative Liz Cheney, Trump claimed she “wants to stay in the Middle East and Afghanistan for another 19 years, but doesn’t consider the big picture — Russia and China!” There appears to be at least a section of the US ruling class that sees

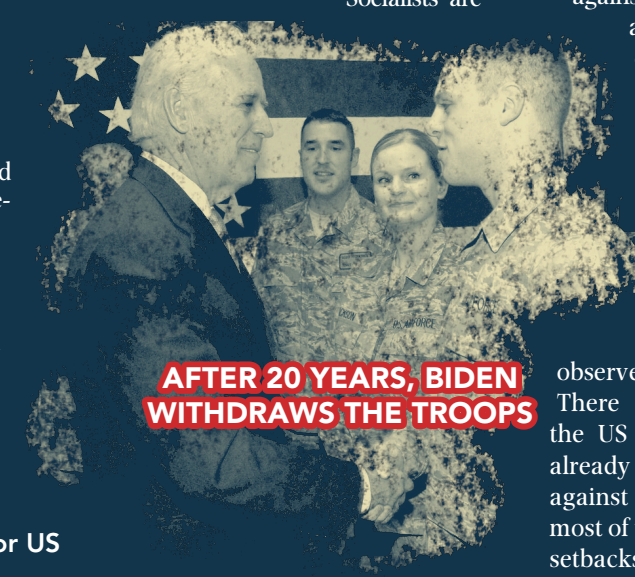
this particular type of nation building as a distraction from the inter-imperialist rivalry with China and Russia, which they consider of primary importance, especially in this period of declining geopolitical power and prestige for US capitalism.

US imperialism is no longer powerful enough to directly reshape the world in its image, and Biden represents a wing of the ruling class that understands that and wants to pivot strategically. Other sections are in denial and want to cling to old ways of doing things, fearful of the impact this defeat will have on US imperialism’s standing in the world.

### A Turning Point for US Imperialism

The failures in Afghanistan deal a blow not only to US hard power but to its soft power as well. If direct military intervention failed so dramatically, the threat of future such interventions holds less sway, and other nations will have less incentive to accept US political domination.

This has repercussions for the US domestically, too. The idea of “American exceptionalism” and the US’s position as the supposed leader of “the free world” has been used to economically and morally justify the rule of the ruling class within the US. The obvious weakening of its position internationally will increase uncertainty in its fitness to rule domestically and cause working-class Americans to seek alternatives on both the right and the left. Right and left strains that question militarized imperialism can be seen in the rapid growth of both DSA and the



**AFTER 20 YEARS, BIDEN WITHDRAWS THE TROOPS**

fighting for a massively expanded refugee program, including humane resettlement and jobs programs for those fleeing Afghanistan. Of course, this holds true for other countries ravaged by military and climate emergencies as well, such as Yemen, Syria, and Haiti. It is a false choice between helping immigrants and improving conditions for the US working class — the US has the resources for living wages, housing, and education for all if we redistribute even a portion of the accumulated wealth of the rich and corporations. Just the top .01 percent in the US has a staggering 11 percent of its wealth.

We reject the imperialist warmongers and their arguments that the most humane approach is to stay in Afghanistan indefinitely. The withdrawal (beyond the question of how it was done) was the right decision — but Afghanistan

Trump-adjacent “America first” right.

Despite Biden saying he bears “no responsibility” for the humanitarian crisis, the predicament faced by people in Afghanistan is the direct result of failed US imperial policy that Biden supported for decades. Socialists are

should never have been invaded in the first place. As socialists we demand: bring all troops home, now. Close all the approximately 800 military bases abroad that do nothing to serve the interests of ordinary people in the US or in the host countries. End the war on terror and domestic racism against Muslims. Use the huge amount of money wasted on the military for Medicare for All, affordable housing, jobs, and a just transition toward a green economy based on racial, gender, and economic justice.

The Afghan people are not passive observers in their own story. There was resistance against the US occupation, and we’re already seeing resistance against the Taliban. Although most of the revolutions ended in setbacks for now, the Arab Spring showed the power of movements opposed to imperialism but also to corrupt domestic ruling classes and right-wing religious reaction. True democracy, only possible in a state run by and for working and oppressed people, will never be imposed from the outside.

Although what’s happening in Afghanistan is certainly tragic, there is a very important silver lining in this blow to US imperialism: if the mightiest military on Earth was defeated so resoundingly by a rag-tag army of militants based on its inability to build any economic and social roots in the country, there is hope for the self-emancipation of millions around the world.

*Rosemary is a member of the Steering Committee of the DSA Chapter in Portland, Oregon.*



# A Movement on the March — but Serious Challenges Ahead



BY RAMY KHALIL AND PHILIP LOCKER

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**DSA held a successful National Convention from July 30 to August 8. Running an online convention democratically with 1,240 delegates was no small feat. While at times frustrating and contentious, the convention nevertheless highlighted the huge gains made by the socialist movement in the epicenter of global capitalism.**

With 94,000 dues-paying members — organized in 207 chapters, 35 Organizing Committees, and 142 chapters of Young Democratic Socialists of America — DSA's rapid growth into a semi-mass organization represents a major step forward for the US left.

The convention exemplified the key strengths of DSA. First, the debates at the convention vividly demonstrated DSA's democratic character. Second, the convention voted to codify DSA's radical socialist vision — albeit a reformist one — in the form of a new platform. This is

a huge advance after decades of retreat from the dreaded “s-word” on the left, and a significant step beyond Bernie Sanders' limited portrayal of socialism. Third, the convention agenda spoke to DSA's strength of combining electoral activity with grassroots movement-building.

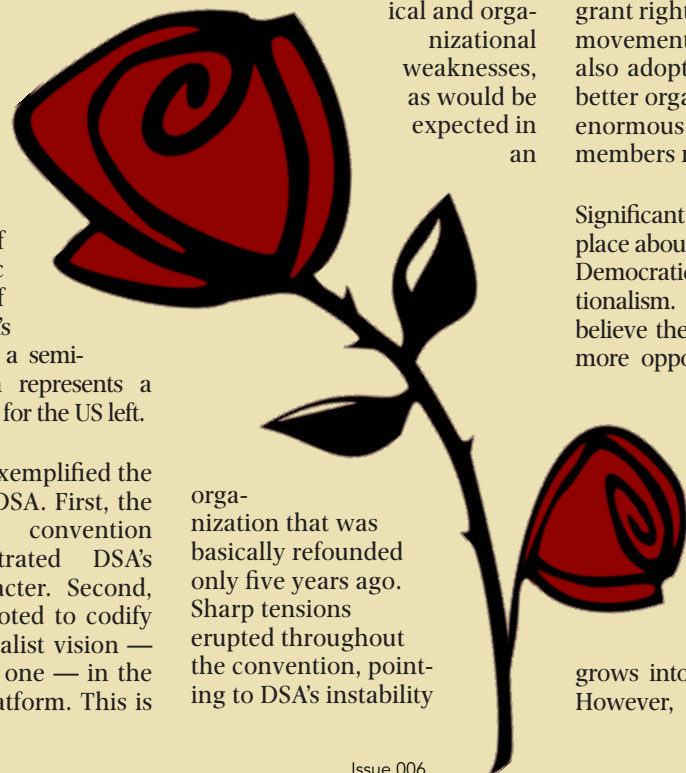
At the same time, the convention showed that DSA has significant political and organizational weaknesses, as would be expected in an

organization that was basically refounded only five years ago. Sharp tensions erupted throughout the convention, pointing to DSA's instability

and the political challenge of uniting its big tent in outward-facing struggles that can activate large numbers of working people.

The convention agreed to prioritize national campaigns for a Green New Deal, the PRO Act, voting rights, and Medicare for All. It also adopted strategic resolutions<sup>1</sup> that will deepen DSA's involvement in elections and the labor, anti-racist, immigrant rights, and housing justice movements. The convention also adopted some measures to better organize DSA and use the enormous energy of its members more effectively.

Significant political debates took place about DSA's approach to the Democratic Party and to internationalism. In both instances we believe the convention chose the more opportunist course, in the sense of watering down an independent working-class position to accommodate more popular ideas in society. This is just a taste of the reformist pressures to come if DSA grows into a mass organization. However, the existence of a



## The Missing Discussion: Socialist Resistance Under Biden

**A crucial question was not discussed at DSA's convention: What are the tasks of socialists under the Biden administration?**

Right-wing Democrats like Kyrsten Sinema and Joe Manchin are trying to block or whittle down Biden's \$3.5 trillion budget reconciliation package. Their priority is passing the limited bipartisan infrastructure bill which is supported by corporate America.

The budget reconciliation bill would be the largest expansion of social welfare in the US in decades. It includes important environmental programs, monthly child support payments, universal preschool, free community college, paid family leave, expansion of Medicare, and more — all paid for by taxing the rich. This would significantly benefit tens of millions of working people and is the best chance of stopping the Republicans from taking the House and/or Senate in 2022.

Biden and the wing of the ruling class he leads believe for now their interests are best served by reforms that try to rehabilitate the tattered legitimacy of their system and institutions. Alarmed by the growth of left and right-wing populism in the form of Sanders and Trump, they hope to alleviate the huge discontent in society by trying to reduce economic and racial inequality. They also need to address the economic crisis unleashed by COVID-19, as well as a growing challenge from China to US imperialism. While

promoting reforms from above that would temporarily improve conditions for working people in the US, their overriding priority is to protect the capitalist system.

On the basis of clearly understanding their pro-capitalist strategy, DSA should support every progressive proposal from Biden and the Democrats, while calling them out whenever they refuse to do whatever it takes to overcome the obstruction of Republicans and right-wing Democrats. We also need to explain how their measures are insufficient and make the case for fundamental socialist change.

*The battle over \$4 trillion of human and physical infrastructure is the time to “force the vote.”*

But most of all we should emphasize the need for working people to take its fate into its own hands through mass action and building its own independent organizations. The strategic task of the radical left is promoting demands and tactics that help bring workers and oppressed people into active struggle, and that raise their level of consciousness and organization.

### Mobilize and Force the Vote

A promising example of the way forward was when Congress-

woman Cori Bush led an encampment on the Capitol steps in early August demanding an extension of the eviction moratorium. Cori Bush rejected claims by Biden and Pelosi that nothing could be done. Quickly, Biden was forced to extend the eviction moratorium in 90 percent of the country (though it was later struck down by the Supreme Court).

Earlier this year there was a debate on the left about whether the Squad should “force the vote.” This meant they would refuse to support Pelosi's reelection as Speaker of the House unless she made concessions, such as allowing a floor vote on Medicare for All. AOC and others argued against this, saying they would use their leverage at a better time. What better time is there than now with this \$4 trillion battle?

But congressional maneuvers by themselves will not be enough. To win lasting, fundamental change we need a massive mobilization from below. Let's fight for a bold Green New Deal, putting maximum pressure on the Democrats. This should include the threat of running left-wing challengers in 2022 against all those Democrats who fail to deliver. This should be linked to building mass movements of the multiracial working class.

The unfolding infrastructure battle is the time to force a vote, to mobilize from below, and build toward a movement-oriented democratic socialist party.



significant opposition on these issues (43 percent and 35 percent in the key votes) also showed the potential for building a strong Marxist wing of DSA.

Given the highly favorable, though complicated, political climate for building the socialist movement currently in the US, DSA is well positioned to develop further. But the challenges on display at the convention are also a warning sign that DSA could run into a crisis, especially if the objective political situation takes a turn for the worse.

Forming a larger layer of experienced organizers and sinking roots in the working class will help stabilize DSA. But this is connected with the challenge of DSA charting a political course that avoids opportunism on the one hand, and on the other hand self-marginalization (which Marxists call “ultra-leftism”).

Opportunist pressures can take various forms, from being co-

opted by the Democratic Party to watering down a socialist message to cheerlead the politics that often dominate mass movements these days.

*The shift to the right is, in reality, a formalization of DSA's recent practice.*

On the other hand, the weakness of the left and its isolation from the working class results in strong ultra-left impulses in DSA — radical posturing that avoids the challenge of engaging in mass work in a principled way. For example, refusing to participate in capitalist elections out of fear that socialist candidates will eventually be co-opted would cut DSA off from valuable opportunities to popularize transformative policies like the Green New Deal. Instead, DSA needs to develop the political

capacity to take advantage of these opportunities while holding elected socialist representatives accountable to DSA's new platform.

Successfully navigating the twin pitfalls of opportunism and ultra-leftism will require building up strong support for Marxist politics in DSA to ensure that the organization can engage in mass work while doing so in a principled fashion.

**Platform Adopted**

The most significant decision of the convention was the adoption of a political platform defining what DSA stands for, which had previously been lacking. The platform puts forward a clear vision of socialism as a fundamentally different “social order based on popular control of resources and production, economic planning, equitable distribution, feminism, racial equality and non-oppressive relationships.” This contrasts with the most common conception of socialism — promoted by Bernie Sanders and AOC — as being a dramatic expansion of social welfare within a capitalist framework.

Another strength is the platform's working-class standpoint despite the current popularity of postmodern ideas on the left. It identifies the multiracial working class as the historic agent to overthrow capitalism and emancipate all of humanity. The platform boldly opposes all forms of social oppression (such as racism, sexism, and heterosexism) and links fighting them to a bold socialist program.

The platform's chief shortcoming is the strategy it suggests DSA should use to achieve a socialist transformation of society. While advancing many excellent transformational



demands and a clear vision of a new socialist society, it implies these changes can be accomplished by electing a socialist government to carry them out in a step-by-step manner.

*The convention agreed to prioritize national campaigns for a Green New Deal, the PRO Act, voting rights, and Medicare for All.*

Marxists call this a “reformist” strategy. Historical experience demonstrates that a workers' government needs to take decisive measures to break the undemocratic power of the capitalist class over the economy, the media, and the state apparatus. Otherwise it gives the ruling class the time and tools to crush or tame a workers' government.

With this in mind delegates from the *Reform & Revolution* caucus proposed three platform amendments:

- the need for a rupture from capitalism to successfully carry out a socialist transformation of society

- while fighting for every possible democratic reform within the existing US governmental system, DSA's horizon should be a new democratic system based on institutions of popular power; and
- the battle for democracy includes a struggle for democracy within working-class movements and organizations.

However, there was not enough support from delegates to include a debate on these amendments in the convention agenda.<sup>5</sup>

Another area for concern is the section of the platform “The Abolition of the Carceral State,” which is closer to a classical anarchist position than a Marxist one in our opinion.

Unfortunately the platform did not receive enough attention or debate in the pre-convention period or at the convention itself. This is symptomatic of the dominant pragmatic mindset in DSA which fails to anchor day-to-day campaigning and organizational tasks in ideological debates about politics and theory.

Going forward the platform can play a very valuable role of uniting DSA members around

# Composition of DSA

DSA exploded from 6,000 members in 2016 to 55,000 members at the time of its 2019 convention.<sup>2</sup> In 2020 DSA surged to 95,000 members as a result of the Bernie Sanders campaign, the COVID-19 radicalization, the mass BLM protests, and DSA's 100K recruitment drive.

*Around 10-15,000 members are active in their chapters.*

Around 10-15,000 members are active in their chapters. While the majority of members are largely inactive in DSA, 65 percent of members have stepped up to pay monthly dues (whereas the norm a few years ago was paying annually). DSA's yearly income rose from \$2 million in 2017, to \$3 million in 2019, to a projected \$6.5 million for 2021. From 2020 to 2021 DSA's full-time staff grew by 60 percent from 20 to 32.<sup>3</sup>

The typical DSA member is in their twenties or thirties and college educated. Around 10,000 DSA members belong to a union, with a concentration in education and public sector unions.<sup>4</sup> A large majority of DSA's membership is white, although comrades of color have established caucuses, spearheaded critical initiatives, and taken up key leadership positions.

## reform & revolution A Marxist Caucus of Democratic Socialists of America

### Our initial take on DSA's 2021 Convention

**1. SOCIALIST REFORMIST PLATFORM ADOPTED**

Important step forward. Need for a rupture with capitalism unfortunately not spelled out.

**2. DEMOCRACY IN DSA STRENGTHENED**

Convention corrected undemocratic election of delegates in Portland & overturned NPC's removal of candidates facing allegations. Unfortunately other proposals failed, like electing the National Director.

**3. SHIFT TO THE RIGHT ON INTERNATIONAL POLICIES**

Good: overwhelming consensus to boldly oppose US imperialism. Bad: Convention made a shift toward uncritically supporting mass reformist parties and undemocratic “anti-imperialist” governments especially in Latin America.



**4. EXISTING ELECTORAL STRATEGY AFFIRMED**

Good: Bolder commitment to turning DSA into a party-like organization. Bad: Move away from Dirty Break position of the 2019 Convention.

**5. NEW NPC: GIVE A FIGHTING LEAD!**

Potential left majority around B&R, Matt M, Emerge, the GND slate, and others on NPC. The NPC should give a bold lead towards an independent working class, eco-socialist, campaigning organization!

Reform & Revolution's initial take on the convention, August 8



a political outlook and educating members about the socialist policies we should fight for. But this will require an active effort by the national leadership, chapters, and working groups to integrate the platform into discussions and campaigns, while also debating how to strengthen it further.

### Breaking from the Dirty Break

Electoral strategy was a central debate at the convention, culminating in the National Electoral Committee resolution being overwhelmingly adopted by a 77 percent vote. This represented a shift to the right, pulling back from the strategy of a “dirty break” with the Democratic Party adopted at the previous DSA convention.<sup>6</sup>

There is a broad consensus in DSA that the Democratic Party is our enemy and that we need a mass-membership working-class party, but there are strong disagreements over how to get there. A majority believes the road to a workers’ party requires focusing on building DSA into a party-like organization while using the Democratic Party ballot line. A left-wing minority has a higher horizon, emphasizing that DSA should take advantage of existing opportunities to work toward forming an independent workers’ party and prepare for a mass break from the Democratic Party.

This is not just an abstract disagreement about distant goals; it has a real bearing on DSA’s immediate practice. The majority’s strategy results in DSA candidates having a low socialist public profile, arguing for reforming the Democratic Party, and avoiding bold appeals to their supporters to join DSA.

In contrast, the left wing wants DSA candidates to have a high socialist profile, publicly argue that the Democratic Party is dominated by capitalist interests (even when running on the Democratic ballot line), and openly appeal to supporters to join DSA as a step toward a new party.

The majority approach means running almost exclusively on the Democratic ballot line, whereas the left believes DSA should run independently where viable (and on the Democratic ballot line where it’s advantageous).

*We must prepare for an inevitable showdown between the left and the capitalist forces that dominate the Democratic Party.*

The electoral resolution adopted by the 2019 convention stated “DSA is committed to building 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.” The conscious support for the goal of an independent working-class party was underlined by the convention voting down an amendment to remove that goal from the resolution.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, the 2021 electoral resolution states “DSA will continue its successful approach of tactically contesting partisan elections on the Democratic ballot line while

building power independent of the Democratic party apparatus.” This suggests that DSA candidates should run exclusively as Democrats, whereas the 2019 resolution was open to running on different ballot lines. The 2021 resolution also de-emphasizes the goal of an independent working-class party compared with the 2019 resolution.

This shift to the right is, in reality, a formalization of DSA’s recent practice. Despite the official policy of the 2019 convention, DSA has largely failed to carry out key aspects of the dirty break strategy on the ground. The vast majority of DSA candidates are currently running as Democrats, whereas in 2017 sixty percent ran as independent or Green Party candidates. Most DSA candidates do not publicly highlight that they are socialists (though the capitalist media often does). Most candidates advocate reforming the Democratic Party and do not boldly ask supporters to join DSA.

The advocates of the majority approach argue that running socialists on the Democratic ballot line has proven to result in electoral victories which have built the socialist movement. We accept that DSA should run candidates on the Democratic ballot line where that tactic provides advantages. But we are against getting locked into being a pressure group on the Democratic Party and missing existing opportunities to build the socialist movement and independent political power. We must prepare for an inevitable showdown between the left and the capitalist forces that dominate the Democratic Party.

### Strong Left-wing Opposition

The strongest showing for the left-wing strategy described above was when 43 percent of delegates voted for Amendment #5 which was proposed by individual members of the Bread & Roses caucus.<sup>8</sup> (Bread & Roses did not endorse the amendment; a majority of their caucus supported it, but a minority opposed it.)<sup>9</sup>

The 43 percent of delegates who voted for a strong dirty break amendment represents a significant base of support for the left to build on. Besides Bread & Roses, other organized forces supporting a more left-wing policy were *Reform & Revolution*, Tempest, Emerge, Red Star, Marxist Unity Slate, and Socialist Alternative. But within this wing there were political differences.

*43 percent of delegates voted for a strong dirty break amendment — a significant base of support for the left to build on.*

On the one side there are those, such as *Reform & Revolution* and the left wing of Bread & Roses, who are pushing for DSA to actually carry out a dirty break strategy. *Reform & Revolution* believes this is an approach that allows DSA to actively engage in — and lead at

times — the electoral struggles that left-wing workers are following, while helping them move toward breaking from the Democrats and forming an independent party.

On the other side were those, such as Tempest and Socialist Alternative, who argue for a more rapid “clean break” and/or inflexible criteria that would have the effect of not allowing DSA to endorse candidates like AOC or Bernie Sanders. In our view, these approaches underestimate the positive role that Sanders and AOC are playing and the advantages for DSA of boldly endorsing them despite their political weaknesses. We agree with the goal of breaking with the Democratic Party, but we believe these approaches would be ineffective in achieving it. They do not sufficiently engage with how to help the majority of DSA and radicalizing workers draw the conclusion that we must break with the Democrats.

Despite the convention’s shift to the right on the dirty break, the





electoral resolution that passed had many strengths which would mark an important step forward if carried out. It stressed building DSA into a party-like organization, stating that DSA commits to:

*building a working-class party: a mass democratic political organization capable of taking state power with a strategy for social transformation... a strategy of class-struggle elections that polarize the working-class majority against the ruling-class elite... electing socialists who will act as organizers in office and use their offices to grow our movement, contest for state power, and develop working class self-organization and activity... electing socialists who will deliberate with DSA members and act in concert with DSA to carry out a member-driven political and legislative strategy.*

## Sliding Toward Campism

The convention was united in opposition to US imperialism. The DSA platform enshrines this with excellent anti-imperialist demands, including:

- Dramatically slash US military spending
- Close all US foreign military bases
- No new Cold War with China
- Stop using economic sanctions to punish countries, such as Cuba, Venezuela, and Iran, that dare to act independently of the US

However, sharp disagreement exists over how DSA relates to the dominant left parties and governments in the global south. This was highlighted in the run-up to the convention when a controversy erupted over a trip by DSA's International Committee to Venezuela.

The main international resolution (#14) passed with the support of 65 percent of delegates, committing DSA to apply for membership in the São Paulo Forum and prioritize establishing relationships with mass left parties in Latin America.

We believe the resolution reinforced the practice of DSA uncritically supporting these parties even when they impose austerity, adopt right-wing stances on social issues, use state repression against left activists, or carry out colonial occupations.

*This is a shift to the right by avoiding left criticisms of forces like the Brazilian Workers Party and the Venezuelan government.*

For example, we supported DSA attending a left-wing conference in Venezuela as a platform to speak out against US sanctions and to learn from Latin American left-wing parties. But we opposed the DSA delegation publicly supporting Maduro and the Venezuelan government as an example of “socialism,” given their corruption and repression of workers and left activists.<sup>10</sup> Rather than attending parties with “socialists” in power, the DSA delegation should have met with Venezuelan union leaders who have been part of the left opposition to Maduro.

The leaders promoting the international resolution advocated a soft form of “campism” — the simplistic idea that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” and are therefore in “our camp.” They argue that the

most radical thing US socialists can do is align with the biggest forces in conflict with US imperialism, especially Latin American parties who identify as socialist or communist.

But when the Brazilian Workers’ Party (PT) government led a UN “peacekeeping” force in Haiti from 2004 to 2017, it was carrying out a colonial occupation, which principled anti-imperialists opposed.<sup>11</sup> Supporting the PT leadership, regardless of intentions, had the impact of reinforcing a right-wing position. Many Haitian leftists and the radical left in Brazil, such as the socialist party PSOL, vigorously opposed this occupation of Haiti. In such situations DSA should politically support serious left forces most aligned with our principles, rather than aligning with the PT by virtue of it being the largest left-of-center party.

Nonetheless, the majority of delegates voted for the international resolution based on a desire to stand in solidarity with the left around the world. Given that many delegates were not familiar with the debates within the Latin American left, limiting DSA’s role to supporting the largest left parties appeared to many to be a more straightforward position.

While understandable, we think this is short-sighted. It was precisely this kind of thinking that led much of the radical left to uncritically support “communist” regimes in the former Soviet bloc as “actually existing socialism.” This bore bitter fruit by helping to discredit socialism, such as when the USSR crushed worker uprisings for socialist democracy in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. But the biggest impact was how it assisted the ruling class internationally in cementing the idea that “there is no



*Reform & Revolution member Alex Stout urging the delegates at the convention to support an amendment to sharpen the electoral approach in taking on the Democratic Party*

alternative” to capitalism following the collapse of Stalinism in 1989, resulting in an enormous ideological disorientation of the left.

In contrast, Trotskyists defended the progressive aspects of Stalinist regimes (such as the planned economy and their independence from imperialism) but opposed the totalitarian bureaucracies that ruled over the workers. They stood for political revolutions to establish socialist democracy rather than restoring capitalism. And when these states collapsed in 1989, Trotskyists argued it was a failure of Stalinism, not socialism.

While the majority of delegates perceived Resolution #14 to be an expression of radical anti-imperialism, it will in practice mean a shift to the right by avoiding left criticisms of forces like the PT and the Venezuelan government, while undermining US solidarity efforts with far healthier socialist forces within those countries.

An aspect of the majority outlook was a non-Marxist understanding of internationalism that purports to avoid taking political stances on controversial debates in other

countries, but in practice it actually reinforces the dominant reformist leaders against their left opposition (such as the Brazilian PT against PSOL). In contrast, Marxist internationalism requires us to develop an international program through engaging in dialogue and debate with our comrades internationally about how to best overthrow global capitalism.

*It is vital to defend the social gains of the Cuban revolution and fully oppose efforts to restore capitalism.*

In the course of the convention debate there was a convergence of different forces in DSA arguing for an internationalist policy based on Marxist politics. These forces, including Bread & Roses, Tempest, and *Reform & Revolution*, spoke against Resolution #14, which 35 percent of the delegates voted against. Hopefully going forward these trends can work more closely together to build on this significant base of support.

# reform & revolution

A Marxist Caucus of Democratic Socialists of America

R&R's cheat sheet for candidates for DSA's National Political Committee (NPC)

We propose to rank these comrades in this order

1. **Laura Gabby (Bread & Roses)**
2. **Sofia Guimarães Cutler (Bread & Roses)**
3. **Gilman Bagga (Bread & Roses)**
4. **Matt Miller (Independent)**
5. **Justin Charles (Emerge)**
6. **Gustavo Gordillo (Green New Deal slate)**
7. **Sydney Ghazarian (Green New Deal slate)**
8. **Ashik Siddique (Green New Deal slate)**



*R&R's recommendations for the NPC election, August 6*



# Democracy in DSA

Despite weaknesses, the convention demonstrated that DSA is a member-driven democratic organization. This is a huge strength in contrast with most other progressive organizations, such as Our Revolution, which operate in an NGO style that lacks avenues for people to join and actively determine the organization's direction. While unions have the strength of being membership organizations, most unfortunately have a bureaucratized internal life.

Building democratic organizations is not a luxury; it is a vital prerequisite for any project of working-class self-emancipation. History shows that there is a real danger of a bureaucracy developing in socialist and working-class organizations, which leads to splits, demoralization, and undermines working peoples' capacity for mass struggle. But this convention showed that there is currently no powerful bureaucracy stifling democracy in DSA. At this early stage the bigger problems are DSA's chaotic internal processes and the lack of political leadership.

*DSA has a robust democratic culture at the level of internal functioning.*

This organizational weakness, however, does lead to a serious democratic problem. DSA's elected officials — its most prominent spokesperson — are not accountable to the organization.

There is a structural reality that elected representatives face more direct pressure from the ruling class than the socialist movement as a whole. Early indications of this reformist pressure were

shown when three DSA members of Congress (AOC, Jamaal Bowman, and Rashida Tlaib) voted to allow an increase in funding for the Capitol Police, and when Jamaal Bowman voted for unconditional US aid to Israel — both positions which contradict DSA's agreed policies.<sup>12</sup>

However, DSA has a robust democratic culture at the level of internal functioning. The convention set an important democratic precedent when 91 percent of delegates voted to censure and revoke the delegate status of leaders of the Portland (OR) chapter for their role in removing candidates from the chapter's delegate election. One member was barred based on political views (membership in the Class Unity caucus) and two others based on allegations of sexism (a claim that has been refuted by one of the alleged victims and a later official grievance process). The convention's overwhelming decision sent a clear message about the importance of upholding all members' democratic rights, including the right to advocate for minority views and for allegations of unacceptable conduct to be taken very seriously through investigations conducted by a fair grievance process.

DSA's democracy was also tested when the early part of the convention was dominated by allegations of abuse by three members running for the National Political Committee (NPC).<sup>13</sup> The outgoing NPC attempted to resolve this intensifying conflict by barring any comrade facing a grievance investigation from running for the NPC. But 78 percent of the delegates voted to overturn this decision of the NPC. This proved to be a turning point, and the convention began to function more productively. The willingness of

the delegates to overrule the national leadership of DSA — unfortunately rare in left and workers' organizations — was a positive sign of DSA's democratic culture.

*For its democratic decisions to be consequential DSA needs a more political leadership.*

Unfortunately, the NPC election was not very competitive. Originally there were 24 candidates running for the 16 seats. During the convention several candidates withdrew from the race, leaving only 20 candidates. By comparison 33 people ran for the NPC in 2019.

For its democratic decisions to be consequential DSA needs a more political leadership and stronger structures. In this regard the convention agreed to some positive measures, including stipends for NPC members, matching funds for chapters to open offices and hire local staff, and plans to create state-level organizational structures.

At the same time, a strengthened leadership must be kept under vigorous democratic checks. Some proposals that would have enhanced DSA's democracy failed by large margins, like establishing rights for the membership to elect the National Director, recall NPC members and replace NPC vacancies by national election, and set policy through national referendums. Arguments that these measures “require too much work” and benefit caucuses' “factional agendas” unfortunately carried the day.

# DSA 100k

## RECRUIT! RETAIN! RENEW!



From the 2020 100k recruitment campaign, applied in Los Angeles

However, there are also disagreements within this wing. The Marxist internationalism that *Reform & Revolution* supports is not a “third camp” position (articulated historically by figures like Max Shachtman and more recently by comrades from the ISO tradition). For example, while we agree with these comrades' support for working-class struggles for democracy in Cuba, we think it is vital to anchor that policy in the framework of defending the social gains of the Cuban revolution and fully opposing efforts to restore capitalism.

### DSA's Growth Stalls Under Biden

Despite DSA's rise in recent years, so far in 2021 its membership growth has stalled. Delegates from different chapters at the convention also expressed

frustration with a feeling of low energy within DSA.

While there is no doubt that organizing under the pandemic is challenging, this does not explain DSA's recent stagnation. In fact, DSA grew dramatically in 2020, starting in March 2020 when pandemic lockdowns began. It was Biden taking office, not the pandemic, that coincided with DSA's stalled growth, suggesting the cause is political.

DSA grew from 2016 to 2020 within a political context revolving around pro-Bernie and anti-Trump axes. Now we have entered a new period with Biden and the Democrats advocating New Deal-esque measures that break with the past four decades of neoliberalism. In this new and complicated situation, DSA — and the entire left — is grappling with how to be most effective.

*It would have been far better to have had a discussion about the questions of how the socialist left should relate to Biden.*

So far under Biden there have not been huge struggles or protests. The current lull in movements is a product of a number of factors. First, there is a mood of relief among progressive workers that Trump was defeated. Second, these layers are hoping Biden and the Democrats will deliver reforms. Third, union and progressive leaders have not made a clear call for mass mobilizations or a determined struggle from below. But this is likely to change; left-wing struggles will likely erupt at some point during Biden's term.



Amid all the convention debates about process, resolutions, and leadership elections, conscious discussion about these major shifts in the US political terrain was unfortunately absent. DSA needs to prioritize political discussion if we hope to reorient our membership to new political realities. This will require a break from the current culture of “proceduralism” — a depoliticized and overly formalistic conception of how to run the organization.

It would have been far better to have had a discussion — at the pre-convention conferences and at the beginning of the convention — about the crucial questions of how the socialist left should assess the new political situation and relate to Biden. Future conventions should start with an overall political discussion on a draft political resolution from the outgoing National Political Committee (and amendments or alternative resolutions from members), laying out perspectives and priority tasks for the socialist movement.

### Shifting Political Balance

There was a strong conservative sentiment at the convention in the sense of not wanting to change strategies that worked well in recent years. While a strategy can work in one context, we should be aware that sudden major events will often require DSA to be flexible with our tactics and change course.

For example, over the past few years the new left has had success running on the Democratic ballot line. But the current tenuous coexistence between the growing left and the entrenched Democratic establishment will break down at a certain point, sharply posing the need for an independent workers party. If we don't

use the favorable situation today to prepare for that coming showdown, we allow the establishment to choose the timing and framing that is most advantageous for them.

The politics of the convention were naturally representative of the more active DSA members. This layer of core DSA activists is more class-conscious than the average DSA member. These activists also have a more political, outward-facing orientation that seeks to organize the working class to fight for structural changes in society.

In contrast, the broad DSA membership tends to be more influenced by anarchistic “prefigurative politics” — a focus on changing DSA members’ interpersonal behavior and methods of organizing to embody socialist values. This can sometimes take the form of attempts to create islands of socialism amid the vast ocean of capitalism through mutual aid projects (although politicized mutual aid can be valuable).

*There was a strong conservative sentiment at the convention of not wanting to change strategies that worked well in recent years.*

Anarchist and privilege politics had less support at the 2021 convention compared to the previous two conventions. This reflects the political evolution of DSA activists and the weakening of the caucuses which had previously provided a leadership for these politics. Build was influential at the 2019 convention but has since ceased to function. The Libertarian Socialist Caucus (LSC) also

appeared to have fewer delegates than at the last convention, and only one LSC member was elected to the new NPC.

While many supporters of these trends have anti-leadership sentiments, their reduced influence as a result of the weakening of their caucuses actually confirms the Marxist argument that a well organized leadership is a decisive factor in determining the effectiveness of political movements.

While the influence of anarchistic and privilege politics was weaker at this convention, it would be a mistake to underestimate the support for similar politics among the broad membership of DSA. These politics are often regarded as “common sense” on much of the new left, and they are particularly strong in smaller DSA chapters where the socialist movement is more marginal and less experienced in mass campaigns.

### Strengthening DSA for the Challenges Ahead

DSA is still a very new organization largely composed of a new generation of activists who are rebuilding the socialist movement practically from scratch. Most socialist organizations collapsed or swung to the right when the Soviet Union and its satellite states imploded from 1989-91. Socialist and Marxist ideas suffered a huge setback, and the historical continuity of the socialist movement was largely broken. Since then, populism, postmodernism, and privilege politics have filled much of the ideological void on the left. The new socialist movement is having to rediscover socialism and Marxism, which necessarily entails growing pains.

This setback can be seen on an organizational level in the loss of basic traditions of collective organization and democratic decision-making. The rise of



Newly Elected NPC 2021-23, sorted by political affiliation and slates the candidates ran on.

DSA represents a promising step toward relearning these crucial aspects of working-class politics, but it also shows the inexperience of the newly emerging left.

These underlying political and organizational challenges were visible in the sharp tensions at the 2021 convention, which were reminiscent of similar crises that took place at DSA's previous two conventions.

In a highly favorable political situation where the socialist movement is growing, DSA's weaknesses can recede into the background. However, politics and class struggle do not simply unfold in an ever rising curve. Inevitably, there will be sharp turns and major events that can create for a time a difficult political environment for the left. This could include, for example, major terrorist atrocities, a wave of nationalism, or a temporary shift in popular moods that results in socialists losing important electoral positions.

Under such conditions, if DSA has not made a qualitative step forward politically and organizationally, there is a danger that the organization could be thrown into crisis, resulting in demoralization, heightened political divisions, and splits.

*DSA is still a very new organization largely composed of a new generation of activists.*

This would be a serious setback for the socialist movement. It is therefore vital that DSA activists make full use of the currently favorable situation to strengthen DSA to be able to withstand the challenges ahead. This primarily requires DSA to sink roots in the multiracial working class, develop a more experienced layer of organizers, and build a much stronger Marxist wing that can help lead DSA along principled socialist lines.

# NPC '21

*Philip Locker and Ramy Khalil were elected delegates to DSA's National Convention. They were central leaders in 15 Now and Kshama Sawant's initial election and re-election campaigns to Seattle City Council.*

### Endnotes

1. All the convention resolutions can be found at [tinyurl.com/DSACon21Resolutions](https://tinyurl.com/DSACon21Resolutions)
2. For a report and analysis of the 2019 DSA convention see: [tinyurl.com/DSA2019ConventionReview](https://tinyurl.com/DSA2019ConventionReview)
3. [tinyurl.com/DSA2017-Financial-Report](https://tinyurl.com/DSA2017-Financial-Report) and [tinyurl.com/DSA2021-Financial-Report](https://tinyurl.com/DSA2021-Financial-Report)
4. [tinyurl.com/DSA2021-DSLC-Report](https://tinyurl.com/DSA2021-DSLC-Report)
5. 36 percent to 39 percent of the delegates indicated in a pre-convention survey that they wanted to debate these three amendments. The text of the amendments can be found at [tinyurl.com/DSA-Platform-Rupture](https://tinyurl.com/DSA-Platform-Rupture)
6. A good explanation of the Dirty Break strategy can be found at [tinyurl.com/Dirty-Break-Debate](https://tinyurl.com/Dirty-Break-Debate)
7. [tinyurl.com/2019-Electoral-Resolution](https://tinyurl.com/2019-Electoral-Resolution)
8. [tinyurl.com/Dirty-Break-Amendment5](https://tinyurl.com/Dirty-Break-Amendment5)
9. [tinyurl.com/BandR-Dirty-Break-Debate](https://tinyurl.com/BandR-Dirty-Break-Debate)
10. [tinyurl.com/VenezuelanRegime](https://tinyurl.com/VenezuelanRegime)
11. [tinyurl.com/Occupation-of-Haiti](https://tinyurl.com/Occupation-of-Haiti)
12. [tinyurl.com/Capitol-Police-Funding](https://tinyurl.com/Capitol-Police-Funding) and [tinyurl.com/AidforIsraelVote](https://tinyurl.com/AidforIsraelVote)
13. *Reform & Revolution* commented on this during the convention: [tinyurl.com/rnr-statement-renewal](https://tinyurl.com/rnr-statement-renewal)



# An Alternative Take on the DSA Convention

BY GUEST WRITER DAVID DUHALDE

🐦 @THEDUHALDE



**A veteran DSA activist, and a member of the Socialist Majority Caucus, reflects on the recent national convention and DSA's tasks moving forward.**

*Originally published in Socialist Forum, Summer 2021*

The 2021 Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) national convention was a step towards maintaining our consensus on issues such as labor and electoral strategy, while advancing existing momentum around internationalism and a new organization-wide platform. The National Political Committee (NPC) election results, however, left much to be desired. In my view, the convention's decision to adopt Single Transferable Vote instead of Borda had serious, even if unintentional, racialized outcomes that reduced Black leadership in DSA.

The convention programming was a watermark of the rise of DSA both here and abroad. US House of Representatives members Jamaal Bowman (D-NY) and Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) participated in formal remarks, something none of the Squad did in 2019. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) sent regards from the sit-in for a rent moratorium extension Cori Bush (D-MO) led at the U.S. Capitol. Former UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and former Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT) president of Brazil Dilma Rousseff were two of the international guests. My previous seven DSA conventions only had one or two speakers of that prominence. Both DSA's rise and the unique online nature of 2021 gathering compared to other conventions contributed to both.

*Votes demonstrated a shift against the official "dirty break" position the national convention adopted in 2019.*

DSA delegates largely defeated amendments and resolutions put forward by hardline factions such as Socialist Alternative (SAlt) dual-carders. If adopted, these measures would have isolated DSA in both mass union work and national politics. The labor and electoral resolutions the convention passed were consensus motions written by delegates from multiple caucuses and delegate-members who are not aligned with any caucus, as well as members of the Democratic Socialist Labor Committee and National Electoral Committee, respectively.

On labor, a SAlt-backed resolution that described the existing union movement leadership as the main barrier to the further growth and development of the workers' movement was defeated soundly, 156-898.

Concerning electoral politics, a motion from *Reform & Revolution*, a group primarily but not exclusively composed of former SAlt members who have joined DSA, and one from some members of the Bread & Roses caucus (which was not backed by the caucus as a whole) were both defeated. The latter amendment sought to emphasize a "dirty break" to electoral strategy; discourage DSA-backed candidates from endorsing corporate Democrats; and explore alternatives to VAN, a Democratic Party-sponsored voter database. The *Reform &*

*Revolution*-backed amendment was defeated in a 359-623 vote, but the "dirty break" amendment failed by a narrower margin, 442-577.

*Emphasizing a "break" with Democrats per se can be alienating to voters.*

I was happily surprised this amendment failed; its defeat demonstrates a shift against the official "dirty break" position the national convention adopted in 2019. As the new DSA matures, a consensus seems to be building that emphasizing a "break" with Democrats *per se* can be alienating to voters we need to win over, and put DSA-backed

elected officials in a difficult position.

DSA did not need to officially endorse Biden over Trump in the 2020 election, but it likely would have been counterproductive to ask elected officials to do the same. If DSA had asked elected officials to not endorse, this likely would have alienated the organization from officeholders rather than producing non-endorsements. Both DSA itself and DSA officeholders need to maintain flexibility on these questions.

Other stand-alone resolutions to narrow our political work were handily defeated, including a *Tempest*-backed proposal (232-754) that would have greatly limited what national DSA could do with elected officials and a SAlt-backed amend-

Photo: Becker1999, IMG\_300 (14), tinyurl.com/dsa-gnd-detroit, Copyright: CC BY 2.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/





ment (151-838) that would have called on DSA electeds to forego and donate part of their salary.

Many of the resolutions and constitutional/bylaws proposals that were backed by only one caucus failed. This go-it-alone approach probably tanked proposals that might have otherwise won majority support from the delegates.

My own caucus, Socialist Majority, proposed a resolution to create an intermediate body between the NPC and chapters that failed by roughly a two-to-one margin. It failed even after I proposed an amendment to the resolution that would have limited the proposed body to making recommendations for constitutional changes while leaving the power to actually make changes in the hands of the convention. My sense is that a lack of buy-in from other caucuses was a big reason it did not pass, even though there is a consensus that we need more structures between the NPC and the local chapters. To that end, DSA members are starting to build more statewide organizations like in California — a positive development supported by the passage of the outgoing NPC's set of recommendations.

The Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA) resolution to provide more funding to the youth section and stipends for YDSA leaders also failed, after being removed from the convention's consent agenda. My sense is that it was removed largely because of the estimated cost of the resolution. The resolution's backers also didn't do much outreach to YDSA alumni and other stakeholders, which I think also helped to ensure its defeat. Had the authors secured more support from a broader set of members, especially those with student organizing back-

grounds and history in YDSA, it could have passed.

One notable resolution that passed was a matching funds proposal to help chapters get funding for staff and offices. It was initially proposed by Bread & Roses members, but some of the resolution's authors reached out for feedback and advice ahead of time — unlike with some of the caucus's other solely-pushed proposals that went to the floor which were defeated — which helped this pass with the support of over three-fifths of the body.

*The NPC election was, in my view, much less successful than the other outcomes.*

Proposals putatively aimed at creating more “democratic accountability,” but likely would have generated more internal organizational conflict, were soundly defeated. This included motions to mandate the Single Transferable Vote (STV) method for all elections in DSA (320-732); establish a recall process for NPC members and replace NPC vacancies by national election (236-799); and elect the National Director by a membership vote (256-811). The fighting between factions (and sometimes even former caucus-mates) over convention week created an atmosphere less open to effectively prolonging convention season by creating more organization-wide internal elections and votes.

A global solidarity resolution put forward by Emerge, a caucus based in the New York City chapter, may have failed (by a 270-653 margin) for similar reasons: single-caucus support, plus delegates' wari-

ness of more internal elections. For example, it called for the International Committee's (IC) Secretariat to be elected. As a former member of the IC's Steering Committee, I disagreed with this proposal because, unlike other DSA bodies, the IC has a diplomatic function. Its leadership should represent the will of the organization expressed through the NPC which currently and rightly selects the members of the Steering Committee and Secretariat.

Additionally, the body passed an international resolution just two days earlier after it was removed out of the consent agenda. That resolution reflected current trends in the IC; its most notable policy change calls on DSA to join the São Paulo Forum (*Foro São Paulo*, FSP) which includes a diverse range of left-wing parties across the Americas. I voted to remove the resolution from the consent agenda because I felt joining any international association needed public debate, and I ultimately voted for the resolution.

Something that a few people have overlooked is that DSA delegates passed a new platform for the organization by unanimous consent. Unlike other DSA platforms, such as the Resistance Rising document that was created after more than a year of debate last decade, this platform came about in a few months of discussions alongside the convention proposals. The delegates also rejected by a 340-640 vote a constitutional proposal to make members accountable to the platform. I believe this was because delegates felt despite good-faith arguments to the contrary, platform items would be unfairly weaponized against DSA members and elected officials.

The NPC election was, in my view, much less successful than the other outcomes. The final number of candidates was just 20 out of an original two dozen, after several candidates dropped out due to personal reasons and caucus-related disputes. The loss of so many candidates was not healthy for DSA's democracy and I believe this also helped proposals like stipends for NPC Steering Committee members (which I opposed) narrowly pass. About half of the 16 NPC incumbents are returning, which was similar to the first four conventions I attended. This institutional memory is a welcome departure from the past couple of conventions where only two incumbents were re-elected each event.

Against the recommendations of the convention's Credentials Committee, the convention

voted to use STV instead of Borda for the NPC election. Borda likely would have led to the election of more broadly consensual candidates whereas STV favored candidates with strong but limited support. Two of five Socialist Majority candidates, who would have been elected under Borda but lost under STV, were incumbents and Black.

*The convention was successful in keeping DSA on the path of its effective electoral strategy and growing labor work.*

The convention was successful in keeping DSA on the path of

its effective electoral strategy and growing labor work. In addition, the defeat of resolutions and constitutional proposals that would have turned the organization inward saved us from unnecessary difficulties and likely self-marginalization. DSA has a long way to go in having more comradely debate, although the incoming leadership looks to continue the collaboration developed by the outgoing NPC. As DSA adapts to a return of a Democratic presidency, more unity is needed as external enemies and events will not provide the unplanned membership surges seen in the last four years.

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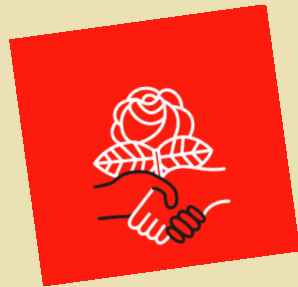


# A Guide to DSA Caucuses



BY JESSE DREYER AND PHILIP LOCKER

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Ideological caucuses are networks or organizations of DSA members that promote certain political ideas. Comrades in different cities and in different working groups can connect in caucuses to make their politics heard and to fight for what they believe is the best strategy for DSA and the wider socialist movement. Below are the main caucuses in DSA and our views about them:

## reform & revolution

**Reform & Revolution:** That's us! We are a Marxist caucus that aims to combine revolutionary socialist principles with the necessary flexibility to connect with mass movements of working-class and oppressed people. We want to fight for each and every improvement today, while linking those struggles to building working-class power to end exploitation, oppression, and capitalism once and for all.

**Bread & Roses:** All three of their candidates were elected to the NPC. The largest organized caucus within DSA. A Marxist caucus that argues for a "democratic road to socialism" along the



lines of Ralph Miliband (in contrast to a revolutionary socialist understanding of the state, which *Reform & Revolution* is based on). They are some of the best builders of the organization who have played an important role fighting for class-centered politics, the rank-and-file strategy in the labor movement, a political strategy of mass struggle as opposed to prefigurative politics, and for going all in on the 2020 Bernie Sanders campaign as part of a strategy of a "Dirty Break" from the Democratic Party. However, we do have political disagreements with B&R. For example, we believe they are sometimes opportunistic in the sense of politically adapting themselves to reformist working-class leaders, such as Bernie Sanders or left union leaders as opposed to critically supporting them on the basis of an independent Marxist position. We think they also tend towards an approach that too simply gives economic answers to questions of intersecting oppressions.

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**Tempest Collective:** An online journal and collective of members both inside and outside of DSA. They are very focused on their generally good proposals to increase democracy within DSA. Standing in the revolutionary socialist tradition, they have also argued for a principled internationalist position as opposed to "campism" (in Tempest's and our view a simplistic approach of uncritically supporting "anti-imperialist" governments or mass left parties). They didn't run any candidates for the NPC. A prominent member of Tempest, Andy Sernatinger (@andsern), provides very useful reporting on DSA's inside politics.

Local communist formations include **Emerge** (NYC) and **Red Star** (San Francisco). Justin Charles from Emerge was elected to the NPC. Jennifer Bolen (Jenbo), who was elected two years ago as a Red Star candidate, was re-elected to the

## TEMPEST

NPC (but is no longer a member of Red Star, though still received their endorsement). Emerge and Red Star are both multi-tendency communist formations, with Red Star being more Maoist influenced. In the

run-up to the convention they worked with the Collective Power Network due to their agreement on the inadequacy of national working groups and general agreement on DSA's international work as represented by Resolution 14.

**Socialist Majority Caucus (SMC):** Three of their five candidates for the NPC were elected. SMC was an influential force in the last NPC and in key DSA chapters like New York City. Many of the best organizers in DSA are members of SMC. Politically, however, we disagree with SMC due to their reformist and opportunist approach. Lacking a developed political ideology, SMC tends to pragmatically accommodate the most popular sentiments on the left.

**Green New Deal Slate:** All three members of the slate were elected to the NPC. We share their urgency to fight for eco-socialism and, within that, an orientation toward labor. We also appreciate their bold vision for mass DSA campaigns that aim to have a major impact. They unfortunately supported Resolution 14. However, their statements about the need to build DSA as a "proto-party" are positive.

**Collective Power Network (CPN):** While arguing for a working-class orientation and mass struggle strategy informed by Marxism, they tend to have a mistakenly depoliticized organizational focus. A few months before the convention they suffered a large number of



resignations. They did not run anyone for the NPC. They have politics reminiscent of the late 1930's CPUSA, with a focus on relatively uncritical support for union leaders, mass reformist and center-left parties in Latin America, and a long-term commitment to running on the Democratic Party ballot line.

**DSA Renewal:** Originally a slate of five candidates for the NPC, but three withdrew during the convention. The remaining two were elected to the NPC. Renewal is a reconstitution of one part of the previous CPN leadership. We published a statement during the convention on the allegations against some of the Renewal comrades: [tinyurl.com/rnr-statement-renewal](https://tinyurl.com/rnr-statement-renewal)

**Libertarian Socialist Caucus (LSC):** One member of LSC ran for the NPC and was elected. The LSC is a caucus of anarchists and libertarian socialists. They have a focus on horizon-

## Collective Power Network

talism, mutual aid, prefigurative politics, autonomous tenant organizations, and abolition (including within the frame-

work of capitalism) — all of which we often politically disagree with.



**Marxist Unity Slate:** Made up in part by supporters of the online journal *Cosmonaut* they describe themselves as Neo-Kautskyists in the political tradition of the British *Weekly Worker*, whereas we in *Reform & Revolution* draw more from the Marxist ideas of Lenin, Trotsky, and Luxemburg. The Marxist Unity Slate put forward a slate of resolutions as well as amendments to the national platform.

**Class Unity:** A "class-first" caucus which opposes Identity Politics. They can rightly be called class reductionist. They proposed good resolutions to the convention for Child-care for All, Amnesty for All, Spanish translation, and STV for Leadership Elections. We disagree with their class reductionism. None of their members ran for NPC.



*Jesse Dreyer is a member of Teamsters Local 162 and the chair of Portland DSA's Unemployed Workers Council. He is also a member of the Steering Committee of Portland DSA.*

*Philip Locker was an elected delegate to DSA's National Convention. He was the Political Director of 15 Now and Kshama Sawant's initial election and re-election campaigns to Seattle City Council.*



# Winning the Right to Choose - Then and Now

BY ANYA MAE LEMLICH AND RAMY KHALIL

**What the feminist movement of the 1960s and '70s teaches us about the fight for reproductive justice today**

The US Supreme Court has announced they will issue a ruling by next spring on a Mississippi law which threatens the legal precedent established by the landmark *Roe v. Wade* ruling which legalized an individual's right to choose an abortion. Given that six of the nine Supreme Court justices are conservative, it looks likely they will try to over-

turn — or at least weaken — *Roe v. Wade*.

Overturning *Roe v. Wade* has been a central goal of the right ever since the women's liberation movement achieved this historic victory on January 22, 1973. They've succeeded in substantially eroding it: 43 states prohibit abortion after a certain point in pregnancy, Oklahoma passed a near-total abortion ban, and more state-level abortion restrictions (90) have been enacted in 2021 than in any year since 1973.

The Supreme Court justices who are threatening *Roe v. Wade* are the same ones who struck down the core of the historic Voting Rights Act in June at a time when Republicans are trying to pass hundreds of laws across the country restricting voting rights, disproportionately excluding working-class people and people of color.

One way to stop the threat would be to expand the Supreme Court. Congress, controlled by Democrats, has the power to expand the court and appoint a progressive majority. Biden set up a commission to study this, but according to the *New York Times* (June 18, 2021), since Biden took office, he has



Photo: Lorie Shaull. [tinyurl.com/abortion-safe-and-legal](https://tinyurl.com/abortion-safe-and-legal)  
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not even uttered the word “abortion” once. It’s clear that the Democratic leadership has no intention of expanding the court or building a movement to defend *Roe v. Wade*.

This leaves us only one option — to organize a wave of enormous grassroots protests, including a massive march on Washington. Activists need to demand that the leaders of the National Organization for Women (NOW), Planned Parenthood, unions, the Poor People’s Campaign, DSA, Bernie, the Squad, and others issue a united call for escalating national days of action. A mass campaign needs to not only defend *Roe v. Wade*, but go on the offensive: demanding a repeal of abortion restrictions, a Medicare for All system that includes free abortion and reproductive healthcare, and more.

In fact, this has been done before. We can learn a lot from the mass protests that feminists organized in the 1960s and '70s which successfully pressured the Supreme Court to pass *Roe v. Wade*, despite the conservative majority on the court at that time.

## Abortion before *Roe v. Wade*

Throughout the 1960s and '70s, oppressed and working-class people around the world rose up demanding equality, self-determination, and socialism. Colonized people revolted and overthrew imperialist powers, ten million workers in France brought the country to a halt in the 1968 General Strike, and in Czechoslovakia, workers rose up against Stalinism to demand genuine democratic socialism. In the US, the Black freedom movement shook society, millions protested the Vietnam War, and wildcat strikes swept the country in the early '70s.

Amidst the rapid radicalization sweeping society, women in the US began openly talking about gender oppression and organizing for their own freedom, in what was originally called the women’s liberation movement and later termed the second-wave feminist movement.

This movement was cross-class and multi-racial, and encompassed a mix of different strategies and theories of change, often conflicting but coming together in shared fights. While the movement put forward a range of demands, the right to legal abortion emerged as a central one (alongside free childcare and equal opportunity) because women understood that they could never be free without control over their reproductive lives.

*Planned Parenthood, NOW, unions, Bernie, the Squad, and others need to issue a united call for nationwide protests to defend Roe v. Wade.*

Abortions have always occurred throughout human history, whether under safe conditions or not. Abortion was first outlawed in feudal Europe during the early rise of capitalism, but it wasn’t banned in the US until the mid-19th century. In the US, approximately one million women had abortions annually before the procedure was legalized in 1973, resulting in the deaths of some 5,000 women every year.<sup>1</sup>

It was hard to tell whether an abortionist would use safe anesthesia and sterile instruments or whether they knew how to

perform an abortion safely. Many people, with no other option, administered self-induced abortions with coat hangers or other sharp objects.

Approximately a third of the million people having abortions each year had to be hospitalized for complications.<sup>2</sup> When complications developed, women would often delay medical treatment for fear of criminal charges.

In Leslie Reagan’s book, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, a woman recounts a story of a college classmate who had an abortion: “She was too frightened to tell anyone what she had done. So when she developed complications, she tried to take care of it herself. She locked herself in the bathroom between two dorm rooms and quietly bled to death.”<sup>3</sup>

The criminalization of abortion disproportionately forced lower-income women and women of color into these dangerous situations. Rich women, however, could afford safe abortions by paying a private doctor exorbitant fees or traveling to a country where abortion was legal.

Underground networks of activists, doctors, lawyers, and welfare rights groups risked arrest to direct women to physicians who would perform safe abortions. Abortion rights supporters had been persistently lobbying the government to legalize abortion under certain conditions but made very little progress — until the women’s liberation movement exploded onto the streets in the late '60s.<sup>4</sup>

## Rising Expectations

The growing number of women working outside the home and the rising yet unfulfilled expectations of the post-war economic up-





Women's march against Nixon during the Republican Convention in Miami, August 1972

Photo: Washington Area Spark, [tinyurl.com/womens-march-against-nixon](http://tinyurl.com/womens-march-against-nixon), Copyright: CC BY-NC 2.0, [creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/)

swing were crucial factors that contributed to the emergence of the women's liberation movement. Working outside the home and earning their own money increased women's economic independence, confidence, and collective consciousness.

World Wars I and II as well as the massive postwar economic expansion drew record numbers of women into the waged workforce. During WWII, the US government opened 3,000 federally subsidized, affordable childcare centers in 49 states to induce women, primarily married white women, to work in factories while men fought the war. After the war ended, the government and corporations used different mechanisms to try and push women back into the home, often refusing to rehire them. The government shut down the childcare centers, and waged a massive propaganda campaign glorifying the joys of motherhood and home-making as women's duty in the fight against "communism."

But many working-class women, especially women of color, couldn't afford to stay home. They often had to take underpaid and undervalued care sector jobs — cleaners, nurses, secretaries, school teachers, restaurant workers — where they faced constant disrespect and humiliation. The median income of working women in 1960 was only about one-third that of men.<sup>5</sup>

Rising living standards and the opening of college doors to women in order to satisfy corporations' demands for more skilled managers and professionals raised women's expectations that they could improve their lives through college and a career. However, many women still found doors slammed in their faces by sexist cultural norms and a capitalist system resistant to change.

### A Cross-Class, Multi-Racial Movement

Betty Friedan, a left and labor journalist, was one of the first to

put words to the depression, isolation, and loneliness that many women faced in the home. In 1963, she published *The Feminist Mystique*, and in 1966, she co-founded the National Organization for Women (NOW). Both her book and the emergence of NOW are often viewed by historians as the start of the second-wave feminist movement.

NOW campaigned primarily on employment discrimination, filing over 1,000 lawsuits against corporations, many of which were victorious. The surge of new activists was reflected in NOW's membership figures, which grew by leaps and bounds from 300 in 1966 to 40,000 in 1974.<sup>6</sup>

NOW's liberal leadership did not want to challenge capitalism; instead they sought an equal place for women within the system. This political agenda meant they often focused on demands that were most immediately impactful to middle-class, white, and straight women. They tried to push radical groups away, for fear they would jeopardize the movement. Friedan famously referred to lesbians as the "lavender menace" — which some lesbians then reclaimed, forming a group by that name to organize for lesbian visibility and liberation.

Contrary to some contemporary critiques of the second-wave feminist movement, organizations like NOW and their primarily middle-class and white membership were not the only active ones, nor were they always the most influential. Socialist, working-class, lesbian, POC, and Black women organized to fight for their interests as well. But they rarely coalesced into a shared movement: as Sharon Smith writes in her book *Women and Socialism*,

"there were a number of different women's movements that progressed on parallel tracks, largely separated not only on the basis of politics but also on the basis of race, sexuality and class."

The National Welfare Rights Organization was founded in 1966, and had around 25,000 members at their peak in 1969, most of whom were Black. One of their organizers, Johnnie Tillmon, argued that women should be paid a living wage for the child-raising and housekeeping work they were already doing. She wrote, "For a lot of middle-class women in this country, Women's Liberation is a matter of concern. For women on welfare it's a matter of survival."

After participating in union struggles for decades, women escalated the struggle in the 1960s against sexist conditions in their workplaces. In 1968, domestic workers — predominantly Black women — created the National Domestic Workers Union. In 1972, flight attendants launched the Stewardesses for Women's Rights, an organization that used a variety of militant tactics, including slow-downs and sick-outs, to win demands against objectification. Clerical workers, who faced degradation, humiliation, and harassment at work — exemplified in the classic 1980 film *9 to 5* — formed unions.

Feminist groups sprung up around the country to take matters of sexual assault and domestic violence into their own hands. People created rape crisis centers, rape hotlines, and domestic violence shelters.

Socialists and Marxists were active in the movement, forming their own organizations and/or joining others, the largest of which was a socialist-feminist organization called the

Chicago Women's Liberation Union. They created an abortion-providing group called the Jane Collective, which provided safe procedures to primarily working-class people. They also created Women Employed, which lobbied for decent wages and working conditions, and DARE (Direct Action for Rights in Employment) which campaigned against unfair labor practices against women janitors. And they created the Committee to End Sterilization Abuse, an issue for predominantly poor women and women of color, who maintained that reproductive justice included the right to choose to *have* children, not just the right to choose not to.

*Mass movements, like the women's liberation movement, can grow quite quickly and affect dramatic social change.*

Many women also fought sexism that existed within the "New Left." Similarly, women of color experienced racism within the feminist movement, and some women of color decided to form their own separate organizations. In 1973 the National Black Feminist Organization was created in New York, and in 1977 a group of Black feminists launched the Combahee River Collective, who coined the term "identity politics."

### Women's Liberation

Beginning in 1967, young radical women came together to form local groups to discuss their oppression, breaking apart stereotypes and ideas that were previously normalized as natural or biological. By 1969, this practice had spread to over 40 cities

and had a name — consciousness-raising. As Jenny Brown puts it, "consciousness-raising was the program of the 1960's women's liberation movement... It was responsible for really spreading women's liberation across the country by 1970."

In consciousness-raising groups, women questioned unequal gender roles and talked frankly about sexual issues which had been hidden causes for shame and embarrassment, turning depression into anger and building self-confidence and strength together. They began openly speaking about rape and abortion, masturbation, and menstruation. They gave language to phenomena like "rape culture" and "sexual harassment." The phrase "the personal is political" originated with these groups, describing how events happening to people in the "private" sphere were shared experiences, common, and systemic.

Women's liberation groups also debated strategies for the movement. Many considered NOW's emphasis on courtroom tactics too conservative. Instead, they organized demonstrations in the streets and took direct action to confront instances of sexism, making far-reaching demands for changing society.

One powerful organizing tool was a "speak-out" where people publicly shared stories about their abortion experiences. A group called Redstockings in New York, after protesting at a state hearing about reforming abortion laws in which men and one nun were the only "experts" asked to testify, organized their own hearing where the real experts, women who had had an abortion, spoke. The practice spread. One activist explained that their speak-out was "unbelievably successful and it turned out to be an incredible organizing tool. It brought abortion out of the closet where it had



been hidden in secrecy and shame. It informed the public that most women were having abortions anyway. People spoke from their hearts.”<sup>7</sup>

Direct action and pressure campaigns proliferated across the country. In New York, feminists distributed copies of their model abortion law — a blank piece of paper.<sup>8</sup> In Washington State in 1970, grassroots and socialist organizations campaigned for a state-wide ballot initiative to legalize abortion. They door-knocked, leafleted, held rallies, and sold 10,000 copies of a pamphlet titled “One in Four of Us Have Had or Will Have an Abortion,” which helped convince 56 percent of voters to vote for the initiative.

While many socialist-feminist and radical groups were small, they often pushed NOW and other mainstream organizations to the left. As more women became active and outspoken, NOW began to incorporate more assertive tactics, like protests and mass actions. In 1968 they succeeded in ending sex-segregated job listings in newspapers by combining lawsuits with mass actions.

### Striking Back

Each new victory scored by the women’s movement embittered the right-wing anti-feminist opposition, spearheaded by the Catholic Church hierarchy along with evangelical Protestant leaders. In 1971, a bipartisan majority in Congress voted for the Comprehensive Child Development Act, which would have made the government responsible for providing childcare for all children. Yet the right wing pressured President Nixon to veto, scoring a major victory.

In his veto message, Nixon described the act as “the most

radical piece of legislation to emerge from the 93rd Congress,” and said it would “commit the vast moral authority of the national government to the side of communal approaches to child-rearing” and “would lead to the Sovietization of American children.”<sup>9</sup>

In response to the “New Right” backlash, NOW called a national Women’s Strike for Equality. Held on August 26, 1970, it commemorated the 50th anniversary of the day women won the right to vote.

*100,000 women marched, picketed, protested, and held teach-ins, skits, and domestic strikes across the country.*

A debate opened up among activists about what the demands of the women’s strike should be. Liberal middle-class elements in the movement limited their demands to the legal right to abortion, childcare, and equal employment opportunities.<sup>10</sup> Socialists and working-class women wanted more — *free* abortion on demand, *free* 24-hour community-controlled childcare, and equal pay for equal work.<sup>11</sup>

Socialist feminists rejected the supposedly more “realistic and practical” call for *reforming* the existing abortion laws, for which previous abortion rights activists had been lobbying for years without success. Instead, they insisted on the *full repeal* of all laws limiting a woman’s right to abortion, as well as government funding for abortion to make it free and accessible.<sup>13</sup>

The popularity of these more radical demands caused NOW and the National Association

for the Repeal of Abortion Laws/National Abortion Rights Action League, (NARAL, founded in 1969) to call for the abolition of all laws restricting abortion — the first mainstream organizations to do so.

Socialist ideas were a strong influence in the movement. Many looked to the 1917 Russian Revolution, for example, which brought to power the first government in the world to establish free abortion, free community-run childcare, and equal pay for equal work, as well as free socialized healthcare and the decriminalization of divorce and homosexuality.

The two wings carried their different banners together in the largest women’s rights demonstrations since the suffrage movement.<sup>14</sup> 100,000 women marched, picketed, protested, and held teach-ins, skits, and domestic strikes across the country. In New York City, protesters hung a banner on the Statue of Liberty which read, “Women of the World Unite.”<sup>15</sup>

### Political Balance in Society Shifts

Although the feminist movement never reached the massive size of the Black freedom movement, hundreds of local protests demanding the legalization of abortion took place between 1969 and 1973.<sup>16</sup> Court actions to do away with laws against abortion began in over 20 states between 1968 and 1970.<sup>17</sup>

By the early ’70s, the movement’s persistent demand for legalizing abortion without any restrictions compelled 11 state governments to liberalize their abortion laws, allowing the procedure under certain conditions.<sup>18</sup>

Despite these concessions, socialist feminists continued to insist on free abortion to prevent



Pro-choice demonstrators outside the Supreme Court, April 26, 1989, Washington DC: Pro-choice and anti-abortion demonstrators stage concurrent events on the day of the opening arguments in the *Webster v Reproductive Health Services* case at the Court.

Photo: Lorie Shaull, [tinyurl.com/SCOTUS-abortion](http://tinyurl.com/SCOTUS-abortion), Copyright: CC BY-SA 2.0, [creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/)

market forces from getting in the way of women’s needs. In New York, for example, the availability of abortion attracted women from all over the country, driving the price of abortion through the roof, making it less accessible to lower-income women and women of color.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, on January 22, 1973 the Supreme Court issued its historic *Roe v. Wade* ruling, striking down all state laws prohibiting abortion during the first three months of pregnancy.

This crucial victory took place under the administration of President Richard Nixon — a conservative Republican adamantly opposed to abortion — and a Supreme Court with a majority of Republican appointees. Nixon had insisted only two years

before: “Unrestricted abortion policies, or abortion on demand, I cannot square with my personal belief in the sanctity of human life — including the life of the yet unborn.”<sup>20</sup> (The New York Women’s Strike Coalition replied: “We will grant Mr. Nixon the freedom to take care of his uterus if he will let us take care of ours.”)<sup>21</sup>

*The past 50 years show that reforms won under capitalism will always be temporary.*

Activists’ persistent organizing had shifted public opinion in favor of the right of women to

decide whether and when to have an abortion. By 1969, 64 percent of Americans considered the decision on abortion a private matter, and in 1976, 63 percent of women supported efforts “to strengthen and change the status of women in society.”<sup>23</sup>

### Lessons for Today

The women’s liberation movement transformed public and private life for women: the cultural and political change was reflected in legal wins, like *Roe v. Wade*, as well as literature, art, higher education, and daily life. The explosive growth of this movement disproves the idea put forward by many liberals — then and now — that change only happens gradually, step-by-step. Mass movements, like the women’s liberation



movement, can grow quite quickly, and can affect dramatic social change.

Victories like *Roe v. Wade* were not handed down by enlightened judges or politicians from either party, but won in spite of them. Feminists had to fight hard for these gains by building their own independent mass movement and large-scale protests. The courts, laws, and political system are not immune from mass pressure; they do respond to shifts in public opinion, and activists can sway them by building mass protest movements which convince and inspire the majority of working-class people.

This was demonstrated again by two marches on Washington in 1989 that drew a total of 900,000 people and another protest of over 500,000 in 1992 which impacted the Supreme

Court's 1989 *Webster* ruling and its 1992 *Casey* ruling. The Court's *Casey* majority opinion admitted: "A decision to overrule *Roe* ... under the existing circumstances would address error, if error there was, at the cost of both profound and unnecessary damage to the Court's legitimacy." Translated — criminalizing abortion would lead to a massive backlash and undermine the legitimacy of the Court, due to widespread public support for abortion rights.<sup>24</sup>

The feminist movement would not have been as successful if it had not been part of a broader upswell of mass working-class struggles, expressed in Black freedom struggles, the anti-war movement, and a wave of wildcat strikes in the early 1970s. The ruling class, worried about a threat to the capitalist system itself, was compelled to grant concessions — substantial reforms — to these move-

ments, to protect the integrity of their system as a whole.

Unfortunately, however, the feminist movement was not prepared for the unceasing attacks on women's and workers' rights since the rise of neoliberalism, the Reagan era, and the rightward shift of the Democrats. The right to abortion has been steadily eroded since 1973, most immediately with the passage of the Hyde Amendment in 1977, which banned the use of federal funds for abortions (signed into law by Democratic President Jimmy Carter). Though abortion was still legal, this severely restricted working-class women from accessing it.

Fifteen years later, the Supreme Court further weakened *Roe v. Wade* with the ruling in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, which — while upholding the decision in

*Roe* — allowed states to adopt restrictions on abortion in the first trimester. That opened the door for one restriction after another. Despite very effective direct action to defend abortion clinics from right-wing violence, the religious right's unswerving legislative attacks on abortion has meant that it is almost impossible for working-class women in many states to access any abortion services. The legal right to an abortion is valuable, but it's not enough if abortion and reproductive services are not also accessible and affordable.

Some radical feminists, reacting to their anger at a sexist society, viewed men as the enemy of women and argued that men had nothing to gain by taking part in the feminist movement. Proposals for separatist communities (women living separately from men) sprung up, sometimes by lesbians as a response to homophobia within the movement. Yet these ideas pitted working-class women and men against one another, and made it harder for the feminist movement to grow. Although the movement won many gains, its appeal was limited by both the liberals and many radicals' failure to adopt a socialist class-struggle program that could bring together all working-class people by asserting that working-class men would also gain from ending sexist oppression, and by linking the fight for gender justice to the fight for economic justice.

We can learn from socialists' insistence on calling for far-reaching changes. The radicals' bold, unapologetic case for free abortion on demand with no restrictions raised the confidence of millions of people and changed the terms of public

debate. This stands in stark contrast to the apologetic, timid defense of abortion by today's leaders of NOW, NARAL, and Planned Parenthood, who continually preach "moderation" and "realism."

*A working-class political party would help unite progressive movements against the capitalist elite and all forms of oppression.*

Our feminist movement today can bring back the still-powerful demands of the socialists of the 1970s. The new political platform adopted by Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), for example, calls for free abortion on demand, the repeal of all laws restricting abortion, universal childcare, and an end to forced sterilization. DSA, along with other feminist groups, should wage campaigns around these demands, bringing together a concerted national fight, particularly while the Supreme Court is reviewing a case that threatens, yet again, to weaken or overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

And we can learn from the creative, wide-ranging tactics of the second-wave feminists. All sorts of direct actions, public skits, debates, marches, and protests are at our disposal, made even more accessible through modern technology. The #MeToo movement has been a powerful example of the effect that mass speak-outs can have on public consciousness and their ability to effect change.

The experience of the past 50 years shows that reforms won under capitalism will always be temporary and partial. The ruling class can be compelled to make certain concessions (such as legalizing abortion) under the pressure of mass movements, but as soon as these movements subside, the capitalists will move to roll back the reforms. We must build not only periodic protests but ongoing broad mass organizations that can lead a sustained movement against the ruling elite. In particular a working-class political party would be able to unite progressive movements together against the ruling class and set our sights on overthrowing the capitalist system itself.

*Anya Mae Lemlich is a food service worker and a socialist feminist activist. Ramy Khalil is a history teacher and a member of the Seattle Education Association.*

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- 18 Rosen, p. 158.
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Women's Strike for Equality in New York around Fifth Avenue August 26, 1970

Photo: RV1864, <https://tinyurl.com/womens-strike-for-equality>  
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# GREEN NEW DEAL



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## Biden's False Promise of Eco-Capitalism



BY ALEX MONI-SAURI  
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Congress is battling over trillions of dollars which could finally do something meaningful to combat the effects of climate change. While we fight for our future and a habitable planet, it's clear that a framework of eco-capitalism won't be enough.

In response to the escalating climate catastrophe's effect on the capitalist economy, as well as to pressure from below, the Biden administration has taken a noticeable shift on climate policy. Moving away from the

ism in which the energy industry and broad market forces are left squarely in charge of our transition away from fossil fuels.

This shift is consistent with broader policy changes the Biden administration has made in its first year that mark a move away from austerity and neoliberalism in the immediate period, and a willingness to spend more on infrastructure and a social safety net, making concessions both to the desire of corporate America to stimulate the economy while also responding to popular demands.

gas leases on public land, stopped the continuation of the Keystone XL pipeline, and rejected drilling in Alaska's Arctic Wildlife Refuge.



**ECO-CAPITALISM**

### Biden's Plan

Shortly after taking office, Biden held a virtual climate summit in which he pledged that the US will adhere to carbon emission goals laid out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which will require major cuts to emissions (as much as 52 percent below 2005 levels) by 2030, with net zero emissions by 2050. He rejoined the Paris Agreement, the international treaty adopted by nearly 200 countries with its stated goal to "limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels." He paused oil and

Perhaps most significant among these policy changes is the proposed \$3.5 trillion budget reconciliation infrastructure plan, one of two such budget proposals which promise to invest money into both fortifying "hard" infrastructure, such as roads, utilities, and public transportation, but also "soft" infrastructure, such as child-care, free community college, and other programs that would greatly benefit working people and the planet.

All of this clearly indicates some recognition on the part of the ruling class and the world's billionaires that climate denial-



**CAPITALISM**

flagrant climate denial of the Trump administration, Biden plans to respond to the climate crisis within the framework of capitalist and imperialist power relations, a vision of eco-capital-



ism or inaction around climate change is no longer politically viable. The global population has experienced unprecedented natural disasters, deadly weather events, mass extinctions, massive crop die-offs, and a raging pandemic. In 2018, the IPCC published a report detailing the likely consequences of a 1.5 degree Celsius rise in global temperatures above pre-industrial levels, at a time when temperatures had already risen between 0.8 to 1.2 degrees Celsius. The findings of this report were starkly alarming, and warned of exponential (rather than linear) tolls to human life and the habitability

of the planet with each degree of warming.

*The US is pledging less toward IPCC goals than any other developed country.*

The report sparked new momentum on the left to address climate change with the Green New Deal, publicized and popularized by figures like Greta Thunberg and AOC, as well as the emergence of youth movements like Extinction Rebellion and the Sunrise Movement.

The left has already succeeded in pushing the conversation around climate change away from moralistic conclusions that place responsibility on individuals and their consumption choices, and towards the policy changes that are needed. This is reflected in the Biden administration's climate policy and proposed infrastructure plans. Of course, increasingly large sections of the ruling class also recognize the existential threat that the climate disaster poses to profit and to capitalism itself — which requires a human population and a life-supporting planet to survive.

While it's correct to see these shifts as positive in relation to the climate denialism of the Trump administration, we must also recognize how inadequate they are in meeting the needs of the planet and of our collective survival. The US, as one of the wealthiest countries in the world, is pledging less toward IPCC targets themselves are estimates, representing a wide range of possible scenarios with little or no accounting for feedback loops, in which warming is accelerated by climate events like the eventual release of billions of tons of methane and organic carbon locked in the now melting permafrost beneath the Arctic Ocean. We're already experiencing record-setting temperatures that were previously forecast to come years in the future. The most recent IPCC report, which was published on August 8th between back-to-back heat waves which killed 112 people in Washington state, confirms that "we are locked into 30 years of worsening climate impacts no matter what the

world does," as the *New York Times* recently stated.

Biden's stated commitment to reduce emissions from greenhouse gasses by 52 percent by 2030 is an improvement from previous policy goals, but what we need is zero percent by 2030. This commitment is also non-binding, and offers no concrete plan to reach its stated goal. And while the Biden administration has paused oil and gas leases on public lands and halted development of the Keystone XL pipeline, it has also continued to approve drilling permits at a clip comparable to that of the Trump administration. A Jacobin article from June reports:

*According to statistics from the Bureau of Land Management, from the start of February to the end of April, the administration approved 1,179 drilling permits on federal lands, not far from the four-year high of nearly 1,400 approved over a similar three-month period at the end of Trump's term.*

*Meanwhile, according to numbers from the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement numbers, that same February-to-April period saw 207 offshore drilling permits approved. This is compared to the 249 offshore permits approved over the three months to Trump's final day in office.*

**Bipartisan Package with New Fossil Fuel Subsidies**

The \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure package, which passed the Senate 69 to 30, has been all but stripped of meaningful measures to address climate change. The most robust climate proposal included in the bipartisan plan would allocate funds to "build a national network of electric vehicle charging stations,



*Climate change, Tobacco Factory mural, Bedminster by Anthony O'Neil*

*geograph.org.uk/photo/6743758, Copyright: CC BY-SA 2.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/*

purchase thousands of electric buses and upgrade the electrical grid," (Seattle Times, July 6, 2021), continuing a market-based approach centered firmly in the hands of big business. The plan would offer companies tax credits as incentives to cut emissions, leaving industry executives to decide how and where they make those cuts, an approach which could result in widespread opposition to much-needed climate policies if the brunt of those policies fall on working people.

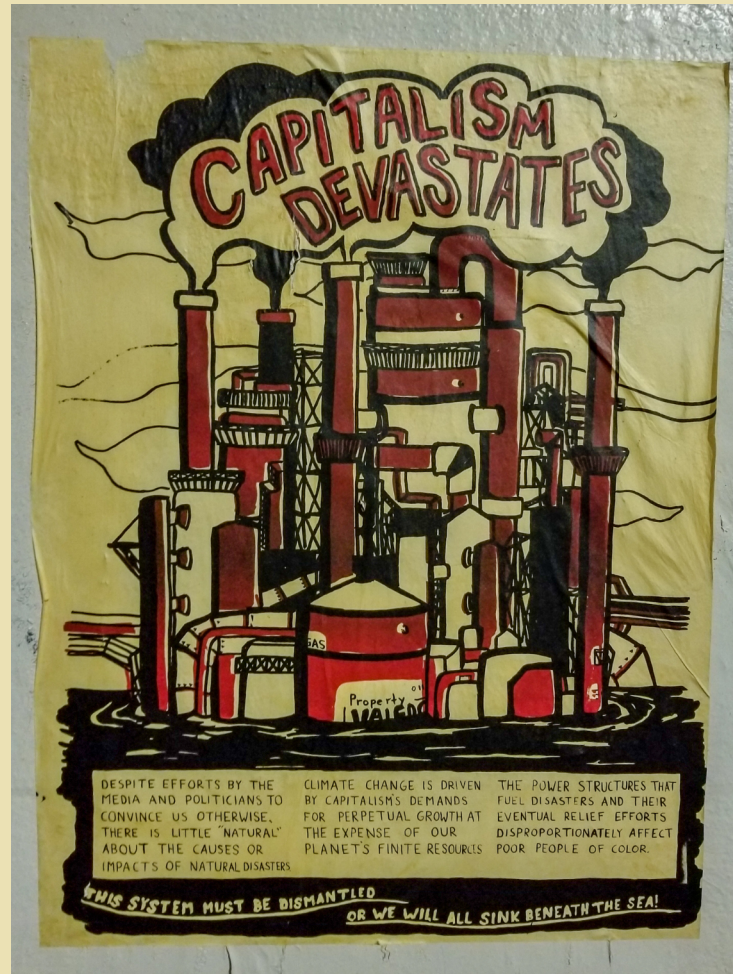
Worse still, as outlined in an article from the Intercept on August 3, it includes at least \$25 billion in new subsidies for the fossil fuel industry. Significant portions of those billions will be used for technologies the Intercept describes as "dream fixes":

Such technologies include carbon capture and decar-

bonized hydrogen fuel. Both purported solutions in practice help fossil fuel companies mask the continued release of climate-warming gases. Neither of the technologies are currently commercially viable at a large scale, so the energy industry requires government help to carry out what critics see as a public relations scheme.

**The Fight for the Budget Reconciliation Package**

For socialists and others trying to preserve life on this planet, the most promising area of struggle around US climate policy is the \$3.5 trillion budget reconciliation infrastructure package. While the details of this package are still in negotiation, it represents a much more expansive vision of how to address climate change, linked to bolstering social services, job creation, and taxing the rich.



*Photo: Bart Everson, flickr.com/photos/editor/41563298744, Copyright: CC BY 2.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/*



The current proposals include elements of the Green New Deal, most notably the establishment of a Civilian Climate Corps, possibly creating hundreds of thousands of jobs for young people while turning our energy system away from fossil fuels. It also includes measures to remediate the environmental, social, and economic costs associated with climate change. In a recent opinion piece in the Guardian, Bernie Sanders highlights some of these crucial measures:

- Massive investments in retrofitting homes and buildings to save energy
- Massive investment in the production of wind, solar and other forms of sustainable energy
- Major investments in greener agriculture
- Major investments in climate resiliency and ecosystem recovery projects
- Major investments in water and environmental justice
- Major investments in research and development for sustainable energy and battery storage
- Billions to address the warming and acidification

of oceans and the needs of coastal communities

Right wing Democrats are putting up a fight to water down these proposals, while a majority of the progressive caucus, including AOC and the Squad, are fighting to link the reconciliation package to the passage of the bipartisan package. Linking these proposals may be a great parliamentary maneuver, but it won't be enough to win what's needed.

*57 percent of voters say they would support if their member of Congress co-sponsored the Green New Deal.*

The Green New Deal as proposed by AOC and others includes a just transition within ten years, job guarantees for all, food security, affordable housing, free healthcare for all, and a focus on the needs of marginalized groups. This is the minimum of what's needed for our collective future on a livable planet. But such policy is not

compatible with the capitalist profit system. It would demand massive, democratic intervention in the functioning of the economy. It would cut into the profits of fossil fuel companies, clash with car producers, the petrochemical industry, big pharma, housing developers, real estate brokers, and last but not least, the financial industry behind them all. In short, it represents a fight to break the power of the capitalist class.

Biden has stated, in a debate with Donald Trump during the presidential election, "The Green New Deal is not my plan."

Part of Biden's excuse for rejecting the Green New Deal is that it's too big a political lift for moderate Democrats to overcome GOP opposition. But his attempts at bipartisanship, and willingness to limit proposals to what Senator Joe Manchin will support, actually *undermine* his popular support. Recent polls by *Data for Progress* show that Green New Deal policy is overwhelmingly popular, "enjoying a 31-percent-age-point margin of voter support," and that "a majority of voters (57 percent) say they would support if their member of Congress co-sponsored the Green New Deal resolution when it is reintroduced in Congress."

If Democratic leadership championed the Green New Deal, they could mobilize mass popular support as a battering ram against Manchin and big business opposition; but the strategy of appealing to big business to take initiative — the refusal to break with the logic of capitalism — prevents them from taking this course.

*Alex Moni-Sauri is a poet and artist, and is a member of Seattle DSA. She lives in Kingston, Washington.*

# BlackRock will not Save the Climate

**Are large investment companies finally pushing corporations to save the planet? Despite media reports that give that impression, unfortunately not. Taking the fossil fuel industry (and other means of destruction) into democratic public ownership is necessary to carry out a just transition to environmental sustainability.**

On May 26, ExxonMobile shareholders voted to replace two members of its board of directors with more climate-friendly managers. As Bloomberg reports, "BlackRock, the second-largest holder of Exxon, with a 6.6 percent stake, voted for three of the new directors," who were nominated by a much smaller, more activist-driven hedge fund called Engine No.1 to promote action against climate change. "But," Bloomberg continues, "the investment giant [BlackRock] also backed Chief Executive Officer Darren Woods, who opposed investor demands for a change to the company's approach on climate change — a move that rankled environmental groups." The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reports that the target of Engine No. 1 is "carbon neutrality, effectively bringing its emissions to zero — both from the company and its products — by 2050." WSJ goes on:

*"Since January, Engine No. 1's bid for four seats on Exxon's board has turned into one of the most expensive proxy fights ever. Exxon has spent at least \$35 million, and Engine No. 1 has spent \$30 million, regulatory filings show, in an increasingly pitched battle to persuade shareholders."*

*BlackRock, holding 6.8 percent of BP shares, also backed a shareholder resolution that the*

*company will "accelerate efforts to slash greenhouse gas emissions." Yet BlackRock also voted for Total's "energy strategy," which aims to reach carbon neutrality no sooner than 2050. Total — one of the largest contributors to carbon emissions in human history — has plans for another 30 years of oil extraction. Chairman and Chief Executive Patrick Pouyanne said "he wanted the company to become a 'green energy major,' but said a more radical shift would not be appropriate as the company needs to fund its transition from revenues derived from fossil fuels" (Reuters, May 28).*

## On a Closer Look: No Plan

The closer you look, the worse it is. A May 18th report from stock market analysis company Seeking Alpha states that

*"Shell announced its climate plan in February, aiming to cut carbon emissions to net zero by 2050 by lowering oil and gas production, growing its renewables and low-carbon business, and offsetting emissions through measures such as carbon capturing technologies."*

Those carbon capturing technologies do not exist today, and it remains an open question whether they'll be developed in the time frame needed to keep world temperatures below a two degree Celsius increase. When Exxon's Chief Executive Darren Woods rejected the demand from Engine No. 1 for a plan of carbon neutrality by 2050, he argued that other oil companies making such pledges had no real plans to achieve them. He actually has a point.

On May 29th the *New York Times* added that Shell "had already promised to reduce the

carbon intensity of its operations, which means that it could still continue to expand oil and production, but with lower emissions for every barrel it produced." BlackRock backed that plan from Shell as well.

## Doubling Down On Oil

The fact that even capitalist investors are feeling pressure to act on climate change is welcome news. Every reform that wins us time to combat the worst effects of climate change is valuable. However, these concessions are not enough to avoid catastrophic climate change. Summarizing the strategy of US American oil giants Chevron and Exxon Mobil, the *New York Times* writes:

*They are doubling down on oil and natural gas and investing what amounts to pocket change in innovative climate-oriented efforts like small nuclear power plants and devices that suck carbon out of the air. [...] American oil executives say it would be folly for them to switch to renewables, arguing that it is a low-profit business that utilities and alternative energy companies can pursue more effectively.*

Daniel Droog, Chevron's vice president for energy transition, quoted in the *New York Times*, claims:

*"Our strategy is to decarbonize our existing assets in the most cost-effective way and consistently bring in new technology and new forms of energy. But we're not asking our investors to sacrifice return or go forward with three decades of uncertainty on dividends."*

Such is the cold-blooded calculations of fossil fuel companies.

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Illustration by Rita Fei

[www.rिताfei.com](http://www.rिताfei.com)

# A Bright Future's in Sight



BY WHITNEY KAHN

*Whitney Kahn is a paraeducator and rank-and-file member of Seattle Education Association. He is an activist with Seattle DSA and the Labor for Black Lives Collective.*

🐦 @BENJAMINOVITZ

Our world runs on super-exploitation  
by powerful people that think we're in a simulation  
pushing us down a road that leads to decimation  
unless we unite and fight like we're one human nation.

The future's not fated,  
so don't be sated  
into believing we're predestinated  
to be eradicated.

The profiteers are elated  
that you are fixated  
on making their problems individuated.  
That framework was created  
By those who do not want debated  
a problem that's corporate-dominated.  
Billionaires congratulated  
for contributions exaggerated  
Their studies are manipulated  
crafted so they're exonerated.

We're over-alienated  
and under-compensated  
They claim to be elevated  
and that we're uneducated  
but in truth it's not that complicated.

We've got the tech to succeed.  
Humans are not a weed.

With billionaire greed in the lead  
We can't serve human need,  
But without a world run for-profit we can proceed.

We can recycle materials that today are just lost,  
so the vital resources we have will never exhaust.  
We can hold onto that precious permafrost.  
Capitalism lowers prices, but does so at what cost?

The cost is you, the cost is me,  
the cost is our future getting drowned in the sea.  
Stolen lands and people, this system's never been free  
Or been the only way that humans can be.

We can be a boon not a blight  
A bright future's in sight  
Reparations for every slight  
Together we can make it right.

Not just right, but better.  
Even if you think you got your cheddar  
We're not a forever endeavor  
If the power lever's not severed.

All we need shines down all over the land,  
but you can't make a buck if we meet all our demand  
with wind, water, and solar, the rest can disband  
and give power to the people if intentionally planned.



# What is Eco-Socialism?



BY JOHN MOLYNEUX AND JESS SPEAR

@JOHNMOLYNEUX68, @JDUBSPEAR

John Molyneux and Jess Spear wrote a short pamphlet, *What is Eco-Socialism?* Here, we publish an excerpt of it to present the concept and key ideas of a socialist contribution to the environmental justice movement. You can order it here [tinyurl.com/eco-socialism-rupture](https://tinyurl.com/eco-socialism-rupture)

The pamphlet, published in October 2020, is co-authored by Jess Spear and John Molyneux, who are members of People Before Profit and editors of the Irish magazines, *Rupture* and the *Irish Marxist Review*, respectively. *Rupture* is an eco-socialist quarterly published in Ireland by RISE (Revolutionary, Internationalist, Socialist, Environmentalist), and the *Irish Marxist Review* is a theoretical journal associated with the Socialist Workers Network. This pamphlet

represents a collaborative effort by the two journals.

## What Do We Mean by Eco-socialism?

We think eco-socialism is an idea whose time has come.

What has brought this about is quite simply the current condition of the world we live in. We are living in a world characterized by three massive global crises: the COVID pandemic, the economic crisis, and the climate crisis. These are far from being the only issues. On the contrary it would be easy to fill many pages just listing vitally important issues — global inequality, imperialism and war, racism, misogyny, and gender oppression are the most glaring — but the three mentioned are interlocked and

threaten the future of humanity. Eco-socialism represents a coherent but also an open response to all these connected crises.

## Eco-socialism Is Intersectional

Eco-socialism has compelling reasons for being emphatically intersectional. The system change required on a global scale to address the climate crisis and the wider environmental crisis means that we are committed to building a united mass movement for change on a national and international scale. The ecological crisis cannot be solved by piecemeal reforms on this issue or that issue, in this country or that country. But long experience has shown that such unity is only possible on the basis of



fighting all the different forms of oppression we suffer and which subjugate us to the environmentally destructive rule of capitalism.

It is not just a matter of morality and abstract principle, namely that racism, sexism etc. are wrong in themselves (though they certainly are) but rather that you can't fight capitalism and climate disaster without fighting racism, sexism and every other kind of oppression. Oppression is functional to capitalism. It intersects with exploitation systemically to support the continuing rule of capitalism and the perpetuation of the class system and all the environmental destruction that comes with it. For example, women's oppression provides a new generation of labor power in large part through free domestic labor and helps ideologically justify low pay for care work in general. This saves capitalists a load of money. So does racial discrimination in pay and working conditions.

As socialist and trade union organizer Jim Larkin said over 100 years ago, “an injury to one is an injury to all.” It's not just a question of working class unity; racism, sexism, and LGBTQ+ oppression mean there is less possibility for huge parts of the working class to struggle if they have more insecure work, no free time due to caring responsibilities, and are generally downtrodden by being discriminated against.

All of this applies with particular force to the movement against climate change. We know for certain that while climate change ultimately threatens us all, its immediate victims will be disproportionately the poor and the peoples of the Global South, that is those who have done, and do, the least to generate it. This is firstly because the areas

projected to get extremely hot for most of the year are concentrated in the Global South and in less developed countries; and secondly, because these countries are less developed and therefore have fewer social supports and infrastructure to mitigate the harm. Their ability to withstand hotter temperatures, dramatic shifts in weather patterns, and deadly extreme weather events is much weaker than the wealthier countries in the Global North. In short, more people in the Global South and in developing countries will suffer and die if we don't act quickly and take the steps necessary to assist their transition. There can be no effective solution to climate change that does not address the question of a just transition for the Global South.

Of one thing we can be certain: climate change will mean, indeed already means, a huge increase in the number of climate refugees, of people displaced by virtue of their homelands becoming uninhabitable. How our societies respond to these refugees will be a crucial issue in determining whether climate change becomes a point of departure for the construction of a decent world or for a descent into barbarity.

At the same time, the immense inequality between the capitalist North and the Global South cannot be understood without considering the history of slavery, colonialism, empire, and racism. Historically speaking, racism developed as an ideological justification for slavery and colonial conquest. The normalization of racism continues to enable the super-exploitation of black and brown workers who generally receive lower wages and suffer worse working conditions, while also being more likely to be expropriated by landlords who charge extortionate rents for substandard accommodation, and banks who

## Principles of Eco-Socialism

Eco-socialism is based on three key principles:

1) the crises and main issues are all the product not of human nature, of the human race as a whole, or of individual ignorance and bad attitudes, but of the economic and social system of capitalism which completely dominates the world;

2) that the issue of climate change and the broader environmental crisis cannot be solved in isolation from the issues of class exploitation and oppression, and colonial, racial and gender oppression. Stopping climate change demands a just transition and a just transition requires a fight for equality and social justice across the board; and

3) that the solutions to these crises are interconnected and socialist — they involve moving towards a society based on public ownership and democratic planning i.e., production for human need and ecological sustainability, not profit — and will therefore require mass mobilization.

Eco-socialism also involves a view of socialism that is fundamentally different from the anti-democratic police states of official Communism.

Photo: majunzkn, Climate March, Washington, DC, April 29, 2017, [tinyurl.com/PeopleClimateMarch2017DC](https://tinyurl.com/PeopleClimateMarch2017DC), Copyright: CC BY-ND 2.0, [creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/)





charge them higher interest rates. Additionally, capitalists use immigration as a way of increasing the labor supply at lower wages and then work to blame that desired effect on the workers themselves in order to sow division and resentment among the working class.

The effects of climate change are also deeply gendered. Large amounts of research have shown that the impact of so-called 'natural' disasters is substantially greater on women. Thus:

*Natural disasters lower the life expectancy of women more than that of men. In other words, natural disasters (and their subsequent impact) on average kill more women than men or kill women at an earlier age than men. Since female life expectancy is generally higher than that of males, for most countries natural disasters narrow the gender gap in life expectancy. Second, the stronger the disaster (as approximated by the number of people killed relative to population size), the stronger this effect on the gender gap in life expectancy. That is, major calamities lead to more severe impacts on female life expectancy (relative to that of males) than do smaller disasters... Taken together our results show that it is the socially constructed gender-specific vulnerability of females built into everyday socioeconomic patterns that lead to the relatively higher female disaster mortality rates compared to men. (Eric Neumayer and Thomas Plumper in 'The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy, 1981–2002')*

Following the catastrophic Asian Tsunami in 2004, estimates made based on the sex of survivors (for instance, by Oxfam International) suggest that around three

times as many women as men perished. This is a pattern of inequality that is bound to be repeated in the numerous disasters that will accompany climate change. As we've already indicated above, the impacts of these disasters will be far more severe in the Global South than it will be in the relatively affluent North and constitutes yet another reason why eco-socialism, and indeed the whole climate movement, must be intersectional in its approach.

Eco-socialism is an ideological position rather than an organization, so it is not easy to provide evidence of institutional practice as opposed to aspiration. However, the Global eco-socialist Network ([www.globaleco-socialistnetwork.net](http://www.globaleco-socialistnetwork.net)), to which both RISE and People Before Profit members are affiliated, can serve as an example. Its founding principles state simply: 'We need a global mobilization of people power. Such mobilization requires a commitment to just transition... The united mobilization we need also requires opposition to all racist, sexist, national, homophobic, and transphobic oppression'.

#### Our Vision of Eco-socialism

Eco-socialism stands for a society that combines collective ownership and democracy, equality and freedom because only through such a combination can we overcome the metabolic rift with nature created by capitalism and establish a society that is environmentally sustainable.

Capitalism is by its nature nationalistic and organized into competing nation states in a way that continually frustrates even a coordinated international response to the COVID emergency. There is no way it can achieve the international solidarity required to meet the environmental crisis.

An eco-socialist internationalist perspective is also essential for dealing with what is already (and will be in the future) a major consequence of climate change, namely a huge increase in climate refugees. At the moment, the category of climate refugee is not even legally recognized but the fact is that as temperatures rise, ever greater swathes of the planet will become unlivable and people will have no choice but to migrate.

In short, nothing less than international eco-socialism will meet the challenge of our times. This doesn't mean that we should expect the whole world to go eco-socialist at once. That is very unlikely to occur but it does mean that if a bridgehead for eco-socialism were to be established in one country, whether it was in Ireland or Brazil or wherever, it would be necessary to spread it to other countries as quickly as possible. And recent history, with for example the rapid international spread of Greta Thunberg's calls for climate strikes and of the Black Lives Matter movement, shows that in today's globalized world this would be an achievable goal.

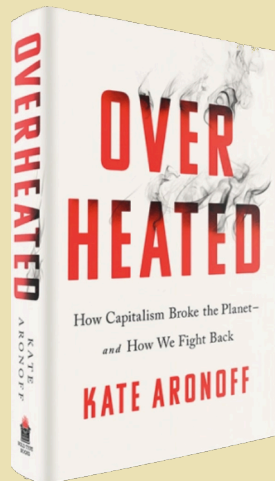
What distinguishes the approach and vision of eco-socialism from what might be considered the more 'mainstream' and dominant strands of the environmental and climate change movement — the likes of Friends of the Earth, War on Want and the Green Party — is that while the latter believe that catastrophic climate change avoidance and a sustainable future can be realized by bringing about a collective 'change of heart' within the existing economic system and state framework, eco-socialists believe that what is needed is a fundamentally different society based on a sustainable relation to nature and production for human need not profit.



Art by Ricardo Levins Morales

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## “Nationalization is Our Best Option to Decarbonize”

BY TY MOORE

[TYTYMO77](#)



DSA's eco-socialist strategy should draw inspiration from Kate Aronoff's excellent new book *Overheated*.

Last spring, as Biden's agenda for his first 100 days dominated the media cycle, DSA's National Political Education Committee responded with our own “100 Days of Socialism” campaign. “Exploring what the first 100 days of a socialist government might look like,” an April 7th article outlining a socialist Green New Deal in DSA's Democratic Left, included

seven “guiding goals,” the second of which reads:

*“We would quickly nationalize fossil fuel companies to phase them out — and try fossil fuel CEOs for crimes against humanity. We would publicly own electric utilities, so we can control the shift to 100 percent renewable, fossil-free energy by 2030.”*

DSA is almost alone within the wider environmental movement in calling for public ownership of the fossil fuel industry, and even within DSA some still argue against it. Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and most of DSA's elected representatives limit themselves to calls for public ownership of electric utilities which, while absolutely vital and more

immediately winnable, remains totally insufficient unless paired with a public takeover of the wider energy industry including the fossil fuel giants.

This is a central argument in Kate Aronoff's new book *Overheated: How Capitalism Broke the Planet — And How We Fight Back*. Aronoff, an acclaimed climate journalist and DSA member, argues that “Green New Deal proposals, though, have largely neglected the need to constrain fossil fuel supplies directly.” She questions the “market logic at work here: by boosting supplies of the good stuff, the bad will wither as it's outcompeted and regulated away by new standards. There are plenty of reasons to be skeptical that this road leads to a zero-carbon economy.”

The two central strengths of Aronoff's book are her recognition that 1) any serious movement to address climate change must forcefully challenge the logic of capitalism and, flowing from that, 2) building a united working-class movement, with organized labor at its core, will be vital to winning that fight. Aronoff's central weakness, which I explore in the final section of this review, is her failure to draw the full political conclusions from her own argument that defending earth's climate requires dismantling capitalism.

### Kate Aronoff's Vision of “A Postcarbon Democracy”

In her chapter titled “A Postcarbon Democracy,” Aronoff begins her case for nationalization by outlining the extreme dangers of leaving fossil fuel executives in charge of their existing assets:

*“Trillions of dollars of fossil fuel profits will have to go unrealized if the world is going to cap warming at 2 degrees Celsius.”*

*“In some ways, the question of whether or not to nationalize fossil fuel assets is even simpler: Do we trust the companies that have spent decades delaying action on climate and spreading misinformation about its existence to steward a transition off fossil fuels, as they claim they will? To value the urgency of the climate crisis and the needs of their workers over the interests of their shareholders? If the answer is no, nationalization is our best option to decarbonize as quickly as is needed to avert catastrophes both economic and ecological.” — Kate Aronoff in Overheated*

*As their decades of denial and delay have proved, executives aren't going to want to give those up willingly. Despite all their newfound green rhetoric, fossil fuel companies annually spent \$1 trillion building out new supply infrastructure between 2014 and 2018. As late as January 2020, ExxonMobil planned to increase its carbon dioxide emissions by 17 percent through 2025, doubling its earnings by expanding its oil and gas business.”*

Aronoff outlines the multiple legal mechanisms available to the Biden administration:

*“If the Biden administration takes up demands from the Sunrise Movement and others to create a cabinet-level office of climate mobilization — modeled on*

*wartime planning agencies — its mandate could mirror that of the bodies that seized factories for the war effort. Invoking the National Emergencies Act to declare a climate emergency could unlock additional powers and spending authority. So could wielding the Defense Production Act (DPA), which was used in the pandemic to compel companies to produce PPE. The Pentagon has long stated that global warming is a threat to national security, so utilizing the DPA to spur along the energy transition wouldn't be too far a stretch. The US has nationalized companies to deal with crises before. It can do it again, whether Republicans control the Senate or not.”*



Throughout, Aronoff emphasizes how the economic volatility of the fossil fuel industry makes them vulnerable. While working-class people reliant on the industry pay the heaviest price, the fortunes of these companies rise and fall with the booms and busts of capitalism, the constant shifts in geo-political alignments, and whether or not governments maintain the generous subsidies, tax havens, and regulatory framework that fossil fuel companies often require to turn a profit. In this context, Aronoff writes:

*“It might not cost much. As of writing this [in early 2021], energy stocks have begun to rebound.... Whereas a takeover of the world’s top twenty-five oil, gas, and coal companies would have once cost some \$1.15 trillion [at their pre-pandemic market valuation], buying them out now would cost somewhere between \$550 and \$700 billion — or half that with a 51 percent rather than full stake. Nixing market distortions like production-side fossil fuel subsidies could bring that price tag down further still. So could any number of common-sense reforms like those mentioned above, including energy efficiency measures and renewable portfolio standards that would erode fossil fuel demand.”*

Despite the continued rebound in fuel prices this year, the general picture remains highly unstable for the industry, and a viable mass campaign to nationalize

them would only deepen investors’ fears. And as DSA’s Green New Deal principles outline, we should “try fossil fuel CEOs for crimes against humanity” and their ongoing efforts to deceive the public. The huge fines and reparation costs levied against these corporations and their billionaire owners should bring the price tag down much further.

### Can We Win Nationalization?

Any serious discussion about winning a Green New Deal on the scale needed must begin with how to build a mass movement strong enough to overcome ruling-class resistance. Aronoff is absolutely right to emphasize that building a powerful climate justice movement requires revitalizing labor and a majority of unions mobilizing their millions of members and resources behind the effort. This is precisely the strategic promise of the Green New Deal. Aronoff writes:

*“We can harness a different kind of feedback loop: by prioritizing climate policies that make people’s lives better in the short run and grow the power of democratic institutions like labor unions, a Green New Deal can swell the multiracial, working-class coalition invested in designing and fighting to expand those programs as they scale back emissions and build up a fairer, cleaner economy. And it can create durable electoral majorities that ensure those changes stick for decades to come. What critics of the Green New Deal have tended*

*to miss is that its policy ambitions are one and the same with its political strategy.”*

Defying conventional liberal wisdom, one of the most valuable contributions of Aronoff’s book is her argument that nationalization could prove *more politically viable*, especially for winning over workers and communities reliant on fossil fuel jobs. In an industry already facing decline, rife with instability and layoffs, Aronoff argues that “nationalization offers an alternative to letting either private equity vultures or CEOs take the money and run, prioritizing communities whose livelihoods have historically depended on fossil fuels.”

### Nationalization could prove more politically viable.

Of course, opposition from big business would be even more frenzied if DSA’s call to nationalize the fossil fuel giants was adopted by Congressional sponsors of the Green New Deal. If Hillary Clinton felt confident enough to proclaim “it’s never going to happen” in answer to Bernie’s Medicare-for-All proposal, the chorus of angry denunciations would be twice as loud against taking democratic control of ExxonMobil.

This may explain why Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Jamal Bowman, and other socialists in Congress have avoided the issue, limiting their calls for public ownership to our country’s electric grids. Unfortunately, most DSA chap-

ters appear to be adopting a similar approach. It’s excellent that DSA chapters from NYC to Texas have launched campaigns for public ownership of regional power utilities, but from what I can tell, with the exception of East Bay DSA’s “Let’s Own PG&E” campaign, most of these don’t even mention the call to nationalize fossil fuels on their websites.

But DSA’s correct tactical decision to prioritize campaigns for public power would help advance, not sidestep, building popular support for a comprehensive socialist program to fight climate change. Such a campaign, if energetically waged by DSA’s public representatives and a wider labor and community coalition, could win majority support. It’s essential that we use today’s fights to publicly prepare a campaign for democratic ownership and control

over all fossil fuel reserves.

### Uniting with Fossil Fuel Workers

Taking nationalization off the table makes promises of a just transition more complicated. For communities economically dependent on fossil fuel companies, calls to increase regulations and tax burdens, or to subsidize clean energy competitors, all amount to a policy of slow strangulation.

Yet a winning socialist strategy for the Green New Deal involves uniting labor and the working class more generally behind the scale and speed of economic change necessary to avoid climate catastrophe, and Aronoff argues that nationalization offers a far more compelling promise of a planned transition for fossil fuel workers than the disorganized decline embedded in the existing GND policy proposals.

*“Nationalization holds some serious political upsides but requires recognizing that a transition isn’t some far-off event. A credible plan to keep people on payrolls could head off opposition, potentially peeling off*

*unions and workers that executives have cynically wielded to curry favor for new infrastructure projects and regulatory rollbacks. The idea behind a*

*managed decline is not to shut off all the taps overnight but wind down the fossil fuel industry’s core operation along a timeline that allows the country to meet energy needs as no-carbon alternatives continue to scale up.”*

If displaced fossil fuel workers cannot find re-employment in a fast-expanding green economy, with equal or better pay, “Green New Deal advocates including Bernie Sanders have proposed five years of full wage and benefits parity... with an option for early retirement to older workers,” Aronoff points out. “Free college and universal health care would make that transition easier still.”

*“Winning such labor-friendly protections will take ambition and a solidarity with social movements and other unions that the international leadership of the trades has been loath to embrace in recent decades as they have tried to protect their own narrowly defined turf. It will also mean recognizing that the interests of fossil fuel workers and their bosses are categorically different things.”*

Despite the enormous popularity of the Green New Deal, including 62 percent of all union workers according to a 2019 Data for



Progress poll, “Labor is often, mistakenly, treated as a unified and reactionary bloc on climate.” Aronoff points out:

*“The ‘jobs versus environment’ narrative peddled by the press and policymakers, including many Democrats, tends to assume that the outspoken building trades union leaders — which have bused workers to Washington in support of the Keystone XL pipeline and lashed out at climate campaigners — speak for the 12.5 million members of AFL-CIO-affiliated unions, for large non-AFL-CIO-affiliated unions like the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the Teamsters, and for working people as a whole. It’s tough to square that picture with the several union internationals and locals, including SEIU, the American Federation of Teachers, the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, and the New York State Nurses Association, that endorsed the Green New Deal... Fossil-fuel-adjacent unions themselves are hardly a monolith, either.”*

### Can We Transition Under Capitalism?

The central weakness of Aronoff’s strategy to win a Green New Deal on the scale needed, including democratic control of global fossil fuel resources, is that she remains trapped within a fundamentally

reformist framework. She spells this out in her introduction:

*“My argument in this book is not that capitalism has to end before the world can deal with the climate crisis. Dismantling a centuries-old system of production and distribution and building a carbon-neutral and worker-owned alternative is almost certainly not going to happen within the small window of time the world has to avert runaway disaster. The private sector will be a major part of the transition off fossil fuels. Some people will get rich, and some unseemly actors will be involved. Capitalist production will build solar panels, wind turbines, and electric trains. But whether we deal with climate change or not can’t be held hostage to executives’ ability to turn a profit. To handle this crisis, capitalism will have to be replaced as society’s operating system — setting out goals other than the boundless accumulation of private wealth.”*

The contradiction between the first and last sentences of this paragraph is never dealt with. There is no disagreement that, long before capitalism can be toppled, socialists should fight for every climate-friendly reform possible. But Aronoff’s clear contention is that it will be possible to

somehow “replace capitalism’s operating system” without actually “dismantling” the economic and military/police power of the capitalist class or replacing it with a socialist “worker-owned” and democratized economy.

While offering a clear-headed strategy to build a mass movement for a Green New Deal, Aronoff leaves vague how mass pressure from below is expected to compel the Biden administration or other capitalist governments worldwide to replace capitalism “as society’s operating system.”

Even if, for example, Bernie Sanders had won the 2020 elections, big business would still wield decisive power over the economy. The army of establishment bureaucrats and politicians dominating the intelligence, security, and military apparatus, the regulatory agencies, not to mention Congress and the courts, would be mobilized to sabotage measures like nationalizing fossil fuels and other vital policies.

The fossil fuel corporations themselves are only one part of the wider global industrial complex that has dominated US and world politics much of the last century. The auto and petrochemical industries, along with aerospace and military corporations, not to mention the

massive investments of global financial institutions — together have reshaped our cities, ripping up the tracks of early public transit systems to make way for highways and suburban sprawl. They have driven US foreign policy in oil-rich regions, fomenting horrendous wars or covert destabilization campaigns against any government seeking to control its nation’s own resources. Enormous amounts of capital are bound up in their technologies, equipment, supply chains, and extraction rights. Decades of foreign aid, military equipment, and political capital have gone to prop up corrupt “friendly” regimes, from Saudi Arabia to Nigeria.

Will this sprawling and dominant section of the ruling class stand by and allow the nationalization of the fossil fuel companies? Or will it view this as an existential threat to its existence and fight back with all the ruthlessness it has shown in the past? Aronoff clearly recognizes that her sweeping vision of an anti-capitalist Green New Deal threatens the fundamental interests of the global capitalist class:

*“Capitalist markets are both deeply dependent on fossil fuels and have been built around them, from the coal-powered Satanic Mills of the Industrial Revolution to markets’ acute responsiveness to even modest*

*changes in the price of oil today. That’s not to say that dealing with climate change means we have to start from scratch, crashing out of either fossil fuel usage or capitalism entirely before making any progress... But it does mean seeing market mechanisms as tools in a toolbox rather than a silver bullet and reasserting a critical role for the state.”*

Here again Aronoff seems to recognize that the full realization of her GND policies will require “crashing out of capitalism,” but she treats the eventual need for a revolutionary rupture as a light-hearted aside rather than the deadly serious strategic question it is. By “reasserting a critical role for the state,” she is pointing toward an advanced green social democratic vision that gradually “replaces” capitalism rather than “crashing out” of it.

But is it really more realistic to hope that pressure politics on the Biden administration, or other capitalist governments, can win new investments in public transit on the scale needed to replace most private vehicles? Will the US capitalist class accept taking vast swaths of housing real estate out of the market to make way for permanently affordable green social housing on the scale needed? What about taking healthcare and education markets from them, replaced with expansive

wealth taxes to ensure quality social services to all? What about the massive carbon footprint of corporate agribusiness? Can full reparations for Black and Indigenous people, and for the poorer nations worldwide bearing the brunt of climate change, be won within the framework of global capitalism?

Even in the most optimistic scenario of electing a Sanders-like president in 2024 and quadrupling the number of socialists in Congress, the history of left reformist governments have repeatedly demonstrated the limits capitalism can impose. Without preparing a mass working-class movement around a strategy to decisively break ruling-class resistance, including broad nationalizations and the replacement of their repressive state machinery with new institutions of working-class democracy, any left government elected to carry out a comprehensive Green New Deal will end in capitulation or deep political crisis.

*Ty Moore is a member of Tacoma DSA. 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.*



# A Message from the State



BY ALEX MONI-SAURI

Instagram: @A.MONI.SAURI

*Alex Moni-Sauri is a poet and artist, and is a member of Seattle DSA. She lives in Kingston, Washington.*

## MESSAGE FROM THE STATE

THE RESOURCE IS SCARCE AND EXPENSIVE  
AND NOW



YOUR NEIGHBOR IS TRYING TO  
TAKE IT





# Eco-Socialists Join Forces with Unions to Push the PRO Act



BY EMMA FLETCHER

@EMFLETCH22

**A just transition to a green economy cannot happen without a mass working-class movement — that’s why the DSA Green New Deal Committee has taken on the fight to pass the PRO Act.**

Gustavo Gordillo, a leader of DSA’s National Eco-socialist Caucus, spoke to why eco-socialists are taking on the PRO Act campaign. “To enact and implement a Green New Deal, we need to radically transform essentially the entire economy, and we need organized workers at the point of production who can create a crisis in those sectors of the economy in order to win our demands, and right now the working class faces really desperate levels of disorganization” (*The Dig*).

The PRO Act, if passed, will break down some of the largest barriers in labor law that keep workers from forming and maintaining strong unions (such as “Right to Work” legislation).

An unlikely alliance between eco-socialists and organized labor has led to an impressive outreach campaign that’s responsible for pushing two of the most conservative Democrats in the Senate, Joe Manchin (WV) and Angus King

(ME), into co-signing the PRO Act with the majority of their Democratic colleagues. All in all, DSA members have made nearly 1 million calls to legislators who had not yet signed on to the PRO Act.

*An unlikely alliance between eco-socialists and organized labor pushed Senators Joe Manchin and Angus King, into co-signing the PRO Act.*

The DSA’s outreach campaign was even praised by the former president of the AFL-CIO, Richard Trumka, who had historically not been very friendly to the radical left. DSA’s eco-socialist fight for the PRO Act is an important step forward in overcoming the long-standing divide between labor and the environmental movement, which has been a result of big business sowing divisions by falsely blaming environmentalists for job losses. Environmental leaders have often exacerbated this by failing to link calls for climate action to calls for green jobs and social spending.

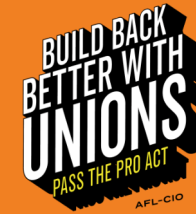
Though the flipping of these two Democrats is extremely impressive, and the alliance between organized labor and eco-socialists is important, the battle for the PRO Act remains an uphill one. Winning the PRO Act will not just come through phone banks; we need a mass protest movement, both to win the PRO Act, but also to remove the largest obstruction to its passage — the filibuster. Without a massive pressure campaign led by the working class to eradicate the undemocratic filibuster, Republicans will continue to stonewall attempts to win labor law reform and environmental justice alike.

DSA is well situated to lead a militant, class conscious fight against the corporations responsible for the colossal environmental destruction that’s heating up our planet. The demand for a Green New Deal must be made by organized labor, and this movement is opening up a new arena for socialists and labor unions to partner in defense of both good jobs and a greener future.

*Emma Fletcher is a labor organizer and member of Seattle DSA.*

## Why Workers Need The PRO Act

The union campaign loss at the Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama was a blow to the working class. Amazon put a lot of money into busting the unionizing efforts of its workers. They lied to, bribed, and threatened their workers into voting no. They were allowed to do this because of the draconian labor laws our country has enacted, primarily the Taft-Hartley Act. This law, also known as the Labor Management Relations Act, was enacted in 1947 as part of the ruling class’ McCarthyite “Red Scare.”



writes that the PRO Act “would limit employers’ ability to intervene in union election campaigns, impose steeper penalties for employers who break the law, make it harder for employers to drag out negotiations and refuse to bargain with certified unions, legalize currently outlawed forms of union solidarity such as secondary boycotts, make it more difficult for employers to misclassify workers as ‘independent contractors,’ and forbid so-called ‘right to work’ laws.” If the PRO Act passes, it has the potential to dramatically change the landscape of worker power, making it much easier for workers to organize.

Matt Huber in his article “Why the Green New Deal Has Failed — So Far” published in *Jacobin*,

## “No Contract, No Snacks!”

### Socialists Stand with Bakers in Nationwide Strike

Approximately 200 bakers who are members of BCTWGM Local 364 walked off the job August 10 to protest proposed overtime

and healthcare cuts. The parent company of Nabisco, Mondelez, made record profits over the past year, but is outsourcing jobs and putting the squeeze on workers.

Photo: Sierra Romesburg



The Mondelez CEO makes \$17 million per year while proposing overtime cuts that could cost workers between \$10 and \$40 thousand per year. The Portland strike has been followed by additional workers walking off the job at factories in Aurora, Colorado, Richmond, Virginia, Chicago, Illinois, and Norcross, Georgia. Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) has been playing a major role providing fundraising and solidarity for the strikers.

The workers are requesting supporters boycott Oreos, Chips Ahoy, and Ritz Crackers for the duration of the strike. No contract, no snacks!



# Three Steps for Labor to Win a Green New Deal



BY STAN STRASNER

@STRSTA11

**It's the job of socialists to show that there are concrete steps working people can take today to put us all on the path to save the world from the climate criminals we call capitalists.**

When DSA member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was elected to US Congress and popularized the idea of a Green New Deal, it marked a new era for the environmental movement. It was a bold agenda to lift up the living conditions of working people as part of a rapid restructuring of the economy toward environmental sustainability. It said that inequality was a cause of climate change, and that a big part of the solution should be

things like a jobs guarantee, free public transit, healthcare, and housing for all.

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) has gone even further in fighting for a Green New Deal that includes taking energy companies into democratic public ownership and leading efforts such as the campaign to pass the PRO Act.

On August 10th, DSA and US Congressman Jamaal Bowman launched the Green New Schools campaign which aims to tax the rich to fund a \$1.4 trillion plan for retrofitting schools with eco-materials and fully staffing school buildings with a huge jobs program in

high-need communities. This campaign presents an outstanding opportunity for educators to bring the fight for the Green New Deal into our unions and workplaces.

*The Green New Schools campaign is an outstanding opportunity for educators to bring the fight for the Green New Deal into our unions.*

Since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, the fight for safe schools with clean air has been a hot issue throughout the country. School buildings across the US have been left in disrepair after decades of inadequate funding; they are not set up to provide a healthy environment for students, educators, and families. Just like the 2018 #RedForEd strike wave of teachers, the fight for Green New Schools can draw massive support from a wide base of the working class with the labor movement taking the lead.

Union activists should seize this opportunity with both hands! Here are three steps that will be important to successfully build the campaign:

## 1

**Link the Green New Deal to the fight against racism.**

The task of uniting the whole working class for a Green New Deal cannot be carried out without a specific fight against environmental racism. Because of a legacy of capitalist class-imposed red-lining, segregation, and forced relocation, Black and Indigenous communities are often the most impacted by climate change. Hurricane Katrina, the Flint water crisis, and the Dakota Access Pipeline are just some of the high profile examples of everyday crimes that the ruling class inflicts on these communities.

It doesn't have to be this way. The Green New Deal should be used as a unifying rallying call in all of these struggles against oppression and for investing in working-class communities. Labor struggles such as Black Lives Matter at School is an outstanding example of how union activists can bring movements for racial justice into our unions.

## 2

**Don't rely on the Democratic Party establishment.**

The Green New Deal is not popular among the Democratic Party establishment who prefer "pro-business solutions" to climate change. Nancy Pelosi shamefully referred to it as "the

Green New Dream or whatever" when it was first brought to Congress. A policy structured to benefit working people that places the cost on big business doesn't work for corporate Democrats.

Labor leaders often rely on their lobbyists friendly with the Democratic Party to push a legislative agenda. This is paired with an idea of limiting political activity to what is acceptable to so-called labor-friendly politicians who are also funded by big business. Workers shouldn't limit themselves to this short-sighted vision and should force politicians to support a movement on working-class terms.

## 3

**Build a strong rank-and-file base.**

Having all the best ideas in the world won't be enough to win a Green New Deal. We'll need to have a strong base of workers who are united around a strategy of taking on billionaire polluters. A rank-and-file approach means busting out of a narrow vision of running a union like an insurance firm for members, toward a union run by the workers that organizes a fight with the capitalist class, aiming to get the whole working class involved.

Union activists should form Green New Deal action committees in every local. These committees can plan

educational programs, do community outreach, and be ready to organize members of our unions to take action together when big climate events occur. These committees can help build up alliances with other unions to plan days of action around climate issues on the worksite and get the media to cover labor's fight for a Green New Deal.

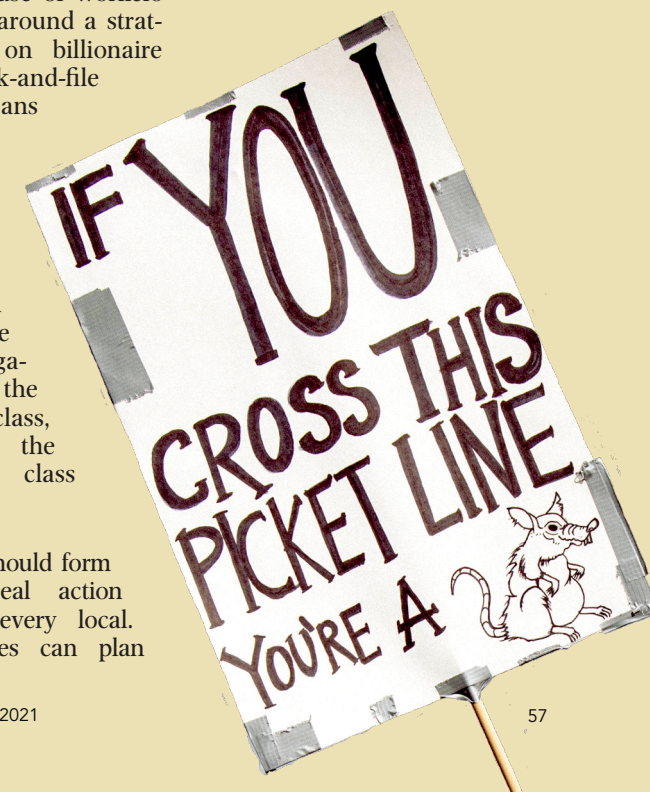
It can be understandably depressing to think about the daunting task of fighting against climate change. Making real headway would rightly mean taking on the most powerful forces in society. It's the job of socialists to show that there are concrete steps working people can take today to put us all on the path to save the world from the climate criminals we call capitalists.

*Stan Strasner is a teacher and former President of the Seattle Substitutes Association. He is also a member of Seattle DSA.*

*Photo: Sierra Romesburg*



Photo: Becker1999 (Paul and Cathy), IMG\_200 (5), CC BY 2.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/, Make Detroit the Engine of the Green New Deal! July 30, 2019





# A Green New Deal for Housing



BY TOM BARNARD

**Calls to build 10 million units of permanently affordable green public housing should be at the center of the climate justice movement.**

Visualize this: tens of millions of Americans living in housing communities that not only provide quality affordable housing for all, but are combined with such amenities as a medical clinic, a community kitchen, free childcare, a library, parks and gyms and even employment opportunities. Frequent and free public transit means most residents rely on public car-share services only for the rare occasions they need a private vehicle. And all of this fed by renewable energy sources, built with union labor and a minimum of fossil-fuel made components.

That may be hard to imagine in a time of massive housing insecurity for both renters and homeowners, exacerbated by a looming eviction crisis coming out of the pandemic. But across the country, there is a growing fight for massive investment in green social housing, an idea that promises to unite campaigns for both climate justice and housing rights.

An organization called Data for Progress that Bernie used for his 2019 election platform has research showing that “a ten-year mobilization of up to \$172 billion would retrofit over 1 million public housing units, vastly improving the living conditions of nearly 2 million residents, and creating over 240,000 jobs per year across the US. These green retrofits would cut 5.6 million tons of annual



carbon emissions — the equivalent of taking 1.2 million cars off the road. Retrofits and jobs would benefit communities on the frontlines of climate change, poverty and pollution and the country as a whole.”

There are also historical precedents. In an inspiring video, Zohran Mamdani, a DSA New York State assemblyman, describes how Austrian socialists in the 1920s and ‘30s pioneered an approach that

offered better, cheaper, and safer homes for everyone, known as “Red Vienna.”

In 1919, in the wake of the carnage of WWI, the Social Democratic Party swept the municipal elections in the capital of Austria, Vienna. Conditions for working people were harsh, and the housing stock was in a rundown state. The new government completely redeveloped the housing stock, building 60,000 units of public housing between 1919 and 1934, financed through taxing the rich. But these were a far cry from what we in the US are used to in public housing. Many developments combined housing with health facilities, a post office, education and other facilities. This model still exists in Vienna today, where 62 percent of housing is public social housing, and the average rent is \$400 to \$600 in US dollars.

## The Failure of the Private Housing Market

The US housing market is constructed on a private commodity model; the construction and real estate industry build housing based not on need, but on the highest possible return on investment. An entire



*Karl-Marx-Hof in Vienna, Austria: an example of social housing construction*

Photo: Kasa Fue, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Karl-Marx-Hof\_Sept\_2020\_8.jpg, Copyright: CC BY-SA 4.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en

network of capitalists, banks, construction firms, developers, rental housing owners, and real estate investment firms collude to produce the most expensive housing possible. The result is a constantly escalating price structure for both renters and people looking to buy a house. It’s also highly racist, with real estate firms and governmental “red-zoning” that kept people of color out of white neighborhoods and forced them to pick from the worst housing options available.

In the meantime, the role of the federal government in providing housing subsidies for low-income people, especially people of color, is simply atrocious. Even in the post-WWII era through the 60’s, the most serious period of intervention in market-rate housing, the public housing built often amounted to warehousing poor people in giant tenements, in contrast to the mixed-income public housing of Red Vienna. It also often destroyed stable neighborhoods where people of color had lived. This was then made worse by the decades of neglect that followed. In the ensuing years, subsidies like Section 8 have been cut to the bone, and

the current HUD model of “mixed income” housing often gentrifies working-class people out of their neighborhoods and they’re forced to relocate to suburbs or smaller cities.

## Profit-Driven Housing = Rising Environmental Costs

This pattern of gentrification not only destroys traditional communities, but also raises carbon emissions and greenhouse gasses, as people are forced to commute long distances for work and other necessities like health care. Most of these communities are far from urban systems like subways and light rail, and have poor bus service.

In addition, the housing stock is older, less energy efficient, less well maintained — especially in rental units where the point is to keep upkeep costs to a minimum. In places like these, children grow up exposed to toxic substances like asbestos, bad internal air flow, and rotting infrastructure. This is one of the reasons why childhood asthma is so closely related to income and housing

conditions. When these units finally deteriorate beyond repair, real estate companies just tear them down and build completely new developments at far higher prices.

Among more established “Big Green” organizations, whose policy priorities are often just palliatives for upper-middle income folks they use as their donor base, you will hear various green solutions — individual solar panels on everyone’s roof, buying electric cars, increasing urban trolleys, and other elite solutions. Among larger units of higher end apartments, you will see various environmental LEED construction levels flung about, seemingly to reassure upper income renters and condo owners that their housing is “environmentally conscious.”

Although there is nothing wrong with any of these things themselves, they are not at the scale needed to meaningfully address the climate crisis. And they are not a solution for working-class people dispersed from neighborhoods they grew up in. Simply put, we need a



new model of housing. Here is where the promise of a Green New Deal comes into play.

### Proposed GND Legislation

The goals of the current GND resolution, re-introduced in Congress in April 2021, calls for "...upgrading all existing buildings in the US and building new buildings to achieve maximum energy efficiency, water efficiency, safety, affordability, comfort, and durability, including through electrification..."

Even stronger is the *Green New Deal for Public Housing*, a proposal introduced in 2019 by Rep. Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Bernie Sanders, which calls for the federal government to spend \$180 billion repairing and retrofitting every public housing unit in the US. Restoring the 200,000 public-housing units that have been lost would require billions in federal spending.

And in 2020, the House of Representatives passed the *Moving Forward Act*, a \$1.5 trillion plan to upgrade the national infrastructure and combat climate change by reducing demand for fossil fuels. The bill included an amendment by Rep. Ocasio-Cortez, that would have repealed the Faircloth Amendment, a 1990s-era rule that created legal obstacles to expanding existing public housing.

Of course, all of those things would help deal with the rocketing increases in greenhouse gas and carbon emissions. They would increase the housing stock and provide improvements in people's living and working conditions. Yet even some of those "solutions" can exacerbate housing inequity. The Transit Oriented Development in South Seattle for instance led to new housing being built that working people could no longer afford anywhere along the light rail

corridor, part of the traditional home to people of color. Thus many of them were dispersed to suburbs and cities far away from any light rail line.

### A Socialist Green New Deal + Social Housing

What we need is to decouple urban planning and housing development from the private market if we hope to solve either the affordability or the climate crisis. Real solutions require a massive build-out of quality public housing for working people, financed by taxes on the rich, as was done in Vienna. We need to construct a housing model that integrates services like health care, education, and work opportunities into a walkable space, and that includes parks, community gardens, and tree cover, especially for our children to enjoy and learn from. This will not only lower carbon emissions and greenhouse gasses, but help to create a vibrant community. These units should be built with the latest green technology, and become part of the society-wide drive to decarbonizing the economy by electrifying everything. Finally, we need a massive expansion of subsidies to working and middle-class homeowners to cover the costs of retrofitting all US homes to lower their carbon footprints.

So how do we get there? The legislation laid out above is an excellent start, but leaving the real estate industry in charge of most of the existing housing stock means there will be a constant threat of having the partial reforms we fight for gradually eroded, as real estate industry lobbyists collude with local and federal governments to roll back hard earned victories. This is the history of the US government in public housing, where they built bad public housing to begin with, refused to maintain and subsidize it, then tore it

down, only to replace it with private/public market rate housing, which further locked in racist zoning practices. In the long run, no housing reforms are safe without a wholesale socialist transformation of society.

We need to bring ordinary people into the current housing struggle so we can build a movement that demands public control over the big landlords and financial institutions that dominate the housing industry. (See *Reform & Revolution* issue #5 for how this struggle has moved forward in Berlin.) We need to fight against the attempts to evict tenants and homeowners as the pandemic lifts. We need to build a tenants rights movement that will resist the double-digit rental increases the mainstream media has already noted. And we need to combine mass environmental struggles with the rising housing struggles. Combining the environmental justice movements with movements around housing and homelessness will do much to strengthen both movements, and solidify their inevitable anti-capitalist nature.

Alongside combining the movements, the key issue is around what program? The existing movements for housing and climate should link immediate demands with a unified national campaign for mass social housing. DSA can play an important role in bringing these fights together at the local level around a coherent national, statewide platform and goals. In this way, the power of the Green New Deal can provide a coherent broad vision to overcome the piecemeal struggles into a common intersectional struggle for our collective future.

*Tom Barnard is a Co-convener of the Seattle DSA Housing Justice Work Group. He is also a member of House Our Neighbors and a founding member of Seattle Cruise Control.*



Art by Mona Caron

from Green New Deal Arts by 350.org | [art.350.org](http://art.350.org)  
A Website to Share Arts Organizing Resources, Skills and Inspiration

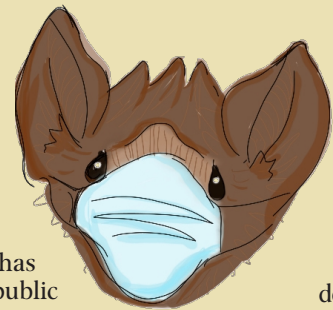


# Animal Agriculture is Very Sick



TEXT AND ART  
BY MEG MORRIGAN

Despite the unconfirmed Wuhan lab leak theories, most scientists believe that COVID-19 came to humans from animals. Whatever the final prognosis is on COVID-19, many other diseases in recent memory, like H1N1, SARS, and Ebola, have spread to humans through animals, and it's clear the risk is growing of even more severe future pandemics.



The pandemic has broadened the public debate around how to prevent such zoonotic diseases, shedding new light on the profound public health and ecological costs of modern industrialized animal agriculture. Capitalist globalization has brought a dramatic expansion and intensification of industrial animal farming methods that is already incompatible with a sustainable future, and it's getting worse fast. Any serious vision of an eco-socialist future needs to include a fundamental overhaul of industrial animal farming methods and a massive scaling back of the industry.

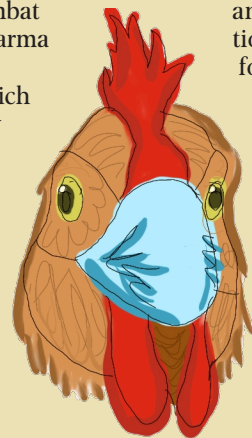
## A Globalized, Capitalist Mode of Farming

Though humans have eaten animals for thousands of years, it is only very recently in our collective history that capital-

ism brought about the scale of industrialized domination over animals and habitable lands that characterizes our current food system. Over the last 200 years most of the planet has moved from subsistence or small-scale farming and hunting to a globalized capitalist mode of farming.

Animals are now bred to be meatier, more docile, and dependent on human intervention to survive.<sup>1</sup>

Animals are raised in increasingly intense factory farms where they have little to no room to move freely, living in cramped and dirty conditions that breed illnesses; to combat those illnesses Big Pharma develops increasingly strong antibiotics, which in turn make any new diseases that develop even more treatment resistant and dangerous. Then either by being in close proximity to infected animals or by eating them, humans become infected by the new virulent diseases which wreak havoc on our immune system and are difficult to treat and cure.<sup>2</sup> It is incredibly important to point out that this is in no



way a "foreign" problem that only happens in populations who eat animals not considered traditional in the US, like bats or chimpanzees, but is just as much a problem in the "West" with chickens, pigs, and cows and our animal agriculture industry.<sup>3, 4</sup>

Finally, as climate change continues, the range of diseases that thrive in warm climates grows, posing a growing deadly threat.<sup>5</sup>

From an ecological point of view, animal agriculture is a disaster. Precious ecosystems and natural habitats are destroyed to make room for either animal farms directly or for the massive amounts of soy and corn that are grown primarily to feed farmed animals. The deforestation of the Amazon rainforest — the world's most important carbon-sink outside the oceans — remains the prime example. In the last eighteen years alone more than 8 percent of remaining rainforest and Indigenous land have been slashed and burned, largely to make room for cattle ranches and soy fields for cow feed.<sup>6</sup>

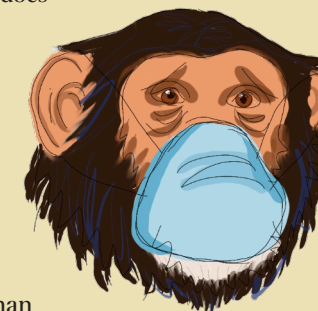
In fact, animal agriculture is the largest industry in the world by

land use — half of the world's habitable land is used for agriculture, of which 77 percent is used for animal agriculture, including pastureland and land used to grow animal feed. This is all the more damning as animal agriculture only provides about 18 percent of global caloric needs. Additionally, animal agriculture directly contributes to greenhouse gas production and thus directly to global warming. The food industry as a whole makes up about a quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, with animal agriculture making up the lion's share of that.<sup>7</sup> Animal agriculture also drives desertification, air pollution, water pollution, soil erosion, and oceanic dead zones.

## A Tragedy for Labor

Animal agriculture is also a tragedy for labor. On the one hand, increased industrialization has by and large decimated agricultural employment,<sup>8</sup> while the jobs that do exist are increasingly dangerous and exploitative. While research into the mental and physical health of slaughterhouse workers is still limited, the research that does exist shows workers in slaughterhouses report higher rates of PTSD, PISD (perpetration-induced stress disorder), and SPD (serious psychological distress) than the population at large.<sup>9, 10</sup> Anecdotal reports and bold investigative reporting shed light on the high levels of workplace injury, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.<sup>11, 12</sup>

So, under the capitalistic enterprise of exploitation of animals for human taste and private profit, public health, workers

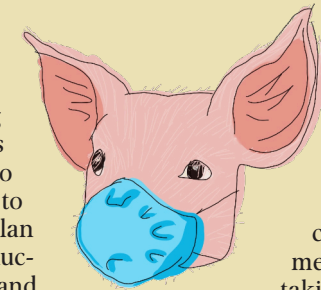


rights, and our climate future are sold out at every turn.

We need a food system that is not beholden to private profits, but rather recognizes healthy food and environmental sustainability as a right for all people. Such a system can only be realized through taking big agribusiness corporations into public ownership to democratically plan global food production. Workers and communities need to be in control of every aspect of the food industry directly, so that decisions can be made that properly prioritize the health and well-being of all people, not the profit margins of a few.

However, even a fully socialized animal agriculture industry, if it maintained the same scale and methods, would still be devastating for the environment and human health. In order to avoid the +1.5 degrees Celsius of warming that would signal climate catastrophe and slow the spread of zoonotic diseases, we need to redefine our relationship with the natural world to be one of regeneration, not exploitation and extraction.

A regenerative food system is one that absorbs as much or more carbon as it releases, feeds the soil as much as it extracts from the soil, does not poison our water ways, yet still provides sufficient food to meet the needs of the global population.<sup>13</sup> Developing a global food system like that will necessarily involve a massive divestment from animal agriculture, which in



turn necessitates a massive public debate and education campaign to create a new voluntary consensus on (not) eating animals. Such a campaign cannot succeed under capitalism, while a small group of owners of big agribusiness have a vested interest in maintaining their profits and control over government policies. Only by taking all aspects of the food system into democratic public ownership and control can we begin to create a food culture that is healthy and productive for people and the planet alike.

Meg Morrigan (they/them) is a member of the Reform & Revolution Editorial Board.

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# Running into a Dead End is **Not** an Escalation of the Climate Justice Movement



BY STEPHAN KIMMERLE

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**A Review of Andreas Malm's Book *How to Blow up a Pipeline* as well as *Corona, Climate, and Chronic Emergency***

Andreas Malm is clearly a dedicated eco-socialist scholar trying to figure out how to advance the environmental movement. His radical ideas have resonated with a growing audience of eco-socialists who are deeply worried about the failure of governments and business leaders to take the dramatic actions needed to avert a climate catastrophe. Naomi Klein quotes Andreas Malm in her book *This Changes Everything* and describes him as “one of the most original thinkers on the subject” of climate change.

Andreas Malm outlines the need to escalate the movement to tackle climate change in his book *How to Blow up a Pipeline* (published by Verso, 2021). Some of the ideas mentioned also appear in *Corona, Climate, and Chronic Emergency* (Verso, 2020). In these works, Malm evokes the romanticism of individuals engaging in eco-sabotage, which he regards as an “escalation” of the movement to fight the climate crisis. Yet Malm doesn't grapple with the question of how to build a powerful mass environmental movement. Despite using the

harsh rhetoric of “war communism” and “eco-Leninism,” he offers little advice on how socialism or workers' power can take on the fossil fuel industry.

## Fighting to Accept Scarcity?

Andreas Malm uses the term “war communism” to include, on the one side, the need to scale back production and ordinary people's living conditions and, on the other, taking drastic measures in the emergency situation created by the climate crisis.

*This is an elitist idea: A self-declared vanguard will act — and the masses can disown those actions.*

Andreas sets up this argument by criticizing the opposite trend among some environmentalists, including some Marxists, who argue for eco-modernism. That belief is that there are technical solutions (carbon storage, fusion energy, electric cars, etc.) that would allow us to avoid basic changes to our current model of mass production and honestly confronting our relationship between the environment and humanity.

Most Marxists, however, including Marx and Engels themselves, do not share the eco-modernist vision. Given the scale and methods that have caused the environmental disaster capitalism has created, they understand the eco-modern strategy is neither realistic nor possible. Engels himself wrote extensively about the interconnected relationship between humans and nature and how capitalism ignores the repercussions of its destruction of the environment — until the repercussions arrive. Technological advances alone will not be enough to avert the climate crisis. The unsustainability of a global economy based on fossil fuels will require not just technological change, but also a fundamental restructuring of the whole infrastructure of an economy based on fossil fuel capital.

In arguing against eco-modernism, Andreas Malm mistakenly concludes that we have to replace the endless search for profits and growth under capitalism, with the opposite — a deliberate approach that scales back consumption and production.

Fortunately, there is a much better alternative. One of the most popular slogans in the movement to combat climate change is the Green New Deal (GND). Even in the liberal form popularized by non-Marxists

like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others, the GND promotes a transition to a carbon neutral economy in ten years, job guarantees for all with full union rights, a just transition focused on BIPOC communities, Medicare for All (free, high quality health care), food security for all, affordable green housing for all, free education and more.

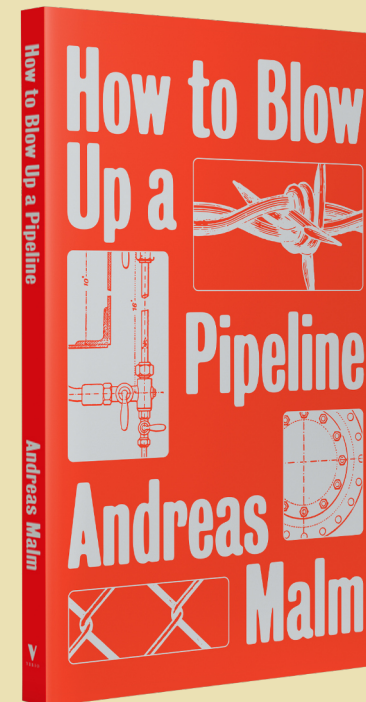
How does scaling back consumption and production work in such a scenario? There is a lot of production that can be virtually eliminated, like advertisements, packaging, the weapons industry, and so on. However, there is also a need to *increase* production of other goods and services: childcare, elderly care, health care, teaching jobs that reduce class size, reforestation, a massive build-out of high quality affordable housing, and so on. The key is that we'll be producing and consuming very *differently* but with an increase in sustainable *wealth* for the vast majority of people around the globe, even in advanced capitalist countries.

The Green New Deal in its best form is environmentally sound (the timeline and the measures proposed in the GND are based on science and offer a path to limit the damage). It also appeals politically to those focused on economic, gender, and racial justice, upholding the potential of a working-class based, powerful movement that takes on all forms of oppression. Andreas Malm himself calls it “the best case scenario.”

Calls for “war communism” or other overwrought terminology appears to emanate from a self-declared revolutionary who never actually grasped the history of war communism, and lacks faith in the ability of working people to build a fighting ecological movement.

## Eco-Sabotage — an Elitist Strategy

There's little analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the climate movement and its organizations globally in Malm's *How to Blow up a Pipeline*. Instead he focuses on one question: pacifism versus violent action. It is in this context that Malm makes an argument for an “escalation” of the struggle. His argument for sabotaging property flirts with some historical examples of



terrorism in 1970's Europe, drawing exactly the wrong conclusions. Andreas Malm writes (my emphasis):

*Extremism can make a movement look so distasteful as to deny it all influence. There is no lack of examples of movements shooting themselves in the foot. Because of the magnitude of the stakes in the climate crisis, negative effects could be unusually ruinous here. Militant formations on the flank of this movement*

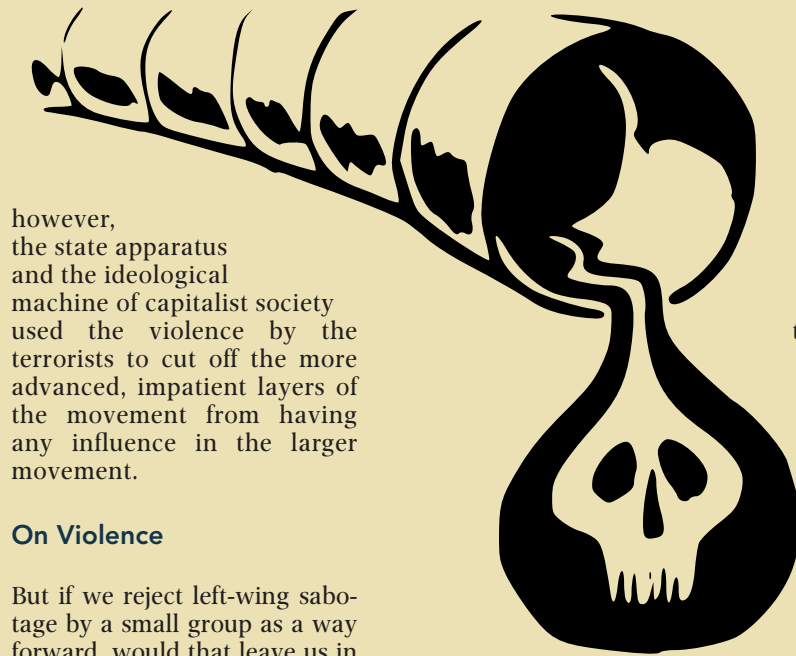
*would thus have to be especially circumspect and mindful of the principles laid down by, for instance, William Smith: practitioners of direct action are responsible before their 'community of opinion' and bound by the duty to advance, not retard, its cause. They may dive into a campaign of property destruction on condition of being prepared to amend or call it off, if it becomes clear that it will draw too much retaliation, vilification, embarrassment on the movement. Now this presents militants with a genuine dilemma. On the one hand, they have to trust the mainstream to reproach and disown them — a seal of the division of labor — but on the other, there might be no better source of information about deleterious consequences for the movement as a whole. When do they ignore the censure and proceed, satisfied? When do they hear it and adjust? If not a catch-22, it is certainly another tightrope. But then no one said militancy should be casual or comfortable.*

The mainstream should “reproach” and publicly “disown” them, but still silently agree with them — and build on them?

This is an elitist idea: A self-declared vanguard will act — and the masses can disown those actions, but somehow these actions will still help to build a mass movement?

The actual experience from the 1970s is clear — while terrorist groups were successful in capturing some radicals' attention, their message was that change comes from a small group of militants, rather than the people's mass struggle. In most cases,





however, the state apparatus and the ideological machine of capitalist society used the violence by the terrorists to cut off the more advanced, impatient layers of the movement from having any influence in the larger movement.

### On Violence

But if we reject left-wing sabotage by a small group as a way forward, would that leave us in the camp of pacifism? Reading Andreas Malm, it appears that these are the only two options. He writes powerfully against pacifism. He refers to past struggles against apartheid, against slavery, against the Shah in Iran, and many other movements that went beyond the framework of pacifism and employed collective resistance, including armed resistance. But there's a difference between the armed resistance of a movement and the individualized action he advocates which he claims would help overcome the shortcomings of the movement.

In the US Civil War, no one in his right mind would have argued that the movement to abolish slavery should have "reproached" and "disowned" the violence of the Northern army. Similarly in the battle against apartheid, the first Intifada of Palestinians, and other revolutionary struggles, resistance, including armed resistance, was employed by mass movements.

In contrast, the elitist action that Andreas Malm promotes is

offered as a substitute for the agency of the masses, let alone their accountability.

*Malm offers no strategy to win over a majority of the working class to take action collectively.*

On the left, there are two ways to discuss violence. Unfortunately, Andreas Malm falls in the camp of those who write abstractly about the necessity of violence as a tool in itself to "escalate" the struggle. This lack of understanding of the history and context of violence helps the ruling classes to portray leading activists in these movements as alien to the broader mass struggle.

On the other side, there are people writing about, defending, and using self-defense — often and rightfully not peaceful nor pacifist — such as striking workers, people protesting pipelines or attacks on Indige-

nous people, anti-racist rallies defending themselves against attacks by police or fascists. The second approach is one that most people understand; the right to defend yourself in a broader sense, meaning you don't have to wait to be attacked, but can mount a militant defense in expectation of such attacks.

The first approach disarms movements, cutting off the more politically advanced activists from broader layers of society. The second approach empowers activists collectively.

### Diversity of Tactics?

Andreas Malm also employs a familiar argument: "diversity of tactics." He views peaceful mass resistance, mass civil disobedience, strike action, and the destruction of property by small groups as all equally valid tactics that we should all welcome rather than judging them objectively.

The "diversity of tactics" slogan has periodically cropped up over the last few decades among militants and some anarchist groups in the antiwar and anti-globalization movement, some environmental struggles, and the anti-fascist movement. It ignores the necessity of pursuing a strategy that actually helps activists develop the struggle and win majority support from the working class.

It allows angry minorities to pursue whatever strategy and tactics they want, including the right to commit property destruction by claiming the right to do whatever they perceive as the necessary next step, regardless of how the majority of the movement views

this. This is not an approach that holds leaders and activists accountable to a movement; instead it weakens movements, and in fact divides them.

Without any hope that the working class could transform society, what is left of Andreas Malm's harsh language about "Eco-Leninism" and "war communism"?

### No Working Class

The current rift between the climate justice movement and the labor movement is a huge obstacle. How can the power of the working class be brought together with the energy and enthusiasm of the environmental movement? Too many unions and union leaders are willing to be held hostage by "their" employers, bound to the fossil fuel, car, and military industrial complexes. However, this issue is of no interest to Andreas Malm's argument about an "escalation" of the struggle because the working class is not the agent for change in Andreas Malm's strategy. In *Corona, Climate, and Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century*, he describes how the state needs to take measures to fight the climate crisis and then asks:

*But what state? We have just argued that the capitalist state is constitutionally incapable of taking these steps. And yet there is no other form of state on offer. No workers' state based on soviets will be miraculously born in the night. No dual power of the democratic organs of the proletariat seems likely to materialize anytime soon, if ever. Waiting for it would be both delusional and criminal, and so all we have to work with is the dreary bourgeois state,*

*tethered to the circuits of capital as always.*

*There would have to be popular pressure brought to bear on it, shifting the balance of forces condensed in it, forcing apparatuses to cut the tethers and begin to move, using the plurality of methods already hinted at (some further outlined by the present author in How to Blow Up a Pipeline: Learning to Fight in a World on Fire). But this would clearly be a departure from the classical program of demolishing the state and building another — one of several elements of Leninism that seem ripe (or overripe) for their own obituaries.*

In the podcast interview with Rupture Radio, Malm argues the same point that a workers' state will not arise anytime soon "because the left is so incredibly weak and the working class is so deeply pushed back and on the retreat politically and to some extent, decomposing at least as an organized social force."

*The "diversity of tactics" slogan allows angry minorities to pursue whatever strategy and tactics they want.*

Andreas Malm offers no vision or strategy to win over a majority of the working class to take action collectively against climate change. Free from considering how to do that, and failing to recognize the struggle of working people as the source of power for change, he instead plays with ideas of property destruction. This neither speaks

to the actual struggle to build movements nor to crystallize lessons for an experienced layer of activists rooted in those movements.

Without any hope that the working class could transform society, what is left of Andreas Malm's harsh language about "Eco-Leninism" and "war communism"? The essence of Leninism has been removed — the power of the working class and its state. There is no historical parallel today with the "war communism" of the early Soviet Union which fought a civil war and imperialist intervention to defend the achievements of the Russian Revolution. Lenin and Trotsky saw "war communism" as a tragic necessity to preserve the improvements of socialism and democracy.

The claim to follow the example of "war communism" is in fact an attempt to avoid the difficult issues of how to build an anti-capitalist mass movement against the fossil fuel industry. The strategy offered for the growing mass movement that apparently disavows such actions, can't direct or control such actions, can't hold anyone accountable, can't even own the successes if they were to happen since they disowned the tactics in the first place. This is not a strategy for the climate justice movement. It's a dead end.

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