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Bold Like a Barista



BY ALEX MONI-SAURI AND STEPHAN KIMMERLE

[@A.MONI.SAURI](https://twitter.com/A.MONI.SAURI), [@STEPHANKIMMERLE](https://twitter.com/STEPHANKIMMERLE)

“Our store is on strike,” declared Sarah Pappin on April 16. The barista’s message to her employer, Starbucks: “Let us be a union!” While she and her co-workers walked the picket line in front of the store at 5th Ave and Pike St in Seattle, salaried managers from all over the city tried to keep the store open.

Despite all the disgusting union-busting methods of Starbucks, so many baristas are stepping up, organizing, and fighting back.

The campaigning style the first unionizing stores adopted was straight out of the well-worn playbook typically used by SEIU and many other large unions: File for a union with the NLRB, keep friendly relations between “Starbucks partners” (corporate jargon to present managers and workers as equal stakeholders with a common goal), and do not raise demands, because doing so would alienate workers who are unsure about the union. With this approach, it is hard to develop the necessary power to force Starbucks to engage in any serious contract negotiations, as high turnover rates make efforts even harder and Starbucks is committed to its anti-union stance.

This playbook is being pushed aside. A number of strikes have shut down Starbucks stores, and as workers build power from

below they are putting forward clear demands. Take Katie McCoy and her co-workers in Marysville. They closed their Starbucks down in a three-day strike, even before filing for an NLRB election (see page 8). They highlighted the need for baristas to have a union with bold demands, like a \$20 per hour minimum wage, ten-hour breaks between shifts, and more.

A similar comparison can be made between the failed unionization efforts at the Amazon warehouse in Bessemer and the newly-formed Amazon Labor Union in Staten Island. The latter won their election with a militant unionism that put workers at the center. They raised the ceiling of possibility in the popular imagination by demanding \$30 per hour (see article on page 10).

A new class-struggle unionism is developing. This new generation hitting the workplace was politicized by the broadly socialist ideas made popular by the Bernie Sanders campaign and through the Black Lives Matter uprising. A good number of DSA members are involved in organizing solidarity and spreading the efforts to rebuild labor.

Over the last 150 years of US history, socialists have played a decisive role in every major upturn in the class struggle.

Today the role of DSA and other class-conscious fighters could prove equally consequential in determining whether the current upsurge continues to develop on the scale needed, or whether the revival is cut across by a combination of employer intransigence and co-option by more conservative labor leaders. Overcoming these obstacles will require strong rank-and-file organization and a layer of conscious socialist activists equipped with clear ideas for how to fight back.

In solidarity,
Alex Moni-Sauri and Stephan Kimmerle



“You Can Take On a Major Corporation – and Win”



ALEX MONI-SAURI INTERVIEWS JAMES SKRETTA, ORGANIZING COMMITTEE MEMBER WITH STARBUCKS WORKERS UNITED (SBWU) IN BUFFALO, NEW YORK

On the tidal wave of unionization victories in shops across the country

Five months ago, Starbucks was a completely non-unionized company. What did baristas do in Buffalo to trigger this enthusiasm for unionizing Starbucks stores across the US? What was that initial organizing push like?

To clarify and just adjust one detail, my store didn't technically win its vote until early March, but the Elmwood and Genesee Street stores won their vote in early December. I'm from the Sheridan and Bailey store, which was part of the second set of stores in Buffalo to have our votes.

After the Amazon Staten Island union vote, EWOC had a 500 percent uptick in people requesting information about organizing.

What did we do to set off this explosion? I think the most honest answer is not much. And that, I think, is the real narrative that people need to understand, which is that workers have been frustrated and wanting to organize for a very long time. I think that they just needed to see that you could take on a major corporation and win.

Testament to that is the organizing approach that our campaign has taken as it has exploded across the country. It's a campaign that's led by the workers themselves. Unlike a lot of big organizing models where union organizers are seeking out organizing campaigns or going into shops and trying to find places to organize, in our situation, Starbucks workers all around the country just

started reaching out to us after we won those first two elections there in Buffalo.

From there, a lot of the workers in Buffalo have been able to offer insight and experience about what going through the process is like, to help out these other stores. Giving them coaching, support, advice – just really being there in solidarity with them as they undertake this process for themselves.

How many stores have unionized so far, and where do you think this is going?

With regard to numbers, right now we're up to almost 250 [that have filed for or won NLRB elections]. Honestly, it's really difficult to keep track of because new stores are filing for elections. It really does seem like every day. It's difficult to say where this is heading. I don't see the pace of unionizing Starbucks stores slowing down.

Honestly, I think that the company's response has a lot to do with this. Just the other day, in one of the meetings that Howard Schultz is having with Starbucks workers at various stores around the country to “hear about their concerns,” a barista confronted Schultz directly about the intense union-busting campaign that the company has been engaged in. We just got a ruling from the NLRB a couple of days ago that the seven workers in Memphis were, in fact, as we always knew, illegally separated. Instead of addressing these concerns, Schultz went on to berate and dismiss the barista for bringing these things up. He said, “If you hate Starbucks so much, why don't you go find another place to work?” That kind of response just makes people more angry and frustrated about the way in which we are deeply disenfranchised in our workplaces.

Amazon workers in Staten Island recently won union representation, and I'm sure



Baristas on Strike. Seattle, 5th Ave and Pike St, April 16, 2022

were also inspired by this Starbucks campaign. It looks like a sign of encouragement for labor in the US – would you agree that this is the beginning of a labor revival?

Oh, absolutely. I think it's undeniable. I have been fortunate enough to do a lot of solidarity work with people in the DSA. Some of the people I've worked with are connected to EWOC, the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee. They put up a tremendous post a few days after the Amazon Staten Island union vote, saying that they had a 500 percent uptick in people requesting information about organizing their workplaces, as well as an even greater uptick in the number of people who have downloaded their workplace organizing manual.

There are many other questions I think that could be asked here – like what will need to change to make it such that the paw actually

has claws? The NLRB is deeply underfunded and is not going to be able to handle, in a timely manner, the massive influx of petitions that are being submitted. They are not going to be able to handle the incredible uptick in unfair labor practice charges that they will have to litigate. They're not going to be able to handle what will happen when there is a ridiculous amount of bargaining that does not happen in good faith.

Right now, the greatest authority for establishing a union is gained through the NLRB and the NLRB union process. It will not be enough though to guarantee workplace democracy. It begs the question of what will need to happen with regard to direct action. It'll beg the question of just how well-organized are the workplaces that are being organized, because direct action will only be successful if you truly have worker buy-in, and people aren't just going along with organizing a union because there are a few strong

leaders at the store who seem to have the best interests of the workers at heart.

This is ultimately why I think it's so important that the workers themselves are the ones that are organizing. And I feel optimistic about this truly being a labor revival because this seems to be a situation where it is the workers themselves who are trying to demand more for themselves, as opposed to the big unionism approach of organizing new bargaining units.

Could you tell us a little more about the union-busting tactics that Starbucks has been using in response to organizing efforts?

Absolutely. I would say that there are two phases to what the company has engaged in with their union-busting program. In the first phase, the union-busting was centered almost exclusively on Buffalo. In Buffalo, the company sent in

over 100 corporate managers to conduct surveillance in the stores. The managers were explicitly told that workers were to never be left alone. It's obvious what they're trying to do here. They're trying to intimidate us and make it such that we don't feel comfortable having open conversations on the shop floor about organizing. They were explicitly feeding us the general false information.

And they're threatening our benefits, saying that we're not going to be able to transfer stores, saying that our managers aren't going to be able to work with us anymore, talking about how you're going to have to pay \$600 in union dues. Which, to be fair, you'll probably pay around \$600 in union dues over the course of a year – but through the contract that we intend to negotiate, you'll probably also get a net raise of around \$4,000.

The most intense aspect of this union-busting campaign was the psychological warfare and psychological manipulation that the support managers would subject us to. They would have one-on-one conversations and two-on-one conversations and in some cases, there were as many as seven or eight corporate managers talking to just one worker to try and convince them that: "We're all family here and we really value our direct relationship. We're all partners. I would just hate for you to no longer be able to speak for yourself." The amount of third-partying of the union that the company and these managers would do is just really incredible.

Third-partying, could you explain what you mean by that?

So one of the most common union-busting tactics is to "third-party" the union. Call the union a third party, an outside group. The company imagines that, one party is the management of the corporation, the second party is the workers, and they want to call the union a third party which is going to get in between the two parties and make it impossible for the workers and the managers to be able to talk directly to one another. But this is just absolutely false, because the union is the workers. We are the union. The union only exists because we make the union. The union is the workers themselves coming together, forming an organization that allows them to fight for themselves and have legal protections under the NLRA.

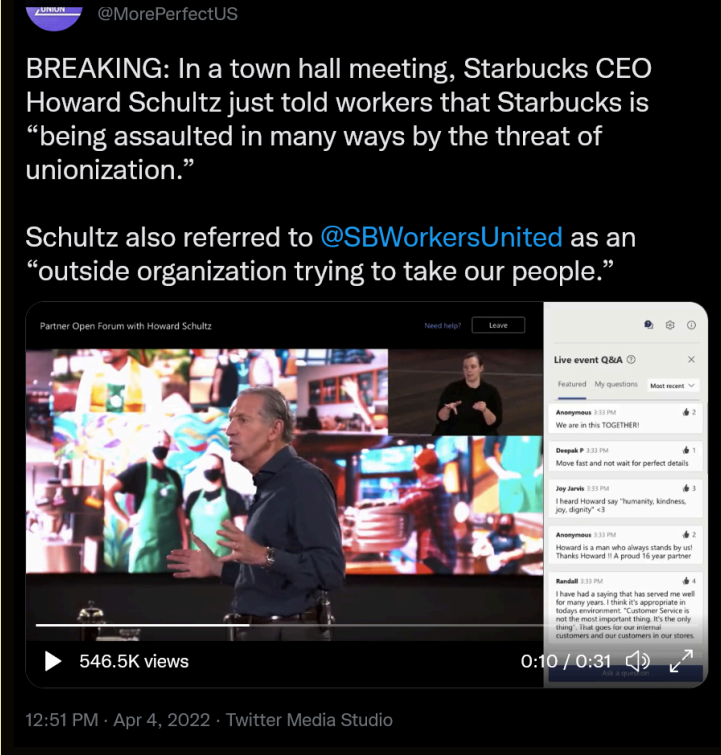
But every company wants to say otherwise, and truly every company will say this: "A direct relationship with our workers is what allows us to be

an effective and agile company." Read what Amazon has said about the union, read what REI has said about the union, read about any company that has employees that try to unionize.

By late November or so, we saw the start of the second phase of the union busting. As time went on in Buffalo, the union-busting campaign became more intense. They started writing pro-union people up for small infractions that people had not had been written up for before. For example, minor tardiness issues. They started rigorously enforcing the dress code, things of that nature, really just like trying to nickel and dime us to start creating a paper trail so that they could eventually terminate some pro-union workers, which is what they have done. In Buffalo, there have been no less than five pro-union workers now who have been terminated.

We saw in Memphis, those seven workers in Memphis were fired almost immediately after the store filed. The NLRB just ruled that that firing was illegal. In Phoenix, Laila Dalton was written up with nine written warnings about two or three days before that store was getting ready to file. She was one of the big leaders there, and they eventually moved to separate her for simply protecting herself at that store.

The company has seen that the approach in Buffalo hasn't worked, and they can't sustain that kind of approach across 200 stores. You can't send 100 managers to all these stores around the country. So instead, what they're doing is putting the responsibility to union bust on the managers



and the district managers and the regional managers, hoping that these managers are so wedded to the company that they will just do what they are told. So it makes sense that a support manager or a store manager will try to quash their workers from unionizing because if they unionize, the company's going to think they're a bad manager and they might get fired.

So these are the things they're doing. Unfortunately, it's really effective, because we talk to workers around the country who are scared. People are legitimately afraid of retaliation.

Winning the NLRB elections is one thing, as you mentioned – then the challenge is to win your first contract. Have the contract negotiations in Buffalo already started, and what are your expectations for that process?

For the two stores in Buffalo that won back in December, contract negotiations have begun. I feel very optimistic about them. I think that the only way though that we're going to win a good contract is if we continue winning stores, because Starbucks is going to come to see that they're not able to handle negotiating with 400, 500 individual stores. If five, six hundred individual stores end up winning union elections, we're talking about 10,000 workers, and the company's not going to be able to disregard 10,000 workers. That's just too significant of a portion of their profit generating machine.

Would you like to highlight anything that we haven't touched on so far?

I would just say that we don't organize because we hate the place that we work. Howard Schultz couldn't be more wrong about this. At Star-



bucks, what I find is that the workers that most want to organize are the workers who have been there for two, three, four, five, ten years.

Howie can say what he wants about corporations being under assault by the threat of unionizing. But all he does is show that he doesn't actually understand what it means to be a worker in what he likes to think is his company.

This is our company. If we're all partners at Starbucks, then it's our company just as much as his

company. We're going to stand up for that and we're going to fight to make that a reality, not just in aspiration, but legally, through a contract. ■

James is a SBWU Organizing Committee member and former Starbucks barista from the Sheridan and N. Bailey store in Buffalo, New York.

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

Picket line in Seattle, 5th Ave and Pike St, April 16, 2022. At the megaphone is Katie McCoy, barista from Marysville, WA, who is interviewed on the following page.



Starting Backward, With a Bang

Stephan Kimmerle speaks with Katie McCoy, Starbucks barista in Marysville, Washington, about their four-day strike and the demands that they put forward.

We're here on April 16 at the picket lines of a Starbucks workers' strike in Seattle at 5th and Pine – but this is not the store you work for.

No, I'm actually from Lakewood Crossing, out in Marysville. We just finished our four day strike.

Fantastic. How did you do that?

We organized pretty much overnight. We walked out of the store, we went to my house and we started drawing up signs, making flyers, creating a list of demands and just communicating with partners, seeing what they wanted to see from Starbucks. And then we planned a strike for 10am the next day. And we had a pretty big turnout, for it being planned basically overnight.

What were your demands?

One thing from our list of demands is ten hours scheduled between shifts. We have seen partners missing breaks – like I would close and then I would open the next day. And it's really harsh on partners and their mental health and their physical wellbeing to work those kinds of hours.

Another thing is more accessibility within stores. We have partners who are disabled, and Starbucks claims to be a very progressive and a safe place for disabled partners. And it really hasn't been. We have a partner that has asked for VRI services to be able to communicate with customers. And he's been with the company for almost six months and has not seen those services. so we're calling on Starbucks to actually be more progressive.

We're also calling for a \$20 an hour wage. We've definitely seen that they have the funds – they gave former CEO Kevin Johnson a 39 percent raise and a 24 percent revenue increase. Yet I've been with the company for over a year and have not seen a pay increase.

What was the outcome of your four-day strike?

On the fourth day, we shut down our store and collected 70 percent of our union cards. And we filed for a union election.

We kind of started backwards – we started with the strike, the big bang, and then we filed for our union election, but I feel like that is how you create that credible strike threat. That's how you show corporate you're not playing around and you're not willing to play their games anymore.

Have you experienced any union-busting retaliation from Starbucks?

We were without a manager and were told it could be up to six months before we got a new one. The day after we got back from our strike, all of a sudden we had a new store manager. And she's been scheduling one-on-one meetings with our partners. We've also been noticing hours slowly starting to drop for partners who were openly out at the strike and supporting it. And I can tell it's gonna get worse from here – but we're ready. We're so ready at our store. We've been reading articles, preparing each other for what's about to come, because they're gonna do as much as they can to disrupt the union in our store. We're just not gonna let that happen.

Starbucks workers in Buffalo fought for a union. Now we have the State Island Amazon success. Is this the beginning of a new labor movement?

I hope so. I think that labor movements are the future. They've been the past and they are the future. Workers are ready to organize and stand in solidarity with each other and show the corporations that we are the ones who make the profits. We're the ones running the companies, not them. They are the faces, but we are the ones truly making the profits.

If all your dreams were to come true, what would happen tomorrow?

We would be a unionized store making \$20 an hour!

Thank you so much!





It Wasn't Just Chris Smalls



BY MANUEL CARRILLO AND ANYA MAE LEMLICH

Three Theses on What the Labor Movement Can Learn from the Amazon Labor Union's Victory

Since the Amazon Labor Union's (ALU) victory on March 30, we've seen countless articles citing the ALU's "unconventional" and "unorthodox" organizing tactics. We believe that their tactics – a strong worker committee inside the workplace, worker-to-worker organizing skills, and creating camaraderie – are tried-and-true methods that both socialists and radical labor organizers know work. But importantly, what was new and exciting about the ALU's win was their willingness to take risks, put forward bold demands, and the level of control and decision-making power that workers themselves had over the campaign.

Here are three theses on what we took from the ALU's victory:

1) A Committee of Rank-and-File Worker Organizers

"What we noticed was that they didn't really have too much of a workers committee inside of the building like we do in Staten Island. That was one of their biggest mistakes."

– Christian Smalls on the podcast *Chapo Trap House*

When the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) attempted to unionize an Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama in 2021, two worker organizers from the JFK8 Staten Island Amazon warehouse went to help the effort. Christian (Chris) Smalls, a worker leader who was fired in March 2020 for leading a walk-out protesting a lack of COVID-19 safety measures, and his coworker, 6-year warehouse worker Derrick Palmer, tried to talk to workers in Bessemer. "So when I went down there I'm

expressing to them, like, I'm here as an actual worker, former worker, trying to make that bridge saying this is the reason you need to sign up for the union, and I thought that would be helpful to their efforts," Chris said on an episode of the New York Times podcast *The Daily*. But he continued, "[RWDSU] didn't allow us to rally. They barely wanted us to talk to workers."

Ostensibly, RWDSU organizers didn't want Chris's story of retaliation – that he got fired for organizing at Amazon – to scare workers. The fear the boss can create through retaliation – that's real! And we'll come back to it soon. But the real story is that RWDSU did very little to find and empower worker organizers who could provide strength and encouragement to their coworkers by standing up for each other in the warehouse.

The campaign in Bessemer relied on staff organizers, prominent public figures including celebrities, and groups outside of the community in Alabama. Instead of building up a strong worker committee inside the workplace who could take ownership of the campaign and talk to their coworkers, they relied on paid staff and media attention. RWDSU organizers only talked to workers outside the warehouse gates, not visiting workers at their homes, away from employer surveillance. And the organizers standing outside the warehouse gates were not workers themselves, as they would be at JFK8.

After being denied the ability to talk to Amazon workers in Bessemer – and after the Bessemer union loss – Chris and Derrick decided that their model of organizing in the JFK8 warehouse would look different. That meant having workers themselves lead the campaign.

Derrick explained:

"The main reason for me was going down there and seeing how Bessemer handled their

campaign, the fact that they weren't engaging with these workers was a red flag, about working with a big union ... we knew [starting our own union] was going to be harder, obviously resources, you know, money, that's what big unions provide. But the fact that we're the workers and we're going to connect with them? That's all we really needed to know."

Workers themselves connecting with other workers inside a shop – this is the key ingredient for successful organizing. It's what organizers mean when they talk about the importance of a strong "worker committee": a team of committed workers who take on leadership and learn how to organize their coworkers. These are the people like Derrick Palmer, Angelika Maldonado, Michelle Nieves, Brima Sylla, and others who organized their coworkers to form ALU together in JFK8.

And it's the opposite of the RWDSU strategy in Bessemer. When Amazon workers ran into union organizers at the bus stop outside of the JFK8 warehouse, instead of talking to outsiders or union staffers, they were talking to their own coworkers – people like them who understood what it was like to do the same grueling work, day in and day out.

You Can't Third Party This Union

For Chris and Derrick, running a union campaign where the workers were the ones organizing meant that they had to create their own independent union. This way, they ensured that the worker committee themselves were the ones calling the shots. Decisions around tactics and workplace actions weren't being developed in boardrooms in D.C. or Manhattan by staff who'd never worked in a warehouse. By remaining independent, ALU's worker committee had full control and oversight over their campaign's strategy and decision making, rarely the case in campaigns run with the support of most large, established unions.

When Amazon's anti-union campaign tried to sell workers on the idea that the union was an

outside "third party," it fell flat. The union was their coworkers. Of course, the response to a company trying to "third party" the union should always be, "no, the union is us – the workers," because this is the kind of labor movement we're fighting for. With the ALU, this was especially hard to disbelieve.

For us, the lesson is that a strong worker-led campaign is essential to win – and essential to transform our labor movement. This doesn't mean that we only need to form new, independent unions in order to do this, however. Some established unions are better than others at building up strong committees of fighting worker organizers who can take real ownership; and it's the key task of the labor movement to re-introduce this type of shop floor-centered, democratic organizing across all our unions.

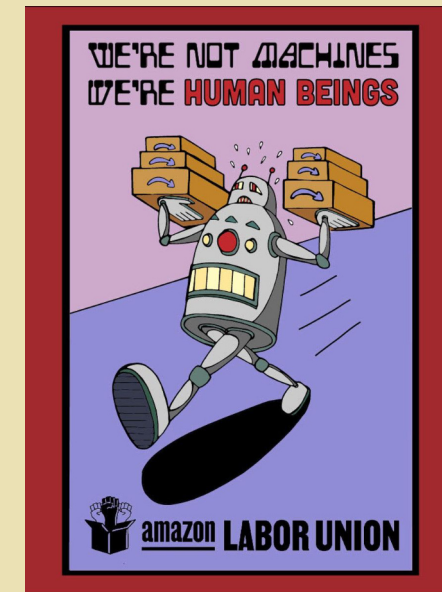
It Wasn't Just Chris Smalls

At ALU's victory press conference, ALU president Chris Smalls spoke: "It's not about me, Amazon tried to make it about me from day one – and I never said it was gonna be Amazon versus Chris Smalls – it's always gonna be Amazon versus the people. [...] And today the people have spoken, and the people wanted a union."

It wasn't just Amazon who tried to make it about Chris. Most of

the media, too, has focused almost exclusively on Chris's leadership in the campaign. Chris's leadership is important – the labor movement needs visionary, respected leaders who come from the shop floor and are committed to worker-led organizing and rank-and-file democracy. It's probably true that the win at JFK8 would not have happened this soon, or in this way, had it not been for Chris. And yet the decisive factor was not Chris's leadership, but the leadership of the entire worker committee in the shop (who Chris himself helped recruit!).

When labor organizers talk about building worker committees, they often talk about finding "organic leaders" – workers who have built a lot of trust and respect with their coworkers and can move them to do hard things. The worker committee at JFK8 was



Poster produced by the Amazon Labor Union, ALU

made up of many “organic leaders.” Derrick Palmer, the vice-president of ALU, has worked at Amazon for six years. “He has a larger influence on his coworkers,” says Chris.

Chris’s firing in March 2020 likely instilled more fear into the JFK8 warehouse. This isn’t surprising – bosses use retaliatory tactics like firing outspoken or committed organizers as tools to sow fear and division, in order to make it harder to organize. According to Chris, Derrick Palmer helped overcome this fear.

“His coworkers know who he is, they see him all the time in the media speaking out about workers’ rights, speaking out about their rights because he’s an Amazon worker, and that helped encourage workers to not be afraid anymore,” said Chris on Chapo. “Because they’re like, wow, Derrick’s been here... and he still hasn’t been retaliated against. So the retaliation rumors and stuff like that started to dwindle because he’s still employed and he’s not fired or on a final [warning] or on a write-up.”

2) Worker-to-Worker Organizing Tactics Are Not New

“Everyone thinks we had these tactics worth thousands of dollars but basically we were just being ourselves.”

– Angelika Maldonado on the EWOC panel

Worker organizers relied on existing relationships among their coworkers to be able to have conversations about the union and move people to stand up for themselves. This is a key tenet of worker-to-worker organizing – that we organize through the existing connections in a given workplace. Imagine you’re scared of taking a risk to stand up to the company at your workplace – how different would it feel to have a conversation about organizing with a friend, or even someone you’re friendly with at work, versus a total stranger?

Michelle Valentin Nieves, one of the worker leaders, explained what this was like for her.

“I’d already been at that facility for three years, so I pretty much already knew a bunch of people and I was already a familiar face ... So they would feel, for the most part, they would feel comfortable speaking to me, when I would go up to people and try to speak to them about the union.”

Brima Sylla, another key organizer and a leader in the African community in Staten Island, was able to connect with many of the immigrant workers in a way that other organizers weren’t. “I’ve got skills... I speak French, Arabic, English, and three African languages,” he told Eric Blanc in Jacobin. “So that made it a lot easier for me to communicate with immigrant workers inside the building. And there are a lot of us here at Amazon.”

Another tried-and-true tactic in organizing is that we tell the truth to each other – that we dig deep to be honest about what it’s actually like to work for a company that sucks our soul, what we want and can’t get in our lives because of it. We tell our own stories to each other because that’s part of where our power comes from! Angelika described how in conversations with coworkers who didn’t know her, she was most successful when she was vulnerable.

“[I’d] let them know that I’m a single mother of a 4-year old child, I have a son. You know, I work 12.5 hour shifts three days consecutive, and on my off days, I’m here every day. I would say about 90 percent of the time that’s when people would really listen to me.”

Creating Camaraderie

So much has been made of the bus stop outside the JFK8 warehouse that you might get the sense that every organizing conversation happened there. As Chris has elaborated in many interviews, it was the “inside outside” strategy that worked – the organizing going on inside the warehouse was absolutely crucial to the win. While the bus stop organizing was not the deciding factor, it was still crucial in recruiting new worker organizers, helping workers feel strong, and creating a sense of community.

Workers at the bus stop passed out food and weed, and paid for their co-worker’s taxis to the hospital. They had BBQs and bonfires late at night, and they blasted music and sang songs together. These aren’t wildly new tactics, but the workers at JFK8 got creative with how to create a supportive culture among coworkers, and they prioritized this community in a way many campaigns don’t.

Standing Up to Fear

Amazon spent millions to create fear in the warehouse: hiring paid union-busters, holding captive audience meetings, and trying to scare people into not only voting no, but also staying silent. The ALU worker committee counteracted

this by using powerful methods that many unions use. They spoke up in captive audience meetings, so that workers would see that they weren’t afraid to go up against the union-busters. In fact, Brima Sylla joined the worker committee after seeing Cassio, an ALU member, get kicked out of one of these meetings after “correcting the lies they were telling us.”

The ALU committee was also visible about their support for the union inside the warehouse, passing out t-shirts and lanyards to workers. This is a key organizing tactic to make people feel strong by showing support visibly. As Chris said, “we had organizers that were vocal in the building, that were wearing ALU shirts from day one, and we were passing them out inside the building, just showing workers that you can’t be afraid when you’re going up against your employer. You gotta stay militant, stay together.”

3) Assessing Conditions, Being Bold: We Have to Take Risks

The ALU was public about unionizing from the very beginning of organizing, even before they started collecting signatures. Unlike many union campaigns, they didn’t have an “underground” period, where workers are organizing in secret, away from the boss, to build up support and prepare workers before the anti-union campaign starts. And when they did file with the NLRB for a union election, they did so with only 30 percent support from the workers in the warehouse – the bare minimum needed to hold a union election. In fact, the first time they filed, they had to withdraw because they had less than 30 percent. In contrast, most unions’ rule of thumb is to file with a supermajority – usually aiming for 60 to 70 percent support – with the assumption that workers will get scared and lose support during the long, drawn-out campaign between filing and the election.

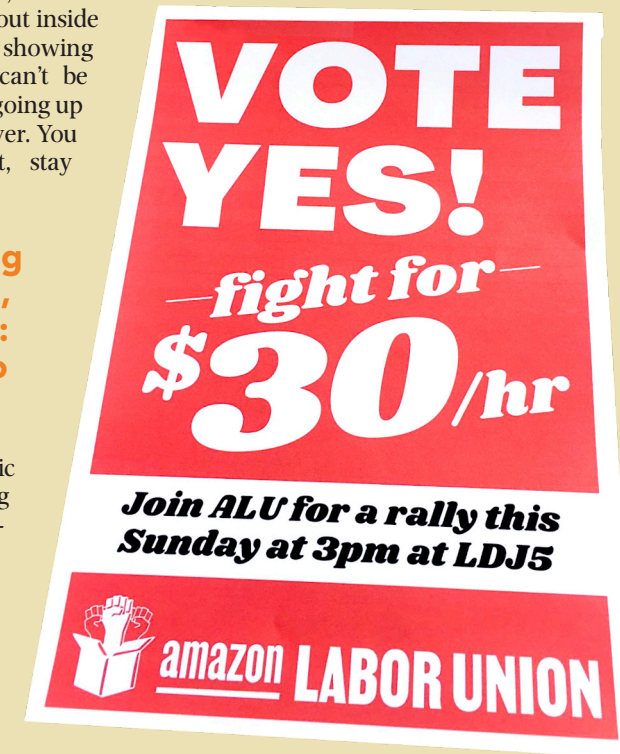
These are risky moves that fly in the face of the labor movement’s conventional wisdom. But at Amazon, and particularly the JFK8 warehouse, these strategies made sense. Turnover in Amazon warehouses is 150 percent each year. Every time the ALU would try to get above 30 percent signatures, many of those signatures would be invalid, because so many people didn’t work there anymore.

The lesson is that we can defy conventional labor wisdom, but we don’t have to. The particular conditions in this Amazon warehouse – the high turnover rate, 8000-person workforce, union-dense city, and the early COVID organizing – meant that organizing publicly from the beginning and building support after filing worked for them. But it won’t fit conditions everywhere. We have to take risks, but we have to be smart about the ones we take.

Finally, it helped that the ALU put forward concrete demands like “\$30 minimum wage! Longer lunch breaks! Free shuttle buses to work!” These were born from the shop floor, and raised expectations for workers. They weren’t promises or guarantees of what the ALU would accomplish – instead they were pointing towards a vision that said, we will fight and win these together. ■

Manuel Carillo is a member of Seattle DSA and has been active in the labor movement for 8 years. He currently works as a Data Organizer for Student Researchers United – UAW. He has previously worked for SEIU 925 and is a former shop steward with UNITE HERE Local 8. He is also a member of DSA’s Reform & Revolution caucus.

Anya Mae Lemlich is a member of Seattle DSA and has been active in the labor movement for 4 years. She previously served on the Local Council of Seattle DSA and is a member of DSA’s Reform & Revolution caucus.



A Response to Reform & Revolution's Position on the Rank & File Strategy



We are the Power
– slogan of the uprising in France 1968

In the last issue of Reform & Revolution magazine, we focused on the state of labor in the US and DSA's approach to the Rank & File strategy. Stephan Kimmerle laid out our caucus' position in an article titled "For a Socialist Rank & File Strategy," in which he wrote "we need to revive the Rank & File Strategy. ...we need to build organized opposition to the dominant trend within labor-business unionism." The article also outlines R&R's understanding of the political trends and caucuses within DSA, with their differing methods and perspectives on labor. On CPN and its various successors, Kimmerle wrote:

Ryan Mosgrove, one of the leaders of CPN before moving on to the Renewal slate in 2021 criticized the Rank & File Strategy [...] adopted by the 2019 DSA convention for assuming "[f]irst, that all labor leadership are by their nature 'conservative' and antagonistic to the interests of the workers they represent regardless of, whether they actually are or not. Second, that socialists represent the real leadership of workers, again regardless of whether they even have members in that union or not, by their nature as socialists."

He's right that not all union leaders are conservative. However, his argument lacks a structural critique of the union bureaucracy and how to fight it. He ends up with a pragmatic, ad hoc criticism of conservative union leaders – this or that union leader might sell out; others might not. He covers up the overwhelming dominance of pro-capitalist politics and business unionism among most union leaders with alleged modesty: Who are we – a small, newly-emerging socialist organization – to criticize unions (or their leaders) from the outside?

[...] CPN also downplayed the role of the union bureaucracy and denounced the Rank & File Strategy as "seek[ing] to create a militant minority that can be a vanguard for the rest of the workers in a given union or union local." [...] CPN's approach does not arm workers and DSA with an understanding of where business unionism comes from, or how to fight it.

We appreciate that Ryan Mosgrove took the time and effort to respond to our critique, and to engage in comradely debate around a socialist approach to the Rank & File Strategy. The following is his contribution to this debate.

For An Actual Strategy, Not Simplified Internal Struggles



BY RYAN MOSGROVE

@WORKERISM

A successful labor strategy must reckon with the entire field we operate on – economically, politically, and even internationally

In his article on the Rank-and-File Strategy Stephan Kimmerle presents an overview of the various labor strategies expressed within DSA. The main thrust of his critique is that socialists must emphasize the political struggle within labor to counter the prevailing trend of business unionism. While Kimmerle raises some cosmetic differences with how the Rank-and-File Strategy (RFS) has already been articulated within DSA, he doesn't grapple with RFS's inconsistency in accomplishing even its own stated goals or how it can in fact blunt the political struggle rather than sharpen it.

The Example of the Teamsters Election

The Teamsters election is a recent example of this trend, which resulted in the election of the first slate endorsed by Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) since 1991. Incoming General President

Newly-elected leadership around general president Sean O'Brien, who led the Teamsters United slate, (endorsed by TDU), pushed for a combative approach to unionizing Amazon, and is preparing 2023 negotiations for a new contract with UPS. In 2019, UPS workers opposed the two-tier wage system, and a majority voted against it – only to see it imposed by the Hoffa administration anyway. Photo: TDU



Sean O'Brien, who led the TDU-endorsed Teamsters United slate, defeated Hoffa's chosen successor. The defeat of the old guard comes on the heels of a concessionary UPS master agreement, which members initially rejected before the leadership used an obscure rule in the bylaws to approve it against their will. Given the context, RFS advocates have presented the election as a victory for their approach, a point which R&R largely echoes.

We need an actual strategy that soberly ties together all of the fronts labor faces, rather than condensing these strategic questions into simplified internal struggles.

The reality is less straightforward, however. O'Brien spent almost his entire career not as a reformer but squarely within the old guard camp with a long

history of harassment against reformers. In 2013 he made threats against reform supporters in Providence Local 251 and in 2016. While he was running on the slate with Hoffa for the General Executive Board, he was investigated for threatening TDU convention delegates attempting to nominate opposing candidates and was later found to have lied to investigators about it. Beyond O'Brien, the slate itself is still mostly former old guard with only eight of twenty-four members being bona fide reformers, only three of which are TDU members.

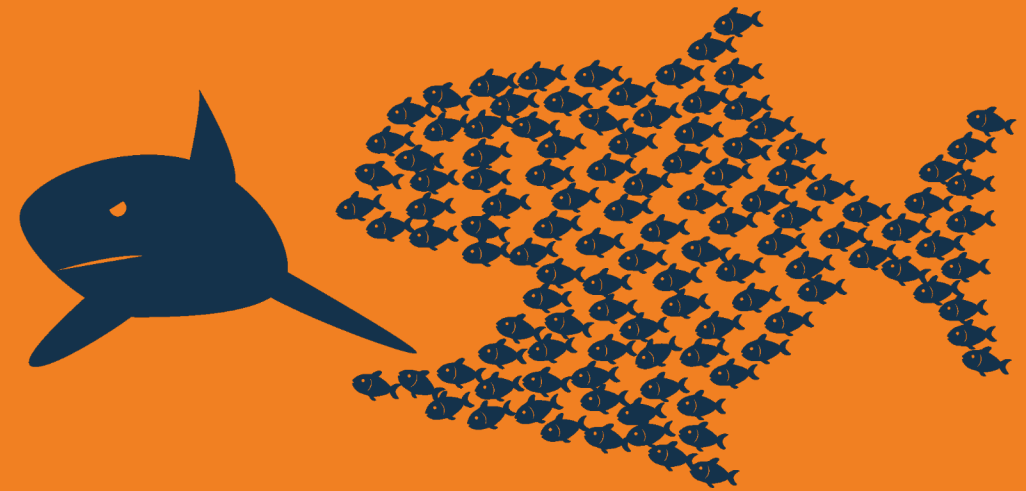
The article "Return of the Teamsters" in Reform & Revolution's last issue which covers the election condenses many of these problems in favor of the more optimistic tone echoed in most left coverage of the election. They counter concerns about the slate's shaky record by stating that TDU's influence on the platform and their ability to mobilize the rank and file to which Teamsters United owes its victory "suggests it will continue to play a major part in the OZ administration." With only 15 percent of members even voting in the election, the lowest turnout since the move to direct vote in 1991, it's difficult to establish what decisive role TDU played outside a handful of specific locals.

TDU itself was divided on the question of getting in bed with O'Brien. Former TDU candidates like Tom Leedham and Sandy Pope, who led their ticket in 2001 and 2011 respectively, were among many high profile reformers who opposed the endorsement and subsequently distanced themselves from TDU. At that same convention, members were alarmed by the removal of the "Rank-and-File Bill of Rights" from the TDU constitution at its convention, which included core demands such as just salaries for union officers. The stated reason being so that it could be revised and later reinserted, but some have alleged its removal was motioned at O'Brien's request.

Despite this, most left labor coverage on the election has papered over many of these political questions and its implications for the left. The Hoffa-endorsed Teamster Power slate was no alternative of course, exemplified in the slate's architect Rome Aloise being found guilty on corruption charges just weeks before the election. The problem goes beyond lesser evil type arguments. Reducing the complex challenges facing labor to mainly an internal ideological one dulls our understanding of what is actually happening and our ability to wage that struggle effectively. Were the results a change for

"Red state revolt" was a wave of strikes and protests of educators in 2017 and 2018 in southern states which have been politically controlled by Republicans. This photo shows teachers in Arizona on strike on April 26, 2018

Photo: Photo by Gage Skidmore for Arizona Education Association, tinyurl.com/arizona-red-state-revolt, Copyright: CC BY 2.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en



the better? Without question. Do they represent a strengthening of socialist forces within labor? That answer is far more muddled and may in fact demonstrate how fundamentally marginal we are more than anything else.

Magical Thinking

In their 2015 essay, "The Crisis of Labour and the Left in the United States," veterans of the US Labor Party effort Adolph Reed and Mark Dudzig contextualize how these internal struggles are expressions of a broader political crisis and outline two "dysfunctional responses" to the rise of neoliberalism from the late 1970s onward.

One openly accommodates neoliberalism and shifts its focus away from class conflict, instead seeking common cause with "willing employers" while turning unions into little more than extensions of management's own HR department.

The second model, "persists both as a cynical pageantry of protest as prelude to defeat and its mirror image in the magical thinking that produces the rank-and-file fetishism and 'activist' fantasies that this or that spontaneous action will spark a mass movement." This approach, which is predominant in much of how the left talks about labor strategy, bases itself on a terrain that no longer exists. It assumes the "framework of postwar pluralist liberalism" as well as working-class mass organizations that would make tactics like those RFS seeks to deploy more consistent, but in the modern context of this broader crisis end up totally rudderless. Unable to find much tangible

success, and when it does, unable to capitalize on it.

Magical thinking produces the rank-and-file fetishism and 'activist' fantasies.

We need an actual strategy that soberly considers these broader factors and ties together all of the fronts labor faces, rather than condensing these strategic questions into simplified internal struggles. Without it we will continue to find ourselves trapped in this same cycle of bitter defeat: Heroic organizing drives like at Bessemer, busted by a corporation that knows it can violate what passes for labor law in the US at will. Inspiring mass strikes like in West Virginia, who within a year had almost everything they won washed away by a uniformly pro-business legislature.

A successful labor strategy must reckon with the entire field we operate on – economically, politically, and even internationally – linking together diverse sites of struggle under a unified plan to ultimately forge a working-class mass organization with the potential to change not just the pieces, but the whole board.

Ryan Mosgrove is a union organizer, former 2021 National Political Committee candidate, and editor for New Majority.

This is Ryan Mosgrove's response to an article from our last magazine on labor, tinyurl.com/rnr-labor, and the broader position advanced in our magazine tinyurl.com/rnr-07 (PDF).

Freedom is something people take

The morning air is still
and my neighbor's flag hangs
limply in its socket. TV sounds
float from a high white balcony,
oiled voices narrating
a war. Whose cities will it
flash through; whose bodies
will be left? Thirty seconds of noise
loops into a coil: guns and bombs
and countries full of kids. Whose
fast white dog is this, tearing
through the trees?

Next door a German shepherd
throws himself against the window
at a person walking by. I picture
my neighbor beside a blue painting,
padding down a hallway, lacing up his shoes.
A person is struck without warning
by the logic of numbers, the count
cleaved from meaning as it rolls across
the screen. Each digit rooted
lightly in the living world, born
to human parents.

I think of all the people
who are so much like myself,
my neighbor – each of us home
to dark pulses of clarity
that we, the numbers
huge and growing, will not comprise
a simple math of coins, spent and traded

but ancient formulas of phase change,
seismic shift, and electricity. Hundreds of birds
drop out of the sky and lift again sharply at once
on a fresh strong wind.



BY ALEX MONI-SAURI

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We Won't Go Back



BY MEG MORRIGAN

Book Review | *Without Apology: The Abortion Struggle Now* by Jenny Brown

Without Apology: The Abortion Struggle Now was published in October 2019 as part of a collaboration series of books between Jacobin Magazine and Verso Books, which offer socialist perspectives on politics, economics, and culture. It was written by feminist activist, National Women's Liberation organizer, and former Labor Notes editor Jenny Brown. The 150-page book is highly relevant in the shadow of upcoming Supreme Court rulings that threaten to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, and offers an accessible primer on abortion from a woman's liberation perspective. However, for this transgender Marxist reviewer, Brown's political analysis leaves something to be desired.

The bulk of the book is distributed over four chapters: "Abortion: The Basics," "History," "Ideas and Analysis," and "Strategy." Chapter 1 opens with a detailed description of a vacuum aspiration abortion. This passage is one of many throughout the book that provide brief but lucid descriptions of abortion processes such as dilation and curettage, pill abortions, and various DIY methods used through the generations. These passages enact one of the hallmark strategies of abortion activists historically – demystifying abortion processes, to destroy the taboo and increase the number of people who can perform them – and are one of the book's biggest successes.

A Materialist History

The book's next success is the history and materialist analysis it offers. Brown starts with the century of early American history when abortion was legal, then explores the roots of abortion restriction – not in religious oppression like many believe, but in industry. It was the fledgling industry of medical doctors who drove anti-abortion sentiment into the Protestant Church

to supplant midwives and "doctresses," who provided most of the routine care of the time. The following outlaw, underground period of abortion leads into the beginnings of a narrow abortion reform movement (allowing abortion in certain "extreme cases") and the coinciding repeal effort led by the women's liberation movement. Furthermore, Brown points out the racist history of abortion legislation and reproduction coercion, underlining the intersection between women's and racial oppression.

Frequently, Brown displays how "mainstream" views of abortion were guided by ruling-class interests. For example, she outlines the tendency of politicians to now support abortion bans, now abortion reform, depending on whether capitalist interests demanded population growth or decrease. However, this is also the first hint of the book's weakness: it stops short of drawing the conclusion that the need for population growth or decline is a particular problem of capitalism. She correctly sees reproductive justice as a labor issue – the unpaid labor of social reproduction – but points to patriarchy and white supremacy as the forces of oppression, without demonstrating how those forces are inherent to capitalism.

Liberalization of a Movement

Brown bemoans the liberalization of the women's liberation movement into a single-issue campaign for legal abortion. She correctly sees the successes in the abortion struggle as fruits of the mass movement, not as some gift or "gold standard" handed down by the courts. She sees the dilution of the feminist program as conservative, reactionary, and anti-liberation, and she's right.

However, Brown appears to desire, if not a return to the 1960s and '70s, a resurgence in '60s and '70s-style activism. She rests her model for struggle on a return to the women's liberation move-

ment, and though this may be better than the liberal legal battle that dominates the struggle today, it is also short-sighted. This is the primary weakness in *Without Apology*: the emphasis on the women's liberation model at the expense of a wider sex – and gender-liberation model.

Wider Liberation Model Needed

The women's liberation model, crystallized today on womensliberation.org (where Jenny Brown is an organizer), views patriarchy, and even men themselves, as the primary source of oppression. Their demands focus on getting men to do an equal amount of housework, with a secondary emphasis on social welfare programs. This approach still assumes that the family unit is the best, or only, model for social reproduction – a view which comes with an unavoidable amount of gender-essentialism and heteronormativity.

Despite a sentence in Chapter 1's section "Who Gets Abortions?" which admits that trans men, "and others who do not identify as women," are also beneficiaries of abortion rights, Brown frequently equates those who can get pregnant to women and those bearing penises to men. Brown does not offer further thoughts on how reproductive justice and the policing of bodies might affect or intersect with the rights and self-determination of trans people. And she offers no insight whatsoever into how reproduction struggles might affect people in non-heterosexual relationships.

This is why a women's liberation model is not enough to build a mass movement for reproductive justice today. The legacies of the liberation movements of the past century have created new material conditions and LGBTQ+ rights and liberation are becoming increasingly vital. In much the same way that the women's liberation movement captured the radical spirit of young women fifty years ago, today's youth and activist layers will be mobilized by a radical agenda for universal liberation on all axes of oppression.

A sex – and gender-liberation model demands nothing less than complete bodily autonomy for all people. This includes not only the inalienable right to birth control and abortion, but universal, free healthcare for all, including gender-affirming care.

While this model demands programs that make parenting more accessible, like paid family leave and access to reproductive medicine and adoption, it also demands an end to the assumption of the nuclear family as the default for social reproduction. This means high-quality, universal child care that goes beyond daycare and the often depressing fostering system we currently have, towards a system of socialized child rearing that guarantees every child a stable home and education. It means public cafeterias to reduce housework for all workers, not just women. The sex – and gender-liberation model unites the entire working class and points towards a fundamental rupture with capitalism, while the women's liberation model cannot and does not.

The Role of Socialists

Brown spends some time in *Without Apology* discussing the ways in which the former Soviet bloc countries had better track records on legalizing abortion and birth control than capitalist countries, seemingly acknowledging socialism as a better structure for recognizing reproductive justice, but does not say much about why it is important for socialists to be at the forefront of the struggle.

This is because her framing of this situation in the terms of women's liberation fails to unite the multi-racial, multi-sexed, multi-gendered working class under a banner for complete liberation from capitalist tyranny and its patriarchal, racist, hetero-normative tentacles.

Today's movement for reproductive justice needs socialist leadership. Just as the liberation movements of the 1960s and '70s were catalysts for many important victories, today's struggle necessitates radical programs that connect the bodily oppression of individuals by the state, to the tradition of familial relations, and the unpaid work of social reproduction to the system of capitalist exploitation that is the main framework. Socialists must connect these intersecting struggles into a united war against capitalism. ■

Meg Morrigan (they/them) is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America and the Reform & Revolution caucus. They are on the editorial board of Reform & Revolution.



A Call to Action for Trans Rights



BY SPENCER MANN AND ROSEMARY DODD

@BICOASTALLEFTY, @MARXIST_BARBIE

For a DSA Response to the Wave of Anti-Trans Bills that Turns the Fight for Trans Liberation into an Essential Part of Our Broader Struggles for Workers' Rights, Medicare for All, and Socialist Feminism

2022 has seen an unprecedented wave of anti-trans legislation. Most high-profile was the grotesque directive issued by Texas Governor Greg Abbott, instructing the state's Department of Family and Protective Services to characterize gender-affirming health-care for trans youth as "child abuse." This directive targets not only trans children, but also the parents, teachers, and medical workers who seek to support them.

More recently, Alabama too passed an unprecedented law that makes it a felony for medical professionals to provide gender-affirming care to trans youth. This care is safe, medically necessary, and frequently life-saving. Anyone breaking these laws could face 10 years in prison and a \$15,000 fine.

The situation for trans people is dire all across the country, and most anti-trans bills have flown under the radar of mainstream coverage. In the first three months of 2022, state lawmakers

have proposed 238 anti-LGBTQ bills, with a staggering 154 of these targeting trans people specifically. For comparison, in all of 2018, only 41 anti-LGBTQ bills were filed in state legislatures.

Regardless of some backwards beliefs among the public, the push for anti-trans legislation is coming from above, not below.

Furthermore, this year's numbers dwarf those of 2021, itself a record year for anti-trans legislation, when 191 anti-LGBTQ bills were introduced, 80 percent of which were anti-trans. These bills prevent trans people from participating in athletics, using gender appropriate bathrooms, prohibit trans issues from being discussed in schools, allow workplace discrimination, and even cut off access to health-care. Many of these bills target children under the guise of protecting them.

Hate from Below or Above?

But why the sudden onslaught of anti-trans laws? Research shows that while the

frequency of these bills have hit record highs, so has support for queer people among the general public. One poll found that 79 percent of Americans support anti-discrimination laws for LGBTQ people in jobs and housing (PRRI, March 17, 2022). According to another poll, 62 percent of Americans say they have become more supportive of trans rights compared to five years ago, compared to 25 percent who have become more opposed (PRRI, June 11, 2019). Two-thirds of Americans, including a majority of Republicans, say they are against laws that would limit transgender rights, a poll found (PBS/NPR/Marist, April 2021).

This isn't to prettify the issue.

Despite the fact that support for trans people is on the rise, it is still far lower than it needs to be. Trans people still face an onslaught of discrimination daily not just from the state, but from peers, coworkers, bosses, and community members.

Safety is also a major issue. Transgender people are over four times more likely to experience violent crime (including assault and sexual violence) when compared to cisgender people.

One flash point has been sports participation; only 34



Trans Day of Visibility on March 31 in Portland, Oregon

Photo: Sierra Romesburg

percent of Americans say that trans athletes should be able to compete on teams that correspond to their gender identities according to Gallup (May 26, 2021). However, consciousness isn't set in stone, and a nationwide movement for trans rights as well as increased visibility of trans people could do much to reverse discriminatory beliefs.

Regardless of some backwards beliefs among the public, it's clear that the push for anti-trans legislation is coming from above, not below.

Right-wing lawmakers are catering to extreme religious groups and their hardened bases. In the era of Biden, social issues like trans rights are being wielded to spur polarization and give Republican state officials a scapegoat for the declining living condi-

tions of the working class, allowing them to do nothing to address stagnating wages or provide social services. In the wake of the ongoing surge in labor action and solidarity, the ruling class and those aligned with the interests of capital are wielding race and gender identity as a tactic to divide and disempower workers.

President Biden has actually been more vocal in supporting transgender people than the Democratic Party has historically been. He condemned the Texas directive and appointed Rachel Levine as assistant secretary for health, the first openly trans federal official confirmed by the Senate. He also signed an executive action expanding non-discrimination protection to include gender identity.

Rhetorical support does not overshadow the Democrats' refusal to embrace trans-inclusive Medicare for All and affordable housing.

However, rhetorical support and appointing trans officials, while a good step, does not overshadow Biden and the Democrats' refusal to embrace trans-inclusive Medicare for All and affordable housing that would truly make a difference in the lives of all marginalized people. In order to accomplish those aims, we will need more than a liberal capitalist orientation towards trans rights. We need a nationwide, socialist

mass movement struggle for trans liberation.

Socialist Feminism and Bodily Autonomy

It's not a coincidence that laws targeting trans people are ticking up at the same time as anti-abortion legislation and the likely overturning of *Roe vs. Wade*. Bodily autonomy is fundamentally incompatible with capitalism, which relies on traditional families raising the next generation of obedient laborers as its source of social reproduction. Not only are anti-trans and anti-abortion laws similar in that they seek to control people's bodies, a significant number of trans and queer people need abortion care and often have far less access to it than others, a fact that is often left out of mainstream discourse.

The feminist and abortion rights movements, both in the past and today, have not always been friendly to trans rights. The fact remains that it is absolutely essential that we build a socialist feminist movement that embraces ending all forms of discrimination that affect women and gender minorities, including racism and transphobia. Broadening our demands and rising in solidarity with our trans siblings doesn't diminish the fight for abortion rights, but rather strengthens the base of the movement to bring in wider swathes of society.

The fight for Medicare for All should embrace free abortion services and comprehensive gender-affirming healthcare. Trans people face a myriad of obstacles in the for-profit healthcare system, including prohibitive costs, a lack of trained doctors, and require-

ments to prove to psychologists that they are "really trans" in order to get care. Combining these issues with a campaign for universal healthcare is an example of how anti-oppression activism on issues that impact a minority of the working class can strengthen and broaden demands that help everyone, while building working class, socialist power in the process.

What DSA Can Do

In response to the onslaught of anti-trans bills, a group of DSA organizers across the country decided to host a call to organize events for Trans Day of Visibility on March 31. One such event that the authors of this article helped organize was put on by Portland DSA—a rally and march that brought together transgender housing, labor, and socialist organizers, and was attended by well over a hundred people.

While these events were mostly small, they can serve as a starting point for a national mass movement campaign for trans rights. Unfortunately, DSA's National Political Committee (NPC) did not help organize a coordinated response, which could have made the events much more wide-spread and provided materials and resources such as leaflets, unified political demands, and social media graphics.

However, it's not too late for a coordinated push from DSA on both trans rights and abortion access. Queer liberation is a major radicalizing force, especially for young people, and DSA members across the country would be eager to jump on an organizing drive that could help overcome the malaise that has plagued our organization during the Biden Administration. Such an effort could be housed in the

Medicare for All campaign, which could bring trans and abortion rights activists together with healthcare advocates.

DSA could organize a national day of action for trans rights with chapters participating all across the country, perhaps centered around Pride events this summer. Additionally, DSA could incorporate demands around trans rights and bodily autonomy into ongoing abortion rights protests.

Protests are a great way to raise awareness and bring new activists into the fold, but alone they are not sufficient, and would need to be combined with town halls, labor action, and class-struggle elections.

While it may seem like a stretch to get unions on board with a trans rights campaign, our event in Portland featuring transgender Unite Here and American Federation of Teachers organizers as speakers reveals that there is an opening to start making those connections. Starbucks workers, who are disproportionately young and left-leaning, might also embrace trans rights in their unionization work, providing a major opportunity for DSA to make connections and build the socialist movement.

Ultimately, DSA should put more resources into running pro-trans rights and trans independent socialist candidates for office at all levels who can use their positions to build movements demanding equality, worker control, housing, free healthcare, and expand the power of the socialist movement and the organization. In order to unite the multi-racial, gender diverse working class behind a socialist program, DSA must take serious strides to incorporate the fight for trans rights into every aspect of our work. ■

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Rosemary Dodd (she/her) is a bartender, a former member of the Portland DSA Steering Committee, and a member of DSA's Reform & Revolution caucus.

Working While Trans

Trans people, particularly trans people of color, are among the most exploited members of the working class. Compared to their cisgender counterparts, trans people are twice as likely to be unemployed. An astounding 90 percent of trans workers report mistreatment or harassment on the job, and 47 percent of trans workers report adverse job outcomes such as being denied a promotion, passed over, or fired due to being trans.

In a capitalist society with a limited social safety net where people must work in order to survive, workplace discrimination can lead to homelessness and death. 22 percent of LGBTQ people and 30 percent of trans people report earning less than the federal poverty level of \$12,490 per year, as compared to 16 percent of cisgender straight people. The numbers are even worse for trans people of color, with 38 percent of Black trans people living in poverty.

Although the Supreme Court ruled in 2020 that the Civil Rights Act applies to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, proving discrimination can be an onerous burden for workers. Organized workplaces and strong union contracts can provide an extra layer of protection for queer and trans workers.

Arsenia Reilly-Collins, a labor organizer interviewed for *Teen Vogue*, says that they've seen recent union contracts that include "protections around pronouns, anti-harassment language, non-discrimination, health and safety, [and] expansive health benefits to include trans benefits." Labor organizers and unions need to continue fighting for these types of benefits in order to sow the seeds for solidarity across the gender spectrum.

Historically, unions have a mixed record on queer rights, which is something that cannot be glossed over. Despite this, there are many historical examples of unions supporting the fight for protections from gender and sexuality based discrimination. In 1970, the American Federation of Teachers called for an end to anti-LGBTQ discrimination, and in 1977, the Teamsters union joined a boycott of Coors Brewing Company due to its racist, anti-LGBTQ, and anti-union stances, that was organized by queer activists. For the union movement to truly embrace trans liberation, rank and file workers need to have more control over their contracts and leadership.



Trans Day of Visibility on March 31 in Portland, Oregon
Photo: Sierra Romesburg

Should Socialists Argue for Degrowth?

The latest IPCC report outlined again that stabilizing the climate will require rapid and dramatic action. Emissions of greenhouse gases must peak by 2025 to have a chance of preventing global temperatures from rising more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial averages and to avoid the climate crisis from spiraling out of control.

However, the facts that call for phasing out fossil fuels have been clear for decades – and still emissions continue to increase, not decrease. Capitalist governments lack any urgency beyond lip service about climate change. Corporations defend their

profits based on fossil fuel infrastructure. The future of humanity depends on building a strong environmental movement to force the changes needed against the capitalists' interests so we can put the planet over profits. How can eco-socialists contribute to this movement and what should we argue for?

There is a debate among eco-socialists about whether we should use the term "degrowth" to describe (at least within the socialist movement) what we are fighting for. Here are two opposing viewpoints in this debate.

Yes!

The Necessity of Eco-socialist Degrowth



BY PAUL MURPHY AND JESS SPEAR

@JDUBSPEAR, @PAULMURPHY_TD

Capitalist growth is destroying our life support systems. Every single year the material taken from the Earth to feed the insatiable capitalist appetite for profits grows larger and larger and the waste spewing into the atmosphere, land, rivers, and sea grows bigger and bigger. Out of the nine planetary boundaries identified – which together delineate the "safe operating space for humanity" – four have been crossed.(1)

Never has it been more clear that we face a choice between socialism and barbarism.

However, what socialists mean by "socialism" is not settled. It ranges from the "ecomodernists" and "fully automated luxury"(2) communists, who place an emphasis on technological solutions to the climate emergency, to the eco-socialists and "eco-socialist degrowthers"(3) focused

on urgently reducing emissions and ecosystem destruction.

We want to make the case for eco-socialist degrowth, which is "a planned downscaling of energy and resource use to bring the economy back into balance with the living world in a safe, just and equitable way."(4) As a guiding concept for the revolutionary left today, eco-socialist degrowth can help

illuminate the ecologically-sustainable path forward.

But don't we need both degrowth and growth?

Yes. We need degrowth in industries ranging from armaments and advertising to fast fashion and fossil fuels, together with a dramatic reduction in consumption of the richest 1 percent who are responsible for 15 percent of emissions.(5) We need growth in public services like healthcare, education, public transit, renewable energy, childcare, etc. (the list could go on), particularly in developing countries.

In our view, though, this question is a red herring. It sidesteps the bigger question degrowth is seeking to address: does humanity need to reduce energy consumption and material throughput overall?

We answer unambiguously – yes.

Of course, that is not enough. The blame for climate change and environmental destruction is all too often placed on the shoulders of "humanity" as a whole, whether you're a private jet-owning billionaire or a Ugandan subsistence farmer. This framing repels working-class people who, even in the wealthiest countries, struggle to secure even the basic necessities. So, as socialists we must go further and highlight all the wasteful production capitalism depends on, from which we don't benefit (e.g. advertisement), and the class divide in consumption, within rich countries, but also between the global North and global South.(6)

We have to immediately add that degrowth can and must be done in a way that improves the quality of life for almost everybody on the planet, but only on

the basis of a rational and democratic plan of production.

Won't this turn off working-class people?

As a slogan, we agree that "degrowth" is too abstract, and it jars too sharply with the 'common sense' ideology of growth. We're not advocating you show up with giant "DEGROWTH" banners at the next rally.

As a concept, however, degrowth refocuses our attention on the growth imperative inherent to capitalism and its ever-expanding energy requirements. It challenges us to reconsider how to build a powerful socialist movement on a solid ecological footing.

An imprecise parallel would be Lenin's concept of "smashing the state." In *State & Revolution*, Lenin drew the conclusion, in line with what Marx already wrote in the wake of the Paris Commune of 1871, that the working class "cannot take possession of the capitalist state apparatus and put it to work at their service."(7) They must smash it and build a radically different one that serves their interests.

"Smash the state" was not and is not a slogan to mobilize large numbers of working-class people. But it assists socialists in developing demands and slogans that point in the right direction and which have the potential to reach, and in certain circumstances, mobilize masses. For example, that essential concept informed the popular Bolshevik slogan "all power to the Soviets."

It might be challenging to win car factory workers to degrow their industry, but we have to start from the needs of the working class as a whole. We

cannot base ourselves on replacing combustion engine cars with electric cars. We must make the case for converting private car factories into producing public transport infrastructure, and for a democratic and just transition. The same is true for a whole suite of industries. Workers in armaments, fossil fuels, big agribusiness, air travel, etc. will understandably resist the loss of their existing jobs. Instead of just echoing that, we have to struggle within the trade union movement for a program which challenges the hegemonic ideology of growth and outlines how these industries can be converted to socially useful production, with guaranteed jobs and improved conditions for all workers.(8)

No more sacrifice zones

Degrowth also forces us to seriously consider the existing plans to replace fossil fuels with clean energy technology. Where will you get the material necessary to build all those solar panels, wind turbines, electric buses, trains, and batteries? What communities will be displaced and harmed by unearthing those minerals? How much do we need to ensure everyone has a good living standard? Socialists in the global North have a responsibility to raise awareness of the ecological crises, including not only the existence of technological solutions that the ruling elite have refused to deploy, but also the impact of such solutions on other peoples.

The way out is not increased mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chile, and South Africa to build solar panels and wind turbines for cities in the global North, destroying local environments and communities. The bridge we build from here to an eco-socialist future cannot be built by stepping on the backs of workers, women,

and peasants in the global South. Therefore, we must make the case for ramping up renewable energy production while simultaneously reducing overall energy needs, starting with the luxury consumption of the 1 percent and unnecessary production (ie, planned obsolescence).

What does it mean for us?

Utilizing the concept of degrowth means breaking free from the ideology of growth which has wrapped its tentacles around not only the reformists, but also the revolutionaries.

Instead of advocating for 'sustainable' growth, we should describe our aim as delivering a good life for every person on the planet. As part of that, we should reject the aim of a superabundance of material private goods. On a finite planet, there cannot be infinite goods. Instead, socialists should advocate the provision of high-quality public goods, the decommodification of the commons and all aspects of life, and the healing of the rift between humanity and nature.

Adopting degrowth as a concept means emphasizing slogans, demands, and potential struggles which help to mobilize working-class and oppressed people in a struggle against capital's destruction of life, but which point towards a better life.

Some demands to raise include:

- ▶▶ A four-day or 30-hour week without loss of pay, which would result in a significant decrease in energy consumption and give workers more leisure time.
- ▶▶ Mass retrofitting of people's homes, slashing energy consumption while cutting bills for families and creating millions of green jobs.
- ▶▶ An expansion of 'care jobs' – in childcare, education, and healthcare. These are high impact jobs in terms of quality of life for all, while adding very few carbon emissions.
- ▶▶ Free, green, and frequent public transit so that people can move away from individual cars.
- ▶▶ Break the cycle of consumption and waste of consumer goods by banning advertisement, implementing mandatory extended warranties, outlawing planned obsolescence, and introducing a 'right to repair,' ensuring that they are repairable at low cost.

These positive demands need to be combined with negative demands to eliminate the emissions of the capitalist class and the personal luxury consump-

tion of the rich. For example, in Ireland we in People Before Profit put forward a bill to ban the future development of data centers and fossil fuel infrastructure. These data centers are projected to use nearly 30 percent of our electricity by 2028.(9) By and large, they are not performing useful work from the point of view of the majority. Instead, they are running algorithms to target people with advertising (which we all hate!)

Fossil fuels should be expropriated from the oil companies and left in the ground. The armaments industry and the military industrial complex must be put out of business. Private jets should be banned, as should the production of SUVs, which should be banned from cities immediately.

In addition, our demands for progressive taxation on the rich have a vital position in a program inspired by degrowth. Taking wealth out of the hands of the energy and resource wasting ultra-rich and investing in public services is the simplest way to reduce carbon emissions.

The crowning demands of an eco-socialist program informed by degrowth has to be the nationalization and democratic public ownership of the key sections of the economy in order to allow a rapid and just reduction in energy usage and shift to renewable energy. Only on the basis of a globally planned system will it be possible to rationally reduce the overall envelope of energy and material usage, while ensuring big leaps forward in the quality of life for everyone. ■

This article is a shortened and edited version of a much longer piece which appeared in Rupture (the eco-socialist quarterly) Issue 7. It's available online at www.rupture.ie

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Endnotes

(1) *These are climate change, biodiversity loss, nitrogen removed from the atmosphere, and chemical pollution (see The Tipping Point in the latest issue of Rupture).*

(2) Aaron Bastani, *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* (Verso Books, 2018).

(3) Michael Löwy, Benji Akbulut, Sabrina Fernandes, and Giorgos Kallis, 'For an Eco-socialist Degrowth', *Globalecosocialistnetwork.net*, April 8, 2022.

(4) Jason Hickel, *Less Is More: How Degrowth Will*

Save The World (Random House, 2020) p. 29.

(5) Oxfam, 'Confronting Carbon Inequality' (September 2020)

(6) "Global North" is the "IMF's 'advanced economies' grouping (as of 2015), which includes the USA, Canada, Western and Northern Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Israel and Japan, plus South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, and a number of small island territories" from Jason Hickel et al., 'Imperialist appropriation in the world economy: Drain from the

global South through unequal exchange, 1990–2015', Global Environmental Change, Volume 73, March 2022.

(7) Lenin, 'The State and Revolution' (1917) quoting Marx's 1872 preface to *The Communist Manifesto*.

(8) The Lucas Plan developed by workers at Lucas Aerospace in Britain 1976 gives a glimpse of how this could be done.

(9) Eirgrid Report, 'All-Island Generation Capacity Statement 2019-2028'

No!

For a Green New Deal and a Socialist Transformation



BY STEPHAN KIMMERLE

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The climate catastrophe, pollution of the oceans, microplastics in animal and human bodies, the threat of pandemics, and many more large and small disasters threaten human existence. The environmental movement feels the urgency to act but has many different political trends within it. It's essential that we work together and unite wherever possible. However, the different strategies, demands, and proposals deserve an open, democratic debate in solidarity and respect for each other. Reform & Revolution sees itself as part of the eco-socialist movement. The degrowth movement, coming from a tradition from the 1960s and especially in the early 2000s, is a different trend. In my view, it's better not to confuse the two trends; we should respect our differences in order to fully clarify the best way forward for the movement.

So, what is eco-socialism, and what is the idea of the degrowth movement? What do we have in common, and what are the differences?

The Two Inseparable Parts of Eco-Socialism

The Green New Deal summarizes many of the aspirations of left-wing environmental activists. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and

Senator Ed Markey might not have had abolishing capitalism in mind; however, the Green New Deal they presented included:

- ▶▶ A carbon neutral economy in ten years
- ▶▶ Medicare for All
- ▶▶ Food security for all
- ▶▶ Affordable housing for all
- ▶▶ Guaranteed jobs for all – a just transition for workers in polluting industries
- ▶▶ Expanding workers and union rights
- ▶▶ A focus on marginalized communities within a just transition

Mass struggles for such a program will win reforms. This will buy us time (but not much) to achieve our overarching goal. Such struggles will also expose the limits of what capitalism can offer and create opportunities to win people over to a program for socialism. People engaged in struggle will see very clearly that it's much easier to achieve all these reforms by abolishing capitalism than trying to implement them within the framework of capitalism. This is the task of eco-socialists – mobilize working-class people into these struggles and link them to the need to abolish capitalism.

Eco-socialism is a political trend within the environmental movement with two major features:

a) Within the *socialist* movement, eco-socialism is unique in emphasizing the environmental crisis within the fight against capitalism.

b) Within the *environmental* movement, eco-socialism is unique in emphasizing the power of the working class and the need for a socialist transformation of society. Mobilizing the working class to take power to save the planet for human existence is key for eco-socialists. The key force for change, the source of power to fundamentally change the way production and consumption is organized, is the global, multiracial working class.

An eco-socialist program of a Green New Deal – linked to taking the top 500 corporations under democratic, public ownership and developing a plan to reorganize society and production – has, in our view, a fighting chance to inspire working-class people to take the necessary action to solve the environmental crisis.

We can win over the working class to fight for a sustainable future, even if workers are currently working in polluting industries, because we can make the case that we actually need them, their skills and their contributions to change society. Car factory workers know that their jobs are not secure. The question is whether we offer to fight alongside them for a future where they will still have highly skilled jobs, where union rights will be defended and expanded, where living wages will be guaranteed. We do not want to drive them into the arms of their bosses and managers where they continue working in the destructive industries that capitalism created.

A Socialist Transition under the Lens of Degrowth

The first thing that workers will understand if you talk about growth and degrowth is whether the economy is expanding or contracting. This is often measured by the GDP, a monetary expression of all goods and services produced in a specific time period.

Measuring the GDP is a tool that capitalists like. The endless need to accumulate capital, AKA growth, is built into the current mode of production, capitalism.

However, I believe that the GDP is scientifically useless to describe the change we need to put

people over profit and defend the ability for humans to live on this planet. This becomes apparent, when we ask: Will a program like the Green New Deal, linked to a socialist transformation of society, lead to growth or to degrowth? In a transition to a society based on economic, gender, and racial justice internationally, there is a need for a massive investment program: reforestation, dismantling nuclear power plants as safely as possible, building affordable green housing, massively expanding public transit and reducing transit needs through redesigning how we work and live in cities, expanding healthcare, providing clean water (think of cities like Flint, Michigan) and healthy sewage systems, massively improving education, nursing, and elderly care, retooling and reorganizing production, etc. Why would we call this “degrowth”?

An eco-socialist transformation of society will also need to center marginalized communities and peoples oppressed by racism and nationalism for centuries. This requires mobilizing resources to overcome these historic injustices. Such a transformation will also reorganize social reproduction (care for children, the sick, and the elderly, the material and psychological reproduction of the workforce) which is currently based on gender inequality. Basically, we need to radically reconfigure how humans live on this planet. Calling for degrowth does not help us explain the massive expansion of resources that will be required to uproot the legacies of racism and patriarchy.

On the other hand, we need dramatically less military spending, advertising, individualized transportation, and production of cheap goods that are designed to break in order to sell more stuff. We can reduce a lot of this waste immediately.

On balance, it still looks like a socialist society will increase the factors with which economic activity is measured, the GDP. However, growth or degrowth of the GDP tells us nothing about the changes we are fighting for.

For this reason, instead of using GDP, some in the degrowth movement want to use the material “throughput” to measure growth and degrowth. “Throughput refers to the materials and energy a society extracts, processes, transports and distributes, to consume and return back to the environment as waste,” writes Giorgos Kallis, one of the principal advocates of degrowth. Following this advice – will a Green New Deal reduce the material throughput, energy consumption, and use of raw materials?

Most likely not immediately, but definitely and significantly in the medium term. However, the “throughput” is not a great way to measure the environmental movement’s success either. It does not tell us if “throughput” was used to build long lasting, affordable green housing (which is needed around the globe) or to build another highway. In addition, “throughput” is not what people understand when socialists talk about “growth” or “degrowth.”

Socialists need to talk about quality, not quantity. A socialist Green New Deal will dramatically improve the living standards of the overwhelming majority in the Global South *and* in the advanced capitalist countries. The socialist Green New Deal is not a program to reduce global production measured in money or in a quantity of “throughput.” It’s a program for a democratic, eco-socialist transformation of society, a program for a completely different way of producing and consuming goods and services.

Some acknowledge that degrowth is not a good slogan to use in public. But they maintain that it is a useful term to use internally among fellow socialists. Does this term help clarify what we are fighting for? If you can freely choose what words you want to use, why would you use “degrowth” to describe a qualitative rather than a quantitative change? In reality, some socialists try to use the word degrowth because it has a certain amount of support and a certain meaning among environmental activists. However, the meaning of that word – especially if you want to use it in a scientific context – is then coined by those who use it in a certain field of science and activism.

Degrowth in the Eyes of the Degrowth Movement

The degrowth movement centers on the reduction of either production and consumption in general or at least the reduction of “throughput” – defined as the mass of energy and material used in the economy – in order to achieve a sustainable way of human life.

The movement for degrowth has its roots in the student movements of the 1960s. Even then, farsighted eco-socialists like André Gorz were more influenced by anti-consumerism (a critique of the artificial needs created by capitalism and commodity fetishism) and arguments for a simpler life than by mobilizing the working class.

Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen heavily influenced the degrowth movement that formed in France

and Italy in the early 2000s. He argued that there is a finite limit of resources on the planet and every use of material resources downgrades them. From that perspective he argued that endless growth is impossible. Given the ongoing lack of resources, Georgescu-Roegen was convinced that social conflict would develop under any human system, whether it was capitalist or socialist.

That is why at least a significant part of the degrowth movement is deeply pessimistic about the possibility of a future without capitalism, oppression, and exploitation. When the degrowth movement refers to the growth-driven capitalist society, the alternative is not a socialist transformation based on environmentally sustainable struggles of the working class, but either a voluntary individual reduction or a state regulated decrease measured in quantitative throughput.

There is obviously some overlap of the ideas of the political trend of the degrowth movement and the vast majority of the environmental movement. Most trends within the environmental movement acknowledge the need to reduce energy production and consumption and to end the predatory use of raw materials including the brutal working conditions of extraction of those materials out of the environment.

However, the response to a capitalist society based on the need for endless growth of capital, is a) in the eyes of the degrowth movement to abolish growth and b) in the eyes of the eco-socialist movement to abolish capital.

Michael Löwy, a French-Brazilian Marxist professor and activist, writes carefully: “What could be the relations between eco-socialists and the degrowth movement? In spite of the disagreements, can there be an active alliance around common objectives?” Löwy wants to “achieve, without hiding the inevitable disagreements, a ‘political composition’ of all those who have understood that the survival of life on the planet and of humanity in particular are contradictory to capitalism and productivity, and therefore look for the way out of this destructive and inhumane system.”

I agree. Let's work together, but let's not hide our differences. ■

Stephan Kimmerle is a Seattle DSA activist and a Co-convenor of its District 2 group. He's a Co-editor of the Reform & Revolution magazine and a stay-at-home dad of two wonderful children.



RHL



The Debate in DSA on Anti-Imperialism

Reform & Revolution invited comrades representing different views within DSA on anti-imperialism – and different from our take – to outline their approach. **Grayson Lanza**, member of Orlando DSA and a rank and file member of DSA's International Committee, and **Sam Heft-Luthy**, a member of the Red Star caucus and Secretary of California DSA, make the case for an approach broadly in line with that of DSA's International Committee (IC). **Dan La Botz**, a writer, activist, and member of both DSA and Solidarity, argues for a clarification of DSA's internationalism and anti-imperialism. Following those contributions, **Alex Stout**, chair of the Phoenix DSA Labor Committee, makes the case for Reform & Revolution's position in the debate. We've asked our guest writers to respond to the following question:

Even before Russia's invasion of the Ukraine, there was a lively debate within DSA over the politics of anti-imperialism, with comrades using labels like "campism" and "liberalism" to describe each others' positions. What is the debate about? Why does it matter? What approach should DSA take to build an effective anti-imperialist movement?

On January 31, DSA's International Committee (IC) published a statement, "DSA IC opposes US militarization and interventionism in Ukraine and Eastern Europe and calls for an end to NATO expansionism." The statement makes the case:

"Following months of increased tensions and a sensationalist Western media blitz drumming up conflict in the Donbas, the US government is responding to the situation in Ukraine through the familiar guise of threats of sweeping sanctions, provision of military aid, and increased military deployment to the region. The Democratic Socialists of America International Committee (DSA IC) opposes this ongoing US brinkmanship, which only further escalates the crisis, and reaffirms our previous statement saying no to NATO and its imperialist expansionism and disastrous interventions across the world."

Illustration on pages 32 & 33:

"Propaganda" by Harris

HARRISRSCHMARRIS

On February 9, Stephen R. Shalom, Dan La Botz, and Thomas Harrison published a critique in New Politics, arguing that the IC's statement:

"fails to adhere to basic socialist principles. As socialists, we have a responsibility to speak out and to act against our own government's imperialist role in the world, but we also have a responsibility to condemn the imperialisms of other powers and stand with the victims of oppression everywhere. The statement's biggest weakness is its remarkable failure to say a word about Russia's role in this crisis, consequently creating an incomplete, slanted, and distorted view that makes it impossible to understand what's actually happening, much less to take a principled position on it."

The discussion about the orientation of DSA's anti-imperialist work was also visible in a different context at last summer's DSA National Convention. The main international resolution (#14, focusing on Latin America) at that convention, which passed with 65 percent support, described the task of socialist internationalism as building solidarity with the most influential left mass parties. Reform & Revolution wrote:

"While we support the anti-imperialist aspects of [the main international resolution], 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 undemocratic repression against left activists, or carry out colonial occupations."

We believe resolution #14 argued, in effect, that socialists should offer support to the "enemy of our enemy," or any state or mass political force that came into conflict with US imperialism. In contrast, resolution 17 (which was not adopted by the convention) argued:

"Whereas, we have an obligation to first and foremost oppose US imperialism, the US ruling class and its state are, however, not the only enemies of the world's workers and oppressed peoples. We therefore stand in solidarity not with Washington's rivals and their ruling classes and states, but with the working classes and oppressed in those countries as part of our common struggle for socialism throughout the world."

In the light of new imperialist tensions and the war over Ukraine, how do you understand and reflect on those discussions? How do we apply anti-imperialism today? ■

A Reckoning with US Meddling



BY GRAYSON LANZA

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A Focus on the Role of NATO is not a Thoughtless "Anti-Americanism"

The war in Ukraine, which escalated significantly with the shocking invasion by Russia in February, has drawn out significant conflict among socialists regarding how to approach the conflict. DSA was quickly drawn into the thick of this debate due to the negative attention it gained from not only liberal media outlets headed by ostensible progressives, but also from federal legislators and the White House. DSA's position, which condemned the Russian invasion unequivocally while recognizing the significant antagonizing role in escalating the conflict played by NATO, was met with a barrage of external and internal criticism.

Amongst much of the progressive media chattering class, discussion of NATO's role was deemed a faux pas. However true it may be that NATO set the stage for war, it was now inappropriate to discuss. Internal DSA critics of the organization's position found it unsatisfyingly supportive of Ukraine, with the Bread and Roses caucus coming out in favor of sanctioning Russia and discussion amongst others in the organization about the need for military support for Ukraine. These positions are understandable to a certain extent; however as socialists, we should be analyzing the context of situations as dramatic as war with a far more discerning eye.

US and NATO Meddling in Ukraine

The position that many on the left have taken, which is a focus on the role of NATO in the conflict in Ukraine, is not one that was developed from reductive, thoughtless "anti-Americanism." It is, instead, a thorough reckoning with the extent of the meddling the US and NATO have had in Ukraine, starting with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rush of

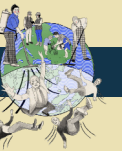
Western liberal economists and capitalists to help set up shock-therapy privatization regimes in the post-Soviet bloc.

The fall of the Soviet Union was an economic and social catastrophe across the former constituent republics of the Soviet Union. Ukraine was particularly hard-hit economically and, like Russia, had American investors and advisers flooding the country to propagate the "shock therapy" economic regime. Ukraine integrated into the global neoliberal trade system through IMF membership and today is the fourth largest borrower from the IMF after first receiving loans in 1998 with the condition of mass privatization of the economy.

In 2013 the IMF proposed a loan package for potential ascension to the European Union for Ukraine that required an increase of 40 percent in natural-gas bills for Ukrainian households, a deal so bad that the Ukrainian government turned it down, resulting in the Euromaidan protests. Ukraine's economy has remained exceptionally weak and unstable, but the liberalizing of its economy allowed for Western interests to gain a foothold of influence in the country. The USSR's collapse and the ensuing economic destabilization also triggered a resurgence of nationalist elements in all of the post-Soviet world, facilitating the most intensive conflicts in the Caucasus and Central Asia. While an outright war did not break out in the European portion of the USSR, tensions have steadily risen in the multi-ethnic Ukraine.

Ukrainian Nationalists after the 2014 Euromaidan

After decades of Western meddling in Ukraine's internal affairs, a right-wing ethno-nationalist movement that had long lingered on the fringes of Ukrainian society was reignited into a powerful political force. Following the 2014 Euro-



maidan, it began to cohere into a large, organized force within Ukrainian domestic politics. Ukrainian nationalists took advantage of the unrest within the country during Maidan, asserting themselves not only in the streets of Kyiv but also in putting down unrest in the southern and eastern parts of the country. What would become the Azov battalion initially started as right-wing soccer hooligans, transforming into an enforcement force against protests by Russian speakers throughout regions with significant Russian-speaking populations.

The new, Western-backed Ukrainian government formed post-Maidan decided to respond with military force to the unrest in the southern and eastern parts of the country that ignited in response to the coup.

Military operations against what would become the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics initially went relatively poorly. The Ukrainian military, at the time, was internally divided. Many soldiers and their commanders felt sympathetic to Ukrainians whom they were now supposed to fight.

Concurrently, right-wing gangs had now transformed into fully equipped paramilitary forces and were gaining notoriety for their abilities. Their willingness to fight brought them to the front, and soon the Azov Battalion became an official component of the Ukrainian National Guard. US military supplies and money aided their rapid ascension, as Western military advisers recognized the necessity for willing combatants for Ukraine's military operations to be successful. Their politics were not a concern in this calculation and it has become evident over the years that unchecked Western military support for the Ukrainian right-wing has given them a privileged and powerful position within the country.

Ukraine's current president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, was elected on a platform of implementing peace. In the 2018 election, he received overwhelming support from across the country, defeating the conflict-hardliner incumbent Petro Poroshenko. For some irony, there were concerns throughout the West that Zelenskyy was actually going to be too friendly to Russia. These concerns never bore fruit. Despite having

a democratic mandate, Zelenskyy was never able to implement the Minsk II peace plan that was agreed upon by all respective parties in the conflict in 2015.

The Ukrainian military, which by 2019 had spent several years fighting in the east and bombarding Donetsk, refused to put their arms down in what was called the "Campaign Against Capitulation." After years of direct US support, the Ukrainian military no longer had a reason to obey the civilian government. US control over Ukraine was effectively complete with its influence over the Ukrainian military despite that control being channeled through a political position that was widely unpopular with the average Ukrainian.

Recognizing the Dynamics Created by the US

The question remains: What should socialists, particularly those in the US, do about the Russian invasion of Ukraine? The point of the previous paragraphs was to lay down to some extent the significance of US meddling in the region. To try and analyze this war without understanding the role US foreign policy has played in facilitating the conditions for it, is like only reading the last half of a chapter of a book. The world system we all live under was created, and now is maintained, by the US. It is the world of our country's making, and all state relations are done on the basis of it. Ukraine's current government, installed after the Euromaidan coup, was directly put into power through US machinations. There's little doubt to be had that this new government's creation of a constitution calling for ascension to NATO could not have been made without private US assurances.

At the same time, the right-wing government of Russia is also a monster of the US's creation. Boris Yeltsin's dismantling of the USSR was done under the guidance of the US, and Vladimir Putin's rise to power also happened with US approval. There was little contention between the post-Soviet Russian government and the US neoliberal regime outside of the red line of NATO expansion into Ukraine. Yet, despite the newly formed Russian state being a more than willing participant in the neoliberal capitalist order, the US still insisted on antagonizing it militarily.

US socialists must recognize and understand the dynamics created by the state we exist within. We have looked on as the US has expanded its military presence in Europe eastward for no reason other than the growth of markets for weapons sales. The failure to develop an anti-war movement grounded in a materialist analysis of the US states' role as the imperial hegemon has been disastrous for the rest of the globe.

For eight whole years, the US has funded, trained, and supplied weapons to Ukrainian forces to carry on the conflict in the Donbas. US politicians have traveled to the frontlines to call for escalation of war. The US refused to help Ukraine abide by the Minsk 2 peace agreement that was agreed upon seven years before the Russian invasion.

Perhaps if socialists had organized as an effective anti-imperialist force domestically, the extent of US involvement in escalating toward

an even more violent and disastrous war could have been made known to the American public. That is why DSA must demand an immediate cessation of all US involvement in the war, diplomatic negotiations mediated by a neutral third party, and Russian withdrawal, all while still calling for the US to withdraw from NATO.

These are practical and effective demands combined with a call to highlight the inherently violent nature of the US dictated military alliance. For the sake of the working people of the world, from Ukraine to Afghanistan to Colombia to Iraq, we cannot continue to perpetuate these failures by calling for further US state intervention through sanctions and weapon sales in this conflict.

Grayson Lanza is a member of Orlando DSA and a rank and file member of DSA's International Committee.

NATO's own presentation of its troops in Eastern Europe, March 21, 2022

Source: tinyurl.com/nato-eastern-europe





The Left's Difficulty Responding to Russia's War on Ukraine



BY DAN LA BOTZ

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An Opportunity to Clarify DSA's Internationalism and Anti-Imperialism

Russia's war on Ukraine summons all of us in the United States and around the world to demonstrate our compassion for the victims and our solidarity with the Ukrainian resisters. It also provides an opportunity for those of us in DSA and the rest of the left to clarify our views on internationalism and anti-imperialism, overcoming the confusion that has hindered us so far in responding appropriately.

As is well known, the US left at first found it difficult to respond to the war. Some would not criticize Vladimir Putin or Russia (some even supported Russia), others would criticize the invasion, but declined to support the Ukrainian resistance, while others seemed to be drawn into the wake of President Joseph Biden and the Democratic Party, with no message of their own.

I believe DSA's initial confusion about the war arose from several sources. First, Bernie Sanders' 2016 campaign for president as a "democratic socialist," which gave the initial stimulus to the rapid growth of what was virtually a new DSA, put an overwhelming emphasis on domestic politics, not foreign policy. Attracted by the Sanders campaign, many new DSA recruits had little experience with, knowledge of, or interest in international affairs. Yet, most DSA-ers had a healthy desire to oppose US imperialism, which is, after all, the first responsibility of American socialists.

"Socialist Camp"?

There was, however, another source of confusion. The US left had for decades been dominated by left organizations – communists, Maoists, and some Trotskyists – who to varying

degrees had been supporters of the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, North Korea, or Cuba. These old left groups had supported those states, seeing them as the "socialist camp."

When communism fell in the Soviet Union in 1991, as China was transformed into a communist-capitalist hybrid, many coming out of the old left and new young associates still supported those states. They also supported the governments of Iran and Syria as anti-imperialist because they opposed the United States.

Those countries were now seen as the "anti-imperialist camp." The fact that those regimes – all of which were authoritarian – were considered anti-imperialist, made it virtually impossible for those in that political milieu to support internal opponents of those regimes, whether they were fighters for democracy, feminist activists, or worker organizers. That is, anti-imperialism trumped international solidarity with workers and the oppressed. Some members of DSA's National Political Committee (NPC) and of its International Committee (IC), and others came to adopt this ideology, which much of the genuinely anti-imperialist DSA membership accepted, as long as there was no alternative.

Russian War Shattered "Campist" Position

The Russian War on Ukraine has suddenly shattered that "campist" position. Putin has made it clear that he wants to restore the glory of the czarist and Soviet empires and that he thinks Ukraine, a former colony, has no right to exist. In the eyes of imperialism, does any former colony ever have the right to exist?

Russia was clearly the aggressor in what is a war between a great imperial power and a former

colony asserting its national sovereignty. To anyone who examines the issue, it is clear that NATO did not start this conflict and that Ukraine is not run by Nazis as Putin claims. NATO's threat has not grown substantially since 2004. Russia has the world's largest nuclear arsenal and its security clearly doesn't depend on Ukraine. And while there are neo-Nazi groups in Ukraine, they are a small minority, and there are far more in Russia. In any case, Putin's actions have made it quite clear to all that the United States is not the only imperialist power and that anti-imperialists need to support Ukraine in its resistance to the Russian invasion.

How to Support Ukrainian Resistance?

All of this, of course, raises many questions. How does one support the Ukraine resistance? How do we support Ukraine's right to national self-determination, but also support the country's socialist and working-class movement against their capitalist class? How do we as socialist opponents of US capitalism and imperialism criticize Biden and the Democrats? Where do we stand on Ukrainians' demands – including the demands of Ukrainian Americans – for a no-fly zone or for NATO intervention? For the first time, the "new DSA" has an opportunity to have a serious discussion on foreign affairs informed by both our internationalism and our anti-imperialism.

We have already seen a positive turn in some DSA chapters. Central Brooklyn invited Denys Pilash, a Ukrainian democratic socialist, to speak to a regular chapter meeting. Boston DSA has invited another Ukrainian socialist, Hanna Perekhoda, to speak later this month. These Ukrainian activists are calling upon us for international solidarity. How do we respond?

For one thing, DSA's NPC needs to organize a national discussion of the Russian war on Ukraine and to encourage the participation of other Ukrainians, like Pilash and Perekhoda. DSA needs at least for the moment to make the Ukraine war a top national priority, putting it ahead of other electoral, legislative, and local actions around other issues. Housing, labor, feminist, anti-racist, and LGBTQ organizing work remains vitally important – but if Russia wins in Ukraine it will mean a defeat for democracy and social movements everywhere. If the

situation in Ukraine leads to a Russia-NATO conflict and nuclear war, it is all over. We are done for, the whole human race.

An Anti-War Movement in the Street

DSA also needs to build an anti-war movement in the street. We all remember that when the Black Lives Matter demonstrations started growing in 2020, local chapters and individual DSA members joined in. But DSA's national leadership failed to mobilize the entire organization to join the movement, and we had no clear and consistent political presence in it. We should not let that happen again. We need to join and build the anti-war movement and raise within it our political ideas.

DSA emphasizes electoral politics above all, and we desperately need leftwing, socialist politics in America, but many DSA members seem to have an aversion to the street. I have gone to Ukrainian anti-war demonstrations in two cities – New York and San Diego – and saw no DSA participation. While we will not agree with the Ukrainian Americans' calls for a no-fly-zone, we need to be in solidarity with Ukraine and to raise our own position. (More about this below.)

The Russian war against Ukraine should also be taken up by DSA elected officials. There are four DSA members in the US Congress: Rashida Tlaib, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Cori Bush, and Jamaal Bowman. We should insist that our representatives support material aid to Ukraine –including canceling Ukraine's international debt. At the same time, we should demand they propose cuts in the US military budget, and in the long run put forward resolutions to dismantle NATO. We should ask DSA elected officials and other progressives we have supported to endorse anti-war demonstrations and help us to mobilize our members to participate in them.

Support Ukraine's Resistance

All of this, of course, should be based on DSA's position on the war. What should that be? Here is a suggestion: We recognize Ukraine is an independent nation and support it in resisting Russia. We believe Ukrainians have the right to get arms to defend their nation and their people wherever they can. We believe that all nations should open their doors to Ukrainian refugees



and to all other refugees from wherever they come. We support the struggle of workers, feminists, LGBTQ people, and Ukraine's ethnic minorities such as the Roma and the Crimean Tartars. We support the democratic socialist organizations in Ukraine and their fight both to defend their country and to fight against the Zelenskyy government's neoliberal policies. We stand for building an international anti-war movement.

We oppose Russia, the immediate aggressor, as well as NATO, which represents the interest of capitalist governments and of Western imperialism. We will fight to cut the military budget and end the development, stockpiling, and testing of nuclear weapons, all of which must be destroyed. We in DSA will organize nationally, on the regional and local level, and as individuals to build the anti-war movement through education, protests, and independent political action. With an expected shortfall in global

grain production, we must pressure the US government to help those who in the Global South will face hunger. Similarly, we must urge a turn to green energy rather than to more fossil fuels.

Above all, we have to emphasize internationalism. We stand with the Ukrainians against Russia and with all other underdogs against bullies, with the former colonies against the imperial powers, and with working people and the oppressed.

We have a big job ahead of us and the time to begin is now. ■

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For a Nuanced Anti-Imperialism of Solidarity



BY SAM HEFT-LUTHY

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Four Theses on Internationalism for DSA

As Russia's invasion of Ukraine brings new scrutiny to DSA's international solidarity work, some DSA members are making the same familiar calls for anti-imperialism of a "new" (old) type for the left. The Collective Power Network caucus of DSA folded under the weight of its own contradictions last year, leaving few organized national factions standing behind what the Red Star caucus believes to be the actual majority position of DSA members on international issues: unrelenting opposition to all US military – and intelligence-guided intervention, principled but measured analysis of semi-pe-

ripheral capitalist powers in contradiction with Western imperialism, and generous, guided inquiry about global socialist experiments.

In our advocacy for Convention Resolution #14, Committing to International Socialist Solidarity (tinyurl.com/dsa-r14), three Red Star members, including myself, wrote about the principles and historical views (tinyurl.com/ratify-14) that guide Red Star's work to activate and further develop this majority position. Rather than offer another explanation of our internationalist principles, I want to offer a few points as interventions to the current conversation:

1. Rejecting the idea that the left got it wrong

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is an escalation of global contradictions, but it does not change the fundamental analysis that existed in the days before February 24, or the tasks of American socialists under these conditions. DSA's original statement on the conflict (tinyurl.com/dsa-ic-ukraine), released before Russia's invasion, correctly laid out these historical conditions:

The Russian Federation was and remains a capitalist power on the semi-periphery. The United States was and remains the linchpin of a global system of imperialism, a qualitative leap from the time of Lenin and World War I, including global systems of finance, military alliances, and intelligence operations that seek to remake the whole world in its image. And Ukraine was and remains a laboratory in the experiments of US empire as it seeks to enforce this world order at the expense of Ukrainian life to keep the Russian capitalist project down.

An insistence that a negative response to either of DSA's statements from the bourgeois press and Democratic establishment (thenation.com/article/world/dsa-ukraine) means that the American left "got it wrong" about Ukraine is misguided. We should not fool ourselves to think that if we had just had a better message (tinyurl.com/dsa-bnr-war) it would have played stronger with the White House's Rapid Response Director. The conditions that created this crisis are still with us, and the conditions that make the American state hostile to socialism are ascendent. We can't simply trick a hostile media apparatus into giving us good airtime if we play it right; that triangulation is the game of the commentariat, and it's one we as socialists should refuse to play.

2. For a nuanced anti-imperialism of solidarity

Among segments of DSA who seek to register dissent from the organization's majority position, there's an assertion that DSA's current international orientation is one that "lacks nuance." The two main arguments advanced are usually: 1) that the current orientation over-indexes on the US' role in the imperialist world order, or 2) that it focuses on "states" over the realities of class dynamics within geopolitical entities.

We reject both of these framings. As our caucus wrote in March (redstarsf.org/fight-the-war-machine-at-hom): "Anti-imperialism as a frame for opposition to war, far from being a naive or simplistic position, considers the whole long, bloody, and ongoing history of violence from the US-ian pole." Capitalist development post-World War II simply would not have been possible without the ascendent US empire choking out socialist projects from Italy to Nicaragua, or even those it perceives as a threat to its global order, like Russia or Iran. This was and is often done by supporting conservative and fascist forces, a pattern that continues with Ukraine's Neo-Nazi terror groups likely trained by the CIA (tinyurl.com/jacobin-ukraine) ready to receive a significant portion of the military aid that Bread And Roses' Neal Meyer asks socialists to consider supporting the provision of (tinyurl.com/dsa-rnr-debate-war).

The second argument, the distinction between "state solidarity" and "class solidarity" is a longstanding one in left circles. The argument generally goes that a geopolitical focus means that we ignore the class dynamics that cohere into a given government under the modern nation-state framework.

But as we stated in our article in support of Resolution #14 (tinyurl.com/ratify-14) – it's not naïveté about conditions in Cuba that leads to our support of their project, but a considered analysis of the difficulty of building socialism 100 miles off the coast of Florida and the difficult choices they face under US embargo. Even engagement with larger and more contradictory socialist projects like China requires a clear-eyed understanding of class history and what actions might make sense for socialist forces under that country's conditions. To refuse to start from principles of solidarity when engaging current socialist parties holding state power would be to avoid the hard work of reckoning with the difficult decisions needed to win the world we want.

3. The International Committee's positive steps toward democratic representation

In his recent article in The Call, Jeremy Gong, a longstanding proponent of the minority position (tinyurl.com/jeremy-gong-r14) on international work and opponent of Resolution #14, wrote that "The current International Commit-



tee (IC) has been dominated by a ‘campist’ tendency.” However, there’s little articulation of who, concretely, this tendency is represented by, or what decisions made at DSA’s various Conventions by the highest body of the organization might be guiding the development of our vehicle for socialist diplomacy.

By most measures, the IC reflects the democratic will of the convention and has an intra-committee democracy that ensures it continues to do so. The IC has transformed since 2019 to establish a robust and well-organized leadership structure appointed by the NPC and developed a membership list that has grown to over 600. Resolution #14 at the 2021 Convention, which was broadly recognized by both its supporters and its opponents to be a referendum on the continued direction of DSA’s International Committee after its re-foundation, passed with 65 percent of the delegates at the 2021 convention.

The IC consistently reflects this breakdown in more contentious votes. For example, last year a motion made to sign DSA on to a statement of condemnation for “Intimidation of Civil Society Organizations in Hong Kong” (tinyurl.com/hongkong-solidarity) broke down along similar lines, with a vote open to the Asia and Oceania and Labor Subcommittees, and the IC-wide China Working Group, ultimately voting 11 to 31 against signing onto the statement. The majority sentiment in that debate was to exercise caution at joining on to a statement signed largely (tinyurl.com/democratic-anti-communism) by global labor NGOs and anti-Chinese political formations like “Students for Hong Kong” and the magazine Lausan Collective. Some have pointed to this as a “stifling of dissent,” but the vote occurred after significant internal deliberation, a meeting, and a vote open to a wide range of members. We see all of this as a positive sign of DSA’s ability to analyze and reflect the membership’s will on important questions.

4. Opportunities for improvement: participatory education and chapter connections

Despite the IC’s presence as one of the better-constructed organs of DSA’s national apparatus, the IC suffers from many of the same problems as the rest of the national organization.

While the IC does a good job of representing the membership as it exists now, there is more work to be done to build a more activated and educated membership that can improve our current analysis and engagement. The IC can also do more to understand and guide the chapter work that represents the majority of DSA’s concrete activity. That means building stronger connections and activating members on international work through chapter partnerships and liaisons for mobilization work. It also includes providing chapter-level support for educational programs that reflect DSA’s nationally-developed positions, consistently briefing DSA’s endorsed office-holders about a socialist perspective on world events, and ensuring that chapters have the resources needed to quickly spin up international solidarity movement work as emerging situations arise.

While our statements should be airtight and reflect the majority’s general will, internal education can and should be more exploratory in nature, with less pressure to “get it right” every time. Building better structures to understand where the membership is with political education can inform the IC’s work and ensure that the democratic mandates which come together at national conventions are even stronger and more unified in their composition. Although I don’t agree that this critique should be taken as a call to stop our IC’s current work, I think it will be necessary to go beyond the stage of development we’re at in the present moment, and strongly agree with calls to improve internal political discussion throughout DSA.

International solidarity work reflects a crossroads for DSA. Will we be a disciplined mass organization that can reflect and sharpen working-class consciousness or a communications vehicle to trick the ruling class into supporting social reforms that go against their basic class interests? For all those who believe in the vision of the former, I hope these interventions are useful for articulating the currents within DSA and how we can ensure we live up to them. ■

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Where Is the Opposition to Washington’s Warriors?



BY ALEX STOUT

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DSA, Sanders, and the Squad need a bold, socialist approach to stop the war.

- **Class-based opposition to the Russian invasion**
- **No to sanctions on the Russian people**
- **No support for the NATO-Zelensky axis**

On February 24, 2022, Putin ordered the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This reprehensible act of imperialist aggression against a former Russian colony was also the latest in a series of escalations between the Russian and the Western imperialist bloc, represented by NATO and led by the US. Any socialist analysis must take both of these

dimensions seriously as we seek a solution based on independent working class power.

As this is being written (April 23), the Russian invasion of Ukraine is playing out in the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine. The retreat to these areas came after over a month of stiff resistance from Ukrainian forces and their US-supplied advanced weaponry prevented the fall of the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv. Stopping a rapid Russian victory, however, could not prevent the horrors of war.

Over five million Ukrainian refugees have fled the devastation to neighboring countries, the vast majority of them women and children due to the combination of Putin’s invasion and Ukrainian conscription separating families at the border. Despite being welcomed more than Syrian and



On 14 March, the Channel One Russia worker Marina Ovsyannikova interrupted a live broadcast of her station by holding up a poster which read: “No War. Stop the war, don't believe the propaganda, here you are being lied to. Russians against war.” She was then arrested.



other non-white refugees by various xenophobic governments, refugee women fleeing Ukraine are still at risk of encountering new forms of danger and exploitation.

Despite the significant military difficulties Russia faced in its initial assault which led it to regroup its forces with a new focus on targets in eastern Ukraine, it is unlikely the war will be ended soon by a simple military victory of one side over the other.

What we face is an imperialist war launched by Russia against its former colony, Ukraine. In this sense, the Ukrainian people are fighting against Russian imperialism and neo-colonialism. As anti-imperialists and socialists, we support the Ukrainian peoples in this war of national liberation against Russian domination.

At the same time, this conflict is also a proxy war between different imperialist powers over control and influence in Ukraine, which changed its allegiance in 2014 from Russia to the West. This is part of an ongoing imperialist conflict over control of Eastern Europe through the expansion of NATO over 30 years, up to the Russian borders, as well as growing tensions between US imperialism and a rising China. As anti-imperialists and socialists, we oppose both sides. We are against the imperialist alliance led by the US, just as we oppose Russian imperialism and the authoritarian Putin regime.

This war remains a volatile and extreme threat to the international working class with the danger that it could spill over into a direct military conflict between nuclear armed rivals.

Whether US or Russian imperialism comes out on top in their struggle for influence, it will not bring peace and justice to the peoples of Ukraine and the region, but will instead further entrench antagonisms that will result in new upheavals and wars sooner or later.

So far, on a global scale, NATO, with US imperialism behind it, is massively strengthened from this war. The ruling elites in Sweden and Finland were quick to use this situation to move toward joining NATO. Dramatic increases in military spending in a number of other European countries – while planned long before this war – were presented to a stunned and fearful public. The war has been used by the German ruling class to

remove the post-World War II limits on its military. The Social Democratic German government has announced a one time spending of more than \$100 billion and a dramatically increased annual spending of more than two percent of the German GDP. All these measures make new wars more likely in the future.

At the same time, Russian imperialism – based on the export of oil and gas plus the power of the Russian military – is dramatically weakened. It will find its future role much more as a junior partner to Chinese imperialist aspirations.

The stage is set for an increase of economic nationalism, an economic detangling after decades of globalization, that will lead to a decrease in wealth – and someone will have to pay for it.

A new period of currency wars, protectionist economic conflict, proxy wars and conflicts between the US (and its various allies) and China (and its allies) is opening up. This even includes the threat of direct conflicts between nuclear powers which could easily spiral out of control.

A Class Struggle Strategy to End the War

Activists who base themselves on the interests of the working class will have to oppose all the imperialist camps, because they are fundamentally at odds with any prospect of peace for working people. Instead, the working class needs a strong, international anti-war movement to combat this crisis and the forces behind it.

The thousands of Russian peace protesters who have been arrested, and the thousands more who have bravely taken their place, represent a significant force though still a minority of the population. They need more support from the international anti-war movement, because despite its small size this movement has the potential to grow and seriously threaten Putin's power.

The ongoing war in Ukraine is not simply the result of the choices of a few hawkish leaders or a crazy Russian dictator, something which could be avoided by electing or establishing leaders with better morals. At best this reasoning is well-intentioned, but too zoomed-in on the final domino on the path to war. In fact, inter-imperi-

alist wars, as well as proxy wars using other countries like Ukraine as pawns and battlegrounds, have been and will always be a threat under the modern imperialist stage of the capitalist system.

In our anti-war work Marxists are consistent internationalists because the only way to ensure a permanent peace is to end capitalism by a democratic, socialist rupture – we must overthrow global capitalism and its system of rival nation states, and replace it with a socialist system based on international cooperation and planning.

Socialism is the democratic rule of the working class, the only social force whose self interest is for a new international order based on its common interests. The working class under capitalism is usually dominated by pro-capitalist and nationalist ideas, but as it revolutionizes and becomes consistently class conscious it moves in the direction of common international struggles and adopting an internationalist outlook. While the capitalist class depends on outdated rival nation states, the logic of working class power points towards uniting working people globally.

Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and many more Marxists advised socialists to take the crisis of imperialist war and change it into a revolutionary mass movement (and since the class conflict starts in the political arena of each nation state, the movement must be directed first of all against our “own” capitalist classes in our respective home countries). We do that not by simply arguing for the ultimate necessity of a socialist revolution, but by fighting today for an immediate end to the war, as well as an end to the conditions which caused it, using that same working class power which has the potential to end all war. Only through the experience of organization and struggle can this class

What is Imperialism?

Lenin's treatise on the subject was called *Imperialism – the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. It was a polemical title for the debate in the international socialist and workers' movement at that time. Every comrade could see the tendency toward militarism, arms races and military conflict, long before World War I. But how should this phenomenon be understood on a deeper level?

Karl Kautsky and others argued that there were competing policies favored by different parts of the ruling classes. While there were more aggressive sections of the capitalists who favored war, another tendency – according to Kautsky – pointed in a different direction: Large multinational corporations and their global needs would point away from militaristic and nationalist policies, and instead toward “ultra-imperialism” or “super-imperialism,” a more unified world market without an interest in military and other conflicts disrupting the interest of these large corporations.

In 1914, Kautsky wrote that next to a tendency toward war on the one hand, on the other hand “capitalist industry is threatened by the conflicts between the various governments. Every far-sighted capitalist must call out to his associates: Capitalists of all lands unite! [...] From a purely economic point of view, therefore, it is not impossible that capitalism is now to enter upon a new phase, a phase marked by the transfer of trust methods to international politics, a sort of super-imperialism.”

For Kautsky, imperialism was only a temporary stage of capitalism, which might soon be discarded as capitalism continued to mature.

Lenin argued against this idea of a peaceful evolution of capitalism. A key concept for him was the “division of the world among the great powers.” As the access to markets, raw materials and geostrategic positions was already divided up amongst existing powers, the way forward for their rivals was only by means of force.

Capitalism leads to world markets and international production but is unable to overcome the limits of the nation state. These two factors are in contradiction with each other, and therefore capitalism cannot remain stable. In its highest state, the battle over spheres of influence intensifies. There are alternating periods of globalization and protectionism within imperialism – periods of expansion and ensuing battles over division of a growing pie, and periods of stagnation and depression where the contradictions escalate. However, capitalism inherently leads to imperialism, and imperialism leads to war.

Only a revolutionary, international, socialist workers' movement can really end this.

For Bold, Socialist Demands

In our initial statement, tinyurl.com/rnr-ukraine, after the invasion of Ukraine, *Reform & Revolution* advanced the following slogans:

- **No War in Ukraine! Build a Global Anti-war Movement! Disband NATO**
- **Russian troops out of Ukraine**
- **NATO battle troops and missiles out of Eastern Europe**
- **Solidarity with the Ukrainian people and the Russian anti-war movement**
- **Defend the democratic rights of the Russian minority within Ukraine**

In addition to these central demands, we should add three more:

- **Cancel all Ukrainian foreign debt.** The US and other Western powers could offer financial assistance to Ukraine by pushing to cancel the significant national debt Ukraine owes to private banks, along with any debt owed to the IMF and other international financial institutions, some of which has been used as leverage to force neoliberal policies on Ukraine. However, Western governments adamantly oppose the cancellation of the debt. For them, solidarity with the Ukrainian people is currently a useful political sentiment to mobilize public opinion in support of their imperialist agenda against Russia and China. But they do not want support for Ukraine to undermine the sanctity of debt, setting a dangerous precedent that would harm their financial interests.
- **Address our energy needs not through expanding access to fossil fuels but through a socialist Green New Deal.** We don't need to get more oil from Saudi Arabia or by expanding drilling at home. We need massively expanded renewable energy, free and frequent public transportation, and a federal job guarantee shifting the economy toward low emission jobs like nursing and teaching alongside wage guarantees for workers transitioning careers. This can be accomplished by nationalizing the fossil fuel companies. As an immediate measure to defend living standards the government must provide energy subsidies for workers and the middle class, paid for by taxing big business.
- **Open the borders to all refugees of wars, not just from Ukraine, and to refugees from the climate crisis.** Tax the rich to pay for more jobs, schools, healthcare and housing for refugees and people already in the US.

power be fully realized, and that starts with good-faith participation in whatever movements against the war exist today, while explaining what we believe will ultimately be necessary to eradicate the capitalist and imperialist roots of war.

Against Sanctions

Rather than seriously address the interlocking economic and humanitarian crises caused by the war, the Biden administration has instead sent billions of dollars in arms to Ukraine and has levied broad economic sanctions against the Russian people. This has helped to consolidate public opinion in Russia in favor of Putin's war and against Western imperialism, which is blamed for the hardship inflicted on ordinary Russian people who played no part in starting the war.

The starting point for socialist internationalism is looking to the common interests of the world working class against war and against all capitalist ruling classes as the foundation on which to organize an effective fight against imperialism. This means foregrounding the need for a struggle against all the interlocking class and national oppressions involved in the conflict, including the workers of Ukraine against Putin's invasion, the Russian minority within Ukraine against the repression of Zelenskyy's government, the workers of Russia against Putin's repressive regime, and the workers of the US against our own ruling class.

US-led Western imperialism has been struggling to maintain hegemonic control over the world, and expects the working class to foot the bill for the cost of preserving its power. Partly due to these destructive sanctions, we are



Art: Sean Case

seeing widespread inflation even in the US, and a sharp increase in gas prices.

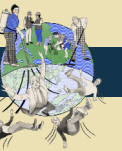
The Biden administration has tried to mitigate this through various ad hoc measures, first announcing the release of some oil reserves in the State of the Union address, then seeking to pressure other countries to produce more oil for US markets. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, engaged in their own criminal war against Yemen, have so far declined to even speak with Biden until they are given even more support, while Venezuela has been more open to US requests for increased oil trade, despite the sanctions previously put on the Maduro regime. Despite these maneuvers, gas still averages over \$4/gallon, inflation still greatly outpaces wage increases, and about two thirds of Americans now live paycheck to paycheck.

Against Pro-war Propaganda

The response of the US working class to the war has so far been one of massive popular revulsion

against Putin's brutal attack on Ukraine, and a desire to help the Ukrainian people in their struggle, which we agree with. Unfortunately, this sentiment is being mobilized cynically by the US and Western ruling classes to further their own imperialist agenda. In this situation this popular reaction is encouraged – but when it comes to Saudi Arabia's attack on Yemen or Israel's attacks on Palestinians, the mass media in the US turns a blind eye, leading to a tacit acceptance or ignorance of US policy in those cases.

Socialists must stand with the Ukrainian people against the invasion. At the same time, we also need to be critical of attempts to heroize Ukrainian president Zelenskyy. Zelenskyy's administration has been supportive of the NATO expansion and aggression toward Russia, and had demanded that NATO include Ukraine long before the war started. He has been waging a war in eastern Ukraine against the Russian minority there, works with fascist forces in the military, and has worked to ban various political parties in a continuing



effort to consolidate power. Eric Toussaint, spokesman of the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt, has pointed out that even in the midst of this war, the Zelenskyy government is continuing to implement neoliberal austerity policies and allocate money to pay off debts in order to “remain credible in the eyes of the financial markets and various lenders.” While international socialists should call for all Ukrainian foreign debt to be canceled, Zelenskyy’s government itself could and should take a different approach: “suspending the payment of the debt [and] asking the country where the assets of the Ukrainian oligarchs are located to expropriate these assets and return them to the Ukrainian people.”

We should also see through attempts to blame Putin for the rise in gas prices or to promote the idea that Putin and Russia are somehow uniquely evil (while the US quietly continues to send arms to Saudi Arabia and Israel in support of their campaigns of human rights violations against the people of Yemen and Palestine).

Still, the impact of this propaganda can only go so far. Although there are a range of hawkish commentators eager to run headlong into nuclear war, the righteous sentiment from below combined with the wave of propaganda from above has so far only led to general support in the US for indirect intervention alongside general opposition to direct intervention. This much, at least, has been accomplished by demonizing the enemy, heroizing the ally, and normalizing US involvement.

For years now, US workers have been under sustained pressure, only increased by US involvement in this war, and conditions are still primed for more social explosions akin to the 2018 teacher strike wave or the 2020 BLM uprising. If the war drags on and the economic impact of the war on US workers were to increase further, or if the war escalates into a direct conflict between the US/NATO and Russia, public opinion in the US could move against the war. The war in Afghanistan, for example, was initially very popular, but ended in defeat for the US after two decades of increasing unpopularity.

There are also supplementary efforts to not only flood the mainstream media with pro-war and pro-NATO propaganda (or pro-war, pro-Putin

propaganda, if you live in Russia), but also to control the flow of information through censorship. A wide array of countries in Europe (plus Australia and Canada), along with various major corporate-controlled platforms, have banned Russia Today (RT) and other state-funded sources of Russian media. As a side effect of this propaganda, anti-Russian sentiment is also rising, leading to xenophobic acts like the banning of Russian pianists in international musical competitions.

In this environment, and under goading from the hawkish mass media, a majority of US workers can be convinced to support (upwards of 74 percent) the abstract idea of instituting a “no-fly zone” over Ukraine; however, the majority opposes the actual result of such a policy – direct military conflict with Russia – and will oppose the measure if this link is made when asking the question. While unscrupulous war hawks obfuscate, an anti-war movement needs to spell out the consequences for such actions and tap into the sentiment of the majority of workers (around 65 percent) who do not want the US to get mixed up in a new military conflict with the risk of nuclear war.

As a result of all this confusion, the anti-war movement in the US is very weak, and mostly liberal in character – opposition is mainly directed at Russia or Putin, with little recognition of the role of NATO and the US in setting the stage for this conflict. After some initial protests, most areas have no active movement at all. Perhaps the largest organized progressive anti-war force, CODEPINK, has no more notable actions planned, and their campaign page has a few petitions calling for diplomacy which haven’t yet reached their goals of 10,000 signatures. It is currently difficult to cut through the propaganda to show most people how even indirect but severe economic sanctions are actually against our own interests as workers. A strong, clear lead from public figures on the left is needed to break through.

DSA initially played a good role in this regard, explaining the role that Western imperialist expansionism played and calling for the US to withdraw from NATO. This sparked immediate outrage from mainstream media and even the White House, which called DSA’s statement “shameful.” Where DSA’s statement fell short, however, was in addressing the critical question

of what to do about all of this. After the initial statement, DSA has had no national campaign regarding the war, and never did call for protests in the US.

Sanders and the Squad

Unfortunately, when it comes to the war in Ukraine, left representatives on the national stage including the DSA members in Congress have largely failed to do much to help.

Bernie Sanders called for alignment with the forces of NATO and US imperialism: “Now is the time to maintain unity with our allies and impose severe sanctions on Vladimir Putin and his government. Severe sanctions. These moves should not only isolate the Russian economy, but should include freezing access to the billions of dollars that Putin and his oligarch cronies have stashed in European and American banks,” Bernie Sanders said in a video speech, published on Feb. 25. Despite also voicing support for “targeted sanctions,” Sanders has not meaningfully opposed the Biden administration’s sweeping economic sanctions which have so far primarily hit the Russian people.

Out of the Squad only Ilhan Omar and Cori Bush ultimately voted against the ban on Russian oil. In contrast, AOC went so far as to broadly praise Biden’s State of the Union address (only offering mild critiques of his limited domestic policy). This was the same speech in which Biden pretended the pandemic was over, pledged to escalate the conflict with Russia, and which notably included the disturbing sight of a room full of US lawmakers and executives chanting “USA! USA!” in response to Biden’s mostly impotent promises to rebuild the US economy’s independence.

Sanders praised the anti-war activists in Russia, but said nothing about the need for an anti-war movement in the US. Ilhan Omar did not oppose in principle the US imperialist policy of sending arms to Ukraine, only raising concerns about the “size and scope” of US involvement. While DSA’s official statement correctly said “DSA reaffirms our call for the US to withdraw from NATO and to end the imperialist expansionism that set the stage for this conflict,” the four DSA members in Congress have not said a word against NATO.

While most have been silent, Jamaal Bowman took the worst position, explicitly supporting NATO. The NY Times wrote that Bowman “signal[ed] distance from the DSA’s position, without the sort of direct condemnation that might alienate a component of his base and play into his opponent’s hands. He declined to comment for this article, but in a prior statement, he said he supports NATO, ‘and will continue to do so during this crisis.’” They also went on to report that “none of the nine New York City candidates the DSA endorsed this year would consent to an interview on the topic [of DSA’s opposition to NATO], even as more centrist Democrats are now using the subject as a cudgel.”

There is a natural sympathy with the Ukrainian people and a rightful condemnation of Putin’s brutal invasion from below, which the wave of liberal propaganda takes advantage of from above. This is the attitude of the average worker, who then sees left representatives in office doing what they can to curb excesses while supporting the main planks of US imperialist policy which don’t seem too objectionable, like sanctions and sending (some) arms to Ukraine.

Working people want to defend the freedom and lives of the people of Ukraine, and while the hawkish liberals/progressives are convinced they have a solution in the current course of massive military aid to Ukraine, punitive sanctions on Russia, and escalation (with the vague hope of regime change), left representatives just come across as indecisive and weak. They gently press the brakes but do not challenge the overall motion of the war machine, saying something about not going too fast and trying not to hit bystanders on the way.

If socialists are to play our role in the anti-war movement we must first be understood to represent something different from the “progressive” stance on the war, which tends to collapse into the liberal stance on the war – support for (or at least failure to meaningfully oppose) US imperialism. This means having a class-based approach to the war, including clear opposition to US and Russian imperialism.

Arms for Ukraine?

Socialists support the struggle of the Ukrainian people against the Russian invasion, which



absolutely includes an armed struggle. Does this mean we should call for the US and other Western governments to continue providing a massive flow of weapons to the Ukrainian government?

Socialists in the US and other NATO countries should answer, no, we cannot support this, for three main reasons.

First, we need to recognize that Western imperialist powers are intervening to further their own agenda, which is to expand their access to markets, raw materials, and control of Eastern Europe, as shown by the aggressive NATO expansion over the last 30 years – they aim to weaken their rivals in Russian and Chinese capitalism. This leads to new wars in the future.

Second, we cannot support arming the Ukrainian government, which is carrying out a policy of discrimination against the Russian minority in Ukraine seeking independence, has worked closely with NATO and Western corporations including through corruption (remember Hunter Biden!), and has a clearly right-wing, capitalist character.

Third, we know that there are terrible consequences to the US habit of flooding a region with high-tech arms when it fits their interests. There are many cases throughout modern history of US arms ending up in the hands of unscrupulous actors, with the Taliban in Afghanistan being just the most recent example.

In terms of the immediate military need to fight the invasion, yes, the Ukrainian people benefit from access to high-end military weaponry. If there were an independent working class resistance not subject to the control of the Zelenskyy regime, then the international labor and left movements should absolutely send them military aid. But even in the absence of such independent working class organizations capable of directly addressing the military dimension of the conflict, we can still support the Ukrainian resistance through political means.

Instead of calling for short-term aid which strengthens imperialism in the long run, we argue for a class-based political approach to the war not only for socialists in NATO countries but for the Ukrainian resistance as well. The

Ukrainian resistance to the Russian invasion would actually be far stronger if the working class organized itself independently from Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian ruling class, because it would have the freedom to utilize its own political messaging as a powerful weapon against the invasion.

Putin benefits from and relies on the narrative of an inevitable nationalistic confrontation between the West and Russia, in which the Russian people of course must side with Russia (and Putin's regime). A recent poll from Russia's most respected independent pollster showed that 81 percent of Russians now support the war, and say that the protection of the Russian minority in Ukraine is the primary justification. An international anti-war movement together with a Ukrainian resistance that openly supported the democratic rights of the Russian minority in Ukraine, including their right to autonomy or independence, that rejects NATO's eastern expansion, and which opposed sanctions from Western imperialism, would undercut Putin's cynical messaging. In fact, this approach would be far more effective in appealing to Russian soldiers to desert or mutiny, as it would clarify for them what they are really being asked to fight for.

What Next for the Anti-war Movement?

The calls for diplomacy from left representatives, various trends in DSA, and progressive organizations, might seem more innocuous. Many working people have hopes in diplomacy. If there is a chance to solve this conflict by talks, great! But is there?

The kind of negotiations needed to establish peace will not happen just by us calling on the parties to the conflict to sit together and "work it out." Unfortunately, the calls for diplomacy from CODEPINK, DSA, and others on the broad left neglect the need for working class people to force the contending ruling classes to end the war. Only under pressure from a powerful anti-war movement based on the working class would the warmongers implement a peace solution that isn't geared towards preparing for the next conflict by promoting one side's imperialist interests over the other's. Unfortunately, that's exactly what diplomacy is if left in the hands of

the imperialist ruling classes – one more tool in their soft power toolkit.

If this is not laid out clearly in our messaging, we end up propping up liberal illusions about the potential for a stable system of peace and international law under imperialism. In reality, global capitalism is descending into a new era of escalating big-power tensions and war. Our job is to soberly explain that a just system of international security requires an international socialist order based on the common interests of the working class, and no system of international law could deliver peace and justice if it keeps in place the deadly system of capitalism and rival nation states.

We understand that a class struggle approach to war can appear far off to most people today who want an immediate, "realistic" solution. But how "realistic" is the Western policy of sanctions? It's not working – it's increasing Putin's domestic support. And a peace deal based on capitalist forces would be a temporary, unstable peace that would deliver new oppression and new wars.

Although the anti-war movement in the US is very weak, and the movement abroad is not yet all that much stronger, we should bear in mind that mass movements can spring up quickly in response to shifts in the objective situation. Even in September of 1965, several months after the draft was imposed for the Vietnam War, a little less than a quarter of the US population thought the war was a mistake. However, over the next few years the anti-war



Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy (left) and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Brussels, December 16, 2021

Photo: [president.gov.ua](https://www.president.gov.ua), tinyurl.com/Zelenskyy-Stoltenberg, Copyright: CC BY 4.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en

movement massively grew within the military and the wider population, making it extremely difficult for the US war machine to continue running, and ultimately helping to defeat the imperialist war (alongside the incredible resistance of the Vietnamese people).

Alongside clarifying our own approach, we should attend any anti-war events and build the movement on the basis of principled mass work, advancing our own politics while forming united fronts for joint action between socialists and other anti-war groups, so that we may be prepared to take advantage of any future surges in anti-war sentiment. Even at

a small scale, we can still lay the groundwork for effective resistance to the US military industrial complex, and we can support direct action by workers in NATO countries and in Russia to block or shut down military supplies for Putin's war machine as well. No matter how dire the situation, we can only rely on the working class of all nations, in international solidarity, in the pursuit of peace. We have a world to win; we have a world to keep safe. ■

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Was Lenin a Campist?



BY ALEX STOUT

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Not even Lenin knew what his “revolutionary defeatism” should actually mean. He dropped it – and so should Marxists today.

“During a reactionary war a revolutionary class cannot but desire the defeat of its government,” said Lenin in 1915, a year after Tsarist Russia entered World War I. Clearly “defeat” referred to a military defeat by the enemy forces.

Devoid of context and an understanding of Lenin’s political evolution, this and other passages from Lenin are approvingly quoted today to lend support to “campist” positions on the US left – positions which seek to more effectively oppose US imperialism by downplaying or ignoring the offenses of regimes opposed to it.

One influential example today would be the approach of the majority on DSA’s International Committee (IC). In January, before the invasion, DSA’s IC posted a statement which said nothing about Russia’s role in the escalation of tensions. The invasion itself is obviously indefensible, and since then their material has condemned it and called for Russian troops to withdraw, but there is still a hesitance to name or critique Russian imperialism in general.

Weeks later, Partisan Magazine published an article by Marvin G, a leader of the DSA IC, which quoted Lenin to argue for a “defeatist” practice, focusing on calls to disrupt US imperialism. However, there was no recognition that a “defeat” of the US in this proxy conflict means defeat for Ukraine, and so this approach provides no answer to the natural objections of working class people who want to stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people.

The imperialist invasion of Ukraine is condemned but that critical dimension of the conflict is not used to develop a perspective on

how to assist Ukrainians or deliver peace (beyond opposition to US escalations). The conflict is primarily viewed through the single lens of opposition to US imperialism, and thus the image produced is distorted.

Campism tends to crop up wherever US imperialism comes into conflict with other governments, especially if that government claims to represent some left wing or socialist position. Instead of starting from an independent working class standpoint (for example, starting from the common interests of the US and Chinese working class struggle against the capitalist oligarchs at the helm of both the Chinese “Communist” Party and the US two-party system), campists end up shielding the camp opposed to US imperialism.

“Revolutionary defeatism” represented a good instinct but a bad formulation.

Some on the US left even argue that the Chinese and Russian states, and smaller powers aligned with them, should be supported as a bulwark against US imperialism because these capitalist authoritarian regimes maintain elements of “socialism”. Is this really the position socialists should take to fight imperialism?

In 1915, Lenin proposed that Marxists in imperialist countries at war should put forward a demand for military defeat of “their own” countries. This does seem to imply that Lenin was a campist.

What gets left out is that even in 1915, Lenin also argued that advocating for the victory of any ruling class would mean betraying working class internationalism and solidarity. His shifting positions over the years were the result of his grappling with that contradiction.



Vladimir Lenin painted within a mural by Diego Rivera, Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City
Photo: Jaontiveros, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Detalle_de_Lenin.jpg, Copyright: CC BY-SA 4.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/

Despite some confusion in his formulations, however, Lenin’s Marxist approach was fundamentally opposed to what we might call campism today.

Lenin’s Opposition to Chauvinism

Lenin was not a mild-mannered person, politically, and certainly had no patience for chauvinism (war-mongering nationalism). He would routinely cut to the heart of an issue, identify “what is to be done” to advance the fight for socialism, and then aggressively “bend the stick” in that direction to pull the Bolsheviks, his political tendency within the workers’ movement, into the necessary position.

When World War I broke out and most of the socialist or social-democratic parties of the Second International buckled under pressure, betraying the socialist movement and falling in line behind “their own” capitalist class for the defense of their respective countries, Lenin was disgusted. This “social-chauvinism” (social-democratic in words, chauvinist in content) was a deadly disease tearing apart the movement for socialism, which could only be won on an internationalist basis, opposed to the imperialist war.

However, even Kautsky and the so-called “Marxist center” of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) were mired in passivity and

bent out of shape under the pressure of the war. The dominant forces in that party had collapsed into support for their “own” capitalist class by voting for war credits. In most countries, socialist or social-democratic parties were now cheerleading the nationalist and chauvinist slogans of a “victory” of their ruling classes in this inter-imperialist war.

Well then, says Lenin, we are for the opposite position: We are for the DEFEAT of our own countries!

Revolutionary Defeatism?

This idea, later termed “revolutionary defeatism,” represented a good instinct but a bad formulation. In fact, as Hal Draper explained in 1953/54 in his article *The Myth of Lenin’s ‘Revolutionary Defeatism’*, from 1914 to 1916 Lenin himself was not too sure what this meant exactly and introduced and used four different formulations interchangeably, even though each had a different meaning and was vulnerable to different criticism:

No.1: The special Russian position: defeat of Russia by Germany is the “lesser evil”.

No.2: The objective statement that “defeat facilitates revolution”.

No.3: The slogan: wish defeat in every country.

No.4: Do not halt before the risk of defeat.

These are four different political ideas. Only three of them are meaningful for the international movement. Only two of them involve any wish for defeat (1 and 3). Only one of them can actually be put forward in the form of a “slogan” (3).

Which is the meaning of Lenin’s position, even assuming that all of them have some self-consistent meaning of their own? The truth is that from this point on, Lenin juggles all four depending on polemical aim and convenience.

Lenin was reaching for a strong way to delineate the internationalist position from the social-chauvinist position, and he thought this difference must be connected in some way with the “defeat” slogan.

At root, this was an attempt to square the modern conditions of the imperialist stage of capitalism with the old Marxist methods of the 19th century. In the 19th century, when rising capitalism was still locked in battle against powerful remnants of reactionary feudalism, Marxists could often identify the more progressive sides in wars between competing ruling classes and call on the international working class to unite with the progressive capitalists to assist the defeat of the more reactionary regime, clearing the way for expanded democratic rights that working people could use to fight for socialism. For example, in the US Civil War, Marx supported the capitalist North against the Southern slavocracy.

By World War I, however, the once-progressive features of the early capitalist class were completely played out. The world was divided up between different capitalist powers,

meaning that any attempt to change access to markets, labor, and raw materials lead to conflict—including military conflict—in the form of proxy wars and inter-imperialist wars. World War I was an expression of this new imperialist stage of capitalism, an attempt to redivide a world already fully interconnected and dominated by the big capitalist powers.

In the imperialist era, the conditions of modern capitalism are fundamentally different, and a class-based approach requires a different method. Whether it is carried out by proxy or directly, *there is no progressive side in a clash between imperialist powers.* There is only the devastation of war, regardless of which section of the ruling class comes out on top.

Luxemburg and Trotsky’s Position

Other Marxist internationalists, like Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky, did not echo Lenin’s “revolutionary defeatism” formulations. From the start of World War I, they argued for workers and soldiers to transform the imperialist war into a revolutionary struggle of the international working class against the whole capitalist system. They agreed that “the main enemy is at home” because workers have more influence in our home countries than abroad; however, our ability to effectively oppose the capitalist class is harmed by any failure to explain things as they really are, or by any attempt to prop up the ruling class of any nation.

As Luxemburg put it, “For the class-conscious proletariat to identify its cause with either military camp is an untenable position ... The proletariat ... can only strive forward and

onward, for a goal that lies beyond even the most newly created conditions. In this sense alone is it possible for the proletariat to oppose, with its policy, both camps in the imperialist world war.”

She ruled out adopting a defeatist position because the working class could not advance by one imperialist camp being defeated or the other, nor could it win peace by going back to the status quo.

“A powerful movement of the proletariat is...a necessary prerequisite for the actual realization of a peace without annexations,” Trotsky agreed. “...It is possible to overcome [the European pre-war status quo which led to the war] only by means of the proletarian revolution.” In other words, the best way to stop World War I was to turn the imperialist war into an uprising of the working class – *to redivide the conflict along class lines instead of national lines.*

Lenin was in the “camp” of the international working class, not in a camp with foreign ruling classes.

Instead of choosing a side in the military war between reactionary forces, Luxemburg and Trotsky argued against the false choice of “victory or defeat” and for a revolutionary struggle against the war and against all the conditions that generated the war. Failing to oppose the ruling class of another regime in addition to our own, or calling for the “defeat” of our own ruling class by the other, obfuscates

the class lines of the conflict (not to mention alienates you from the broader working class at home).

As Draper carefully chronicled, Lenin moved from directly applying an outdated method and taking a fully campist (pro-Japanese) position in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese war, to trying to find some sort of non-campist yet “defeatist” position between 1914-1916 by employing several contradictory formulations of the “revolutionary defeatism” idea, to finally dropping the idea altogether in 1917.

Despite being initially convinced that it was untenable, in the end Lenin fully adopted the approach of Luxemburg and Trotsky, who had never seen the need to tie themselves to defeatist slogans in order to be principled internationalists.

Defencism From Below

Lenin discovered a new approach when sharply confronted with the masses in Russia in 1917 yearning for peace *and* for a defense against the threat of the victorious German army occupying significant parts of the country. The defense of the country as expressed by workers stands in contrast to all the social-chauvinists supporting the aggression of their country in an imperialist war. Instead of opposing the nationalist, chauvinist “defense” of the fatherland with “defeatism”, Lenin opposed this “defencism” from above (which hoped for gains from victory in the war), from the capitalists and their social-chauvinist supporters, with a “defencism” from below: *a defencism that links the desire for peace without annexations to the*



“Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge” – a poster by El Lissitzky made in 1919, during the resistance against the white armies of Russian troops supported by imperialist forces.

socialist revolution, and organizes for both.

In his speech at the Fourth All-Russia Congress Of Soviets in March 1918, Lenin said such a worker-led defense would have been employing “tactics of the defense of the fatherland, not the fatherland of the Romanovs [the tsar and his family], Kerenskys [the leader of the pro-capitalist Russian Provisional Government between July and October 1917], or Chernovs [a leader of the right wing of the Social-Revolutionaries], a fatherland with secret treaties, a fatherland of the treacherous bourgeoisie – not that fatherland but the fatherland of the working people.”

Even in such a situation, you can still rightfully claim that “the main enemy is at home.” But that is not the same as arguing for the military defeat of any side in a reactionary war, or avoiding criticism of the opposing imperialist power. In

fact, trying to shoehorn “defeatism” into an anti-war position would be an unnecessary obstacle to socialism.

Although Stalin’s counterrevolution cynically revived the old “revolutionary defeatism” idea to strengthen his bureaucratic authoritarian clique, it has always been the result of theoretical confusion and serves no good purpose today. We should drop this myth, or else run the risk of lending credibility to campist reinterpretations of Lenin’s staunchly anti-campist principles.

Lenin was in the “camp” of the international working class, not in a camp with foreign ruling classes. It’s time we learn from Lenin’s evolution on this question and discard the unhelpful dogmas that hold back true international solidarity. ■

Alex Stout is a member of DSA and the Reform & Revolution caucus. They are the chair of the Phoenix DSA labor committee.

The following four pages offer different perspectives on how to deal with the current malaise in DSA: What are the challenges for DSA and how should we address them?

Empower DSA's Members to Overcome the Current Crisis



BY STEPHAN KIMMERLE

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- For a Special DSA Convention in the fall to discuss the current crisis and elect a new NPC
- If the NPC fails to organize a Special Convention, Reform & Revolution proposes that different caucuses work together to organize an Activist Conference in the fall to discuss the challenges DSA faces.

On April 5, *Reform & Revolution* published my article with the above title and the two proposals in bullet points, tinyurl.com/dsa-special-convention. I also posted it on DSA's National Discussion Board, tinyurl.com/dsa-special-convention-board (you need to login as a DSA member to read the 168 contributions there) and a number of DSA comrades responded on Twitter. Our website, *ReformAndRevolution.org*, also published an article by other members of our caucus that disagreed with my position, tinyurl.com/not-a-special-convention. The majority of the responses were not very supportive of my proposal. Still, I appreciate the discussion. Here are my thoughts in response.

Is DSA in Crisis?

In times of crisis, turn to the members. They should be at the heart of this organization. As a principle in working-class organizations, this is the only way to collectively learn to be able to end capitalism and oppression and build a socialist society, based on the power and self-activity of the working class.

However, some have argued that DSA does not even face a crisis.

After his votes in favor of \$4 billion of US support to militarily crush Palestinian resistance, our national leadership, the NPC, failed to hold Jamaal Bowman, a DSA member in Congress, accountable. The outcry of members was answered not with a discussion organized by the NPC, but with bureaucratic measures. These reached an ugly peak with the temporary dissolution of the national BDS & Palestine Solidarity Working Group and disciplinary action against the working group's leaders (with the NPC being the alleged victim, witness, judge, and jury all-in-one). Another outcry of opposition by the DSA rank and file led to the NPC taking back half of these measures by reinstating the working group.

The mess surrounding Bowman and the BDS Working Group was only one manifestation of a more fundamental crisis stemming from the inability of the NPC to lead the organization over the last eight months since their election. These are the key parts of the crisis:

- ▶ There is a lack of willingness or ability to hold elected officials accountable.
- ▶ DSA has not found its voice or its activist footing under the Biden administration.
- ▶ DSA is trailing its elected officials who are too often trailing the Democratic Party, rather than forming a socialist opposition. The threat of



disaster for the Democrats in the midterm elections underscores the need for a bold, socialist alternative to the Biden administration's failures (\$15 minimum wage, PRO Act, climate change, cancellation of student debt, and so on) backed by a mass working class campaign from below. Otherwise, we are leaving it to the right-wing Republicans to be the "alternative" to the status quo resulting in the current disillusionment and resignation of the more politically advanced from any political involvement.

- ▶ The Ukraine war shifted the political terrain to the right, and DSA stumbled to a decent position, but has not been visible in the political discussions. Again, elected officials of DSA are not held accountable by any public discussion (such as town halls between them and our members) about what DSA's positions are and how to promote them.
- ▶ While many individual chapters have wholeheartedly jumped into the opportunities provided by the latest upsurge in labor (e.g., union drives at Starbucks, Amazon), not much coordinated action is coming from the NPC.
- ▶ DSA is losing members. The level of activity within DSA is low.

Turning Inwards?

Does this mean that we turn inwards with a special convention, as the chair of the NPC, Kristian Hernandez, wrote on Twitter?

Who do you want to turn outwards? If it's about reactivating, reenergizing, and turning our 95,000 members outwards, yes, I'm for it. The recommitment drive is a good start, but it has to center the political task of winning the members back – it's not enough to rain down some nice videos from above. DSA members must be empowered to take their organization forward out of this crisis.

If you want to turn outwards, then let's not pretend we can push our problems under the rug. Turning outwards requires a lively internal democracy. The NPC has failed in this regard. Where was the town hall organized by the NPC to discuss the Bowman affair and make their case to the members? Where is the bi-yearly activist conference organized by the NPC, allowing members to exchange their views, as demanded in the DSA bylaws?

What Kristian calls "turning inwards" appears to me a necessity, both to unite the organization and to create a leadership with enough organic authority to enable this nearly 100,000-strong organization to finally start punching its weight, or at least come close.



Lack of Resources?

My R&R comrades in their critique of my article wrote, "DSA does not have the funds, and the staff does not have the resources, to commit to this very complicated and time consuming task. It is a fundamentally unserious demand."

The financial report of the DSA convention 2021 contradicts this claim. DSA's 2020 total income was \$5,312,077. As of June 2021, DSA had \$3,882,687 in the bank. DSA has 32 full timers. The in person convention in 2019 cost more than \$500,000. The virtual conference in 2021 (my article argued for an online convention in the fall) cost a fraction of that.

I believe it's clearly a political question whether to spend around \$25,000 for an online convention and to ask the chapters to discuss how to move forward as an organization and elect delegates over six months. It's not a question of resources.

An Activist Conference From Below

Unfortunately, it looks like the NPC will not organize a special convention. However, I still believe that DSA's membership needs space nationally to discuss the current situation and a way forward.

But can we also organize something beyond that, from below? I believe that if the different political caucuses worked together to organize virtual debates representing the full spectrum of views within DSA on the different topics that need to be discussed, either as a virtual activist conference on one weekend in the fall or as a series of monthly discussions, this could open up the necessary space to start to deal with the challenges we face. These organized forums would serve as a critical bridge until the next regular convention in summer 2023, when we will hopefully elect a new NPC that centers active discussion and exchange of ideas among the membership as the primary means of dealing with challenges and crises in our own organization – just as we center the empowerment and self-activity of rank-and-file workers as the primary means of confronting the crises of capitalism. ■

For an Activist Conference Not a Special Convention



BY JESSE DREYER AND WALLACE MILNER

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Minority Statement of the Reform & Revolution Steering Committee

- A minority in the Reform & Revolution caucus oppose the majority's call for a special convention on logistical, tactical, and political grounds.
- Organizing democratic discussions without the pressures of decisions is the solution and the minority supports using the Socialism Conference as the venue for these discussions.

It is undeniable that DSA and the socialist left are experiencing a severe crisis. The most prominent example was the recent controversy over DSA endorsed Representative Jamaal Bowman's vote to continue funding the Israeli military occupation of Palestine. Bowman's actions are a serious violation of the socialist principle of anti-imperialism, and represent major issues with our strategy towards the Democratic Party. Despite this, the National Political Committee of DSA voted not to formally condemn or even censure Bowman. Among other issues, this has led to skepticism over the legitimacy of the NPC exercising their right to fill three vacant seats in the leadership body.

While we disagree strongly with the actions of the NPC on the Bowman issue and their conduct towards the BDS working group, we believe that the NPC is within their rights to fill the remaining seats and capable of doing so in a way that brings us closer to a democratic resolution of this internal discord. We also believe that a special convention in this situation would in fact seriously hinder the prospects of developing a coherent and coordinated solution to the problems facing DSA.

Political Concerns – Who Should Choose the NPC Vacancies?

Unfortunately, it is rather common in DSA for serious political issues to be turned into massive factional fights, despite the potential for political disagreements to lead to productive discussions. We do agree with the majority that there must be a serious reflection on the failures to win the PRO Act, gain ground for the Green New Deal, or accomplish many of the goals of our national campaigns. We should be clear-minded in assessing this and other structural limitations of our current political system, dominated by two major parties fully controlled by the interests of capital and the wealthy ruling class.

However it is common for comrades in leadership positions to fail and lose credibility among membership, that is normal in the struggle. This does not mean the NPC should somehow be stripped of its democratically upheld right to appoint NPC vacancies. On the other hand, it would also be undemocratic for the NPC to appoint comrades to fill these vacancies based on factional preferences, without consideration for the current climate in DSA and the previous political beliefs the comrades who resigned held.

We would oppose the NPC simply choosing the three runners up from the last election. Rather, the NPC must represent the democratic will of the convention and the over one thousand people who signed the pro-BDS Working Group statement and appoint comrades who align with those they replace. This would be one comrade close to the Libertarian Socialist Caucus, one comrade close to the Renewal slate, and one comrade close to the Marxist Unity Group, Reform & Revolution, and Bread & Roses, who were the base of Matt Miller's victory at the last convention.

While the NPC has undoubtedly taken votes we disagree with, not only on the BDS Working Group, but on other issues, to call for a special convention is to claim that it has lost the support of a majority of membership. A special convention is not just an "appeal to democracy" in the abstract, but a demand for a concrete action which would require a significant amount of money, time, and resources and would intensify existing political fights. While the procedure exists for a reason, and there are certain cases where it would make sense, a special convention is not something to be called haphazardly. We believe the overwhelming majority of DSA membership still recognizes the legitimacy of the NPC and wants them to finish their term.

Legitimate Questions – Would this Resolve the Crisis?

Due to all of these concerns, any new NPC that is elected at a special convention would be subject to persistent doubts. At a convention, decisions would not be limited to an election. Whichever side finds themselves with a majority would likely ram through a series of organization-changing proposals, aware that this unique opportunity presents a kind of power that may not be repeated again. Every grievance and dispute over the last year would be aired in a disorganized, unrepresentative, and logistically unsound manner. A special convention would not convincingly resolve any of the political fights or the current crisis in DSA, and is therefore not the appropriate answer. So, the question is, what might help resolve this crisis?

A Point of Agreement

A point where we align with the majority is



in their call for an Activist Conference. The opportunity to interact in person will help heal the real wounds that our organization has suffered from asynchronous debate on platforms like Twitter or the DSA Discussion Board. An event where the crisis in DSA can be openly discussed and debated without throwing out the previous convention's democratic decisions is a solution towards bringing this crisis to a close. The NPC will sponsor the Socialism Conference in Chicago. Open discussions amongst all caucuses and perspectives can take place there, with four months for comrades of different perspectives to prepare the logistics of attending and the political preparation to come to the debate in good faith.

While a special convention is not the right answer, there remain serious problems that DSA needs to confront. The NPC has failed to provide the level of leadership DSA needs, and this failure has brought the organization into an unnecessary crisis. In order to correct this, the NPC must engage in a transparent and open explanation of the entire 'Bowman Affair'. Without clear concrete steps from the NPC to address the crisis in DSA, a breaking point will come.

A special convention at this time, contested between existing factions, could not possibly result in the positive development of DSA, nor could it even feasibly occur. There is only one means by which the organization can be transformed, and its contradictions overcome: that is a steady, rapid project of developing a mass membership rooted in Marxist principles and politics guided by a commitment to international socialism. There are no shortcuts to changing DSA, no single convention quick-fix. Principled Marxist political development with an immediate goal of establishing clear parameters for the conduct of our elected officials should be considered the primary internal task in DSA. ■

Co-signers of the statement: Jesse D (R&R Steering Committee, Portland DSA co-chair), Wallace M (R&R, Portland DSA At Large Steering Committee member), Ruy M (R&R, Austin DSA Electoral Committee Co-Chair), Jordan S (R&R, Austin DSA Electoral Coordinator), Eve S (R&R, Former Boston DSA co-chair), Ben B (R&R, Austin DSA), Nathan G (R&R, Austin DSA)

Reform & Revolution published an article in favor of a special convention, tinyurl.com/dsa-special-convention. This is a shortened response to that article. It was first published here: tinyurl.com/not-a-special-convention.

“What the Heck is Trotskyism, Anyway?”



TEXT AND ILLUSTRATION BY SEAN CASE

My thoughts on the relevance of Trotskyist ideas to DSA

A specter is haunting the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) – the specter of Trotskyism. Accusations of entryism and sectarianism are simmering. Talk of a dreaded split in the organization is on the rise. Given all the fervor, it’s worth asking: just what do these damn Trots want, anyway? Such a question was asked on DSA’s National Discussion Board on March 1: “Question: What the heck is Trotskyism, anyway? Answer: Trotskyism is a vibe” (tinyurl.com/dsa-trotskyism—you have to login as a DSA member to read it.)

Many who wring their hands about Trotskyists being in DSA point to decades of sectarian feuds between Trotskyist groups and others in the socialist movement, and often between different groups of Trotskyists. There’s a lot of truth to that history. Many Trotskyist groups will maintain that theirs is the one true Trotskyism – even the one true Marxism; all the others are pretenders to the throne.

As someone relatively new to the socialist movement – and even newer to the theories of Marxism and Trotskyism – I do not seek to arrive at a definitive declaration of what Trotskyism is and isn’t. In my view, that’s a fool’s errand.

What I will do is briefly highlight three key aspects of the Trotskyist tradition that have convinced me of its continued value to the socialist movement.

For a Rupture with Capitalism

Like all good Marxists, Trotskyists are revolutionaries. They stand unequivocally for an end to capitalism and for building a socialist society through socialist revolution. This means arguing strongly against reformism within the socialist movement.

I came into DSA as a liberal Bernie bro. I knew next to nothing about Marx or Lenin, let alone Leon Trotsky, one of the leaders of the 1917 Russian Revolution and a fierce opponent of the Stalinist counter-revolution in Russia. I liked Bernie and I heard him call himself a democratic socialist, so I joined up. I felt hopeful about Bernie’s prospects. In the wake of AOC and the rest of the Squad’s wins in 2018, it seemed to me we were on the cusp of a huge paradigm shift that would usher in my then-vague ideas of what a socialist society was. Bernie and AOC would fix the Democratic Party and we would ride that train to true equality.

Bernie’s crushing defeat by the Democratic establishment in 2020, the conservatization of the Squad over the past few years, the utter failure of the Democratic Party to respond humanely to the Covid-19 pandemic, the blaze and fizzle of the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprisings – all these things convinced me my outlook was simplistic and naive.

The Democratic Party is an enemy of progress for working-class people. Attempts to capture and realign it are a dead end. Much like the state itself, the Democratic Party is not a machine socialists can simply take hold of to enact change from above. We must instead encourage DSA to work toward a break with the Democratic Party and form a new party of the working class – one that will push for a rupture with capitalism, not tweak it into a friendlier capitalism.

Central to achieving such a rupture – and central to Trotskyist theory – is advocating a transitional program. In fighting for a socialist future we should link our immediate demands – such as Medicare for All, a Green New Deal, or social housing – to the need to abolish capitalism entirely. Demands put forth by DSA, or any socialist organization, should call for a mass struggle for

reforms that would strengthen the working class while weakening the capitalist class. If enacted, such demands create a better playing field on which the working class can struggle for further victories, and the experience in struggle will build the working class’s ability to fight back.

Demands like taking the fossil fuel industry into public ownership, or a free, publicly owned and run healthcare system via Medicare for All are good examples. These demands take aim at the profits of the capitalist class and, if won, would be concrete gains for the working class. Rather than simply calling for marginally beneficial tweaks within the framework of capitalism, transitional demands point toward the need to challenge the power of the capitalist class over our economy and our lives in general.

Demands in and of themselves are not enough to achieve a workers’ democracy. What matters most is how we fight for them. Independent political action by socialist and other organizations based in the working class is necessary. That action must spring from robust internal democracy.

For a Democratic Socialist Society

Trotskyists defend the Marxist understanding of socialist revolution: that socialism can only be achieved by a united multi-racial working class breaking the power of the capitalist corporations to reorganize society and the economy on a democratic basis.

Working-class democracy today in our organizations – from labor unions to political working class organizations – and in a future socialist state is key.

This core Trotskyist approach was first developed in a conflict within the socialist movement more than 100 years ago, when the appeasement to pro-capitalist ideas of social democratic and labor leaders went hand in hand with the bureaucratization of working-class organizations. Socialist and social democratic parties and unions turned from tools for the self-liberation of working people into top-down, undemocratic

organizations run by politically and financially corrupt bureaucrats.

Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement also fought the Stalinization of the Soviet Union and the Communist Movement internationally in the late 1920s and 1930s. As the first workers’ state remained isolated in an economically backward country, Stalinism was an expression of a counter-revolution. The burgeoning workers’ state was not run by democratic workers councils anymore, but by an unaccountable bureaucracy, which enriched itself and played a more and more anti-revolutionary role internationally, for example in the Spanish Revolution 1936-39.

Stalin, perhaps more than any other figure, did immeasurable damage to the ideas of socialism and communism. Rehabilitating those ideas means learning the lessons of the failures of the Stalinist states.

In the long wake of the Soviet Union’s fall, the national and global left has suffered from lowered horizons, which are only now being cautiously raised. The popular take-away from the collapse of Soviet power was that capitalism had won, that a planned economy cannot

work, that the best we can hope for is a friendlier, more democratic capitalism won through tweaks to the market.

A clear example of this defeatism can be seen in the progression of the politics of Bernie Sanders. In the 1970s, Bernie routinely called for the public ownership of major industries, from energy to pharmaceuticals to the major banks. He even called for an income tax of 100 percent on anyone with an income over \$1 million. On the one hand, Bernie helps today to raise the expectations of the working class. On the other hand, this is also an expression of how low working class expectations have been. Unfortunately, Bernie and the Squad often provide left cover for the Biden administration.

While the growth of DSA and the resurgence of the socialist left in the US has been majorly spurred by Bernie and his 2016 and 2020 presi-



dential campaigns, we should not limit our aspirations, demands and targets to a reformed capitalist society. A democratically planned economy can work and would be the backbone of a democratic socialist society.

In a Marxist analysis, a major task of a working-class revolution would be to build such an economy using democratic means – such as elected workers’ councils in which representatives are recallable at any time and are not to be paid more than the average worker’s wage.

For International Socialism

Another important Trotskyist critique of Stalinism is the rejection of the concept of “socialism in one country.” The belief that socialism can exist sustainably in a world dominated by global capitalism is central to the failure of the Soviet states and their allies.

Modern capitalism – in Trotsky’s time and even more so in our own – is imperialism. The liberation of the working class cannot be truly achieved in one country or region until it is achieved globally. It’s crucial that we bring a stronger sense of internationalism into DSA and establish solidaristic bonds with workers around the world. The only way to defeat international capitalism is with international socialism.

In my view, Trotskyism is an organic development of Marxist theory through the experience of capitalism’s evolution into capitalist imperialism. In its constant seeking of new markets, capitalism developed into a global system, with wealthy capitalist countries subjugating the peoples and resources of poorer countries. World Wars I and II were in part symptoms of that development, and reinforced it. In our current era, the roots of imperialism are deep and wide. Massive, globally-acting corporations dominate the world markets while using their nation states to enforce their profit interests. Powerful capitalist institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund act as boots on the necks of workers everywhere, forcing near-global austerity and intentionally strangling development in Global South countries.

Many countries have been prevented from even achieving bourgeois capitalist democracy by the very forces of global capitalism. Because of this dynamic, it is insufficient for one or a few countries to achieve a workers’ democracy within their borders. Though such a development would be positive and an inspiration to workers all around the globe – just as the Russian Revolution was in

1917 – it would not in and of itself bring down world capitalist hegemony. Rather, it is incumbent upon socialists everywhere to keep global socialist revolution as their lodestar.

A successful socialist revolution in the US would be a world-shaking event. But even a successful revolution in the heart of global capitalism would necessarily need to expand outward, not only to assist the forces of working-class revolution around the world, but for its own survival.

It is in my view particularly important for socialists to keep this framework in mind when it comes to standing in solidarity with the most oppressed peoples of the world – working and poor people in the Global South who bear the brunt of capitalist brutality. Capitalism, despite its promise of individual freedom, has captured the vast wealth of poor peoples and nations for the benefit of the global capitalist class – not because of an inherent immorality, but because of an economic imperative. Socialists in wealthy countries like the US must support the struggles of oppressed peoples around the world. The best way to do that is to win socialist revolutions in our own countries and offer solidarity and collaboration to working class and oppressed people everywhere to work toward that liberation globally.

Trotskyism and DSA

I can’t speak for all DSA members who call themselves Trotskyists. But I can speak to what I want for DSA’s future. I want a bigger, stronger, and more democratic organization. I want a DSA that breaks from the Democratic Party and works to form a new party of the working class. I want a DSA that seeks candidates from within its own ranks and holds those candidates accountable to the organization’s democratically decided platform. I want a DSA that organizes bold campaigns nationally and locally that directly confront the capitalist class and its profits. I want a DSA that encourages and reinforces rank-and-file labor militancy to rebuild the labor movement and combat the prevailing business unionism of major labor institutions.

I believe the Trotskyist tradition has much to contribute to the realization of such a vision. Some in DSA may agree with this vision, others may not. That’s fine; I consider them all comrades. Let’s democratically discuss the way forward. ■

Sean Case is line-cook and proud parent to a dog and two cats. He’s a member of Seattle DSA and the Reform & Revolution caucus.

reform & revolution

A Marxist Caucus in DSA

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

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

Our magazine strives to provide a forum for **lively debate** on the program and strategy that social movements need, drawing on lessons from past struggles.

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

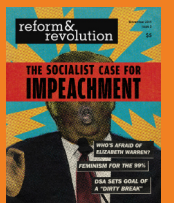
We advocate for a dramatic expansion of **democracy** in which all aspects of society – including our workplaces, neighborhoods and schools – are democratically run by popular assemblies and workers councils that are elected and subject to recall.

If you want to fight the billionaire class, if you want to resist all forms of oppression and fight for an eco-socialist world, join DSA at dsausa.org! If you want to find out more about joining the Reform & Revolution caucus of DSA, please email us at info@ReformAndRevolution.org

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Тов. Ленин ОЧИЩАЕТ
ЗЕМЛЮ ОТ НЕЧИСТИ.

"Comrade Lenin Sweeps Away the Filth of the World"
- Poster from 1920



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