

# reform & revolution

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# reform & revolution

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## Mitigation?



BY THE EDITORS

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From the PT and PSOL in Brazil to NUPES in France, from the Red-Green Alliance (“*Enhedslisten*”) in Denmark to DSA’s crisis of accountability – this magazine focuses on the challenges for new left formations.

The urgency behind these efforts to rebuild working-class power and fight capitalism is clear. The recent COP 27 (the annual climate summit, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, this year) once again underlines the failure of capitalist leaders and governments to address the climate crisis in any meaningful way. In April 2022, the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) outlined these global needs for action: **Greenhouse gas emissions must peak by 2025, and must be halved within the decade, to give us a chance of limiting future heating to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.**

The results? All talk, no action.

The most celebrated outcome of the COP summit was a reparations fund for loss and damages wrought by climate change. Rich countries *promised* to pay \$100 billion to help small island countries and other vulnerable, low-income nations and regions. “This amount, however, will still not be enough to repair and rescue the consequences and suffering being endured by the MAPA [Most Affected People and Areas] recipients,” commented Fridays for Future.

And while this is an urgently-needed step to help the people in those areas, it also marks a shift in what exactly is being promised. Risk assessment and mitigation – learning to

live with the escalating effects of climate change – has replaced even the talk about reaching global targets to cut carbon emissions in half by 2030. Dramatically cutting emissions is humanity’s only chance to keep warming below several tipping points, beyond which future heating will accelerate in a non-linear fashion.

Translated into the words of the regulators for financial institutions in the US: “Banks need to dedicate resources to identify, measure, manage and monitor climate-related financial risks,” said Yue (Nina) Chen, the recently appointed chief climate risk officer of the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency; however, “we ... do not have expectations that banks need to contribute to lower the greenhouse gas emission or have net-zero targets” as this “is not about directing capital or about supporting [a] low-carbon transition” (WSJ, December 6).

Hopes for technical solutions (large-scale carbon storage or equally magical cheaper sustainable energy sources) are paired with an acceptance of having to adjust capitalism to make sure future profits are still realized.

**We’re in a hurry.** We need to build real forces of working-class power with a vision to end this profit-driven system and organize a socialist rupture with capitalism toward a democratic and just transition. Let’s keep that in mind as we look at some of the new left formations in this edition of *Reform & Revolution*.

**In solidarity,**  
Alex Moni-Sauri,  
Brandon Madsen, Sean Case, and Stephan Kimmerle



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# Understanding the Invasion of Ukraine



BY PAUL MURPHY

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*This is a condensed and edited version of a longer piece Paul wrote for the Irish Marxist magazine Rupture, [rupture.ie/articles/imperialism-today](https://rupture.ie/articles/imperialism-today)*

## The Russian invasion of Ukraine signals the opening of a new period of global disorder.

It is marked by the continuing decline of US imperialism and the rise of China. Mounting tensions between imperialist powers bring the probability of further regional and proxy conflicts, as well as the danger of all-out war between nuclear powers.

Analyses of the war on Ukraine from the socialist left to the invasion of Ukraine can be very broadly grouped into three categories:

1) Those who have taken the side of Russia in the conflict, either because they see this as a conflict between US imperialism and a non-imperialist Russia, or because they consider Ukraine to be a fascist-dominated state;

2) Those who see the Ukrainian conflict simply as an example of an imperialist country invading a former colony and have taken the position of support for Ukraine;

3) Those who see two intertwined and sometimes contradictory aspects to this conflict: the Russian imperialist invasion of Ukraine – in which they take the side of the Ukrainian people – and an inter-imperialist conflict between the US-led NATO and Russian imperialism, in which they oppose both sides.

For clarity, I am firmly in the third camp and this article sets out to argue for this analysis against both supporters of Russia and those who fail to recognize the inter-imperialist conflict which is present.

### Back to Basics

It is useful to list some of the categories that Marxists have historically employed to analyze wars:

1. Wars of national liberation or revolts against colonialism. For example, Lenin in 'Socialism and War' outlined, "if tomorrow, Morocco were to declare war on France, or India on Britain, or Persia or China on Russia, and so on, these would be 'just', and 'defensive' wars, irrespective of who would be the

*Illustration: Käthe Kollwitz, "The Mothers", 1921-22, from the series "War"*



first to attack; any socialist would wish the oppressed, dependent and unequal states victory over the oppressor, slave-holding and predatory 'Great' Powers."

2. Wars between imperialist countries, the classic example being World War I. In opposition to the 'social-patriotism' of the mainstream of the Second International, which supported 'their own side' in that war, Lenin sharply formulated the idea of revolutionary defeatism to clarify that socialists do not have a side. As Hal Draper explained, Lenin made a mistake in initially "bending the stick" [over-correcting], using formulations which wrongly suggested that Russian revolutionaries should wish for the victory of Germany. Trotsky's position was actually clearer in consistently arguing against support for either side in such a clash, and arguing that the end of the war which socialists should fight for was based on "the intervention of the revolutionary proletariat, which interrupts the 'normal' development of military events."

3. Wars between post-capitalist or workers' states and capitalist states. In the conflict between Vietnam and US imperialism, revolutionary socialists took the side of the Vietnamese, not only because this was a war of national liberation (although that would be sufficient), but also because it was a clash of social systems. We do that despite the Stalinism of the Ho Chi Minh leadership, which was responsible for the execution of multiple Trotskyists in 1945.

The most powerful imperialist country in the world, the US, is engaging in its single largest weapons transfer in history.

Of course, even where such categories would suggest that socialists have a 'side' in a conflict, that is clearly not the end of the matter. We are not just activists who seek to be on the 'right side' of conflicts – we are socialists who are seeking to end all wars through global socialist revolution. For that, the independence of the working class, with an emphasis on working class power and a socialist position, is essential.

For example, in wars of national liberation, socialists would not simply accept the leadership of nationalist forces, but would fight for leadership through demonstrating the superiority of Marxist ideas and strategy in the struggle for liberation. In wars between post-capitalist states and imperialist states, socialists would not renounce the struggle to overthrow Stalinist bureaucracy and the fight for a political revolution to introduce workers' democracy. Instead, they would seek to demonstrate how the bureaucracy is an obstacle to the struggle for world revolution.

How exactly these approaches are implemented will depend on concrete circumstances, including the political character of the nationalist forces and the size and social weight of Marxists. So while socialists were for the defeat and expulsion of US imperialism from Afghanistan, it is hard to see any circumstances where there would be co-operation between socialist forces and the reactionary Taliban in trying to achieve that aim. In contrast,

## Resisting US Imperialism

### Opening the Debate in DSA to Oppose Biden's and the Democrats' Agenda toward the War in Ukraine

Members of *Reform & Revolution*, *Marxist Unity Group*, and others sympathetic to our view moved a resolution in Seattle DSA calling on DSA Congressmembers to vote "No" on escalating the war in Ukraine, [tinyurl.com/SDSA-Res-Ukraine](https://tinyurl.com/SDSA-Res-Ukraine). The discussion about it started in December and will be continued at a General Membership Meeting in January.

Since the start of Russia's invasion, the Biden administration has sent tens of billions of dollars worth of military aid to Ukraine. DSA members in Congress – AOC, Jamaal Bowman, Rashida Tlaib, and Cori Bush – have backed that aid over and over with little to no criticism of the Biden administration's policy.

The resolution calls on those Congressmembers to vote "No" on further arms shipments to Ukraine, which will continue to escalate the war and ratchet up militarism in Europe. It also urges them to call for the cancellation of Ukraine's foreign debt, US withdrawal from NATO, and slashing the Pentagon budget.

The aim is to start a debate within DSA, to push the organization to be boldly anti-imperialist, and to begin holding our members accountable to our platform and principles. While we support the right of Ukrainians to defend themselves and their nation, we must recognize that there is a political price to pay for giving left cover to US and NATO imperialism.



socialists in France correctly worked to deliver funds to the freedom fighters of the FLN in Algeria.

### Applying the categories to life

Many conflicts do not neatly fall into simply one of these categories but have features of more than one.

World War II for example had elements from all three of the categories listed above. Even in World War I, a most naked inter-imperialist war, different categories of war were combined. At the start of the war, when Serbia was invaded by the Austro-Hungarian empire, there was undoubtedly an element of a war of national liberation amongst Serbs. In assessing this conflict, Lenin argued that 99 percent of the war was effectively an inter-imperialist war. He argued that if the invasion was not part of the “general European war,” then socialists should “desire the success of the Serbian bourgeoisie” in that conflict. However,

*The national element in the Serbo-Austrian war is not, and cannot be, of any serious significance in the general European war. If Germany wins, she will throttle Belgium, one more part of Poland, perhaps part of France, etc. If Russia wins, she will throttle Galicia, one more part of Poland, Armenia, etc. If the war ends in a “draw”, the old national oppression will remain. To Serbia, i.e., to perhaps one per cent or so of the participants in the present war, the war is a “continuation of the politics” of the bourgeois-liberation movement. To the other ninety-nine per cent, the war is a continuation of the politics of imperialism, i.e., of the decrepit bourgeoisie, which is capable only of raping nations, not freeing them.*

In World War II, Trotsky and the Fourth International worked to separate out the different aspects of the war – arguing for support for the Soviet Union in its struggle against Nazi Germany while opposing the war effort of the imperialist forces on either side. Unlike the Stalinist forces, which switched overnight from opposition to the war to full support for the Allies when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, Trotsky emphasized the need to continue to oppose the imperialist aims of the allied countries, which were, after all, the direct oppressors at the time of vast colonial empires.

Trotsky also pointed towards an approach of engaging with the mass anti-fascist consciousness in the Allied countries through the development of the Proletarian Military Policy – which essentially argued that the best way to defeat fascism was through workers’ control of the military and the economy. In reality, this was a partial (and correct) break with the weak sides of Lenin’s ‘revolutionary defeatism,’ in the context of a war against fascist Germany.

### The dual character of the conflict

That the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a brutal imperialist invasion of a former colony is clear. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine cannot be divorced from the ongoing conflict between the US-led NATO alliance and Russia and its alliance. This conflict did not start with the Russian invasion of Ukraine but has to be seen as part of an ongoing escalation, one side of which is the eastward expansion of the sphere of influence of US imperialism in the aftermath of the collapse of Stalinism.

The most visible expression of this expansion has been the enlargement of NATO. In successive rounds of enlargement in 1999, 2004, 2009, 2017 and 2020, eastern European and Balkan countries acceded to NATO. Consequently, the border of NATO has moved 500 miles eastwards since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Along with that came the positioning of NATO battle groups permanently stationed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, and annual so-called ‘Defender Europe’ operations which last year involved almost 30,000 troops on the Russian border.

All of that means opposing the sending of NATO weapons into Ukraine, which are being sent to pursue the interests of the US and western powers.

During the conflict itself, NATO military aid has poured into Ukraine. The most powerful imperialist country in the world, the US, is engaging in its single largest weapons transfer in history. These weapons are going to a Ukrainian military which is increasingly integrated into NATO. While this is presented by the US administration as supporting Ukraine’s “fight to defend their democracy,” clearly anyone with a passing knowledge of either history or current affairs would be somewhat skeptical of that claim.

These weapons and the unprecedented sanctions, described by the French Finance Minister as “all-out economic and financial war,” are instead part of an inter-imperialist conflict between western powers under US leadership and Russia.

None of this is to alibi Putin for his invasion or to justify it. Regardless of the actions of NATO, the Russian invasion remains an inexcusable, brutal, and imperialist invasion.

### Opposing the Sending of NATO Weapons

What is the balance of these elements of the conflict – national liberation struggle and inter-imperialist conflict? The trend of development has been for the inter-imperialist element to predominate more over time, as more US weapons have been sent and as the number of NATO troops in eastern Europe has increased tenfold since the start of the year. With the drive to consolidate US hegemony over European states and to expand NATO to include practically all EU countries, it is clear that the scene is set for a prolonged conflict.

Exposing the hypocrisy of US imperialism, the true motives of the Western imperial bloc, without wavering in our opposition to Russian imperialism and our support for the right of Ukrainian people to self-defense is vital.

Socialists must attempt to disentangle, to the degree possible, the legitimate resistance to Russian imperialist invasion, which we support, and the inter-imperialist conflict, which we oppose.

It means supporting the right of Ukrainian people to resist. We don’t blame people in Ukraine for getting weaponry from wherever they can source it, but we do encourage them to operate on the basis of complete independence from NATO. If such genuinely independent forces existed, socialists could even fundraise to send them weapons.

However, those of us living in the western camp, the dominant imperialist bloc in the world, cannot

support NATO forces pouring weapons into Ukraine in the pursuit of an inter-imperialist conflict, risking an escalatory spiral that could lead to Armageddon.

We should support the Russian anti-war movement and demand the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine. Included in that should be the recognition of the right of minorities within Ukraine to self-determine their own future. An essential condition for the fair exercise of that right in Crimea or the Donbas region, for example, would have to be the withdrawal of the invading army and the right of all refugees to return.

In contrast to the calls for further militarization, we should focus on demands which can assist the Ukrainian people. The demand for cancellation of Ukrainian debt, coming from social movements within Ukraine, may yet gather momentum.

All of that means standing against the stream of pro-NATO and anti-Russian propaganda in the west. It means opposing the sending of NATO weapons into Ukraine, which are being sent to pursue the interests of the US and western powers. Similarly, it means opposing the regime of sanctions on Russia, which are simply war by economic means, for which ordinary people pay the price. ■

*A full version of this article with notes and references can be found at [rupture.ie/articles/imperialism-today](https://rupture.ie/articles/imperialism-today)*

*Paul Murphy is a TD (Member of Parliament) in Ireland for the eco-socialist party People Before Profit and a member of the revolutionary socialist network, RISE.*



Käthe Kollwitz, “The Widow II”, 1922



# Red Ripple, Blue Stagnation



BY SEAN CASE

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## Republicans Bungled the Midterms, but Democrats didn't Win

The 2022 midterm elections were the Republicans' to lose, and they lost them. Much of the liberal media depicts the results as a victory for the Democrats. To be sure, the results are remarkable and even historic. No sitting president in recent memory has seen his party perform so well. And given Biden's dismal approval rating and a looming cost-of-living crisis, the results are even more striking. But these midterm results were not a win for Democratic strategy. They reflect a deeply polarized electorate, blow back from the Supreme Court's overreach in the *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision, and a growing dissatisfaction and anger with both major parties.

Voters seemed to be motivated not by enthusiasm for their chosen party, but rather by fear of and hatred for the other side. Democrats won among voters who "somewhat disapprove" of Biden's job performance, and 70 percent of all voters are "dissatisfied" or "angry" with the state of the country.

### Abortion Saved the Democrats

In the wake of SCOTUS's decision in *Dobbs* this past summer, it was clear the right had overreached. Mass anger at the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* was on display immediately, with large protests across the country.

In states with abortion-related referenda on the ballot (Michigan, California, Vermont, Montana, and Kentucky), those referenda boosted Democratic performance. Michigan is a striking example. Incumbent Governor Gretchen Whitmer easily defeated her opponent in what was expected to be a close race, and Democrats took control of the state legislature for the first time in nearly 40 years.

But it would be a mistake to equate the popularity of abortion rights with support for the Democratic Party. A referendum to ban abortion in the Kentucky state constitution was handily defeated; at the same time, Rand Paul cruised to reelection there, as did five Republican House members. Many of those who voted for Paul and other Republicans also rejected the anti-abortion referendum.

### The Democrats' Failing Strategy

The donors and politicians of the Democratic establishment are patting themselves on the back for their performance in the midterms. Biden, when asked a day after the elections what he plans to do differently going forward, given that upwards of 70 percent of Americans think the country is headed in the wrong direction, simply said: "Nothing."

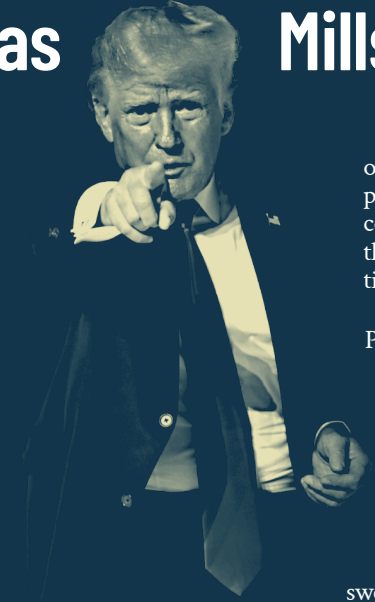
## Things went wrong where Democrats tacked to the right.

On the congressional side, Nancy Pelosi and other senior Democrats did not seek leadership roles in the next Congress. But their hand-picked successors, while younger, are their political doppelgangers.

Inflation was top of mind for most voters this year, and for good reason. Yet Democratic messaging on economic issues was almost nonexistent. Instead, they went all in on abortion and Trump's threat to democracy. That strategy worked in states where abortion rights were on the ballot and in many high-profile races featuring truly right-wing, "Stop the Steal" candidates. But such a strategy has limits and offers no positive alternative for people to vote *for*.

Things went wrong where Democrats tacked to the right, for example by nominating a former Republican governor in Florida to run against current Republican

# Trump as Millstone



## Republican Party Keeps Trying to Ride the MAGA Tiger

Donald Trump is central to the growing political polarization in the US – fueling it as well as being an expression of it.

He continues to be a problem for the GOP. Much of the Republican base remains loyal to him, but he's widely despised outside that base.

Most Trump-backed candidates won their election, the highest-profile winner being Senator-elect JD Vance in Ohio. But many of Trump's most controversial and consequential picks didn't cut it. In Pennsylvania, Mehmet Oz was easily defeated by progressive Democratic nominee John Fetterman, despite being slightly favored to win in pre-election polling and with Fetterman recovering from a stroke. Trump's pick for Governor there, Doug Mastriano, was trounced by Democrat John Shapiro. Other closely-watched races – like Nevada's Senate race and Arizona's Senate and gubernatorial races – were closer, but voters there ultimately rejected candidates with big MAGA energy.

## The Republican establishment can't compete with Trump-aligned candidates at the primary level.

Georgia's Senate race went to a December runoff, which Democrat Raphael Warnock eventually won. If the GOP ran anyone less clownish than Herschel Walker there, they would have beaten Warnock easily. But that's the problem: the Republican establishment can't compete with Trump and Trump-aligned candidates at the primary level because they've captured too much of the party base.

The GOP will continue to ride the MAGA tiger, but it has no way of stabilizing itself. With a slim House majority and a growing and emboldened right wing

of the party, we're likely to see a power struggle in the GOP in the coming months and years, including the possibility of increasingly reactionary politics emerging from it.

Playing into that power struggle will be Ron DeSantis, the re-elected Governor of Florida. While the red wave failed to rise nationwide, it flooded the Sunshine State. DeSantis annihilated his Democratic (formerly Republican) challenger, and Republicans swept both houses of the state legislature. Republicans also made serious gains among Latino voters in Florida.

After beating progressive Democrat Andrew Gillum in the 2018 Florida gubernatorial race by a mere 0.4 percent, DeSantis crushed conservative Democrat Charlie Crist by nearly 20 points this year.

DeSantis is emerging as a viable rival to Trump for the 2024 Republican Presidential nomination. The Republican establishment views DeSantis as a more stable candidate who can be relied on to protect the party's overall interests as opposed to Trump's personal agenda. While his relatively moderate stance on abortion helped distinguish him from many more extreme GOP candidates this election cycle, DeSantis is extreme in his own right. He's championed anti-LGBTQ legislation in the state, and has helped fuel the racist, homophobic, and transphobic culture wars that have become the bread-and-butter of the GOP.

Trump clearly views DeSantis as a threat. His 2024 campaign launch speech – tame by his standards – shows a clear shift in strategy likely informed by DeSantis's rising star.

Several big Republican donors are abandoning Trump. Media baron Rupert Murdoch, whose media empire includes Fox News, has reportedly warned Donald Trump that his outlets will not back another attempt to return to the White House.

However, Trump's political appeal has been his appearance as an outsider, challenging all establishment politicians and institutions. If Fox and the Republican leadership decide – as in 2016 – not to support Trump, that could ironically strengthen his support by reinforcing his anti-establishment credentials. ■



governor Ron DeSantis. The Democrats' votes in that race fell from 4.0 million in 2018 to 3.1 million in 2022.

In New York State, Democrats performed terribly and arguably cost the Party control of the House (Republicans had to flip five seats nationwide to win a majority in the House; they flipped four in New York State alone).

Five-term incumbent Sean Patrick Maloney, leader of the DCCC and responsible for the Democrats' national House strategy, lost his race to a first-time Republican candidate. Every single county in New York State swung to the right compared to 2020 voting patterns.

Nationwide, but particularly in New York, Democrats were hammered from the right on crime, which was the third highest concern among voters this year. Rather than present a coherent rebuttal to Republicans' cynical crime hysteria or a program to address working people's real concerns over rising crime rates, Democrats largely bought into the GOP's narrative. Candidates went out of their way to distance themselves from the movement to defund police and presented themselves as tough-on-crime Democrats. It didn't work.

Meanwhile, socialists and progressives did well in New York. Several DSA members, including Alexandria Ocasio Cortez (AOC), won various races in New York, some featuring strong democratic socialist messaging.

Socialists and progressives also did well across the country. Four new members will join the "Squad" this January: Greg Casar in Texas, Maxwell Frost in Florida, Summer Lee in Pennsylvania, and Delia Ramirez in Illinois.

Though it's positive that the number of socialists and progressives in Congress continues to (slowly) grow, it won't stop the establishment from backing incumbents against left insurgent candidates to the hilt. Nor does it appear that this growth will stop the likes of the Squad from their drift towards becoming loyal oppositionists within the Democratic Party rather than radical insurgents, as they initially promised. Just look at AOC's posture when she got elected and protested in front of Nancy Pelosi's office with the Sunrise movement compared to today, when she heaps praise on Pelosi and the Squad fails to raise any opposition to the continuation of moderate Democratic leadership in the House.

A contradictory process is playing out in the left wing of the Democratic Party. While the ranks of progressives are growing, their influence seems to be waning. Socialists and progressives in Congress

should be feeling emboldened to demand concessions from Party leadership and stake out positions that put them in clear contrast with the establishment. Instead, they walk back from modest requests for diplomacy in the war in Ukraine and shamefully vote to take away the strike power of railroad workers. Meanwhile, the growing ranks of the far-right in the Republican Party are showing much more capacity to put up a fight against the GOP leadership.

### Openings for DSA and the Left

The Democrats missed some potentially huge opportunities this year. They were able to beat back the Red Wave with empty rhetoric about abortion and were also likely helped by Biden's modest student debt cancellation. Imagine how well they'd do if Biden had canceled all student debt, as organizations like the Debt Collective are continuing to fight for. What if Democrats had backed up their rhetoric on abortion rights with concrete promises to abolish the filibuster to pass the Women's Health Protection Act and pack the Supreme Court? What if Democrats had campaigned on passing the PRO Act rather than leaving it languishing on the Senate floor?

## The growth of the number of socialists and progressives in Congress does not appear to stop them from their drift towards becoming loyal oppositionists within the Democrats.

While it's clear that both major parties are deeply unpopular with the majority of working and poor people, what is popular is also clear. In addition to nationwide victories for abortion rights, this year's midterms saw voters turn out to tax millionaires (Massachusetts), ban anti-worker "right to work" legislation (Illinois), legalize marijuana (Maryland and Missouri), expand Medicaid (South Dakota), and raise the minimum wage (Nebraska and Washington, DC). In deep-red Dunn County, Wisconsin, voters approved a ballot measure calling on Congress to institute a single-payer healthcare program. Save for abortion, none of these winning issues were featured in Democratic strategy. All of these victories passed with comfortable and even huge margins in some cases, picking up plenty of Republican votes. (Not all referenda and initiatives showed the electorate firmly to the left of the Democratic Party – voters in Tennessee overwhelmingly approved codifying "right-to-work" into the state's constitution, though this result seems to be an outlier in the overall picture).

The popularity of these issues – and the fact that neither Democrats or Republicans give them any more than lip service at best – points toward an opening for the Left.

DSA should be running coordinated campaigns on the national and local level on abortion rights, worker rights, climate, and more. There are surely opportunities in many states and localities for bold ballot initiatives and independent socialist candidates. DSA should systematically sniff those opportunities out. But in order to do so, DSA needs to deal with its current crisis.

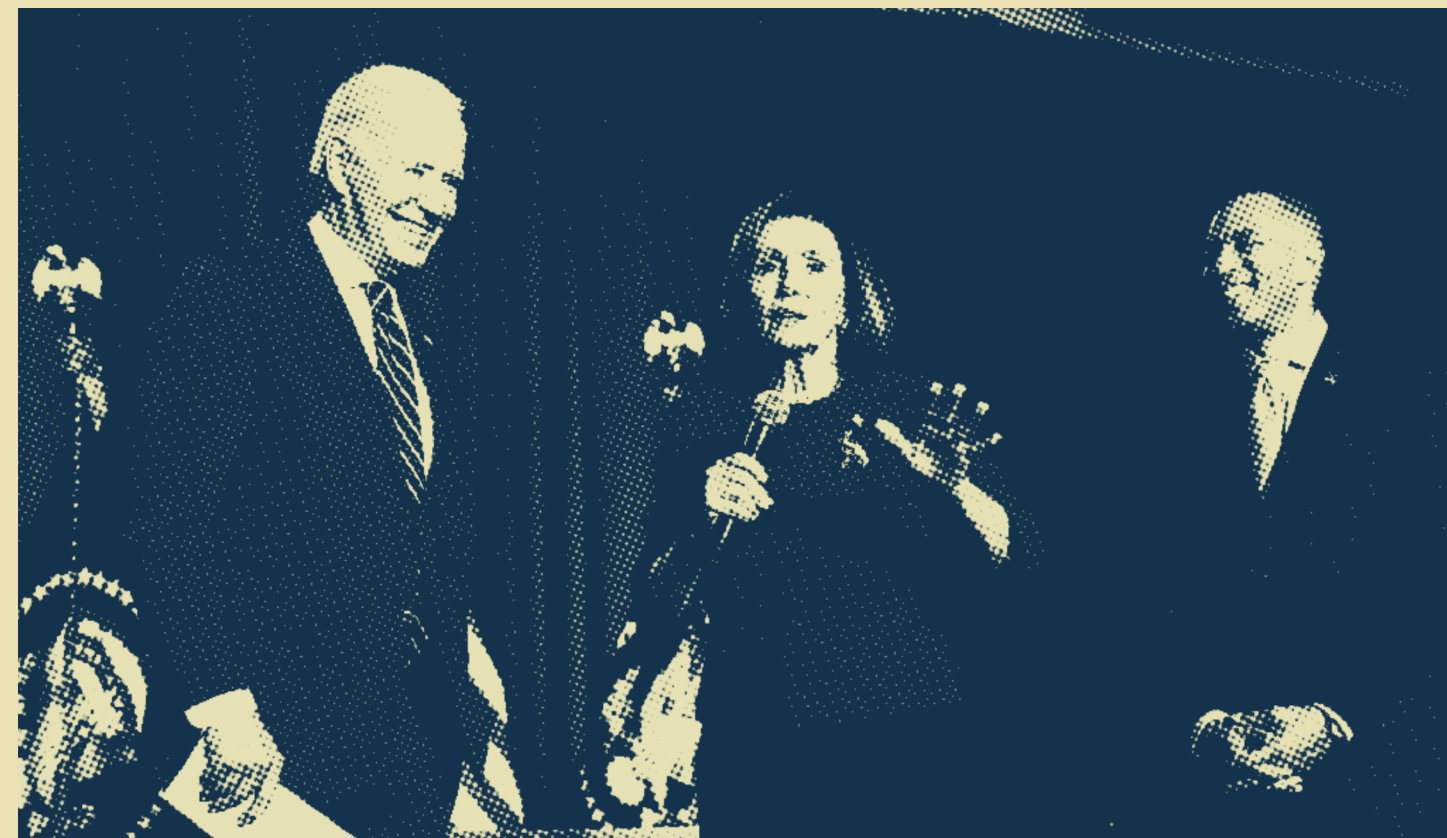
An independent force is needed in US politics – to fight the right, to tax the rich, to take on the fossil fuel industry and win a Green New Deal. But DSA leadership is currently dominated by people who believe we can realign the Democratic Party into a party for the working class. I don't see it. It's great that the Squad is ever-so-slowly growing. But their politics have shifted rightward, and only five of them are actually DSA members. And the DSA leadership has failed to take meaningful steps to exert political discipline over our members in Congress. The need for such discipline is illustrated by Jamaal Bowman's votes to fund the Israeli military earlier this year, and more recently by the votes of Bowman, Cori Bush, and AOC to wrest strike power away from rail workers.

As we approach next year's DSA national convention, Marxists within the organization need to get organized. We should move resolutions that get DSA back on track toward a dirty break with the Democratic Party, and run candidates for the NPC dedicated to making DSA into a more structured and militant organization.

The Democrats eked this one out, and we can breathe a sigh of relief that Republicans didn't come away from the midterms with a mandate for their racist, sexist, homophobic, and anti-worker agenda. But as the social and economic crises in the US and the world deepen, as the inter-imperialist war drags on in Ukraine, as the Federal Reserve continues its war on the working class, as corporations continue to reap record profits, we as socialists must diligently build a mass organization of class struggle. Otherwise we cede ground to right-wing populism, which in the absence of a Left alternative stands to attract working class support with its faux-pro-labor politics and red-meat culture wars. Socialists have a positive vision for a better world that doesn't come at the expense of any oppressed group, but rather comes from the rising up of the oppressed masses together against our true class enemies. Let's organize to make that vision a reality. ■

*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.*

*Biden, Pelosi, Jeffries – "nothing" will change after the Midterms  
Based on official White House Photo*





# Mind Your Assumptions



INTERVIEW WITH JOE BURNS BY STEPHAN KIMMERLE

TINYURL.COM/FB-REVIVING-THE-STRIKE, @STEPHANKIMMERLE

## Why a New Wave of Labor Militancy Needs Class Struggle Unionism

**Joe Burns is a labor activist, author, and currently the Director of Collective Bargaining for the Association of Flight Attendants – CWA. His recent book, *Class Struggle Unionism*, was published in 2022. Before that he wrote *Strike Back: Rediscovering Militant Tactics to Fight the Attacks on Public Employee Unions (2019)* and *Reviving the Strike: How Working People Can Regain Power and Transform America (2011)*.**

*You argue in your book, *Class Struggle Unionism*, that the new wave of labor militancy we're seeing – around Starbucks and Amazon workers, as well as with strikes of John Deere employees, and the carpenters in the Pacific Northwest – needs a theoretical approach and socialist ideas. But before we dive into that, how did you develop these ideas as a labor activist and author?*

I've been doing labor work for over 30 years. Out of college, I was a hospital worker and became president of my local union. That was at the end of the 1980s, early '90s. That was the tail end of the fightback against the concessions of the 1980s. I witnessed firsthand that a lot of the left-wing or militants within labor had a class struggle union approach. We engaged in a lot of fight-backs against labor/management cooperation programs, a lot of emphasis was on building rank-and-file power. But over the years, that changed.

Subsequently, I went to law school in New York and then bargained in healthcare. For 20 years, I've been bargaining in the airline industry, and pretty much every week I'm bargaining full-time. Now I'm the director of bargaining for the CWA.

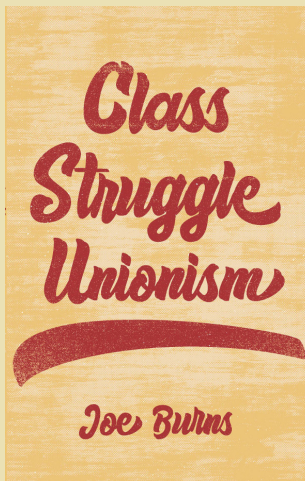
*One of your theses is that labor militancy needs a theoretical approach. Well, why is that?*

Whether we know it or not, we operate under a theoretical approach. It's just a question of which one we use, and which class it serves. For the first hundred years of labor history, the two competitors were business unionism and class struggle unionism. And those are very different ideas and approaches.

It starts with how you view the employment transaction. Whether you know it or not, you have the choice to pick your framework when you do labor work. And if you don't do that, you'll be following around with the liberal ideas which have been popular in the last couple decades, which are kind of a mixture of unionism and advocacy. And that's really going to be what guides you.

*A thesis I drew from your book is that you say we can't ignore the dominant political trends in labor. We have to address them head-on. Can you explain a bit more about the dominant trends that you see?*

The most dominant trend within labor unions was business unionism, or bureaucratic business unions as we also call it. For the last hundred years, up until the 1980s, that was the main competitor to what I call class struggle unions.



Classic business unionism has a very narrow view of labor. They see that the unions are there to negotiate a fair day's wage for a fair day's work with an individual employer or sets of employers within a craft or industry. They basically accept management's overall control of the workplace, and management's rights to control what they call the profit so that after they perform the work and get paid for it, they have no ongoing right to the enterprise. And they don't see themselves as really fighting for a larger working class. They see themselves in disputes with individual employers.

This form of unionism at its worst was often racist and sexist and exclusionary. The American Federation of Labor allowed unions in it that explicitly excluded African American workers. The union label started as an anti-Asian immigrant badge.

In contrast, we have class struggle unionism. When we think of the great struggles of trade union history, the Industrial Workers of the World in the early 1900s, the Bread and Roses Strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, the Seattle general strike, think of the bitter strikes in the 1920s that were led by the folks around the Communist Party, look at the great battles of the 1930s, the Minneapolis trucker strike, Toledo – all of them had heavy influences from folks who were socialists and communists of various stripes. They all shared an overall class struggle approach.

And their viewpoint of the employment transaction is quite different. The business union demands a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. Classical class struggle unions say labor creates all wealth and looks at the employment transaction as where the workers perform the labor during the shift but are paid only a fraction of what they produce.

*You emphasize the contradiction between the capitalist class and the working class, an internationalist approach, and a militant workplace-centered approach. How do these general ideas relate to concrete struggles? So, for example, what's the value of such an approach for a strike at Starbucks?*

The difference between the business unionists and the class struggle unionists flows through all aspects of unionism because the class struggle unionists see ourselves in a fight with the employing class in general, or the billionaire classes. We know we're going to have to take on the boss. We know we're gonna have to fight. We know that the government's primary role is to uphold the system of private property and what we call exploitation. So we know that we can't really trust government officials.

And we also know that shop floor struggles matter. Because one of the ways that employers and bosses can extract more value out of workers during a work shift is by intensifying the work or by making workers work longer. So that's why we believe that work rules are really fundamental to the struggle.

And then, of course, the whole idea that we're fighting for an entire class. We don't see individual strikes as just strikes against one employer. We see them as part of a larger struggle between the working class and the employing class. We see, on political issues, the need

for us to have independence in a labor party and break free from the control of the main political parties.

We fight for Medicare for All or universal health care as opposed to just trying to bargain with our individual employers. You can have tons of examples about what the differences are concretely, but I think they all flow back to this general philosophical difference.

*You speak about business unionism and labor liberalism, and I struggled a bit to get the difference because they are not really mutually exclusive, are they?*

In the 1980s a new form of unionism developed, which I call labor liberalism. It claimed to be a break from business unionism, but, in fact, it wasn't. So you could say they're just business unionists of a different stripe. But I think there's enough difference between them and the classic business union-



ART: SEAN CASE



ists to look at them as a separate trend. And the reason they're different is they really aren't looking toward collective bargaining and workplace struggles in workplace organizations to make their gains.

When you think about a lot of the initiatives – let's say the Fight for \$15 in fast food – it's not really geared towards organizing the workers and taking on the employers in the workplace and getting agreements or directly dealing with the employers. It's really about getting publicity, enough publicity so that they can get the left edge of the Democratic Party to pass protective labor legislation.

Where even in a business unionist organization workers might reject a contract and a certain escalation follows, the labor liberals funnel everything into one-day strikes or carefully controlled campaigns that really don't allow for any sort of explosion. Those unions are even more undemocratic than the old business unions.

A lot of folks who may be reading my book may have more interactions with the labor liberals than the straight-up business unionists.

A lot of the class struggle unionists don't write on that or don't write enough. They're hunkered down and they're doing great work. But who's got all the time to write are these labor professors, union staffers, and so forth. So, they produce a lot of volume. If you look at the main outlets – In These Times or Jacobin and so forth – a lot of the content is coming from this narrow group of people who actually don't have a lot of experience in direct class struggle unionism.

***How does class struggle unionism relate to other attempts to overcome the current low level of organizing in the labor movement? There is a lot of discussion about Jane McAlevey's proposals for example.***

I have a lot of differences with that approach. Fundamentally, she claims to be breaking with what she calls "new labor" folks, like the folks from SEIU. However, I think she's operating very much within that framework. To me, Jane McAlevey's approach is very much based on this idea that the working class needs these outside organizers to come in and get them to fight. And so then it becomes a question of organizing skills and techniques. She goes into great detail about how you pick leaders, organic leaders, and structure tests, which I call hoops people have to jump through before they're allowed to strike.

When you step back and think about it, is that really true? It's based on the assumption that struggle comes from outside the workplace and is imported in there. But struggle comes because of

the conditions of capitalism and in particular the conditions and contradictions in that workplace. So that's why we have strikes coming more out of bargaining or demands than out of organizing. And then organizing is how you get together to win.

Second – and related – is the idea that the unions themselves want to fight and they're organizing the workers to fight harder. But that's not the case. If we look at the strikes of production workers over the last year or two, in almost all of them the workers were the ones who wanted to fight, and the unions were the ones who were kind of dragging their feet or reluctantly engaged in the battle.

A lot of them involved failed tentative agreements where the union said, "hey, this is good enough." And the members said, "screw you, we're gonna vote that down." Sometimes even three or four times. So this idea that the main task is for the outside union staff to come in and get people to fight doesn't track with reality.

There's also a reason that certain ideas become popular, especially among a certain stratum of people. So ideas that fit more within the union establishment are more palatable because it promotes an idea of change in doing things, but it's not fundamentally saying, "hey, we've got a fundamental problem with trade unionism and with the union bureaucracy."

***In your book, you speak about the labor bureaucracy as a force behind business unionism and labor liberalism. But what is that, the labor bureaucracy? Is every union staffer a bureaucrat?***

I'm a staffer. I think staffers have an important role to play in the labor movement, and we need a strategy that's gonna encompass them. It can't just be all about the rank-and-file, because people get promoted within the labor movement and have access to resources. We want that, and we need a philosophy that encompasses everybody. I think that the concept of the labor bureaucracy – or labor establishment – is more of an objective standard that exists within the labor movement.

There exists within labor a group of people who are doing union work, but their life is now divorced from the workplace. They're not showing up to an employer. They're maybe getting pay that's higher and in excess of the workers they represent.

For example, they don't experience the sort of direct oppression every day that railroad workers do. So the railroad union officials who may have been out of the workplace for 30 years, do they really know what rail workers are up against now with preci-



*Workers at sandwich shop Homegrown and its distribution arm, Catapult NW, celebrating their NLRB election win in December. Workers at Homegrown cafes won their vote 59-11, an 84 percent majority. Since June, workers have been campaigning publicly for union recognition through picketing and leafleting, as well as taking on shop floor issues through collective action (for example delegations, petitions, and strikes). Workers at Homegrown cafes went on strike this summer over safety issues and the gender pay gap. Drivers at Catapult NW went on strike over surveillance cameras in their vans and won. Across the company, they are ready to use the shop floor power and public support they've built to win a fair contract.* Photo: Maris Zivarts

sion railroading, the scheduling, and how it impacts their lives? They don't. There's a fundamental difference. And then throughout labor history, that difference has translated into union officials having a lot more conservative and cautious approach.

They're also more susceptible because their way of life is tied to the survival of the union as an institution. They don't want to step out of line legally. Not all of them, but many of them have an interest in not getting into these big confrontations that might jeopardize the union treasuries. And some are just lazy. Fighting is more work than settling. If you go picking a bunch of fights in a workplace and get everyone filing grievances, guess what? You're gonna be working harder. And a lot of people don't do that.

That being said, there's a lot of great staff out there, and there are a lot of people who want to fight, and they go on staff because they want to do it. They are important. We can't do this all from the rank-and-file. But I think we need to have a philosophy that helps

them and says: Okay, stay the course. You entered staff because you want to do this. You need to recognize that you're not workers, but you can still relate to the struggle in a certain way and live by certain principles.

***You make a very strong case in your book that class struggle unionists need a framework of thinking beyond the limitations of a capitalist society.***

Yes, even if we have the most militant unions, you're still negotiating the terms of your exploitation. Militant unionism in and of itself cannot resolve the contradiction because the billionaires are going to keep getting billions. And what is capital? A social relationship, right? It's power. Over time, you give someone more and more power. Guess what? Eventually, they're gonna use it to crush you. Employers very much view us as in a fight to the death. They want to exterminate unionism. So that's one of the problems with business unionism. They crave stability and stable labor relations. But that is fiction. ■



# Peppering | noun [ˈpɛ-ɹ(ə-)rɪŋ]



BY CLAIRE SCHACHTELY

## A Red Hot Labor Tactic to Revitalize the Labor Movement by Exploring New Strategies in Order to Increase Union Density and Participation

Unions are a critical force to fight for the rights and liberation of the multiracial working class. They empower workers to negotiate for higher wages, secure better working conditions, and improve their benefits. Polls show that a large majority of Americans support unions; however, union membership remains at less than ten percent. There is a clear disconnect here where socialists and labor activists have a unique opportunity to close the gap between support for and membership in unions. Many activists are tackling the problem head on by taking jobs to directly facilitate union support among the rank and file workers and improve conditions for themselves, their coworkers, and workers across the world. There are two strategies for engaging in this: one is acquiring a job without a union with the goal of organizing a union, and the other is taking a job with an existing union with the goal of developing that union's fighting capacity to meet the needs of the working class.



### Salting and Peppering: Labor's Favorite Spices

Salts are workers who take a job in a non-unionized workplace with the objective of creating a union with their coworkers. Salts train in organizing programs, and they work covertly to

build solidarity in the workplace while pushing for worker unification against the common profit-driven boss or corporation.

An offshoot of salting is peppering, where workers choose a job in an already unionized workplace, for the purpose of strengthening and progressing that union. Peppers do this by organizing co-workers to build more democratic and militant unions that fight to improve their workplace. Peppers participate in concerted activities to get union members excited and engaged with the union. These include informational pickets to share relevant worker protections in the union contract, hand billing to invite workers to upcoming union meetings, and enforcing the union contract on the shop floor by engaging in the grievance process. Unions may have a strong contract, but companies will constantly work around and outright ignore that contract, so it is the duty of all workers to enforce it. When the time comes for a new contract, peppers organize their co-workers to fight for a great contract and prepare for a possible strike.

Although there are differences between salting and peppering, many aspects of the project are similar, such as building trust and respect in the eyes of fellow workers, developing individual organizing skills, and working to build solidarity among the workers. Salting and peppering are inextricably linked. When a salt is successful, meaning they help to form a union and win a strong contract, then



they become a pepper who continues to strengthen and enforce the union contract and keep rank and file participation high. The labor movement needs both new activists to take on non-unionized corporate giants but also fresh organizers to revitalize existing establishments.

Both salting and peppering are done out of an ideological commitment to improving the material, economic and working conditions of the working class. This commitment comes from a place of genuine love for working people as a whole, and a desire to improve conditions in order for us to have a meaningful life. It entails a direct collaboration that eliminates preaching from above or outside; it is not manipulating workers into some far-fetched plan. Instead, it is immediate involvement in shared struggle, with the ultimate goal of creating a better and more meaningful life free from the toils and tribulations that constitutes work under the modern capitalist system.

### Peppers Turn Up the Heat on Union Bureaucracy

One of the main differences between salting and peppering is the work peppers do within an already established union. Large unions have shifted from away from the days of rank and file-led unions to bureaucratic, top-down organizations, lacking any semblance of meaningful worker input. This is reflective of business unionism, which is the dominant approach in most labor unions in the US. It's based on the belief that workers, managers and bosses should collaborate in "their" corporation for the benefit of business. This creates unions that try to limit the aspirations of workers and tamp down any revolutionary potential of the working class. Since union leadership does not work in complete solidarity with workers, they end up in arguments that are entrenched in capitalist competition,

nationalism, and a race to the bottom.

This approach has helped facilitate the decline of the labor movement for decades. As a result, workers may be partially or entirely disengaged from their union. Peppers try to reverse this trend by engaging in workplace struggles in a way that promotes worker democracy and militancy in their union.

Unions are only as strong as the solidarity of the membership.

Growing worker engagement can mean the difference between a toothless business union run by bureaucrats and a tough, growing union, led by the rank and file.

An activated and engaged membership bargains strong contracts, which strengthens the workers' collective power. This will hopefully be the case for the 350,000 Teamsters at UPS. The union contract expires July 31, 2023, and the UPS workers are ready to fight for better conditions,

better pay, and an all-around stronger contract. If successful, this could set an industry standard across the nation, because UPS is the largest private union contract in North America and a major player in the logistics industry. Since the flow of goods through deliveries is so crucial to the US economy, a strike could have a major impact across several different industries, getting the attention of the ruling class. This is where peppers need to be organizing around central, large and achievable demands in order to win substantial gains for the multiracial working class.

Fully embedding oneself into the belly of the beast to combat corporate giants and take on sleepy bureaucratic unions in order to advance the quality of jobs and meaningfully impact working people's lives is proving to be an effective technique for creating the kind of change necessary to fight the corrupt capitalist system. ■

*Claire Schachtely lives in Portland. Claire is a rank and file Teamster and a member of DSA.*

GRAPHICS: MEG MORRIGAN





# Three DSA Congressmembers Vote to Ban the Railway Strike



STATEMENT BY REFORM & REVOLUTION

WWW.REFORMANDREVOLUTION.ORG

## DSA Needs a Fundamental Change in its Electoral Strategy

The vote by three DSA members in Congress against the basic rights of working-class people to withhold our labor and go on strike is unacceptable. We need discussions in the run-up to and decisions at the 2023 DSA National Convention to hold elected officials in Congress and state and local office accountable. To make this a reality, we also need a debate on how to apply accountability in our own organization, DSA.

A central challenge throughout the history of the socialist movement has been keeping our elected leaders accountable as they face relentless ruling class pressure in an environment built to manage capitalism, not represent workers. The latest example of this is the vote of DSA members Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), Cori Bush, and Jamaal Bowman on November 30 in favor of the Democratic Party's leadership attempt to ban a

looming railroad strike – planned to start on December 9th – and to impose a tentative agreement that a majority of the members of the railroad unions have rejected.

### The Counter-arguments

The defense by AOC and others thus far has been to say that unions asked them to vote in favor of the bill to ban the strike as part of a compromise with Nancy Pelosi (at that time still the House Speaker) to allow a vote on a seven day sick leave package.

First of all, the majority of members of these unions voted on the tentative agreement and a majority of the membership did not approve it. They were preparing strike action. The way to get seven (or the 15 days unions had demanded) days of paid sick leave was to force the railroad bosses – if necessary by a strike.

Socialists in office should not outsource their policies to union leaders, many of whom are often quite conservative and believe in class collaboration. While getting the input of union leaders is impor-

tant, at the end of the day, socialists in office need to make their own political judgments.

Let us remember the vast majority of union leaders supported Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden against Bernie Sanders in the 2016 and 2020 primaries, and DSA did not follow their advice in those situations. Too often, unions have supported environmentally destructive programs because of promises of jobs – something socialists in office need to disagree with (while expressing sympathy). In the case of the bill to impose an agreement on the railroad workers, DSA Congressman Rashida Tlaib made the correct decision to vote against imposing it.

Second, the whole maneuver was rotten from the start. The seven days of sick leave was not included in the first bill in order to allow the Senate to pass the first bill (banning the strike) without the seven-day sick leave provision. AOC and others claim that this would have still increased the pressure and the incentives for President Biden to step in with an executive order that would include the seven days of sick leave. But Biden had asked the Democrats in Congress in a letter from the White House “to pass legislation immediately to adopt the Tentative Agreement between railroad workers and operators – without any modifications or delay – to avert a potentially crippling national rail shutdown.”

If there had been an outspoken socialist left standing against Democrats and Republicans to ban a strike, this would have made a real difference in the struggle against such maneuvers. If the entire left had voted like Rashida Tlaib – “no” on the ban of the strike, “yes” on the seven days sick leave – it would have been an even stronger signal on the one hand to Biden to act in favor of the workers, and on the other hand to the workers that socialists are on their side, never voting to take away their right to collective workplace action.



### Debate About Accountability

On December 1, Seattle DSA published a call for action by the NPC, later supported by 21 other chapters, five YDSA chapters, the AfroSoc caucus nationally, and two political caucuses, Reform & Revolution and Marxist Unity Group (tinyurl.com/SDSA-RailroadStrike):

*We call on the DSA National Political Committee (NPC) to organize a town hall to make clear that DSA stands 100 percent with railroad workers and against the government's ban of their strike. [...] The town hall discussion will also help to determine how to proceed regarding the vote of the three DSA Congressmembers, including potential disciplinary action. It should mark the beginning of a structured discussion within DSA, concluding at our 2023 National Convention, on what we expect from DSA members elected to public office and how to hold them accountable to DSA's platform. As part of this, DSA nationally should establish a Socialists in Office committee which holds regular meetings with the NPC and is able to make binding decisions on legislative matters.*

DSA's national leadership, the NPC, issued a statement on December 4, saying:

*"We are proud of DSA member Rep. Rashida Tlaib's vote against the TA, and for sick days. Any vote by Congress to impose a bad contract on workers sides with the boss, and contradicts democratic socialist values.*

*We disagree and are disappointed with the decision of DSA members Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rep. Cori Bush to needlessly vote to enforce the TA."*

This statement also announces a step toward collective discussion within DSA through a “mass call”.

However, there is no mention of any process to develop DSA's ability to hold elected officials accountable. The NPC should be clear about the subject of the “mass call” – it is needed to talk about the Railway Workers Strike and the DSA Congress-

## The Background



A railroad strike would have a huge impact. The Wall Street Journal reported that “estimates have put the ultimate costs in the billions of dollars, based in part on prolonged shortages resulting from a lack of alternative delivery channels for key items” (December 3, 2022).

The workers planned to use this huge economic power as leverage to demand paid sick days. The railroads made over \$21 billion this year in the first three quarters – 65 times more than the cost of providing seven paid sick days (data from Bernie Sanders, December 2).

The huge profits of the rail barons are in no small part due to the fact that “[t]he seven largest U.S. freight railroads have cut their workforces by 29 percent since 2016 [... putting] more pressure on workers, limiting their ability to take time off.” (Wall Street Journal, December 3, 2022)





# Building Accountability



Now is the time for DSA to take steps toward holding our representatives in public office and in our leadership accountable. Several proposals that did not pass at the 2021 DSA National Convention should be seen in a new light given the recent experiences.

The discussion in the run-up to the August 2023 convention of our organization and the convention itself needs to grapple with these issues and adopt policies that ensure comrades in elected office promote DSA, advance socialist ideas, build movements, and act in line with DSA's general program and political decisions. Proposals that should be taken up can be read below. Our strategic aim in electoral work should be to run and elect candidates who will use their high profile positions to represent DSA's politics, popularize DSA's campaigns, encourage people to join DSA, and actively build grassroots movements from below. Unfortunately, the vast majority of DSA members in elected office do not currently play this role. DSA members elected who represent DSA should be required to:

**A.** When there are multiple DSA representatives in a body, a **Socialist Caucus** should be formed that projects its own public profile, policies, messaging, and votes together as a block. In Congress, DSA representatives should be identified with a Socialist Caucus, rather than being subsumed in the Progressive Caucus as is currently the case. While we should collaborate with progressives on issues we agree on, socialist and progressive politics are fundamentally different.

**B.** In our endorsement process we need to identify **DSA candidates** who commit to running for office to represent DSA and commit to the points below. DSA should prioritize mobilizing its resources – financial contributions from comrades as well as volunteers – for those DSA candidates who commit to these requirements to act as representatives of DSA.

**C.** While we need to adopt these standards for candidates who will run to represent DSA, we should maintain the tactical flexibility of calling for votes for and supporting other left-wing candidates whose election would advance the interests of the Left, who are not running to represent DSA, but might still be **DSA endorsed candidates**. In his presidential campaigns, Bernie Sanders was not running as a DSA representative, but it was correct in our view, for DSA to actively campaign for Bernie, while maintaining the freedom to raise our own politics and criticisms.

**D.** DSA Candidates, running to represent DSA:

1. Comrades who want to be DSA candidates need to vote in accordance with DSA's platform. DSA's elected leadership (the NPC for Congress, chapter or state leaderships for lower office) should establish Socialists in Office Committees. These committees should discuss upcoming significant votes with elected officials and communicate those discussions to the membership. DSA candidates need to commit to follow the voting recommendations of these committees.
2. DSA candidates should commit to participate in DSA sponsored town halls and other forms of discussion including on issues where controversies around their work arise; they have to commit that their public profile and position will be used to help publicize when DSA has criticisms of their votes or other actions.

**E. Other DSA endorsed candidates:**

We should come back to the amendment ([tinyurl.com/Amend5toRes8](https://www.tinyurl.com/Amend5toRes8)) that got 43 percent of the votes at the last DSA National Convention in 2021 which stated (among other demands):

*"[Be it]Resolved that, in order to build toward political and*

*organizational independence, DSA encourages nationally-endorsed candidates to*

1. *Clearly identify, in public-facing campaign messaging, as democratic socialists who are running against the Democratic Party's corporate establishment;*
2. *Use campaigns and elected offices to encourage supporters to join DSA, help organize unions, and build independent working-class political organizations;*
3. *Refuse support for corporate Democrats, actively support left-wing challenges to establishment incumbents, and help build fundraising and campaign networks for DSA candidates instead of contributing to Democratic legislative PACs (e.g. DCCC, DSCC, etc.);*
4. *Defend anti-corporate and left-wing independent electoral candidates from corporate and right-wing attacks;*
5. *If elected, work to build democratic socialist caucuses in legislative bodies, orient these caucuses towards conflict with the capitalist Democratic Party establishment, and prioritize the creation and expansion of socialist caucuses over reforming Democratic legislative caucuses;*
6. *Be active, dues-paying members of DSA and frequently consult their local chapters on political and legislative decisions."*

**F.** In order to hold elected comrades within DSA accountable, we should revive the efforts from the 2021 Convention to be able to recall NPC members and to democratically elect comrades to fill NPC vacancies ([tinyurl.com/resolution5dsa21](https://www.tinyurl.com/resolution5dsa21)), to elect the National Director ([tinyurl.com/resolution4dsa21](https://www.tinyurl.com/resolution4dsa21)), and set policy through national referendums ([tinyurl.com/BylawChange2](https://www.tinyurl.com/BylawChange2)). ■

members should be told to be there to hear what DSA representatives have to say. The subject of the meeting also needs to include how we can hold elected officials accountable. This is a topic the NPC has not just shied away from, but has – in the case of Jamaal Bowman's votes for military aid to Israel – turned into its opposite by taking disciplinary measures not against Bowman, but DSA's national BDS working group and its leadership who dared to criticize Bowman.

## Necessary Consequences

Some comrades in DSA are calling for the expulsion of the three Congressmembers who voted against the workers' rights to strike.

We believe that DSA would emerge from this crisis stronger if we made every possible attempt to convince and pressure the three DSA members of Congress to change their approach. We share the skepticism many comrades have that these members of Congress will change their approach, or even participate in a genuine dialogue with DSA's membership on the issue.

However, we do not believe the majority of DSA members have drawn those conclusions. The role of the Marxist left in DSA needs to be to find ways to win a majority of DSA's membership to our ideas. We don't want to act out of anger and thereby make it easier for the leadership of DSA to isolate us, allowing them to continue the existing (broken) electoral strategy.

Expelling DSA's most prominent representatives may help preserve our political integrity, but expulsions alone will not increase our power to hold other elected leaders accountable in the future. Especially if the majority in DSA does not understand that step.

DSA's federally elected officials are its highest profile public representatives, and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is one of the most popular politicians in the United States. The decision to expel or even censure these officials would become national news and potentially draw criticism and condemnation from progressive journalists, organizers, and politicians. We need to prepare DSA for such an outcome – if we can't avoid it.

Expulsion may still be necessary if our elected representatives continue to betray workers and refuse to be accountable to our organization. But we need to deal with them firstly through educational measures, by an organized discussion in DSA, and by a collective, democratic process that we can uphold in the future, no matter what comes up. ■





# 1-2-3-4 Steps of Accountability



BY TY MOORE  
 @TYRONMOORE

**How to keep our elected leaders accountable and whether DSA should fight for political independence from the Democratic Party are likely to remain the most explosive issues in the run-up to the 2023 DSA National Convention. The effort in DSA's largest chapter to pass "The 1-2-3-4 Plan to Build a Party-like Structure" offers a model for Marxists and DSA's left joining together to offer an alternative vision for DSA's electoral organizing.**

After years of big-picture strategy debates in DSA over if and how to break with the Democratic Party, the practical and concrete character of the "1-2-3-4 Plan" was refreshing. Unsurprisingly, the proposal failed to win a majority at the October biennial convention of New York City DSA. Yet it succeeded in uniting much of the chapter's left-wing and won support from over a third of the convention delegates. It was the central debate at the convention, laying down a clear marker that will shape future debates in NYC-DSA and nationally.

The proposal galvanized sharp opposition and national attention because it was correctly seen by all sides as an achievable step moving New York City DSA toward greater political independence from the Democratic Party.

## "Visibility, Consciousness, and Base Building"

In substance, the 1-2-3-4 Plan was relatively modest and limited to state legislative candidates. The most important elements of the proposal were that all NYC-DSA-endorsed candidates should run on a slate, cross-endorse each other, and coordinate their messaging; that they should identify common issues to run on together, while being free to also emphasize district-specific issues; they should all clearly identify as "democratic socialists" to build DSA's profile and should downplay affiliation with the Democratic Party (despite using the Democratic ballot line); and that, if elected, DSA-endorsed candidates should commit to join the Socialists In Office committee (SIO) and consistently vote as a bloc together.

According to Neal Meyer, the primary author of the 1-2-3-4 Plan and a leader of the Bread & Roses caucus in DSA, the proposal outlines initial steps to "build a party-like structure" and "is designed to address two major problems: the problem of visibility, consciousness, and base building and the problem of pushing back against our enemies' new strategy" (SocialistCall.com, 10/20/22).

To take the last point first, the enemies Meyer highlights are the New York Democratic Party establishment and NYC Mayor Eric Adams, who famously told funders he was "at war" with DSA during his 2021 campaign. The "new strategy" of the NY Democratic Party leaders, on full display during the 2022 election cycle, was to more aggressively red-bait and smear DSA and democratic socialism. In response, Neal Meyer alongside co-author Alex Pellittari, argued that:

*In the coming elections, it is urgent that NYC-DSA defines itself in the public consciousness as a positive force fighting for people's interests and asking them to join us in this struggle. [...] By clearly identifying as a slate and as DSA, we also distinguish ourselves from progressive Democrats [...]*



Photo: Alec Perkins, [tinyurl.com/MAYDAY17-DSA-NY](https://tinyurl.com/MAYDAY17-DSA-NY), Copyright: CC BY 2.0, [creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)

*...] The problem for democratic socialists is that – denied the use of our own ballot line by the US's two-party system – we do not factor into this conflict as a third clear alternative. Instead of a struggle between the working class and an owning class, politics is framed as a competition between Republicans and Democrats [...]. We can't have our own ballot line, yet. But we can take clear steps to present ourselves to the people as a distinct political force.*

For these exact reasons, my caucus in DSA, *Reform & Revolution*, argues that socialist candidates should avoid using the Democratic ballot line wherever possible. But in NYC and other places where the only real elections are the Democratic Party primaries, we agree that it makes sense, for now, for DSA to use the Democrats' ballot line – though with three important conditions: that DSA candidates should make absolutely clear that they are politically independent from the corporate-dominated Democratic Party, that they will remain accountable to DSA and other movement organizations who elect them, and that they are fighting to build a working-class political alternative.

## Breakthroughs Lead to Challenges in New York

The process of capitulation to and co-optation into the Democratic Party is far more advanced among DSA's congressional representatives than NYC-DSA's state legislative representatives. But there is a clear and present danger of similar pressures creating similar results. The 1-2-3-4 Plan offered NYC-DSA an opportunity to push back against those ruling-class pressures, which are an inevitable byproduct of NYC-DSA's historic electoral breakthrough since AOC's stunning victory four years ago.

In socialist electoral politics, the central challenge is how to combat the immense pressures the capitalist class brings down on working-class representatives.

One impressive feature of NYC-DSA's state legislative delegation is how they are organized together with the chapter leadership in the Socialists In Office committee (SIO). Established in 2020, the SIO brings together the NYC-DSA Steering Committee and working group leaders with DSA's elected state senators and Assembly members. The eight state representatives on the SIO are expected to vote and act as a unified block whenever the group takes a collective decision. The SIO meets most weeks and, according to Zohran Mamdani in an interview with *City & State* (7/5/22):

*We have created a decision-making process by which we could air out a question – whether it be legislation or whatever else, or endorsements – and then have a structure to a debate and then a vote, internally, to figure out: Where do we lie on this as a committee, and how do we ensure that we move as a collective even amidst individual dissent?*

In many respects, the SIO is a model for how DSA can keep its representatives accountable and maintain their political independence from the Democratic Party.

Yet even the best organizational structures will not prevent the Democratic Party and the ruling class



more generally from bringing acute political pressures down on socialists in office. Over the last year, this pressure has resulted in several controversial split decisions by NYC-DSA state legislators that provoked outcry from DSA members.

### Accountability Requires More Than Structures

After NYC-DSA endorsed David Alexis for State Senate against the powerful Democratic incumbent Kevin Parker, DSA members rightfully expected their sitting state legislators to also endorse Alexis, and use their public profile to help get him elected. The four DSA state assembly members all endorsed Alexis, as did AOC. But NYC-DSA's two State Senators, Julia Salazar and Jabari Brisport, refused to endorse Alexis, clearly concerned that Democratic Party leaders would punish them for backing a socialist challenger to their senate colleague.

Another controversy erupted when Julia Salazar surprised many housing justice organizers and DSA members by sponsoring a controversial bill to reorganize the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) that many feared was a step toward privatization. Apart from sharp debate over the merits of the bill – Salazar defended inviting private financing into NYCHA as the only politically viable option to address chronic underfunding – what especially alarmed many DSA members and housing justice advocates was Salazar's apparent decision to prioritize insider deal-making over open dialogue with movement representatives to develop a joint strategy and to amplify their voices in the halls of power.

These split decisions and others were not taken in violation of collective SIO decisions (though many felt Salazar's sponsorship of the NYCHA bill violated a resolution agreed by the NY Citywide Leadership Committee). Instead, as Julia Salazar explained to *City & State* (7/5/22):

*There have been a lot of occasions where we [in the SIO] didn't make any decision at all and then as a result we just ended up voting in different ways.*

This underscores that the central problem facing DSA electoral strategy is not the lack of accountability structures, important as these are. The central challenge is building political clarity among DSA members and leadership around the need to root socialist electoral tactics within a fighting, class-struggle strategy and to build toward a socialist political alternative to the Democratic Party.

The main significance of the fight to pass the 1-2-3-4 Plan at NYC-DSA's bi-annual convention last

October was that it brought together a coalition of the Marxist left within the chapter to campaign for this vision. And the same needs to be done nationally.

### The Debate in the New York City Chapter

Proposed by comrades in Bread & Roses, Marxist Unity Group, Emerge, and others on NYC-DSA's left-wing, the backers of the 1-2-3-4 Plan included long-time chapter leaders and comrades who played important roles in the NYC-DSA's electoral breakthroughs.

Yet virtually all of NYC-DSA's elected representatives signed the main opposition statement to the 1-2-3-4 Plan, with the exception being State Assembly representative Zohran Mamdani who signed on in support. Most of NYC-DSA's chapter leadership around Socialist Majority caucus and the newly formed "We Win Together" slate – which included many leaders of the chapters' electoral work – also campaigned against the 1-2-3-4 Plan.

For those who believe in "realigning" the Democratic Party, or who see gradualist reforms within capitalism as the only viable road to progress, a narrow focus on electoral victories and insider horse-trading makes sense.

Consequently, no one was surprised that the proposal lost at NYC-DSA's convention. Given the powerful opposition, it's impressive that 35 percent of convention delegates, organized through a de facto alliance of the three Marxist caucuses in the chapter, stood up against pressure from their elected leaders and were successful in shaping the central debate at the convention.

At root, the debate in DSA is over the purpose of running in elections and the role of socialists in office. For those in DSA who believe that "realigning" the Democratic Party to serve working-class people is possible, or who see gradualist reforms within capitalism as the only viable road to progress, a narrow focus on electoral victories and insider horse-trading remains a persistent political conclusion (though we'd dispute this approach is more effective even at winning reforms). For Marxists and those who believe a rupture with capitalism is both possible and the only way forward for humanity, elections are first and foremost a tool to fight for working-class conscious-



*NYC-DSA endorsed David Alexis for State Senate against the powerful Democratic incumbent Kevin Parker. But NYC-DSA's two State Senators, Julia Salazar and Jabari Brisport, refused to endorse Alexis, clearly concerned that Democratic Party leaders would punish them. Image: facebook.com/David4BK/*

ness, organization, and political independence from both capitalist parties.

The main opposition statement to 1-2-3-4 was a widely circulated sign-on letter titled "Against 1-2-3-4, a resolution solution to an organizing problem." The opposition took issue with the idea that DSA's elected representatives should be expected to vote as a united block:

*The expectation that every Socialist in Office always vote the same ignores that DSA, the working class of New York City, and the constituencies in their districts do not have unified positions on every issue. Expecting or holding ourselves to the expectation of political purity as a precursor to organizing is backwards and ineffective – it only works to further isolate DSA as an organization.*

This line of argument completely obscures the nature of the problem, as if the political calculations facing elected socialists can simply be chalked up as disagreements among comrades. The central challenge is how to combat the immense pressures the capitalist class brings down on working-class representatives in the halls of power. Through promises of political favors and threats of retaliation, corporate Democrats have more often than not succeeded at transforming working-class leaders initially elected as genuine fighters into a loyal and harmless left flank of their party.

It is not an "expectation of political purity" to ask socialists legislators to act as a unified block. Debates arising among electeds, or within and between DSA and allied organizations, is inevitable. But leaving critical decisions up to individual electeds is setting ourselves up for an endless train of betrayals. Instead, the goal should be to recruit candidates who agree that debates will be settled through democratic processes within DSA, like the SIO committee, and through negotiations with our allies.

There will, of course, be moments when DSA decides to endorse candidates who are not members, or whose primary political home is another movement organization, but who are nonetheless advancing working-class politics. Bernie Sanders' two runs for the presidency are the prime examples. Making room for these situations should not get in the way of moving DSA toward more party-like structures and fighting to build a clear culture of democratic accountability at the heart of our electoral work.

For Marxists, elections are first and foremost a tool to fight for working-class consciousness, organization, and political independence from both capitalist parties.

We in *R&R* are urging chapters across the country to discuss electoral resolutions along the lines of 1-2-3-4, and for DSA's left trends to come together nationally to coordinate a similar effort. Through this process, it will be vital to build a strong Marxist wing within DSA to offer proposals and tools to overcome the general malaise in the socialist and workers' movement. ■

*Read a fuller version of this article online, dealing with the argument that the 1-2-3-4 Plan and similar efforts are "too little, too late."*

*Ty Moore is a member of the Tacoma DSA Steering Committee and is a leader in Tacoma's housing justice movement. He has previously worked as a union organizer and was National Director for 15 Now, among other organizing projects. He now works for Seattle DSA.*



# “I Don’t Horse-trade. You Can Vote for Saving Lives – or Not”



INTERVIEW WITH ROBIN WONSLEY BY TY MOORE

ROBINFORMPLS.COM, TYTYMO77

**Robin Wonsley, a DSA city council member from Minneapolis, on her first year in office and her independence from the Democratic Party.**

*I want to start with the big labor news this week: the vote in Congress, led by the Democratic Party, to impose a bad contract on rail workers and ban them from going on strike. Three of the four DSA members in Congress voted with the Biden administration on this, which has created a real uproar in DSA. What are your thoughts?*

There’s definitely valid anger coming from working-class people, especially members in DSA, towards the Squad for an action that absolutely seems like a betrayal of the working class. Basically siding with railroad companies in a capitalist party over the needs of railroad workers. I think this is indicative of an ongoing struggle that’s been happening within DSA on how to truly keep in check the electoral power that we’ve built, all the way to the federal level.

What does it look like to have checks and balances on candidates and elected leaders that we’re putting into office, who are supposed to be representing a socialist vision, a socialist platform, and the will of the people? And when our electeds are in violation of that, what do we do to hold them accountable?

I can’t do the work of strengthening working-class people’s political power from within the Democratic Party.

Last year in Chicago, there was a DSA-elected alderman who voted for an austerity budget, a betrayal of working people. The DSA chapter in Chicago publicly called him out and told him to resign from DSA. I’m seeing similar proposals come forward in response to the railroad vote too. I’m hoping that our leadership within DSA don’t shy away from this debate because it’s not going away!

I think when you are attached to the Democratic Party, you’re

forced into trying to serve two masters. You’re going to be pulled between trying to uphold the interests of a political party beholden to capitalist forces while also trying to serve the interests of working-class people. You’re going to ask: is there a way I could maintain this middle ground between the people and the capitalist forces to somehow advance a leftist agenda, a socialist agenda?

If we don’t wholeheartedly lay down the expectation that as a socialist you are choosing the people every single time, it’s gonna be DSA’s demise.

*Why did you decide to run independent of the Democratic Party, to take a path most would consider to be harder, when so many DSA candidates have found success running on the Democratic Party line?*

My decision to run for office solidified during the uprising that took place in 2020, following the Minneapolis police murder of George Floyd. That uprising was a clear marker that the Democratic party establishment had failed working-class people and black and brown people once again. Prior to George Floyd, I had been organizing against police violence and for anti-capitalist proposals that would uplift working-class

Using public office to promote working-class protest:  
instagram.com/robin4mpls

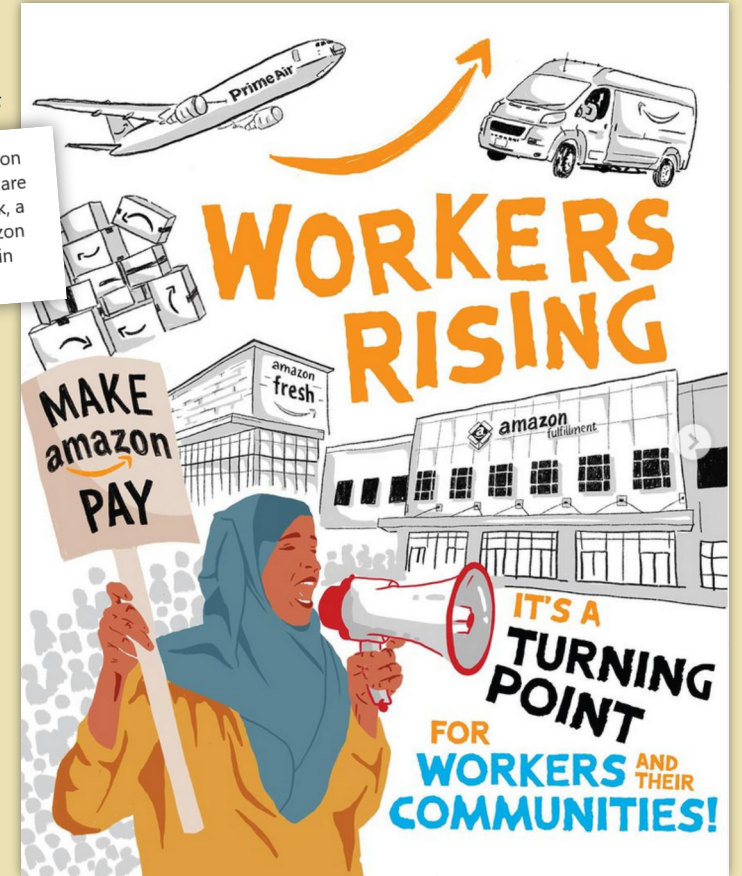
robin4mpls On December 8, Amazon workers and community members are standing up for their safety at work, a living wage, and action from Amazon on the company’s climate impact in Minnesota. Join us! Link in bio.

people, primarily black and brown people, like the fight for a \$15 minimum wage, and for fully-funded public schools.

Every single one of those struggles that I participated in wasn’t against Republicans. It’s always been against liberal Democrats. And we’re talking about the kind of liberal Dems who love symbolic gestures and hate action. They are at all the events during Black History Month. They’re signing all the Juneteenth proclamations. And then when a black person gets killed and working-class people and black and brown people are in the streets saying “you ain’t gonna kill us no more,” they are the ones authorizing the cops to deploy tear gas against them, to brutalize folks, to silence dissent.

So for me it was very clear. I can’t do the work of holding this capitalist system accountable, of extracting necessary resources for working people, of strengthening working-class people’s political power, from within the Democratic Party.

I also was able to galvanize a number of Marxist and socialist friends who have been part of all sorts of struggles with me. And if my campaign was going to be successful, I was going to need them on my team. We knew independent political organizing was how we’d already won some of the most monumental working-class victories in this city, like the \$15 minimum wage.



And we figured, why the hell not? We all have skills in running campaigns. We know how to put together a socialist, Marxist program. We know how to build broad popular support around working-class demands. So having a team of seasoned Marxist organizers was also very critical to my decision to run independent, knowing that we could put up a successful fight.

*It was a really close, hard-fought battle with a candidate backed by the Democratic Party, and business came in a close second to you. Tell me a bit more about how the Democratic Party responded to your run.*

We saw the conservative wing of the DFL [Democratic Farmer-Labor Party is what Democrats in Minnesota call themselves] not only target my race – they ran a whole slate of candidates. They ran candidates against most of

the incumbents who stood on the protest stage after George Floyd’s murder and made that declaration to defund the police.

So they made this a referendum on “do you support the police or not?” Mayor Jacob Frey’s conservative DFL machinery really galvanized a whole slate of candidates who were out saying that they would do whatever was needed to build support and credibility for the MPD again. Even though it was MPD who caused our city to burn down. Even though the Minneapolis police had triggered protests in every single state across the US and in 70 countries around the world.

Again, these were not Republican candidates. The political rhetoric and tactics they used came straight from the Democratic establishment political playbook. You know, the usual



fear-mongering, racist, counter-revolutionary playbook that corporate Democrats have used to gain electoral power for decades. Returning to my race though, one tactic that the Democratic establishment threw our way to try to block us from winning was stripping our campaign of its VAN access [a voter outreach database] five weeks before the election. My campaign knew that our pathway to victory would depend on running a top-notch field operation. Democratic leadership quickly learned that too, and hoped that taking away our voter engagement database would promptly weaken our field operations and overall chances of winning. But they underestimated the brilliance and ingenuity of my badass Marxist team, who quickly got us a new voter database while also upholding our strong field plan.

Another tactic they employed was sending a Jacob Frey approved, corporate-backed DFL candidate into our race. And their candidate's campaign was modeled straight from the Democratic establishment playbook, but with a liberal twist. Their candidate was a woman of color and former immigrant, who could speak beautifully about the need for mass affordable housing, while also firmly stating her opposition to popular housing policies like rent control, which was widely supported by ordinary people across Minneapolis.

The corporate Democratic machinery had hoped that her candidacy would split the progressive vote in Ward 2, and sis did give us a run for our money. Had my campaign not run the strong field game that we did, I would not be talking to you now as a Minneapolis Council member. I should also mention that even after winning our race, sis and the conservative Democratic machinery that backed her contested the election results via an extensive recount process. Unsurprisingly, those were very stressful times, but in the end I got the bragging rights of being the only candidate to have won their race three times.

***With more and more DSA candidates winning office in recent years, there's been a lot of discussion about the pressure that comes down on elected officials – pressure to engage in horse-trading insider politics which leads even some socialists to vote for anti-worker policies. What has been your experience over the last year with these pressures, and how have you dealt with them?***

I think that's a core part of politics, the horse-trading. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours, as a way of ascending power within local government, which is an extension of capitalist rule. Those are the expected rules of the game.

One thing that's helped me is that in every fight, people know where I stand. And it's not to say I won't work with my political opponents. But the basis of our work is gonna be, "How is this going to empower working-class people? How is this policy or budget request going to take from the already powerful and rich and give it to those in need?" When I approach my colleagues about something, they know it's gonna be a strong political proposal for working-class people, and that I don't horse-trade votes.

For instance, just this budget cycle I brought forward amendments that totaled about one and a half million dollars. And the biggest chunk of it was a \$1.2 million amendment to fund fire suppression for four Minneapolis public housing high-rise apartments.

This is in response to the deadly fire of 2019 that claimed five lives, public housing resident lives – because of divestments, those fire suppression fixtures were not updated. As a champion of public housing, I had the opportunity this budget cycle to get dollars to public housing, to a public asset.

I knew it was gonna be a fight, but I brought the proposal and I met with every single colleague about it. And never did I say, "Hey, if you vote for this, I'll vote for your thing." I maintained the line: "You might not support it, that's fine. But at the end of the day, people shouldn't have to risk losing their lives because they live in public housing. So you can vote for saving lives – or not." That was my line. And because I held that line, we eventually won the amendment.

## Ultimately the greatest leverage that a leftist elected official has is the people

I think that example shows what independent politics is about. Some of my progressive colleagues were not on board with my amendment initially because they thought it wouldn't win. But when they saw we had this prime opportunity to actually advance something meaningful for working-class people, they all rose to the challenge. The other progressives started whipping support amongst city staff and the council conservatives for my budget amendment. And the collective solidarity that my progressive colleagues showed during the budget vote absolutely helped get my budget amendment passed.

***Where do you get leverage, if not from trading votes and scratching colleagues' backs?***



Photo: robinformpls.com

One leverage point for my team is our mantra of "fuck it." We aren't afraid to bring forward the things working-class people need and, win or lose, make our colleagues vote on it. We're not afraid of taking "L's" or forcing our colleagues to take bad votes. And best believe, we're gonna do all the work necessary to not give our colleagues any meaningless excuses to vote our stuff down. We're gonna talk to everyone, we're gonna talk to the staff and external partners, we're gonna remove any ammunition that folks will use, like petty personal stuff. When our proposals come up for a vote, you are going to have to vote it down because you hate poor people. So that's my role. We're gonna bring the proposal and you are gonna have to reveal yourself and where you stand.

Traditionally, elected officials absolutely hate taking losing votes, but my team doesn't care. And our "fuck it" disposition scares the shit out of Democrats across the spectrum. They hate having to publicly air their political grievances and disagreements. Democrats hate having to say: "I hate poor people, I hate renters, I hate homeless people." They hate being put in that predicament.

So the fact that we will bring a proposal to a vote, win or lose, is a different approach than our progressive or even DSA colleagues. We see this again and again in DSA – for instance around the Medicare for All debate. The Squad was being asked to bring Medicare for All to a vote in Congress. And what we heard from Squad members and others in DSA was that they shouldn't because it was gonna lose. It's this idea that we should only bring forward palatable things, or proposals we know will win.

There was a contingency of socialists who were saying, no, take the vote. Make elected leaders have to reveal what side they are on. Are you siding with big pharma, are you okay with people dying? Or are you on the side of the people, who need healthcare, universal healthcare – who needed it yesterday? Take the vote and trust that the people will organize from there.

This is why my office loves when working-class people come to City Hall and disrupt business as usual by occupying the chambers or shutting down Council meetings. We encourage that, because ultimately the greatest leverage that a leftist elected official has is the people. This is why my team ran on making City Hall a place that prioritizes working-class people's needs, and that cannot happen through simply horse-trading and sharing nice words with my colleagues; it has to happen through struggle.

I think liberal Democrats often see themselves as mediators for working-class people. As an independent socialist, I see things differently. I'm forever beholden to the will of the people. That baseline understanding serves to remind me that I'm on the inside to be the amplifier of working-class people's needs and struggles. I'm there not to simply have a seat at the table – I'm there to do everything I can to ensure that working people are building the table and setting the table. I feel so honored that I get to do that work alongside so many brilliant folks across the city, to create real and lasting transformative change for working-class people. ■

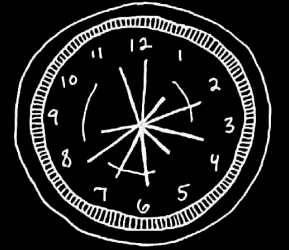
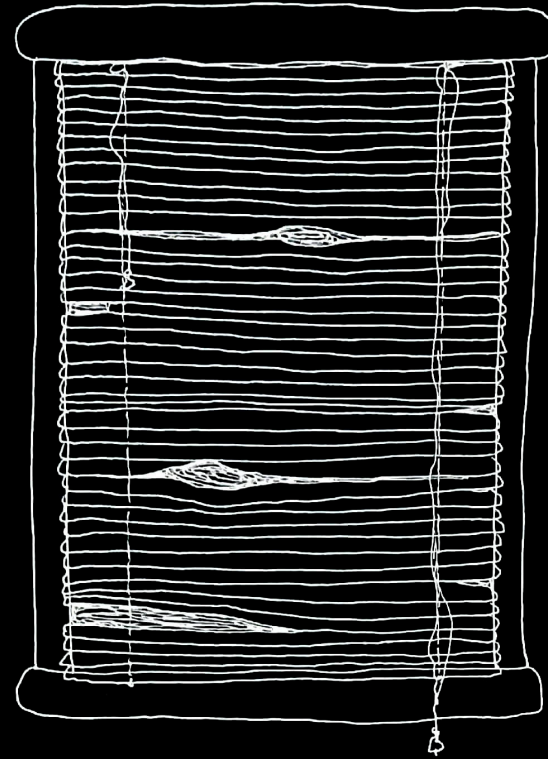




BY ALEX MONI-SAURI

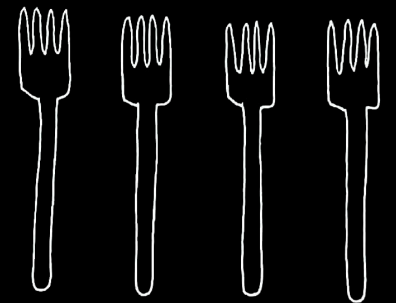
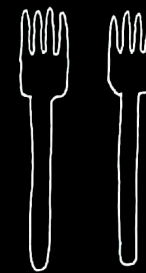
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*Alex Moni-Sauri is a poet and artist, and a member of Seattle DSA and the Reform & Revolution caucus. She lives in Kingston, Washington.*



OVERTIME

BUSY IN SLEEP WAKING  
TO CHECK ALL FINGERS  
STILL WORK TO DO  
LISTS FOR MORNING  
DREAMING OF TASKS  
IMPOSSIBLE TO GET  
WRONG





# New Hope and New Debates for the Left



BY FRANCIS SITEL, LAURENCE BOFFET, AND JOHN BARZMAN

ENSEMBLE-LE-HAVRE.EKLABLOG.COM

## The Presidential and Legislative Elections in April and June unexpectedly gave birth to a New Left Alliance, NUPES

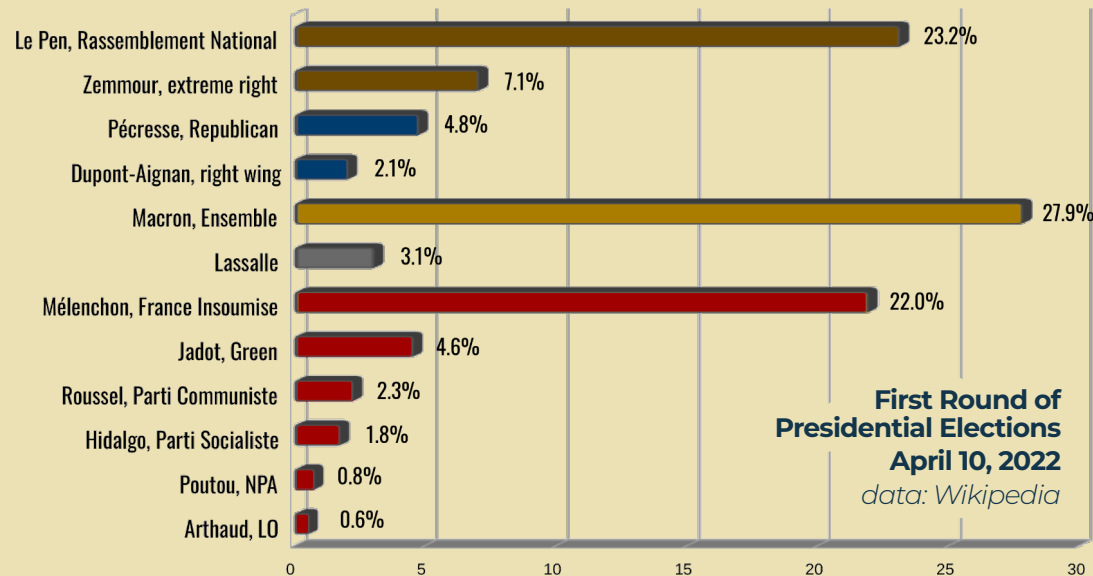
The 2022 election season began with the presidential contest in April and continued with parliamentary elections in June. The left entered the field divided and with little prospect of change. But as grassroots pressure for unity mounted, things changed fundamentally in time for the legislative round.

As he did in 2017, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of the left populist-style organization La France Insoumise (“France Unbowed”, LFI), chose to run alone in the presidential elections of 2022. He ruled out any negotiated agreement with the other left-wing and ecology candidates, even though their campaign proposals differed only on minor points.

In the last two weeks of the campaign, Mélenchon pulled far ahead of his left and green competitors, with 22 percent of the votes cast (7.7 million votes). But as those who called for serious unity negotiations had feared, this was not enough to enter the second round. While well ahead of the other left and green candidates, he stood 1.5 percentage points behind the far-right Marine Le Pen (23.2 percent, 8.1 million votes) who thereby qualified for the second round against Macron.

It became obvious a united left could have forced a run-off between center-right President Macron (who got 27.9 percent in the first round) and the left. Instead, the far-right candidate Le Pen was able to present herself as the main alternative to the ruling policies in the decisive second round.

Mélenchon had to react fast. It was clear that in the ensuing legislative elections, given the electoral system, a divided left would have been condemned to near extinction. The LFI leader, therefore, proposed



Jean-Luc Mélenchon addresses the convention of the Nouvelle Union Populaire Écologique et Sociale (NUPES) in May 2022.

Photo: Hugo Rota, [tinyurl.com/NUPES2022](https://tinyurl.com/NUPES2022), Copyright: CC BY-SA 4.0, [creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en)

to all left-wing and ecology parties, including the Socialist Party (PS), an alliance in which all candidates would run under the same label and on a broad anti-liberal program (liberal, in France, signifying the pro-capitalist policies pursued by the three previous presidents, Sarkozy, Hollande, and Macron). Thus was created the New Popular Ecological and Social Union, NUPES. The tactic paid off, with the left gaining 147 seats, as compared to 78 in 2017, and Mélenchon’s LFI taking the lion’s share of elected officials. However, the popular vote for the left only increased slightly (between one and two percent) as abstentions remained very high. In contrast, the far right won a big victory, about 23 percent of the vote and 89 seats.

Outgoing president Macron failed to win the absolute majority in parliament that he thought his presidential victory guaranteed. Forced to make do with only a relative majority, he now has to negotiate constantly with the opposition, especially the conservative party, Les Républicains (LR). This is a very unstable situation, unheard of in the Fifth Republic (the electoral and political regime established by De Gaulle in 1958).

Both poles of the parliamentary field, the left-wing NUPES and the extreme right-wing party Rassemblement National (RN) are faced with the challenge of responding to the many impending crises and preparing a successor that appears capable of taking the reins from the badly scarred Macronist government. The question is which of the two will appear

to the workers and their allies the most capable of taking up this challenge.

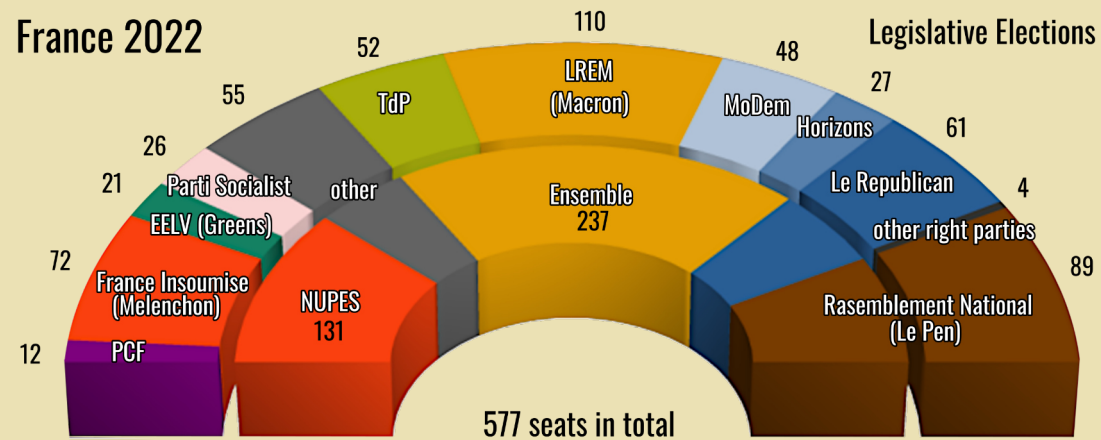
### “Dégagisme” – “Dump the Recent Leaders”

The 2022 elections are the culmination of a process of polarization in French society between a radical left and a radical right. The traditional center, the so-called “parties of government” ensuring the “alternation” of “responsible” leaders, was diminished and transformed as large sections of the PS and LR leadership shifted to Macron’s movement, and millions of centrist voters moved to the radical wings and abstention. LR’s unpopularity dates back to the defeat of LR president Nicolas Sarkozy by François Hollande (PS) in 2012 and was confirmed in subsequent elections. The collapse of the PS (sometimes called “Pasokification”, referencing the absorption of its Greek sister party by Tsipras’ Syriza in 2015) soon followed as Hollande adopted severe anti-worker and anti-democratic measures (attacks on labor law, pensions, and dual citizenship). In 2017 Macron benefited from this ensuing mood of “dégagisme” (which can be roughly translated as “dump the recent leaders”), but the same discontent denied him a parliamentary majority in 2022.

His initial project of reformatting not just the political field but society itself – detailed in his programmatic book “Revolution” and subtitled “reconciling France” – has failed. His first five-year term was



## France 2022



marked by a succession of major crises: social mobilizations on labor law, pension reform projects and climate issues, the Yellow Vests revolt, then the Covid pandemic, police unrest, and finally the war in Ukraine. Obviously, under extreme stress, the neoliberal model has shown its limits, and this has fueled radicalizations at both poles of society, but without the emergence of a credible and coherent response to today's multiple challenges.

Given these conditions, Macron's re-election as president, with a second round vote of 58.6 percent for him against Marine Le Pen's 41.5 percent, represented a real success at the end of April, but one that he overestimated, oblivious of the millions of left voters who cast a ballot against Le Pen, rather than for him, and blind to the backlash against him that was brewing in the legislative elections two months later.

### NUPES – an Opportunity for the Left

NUPES is an electoral alliance between all the forces of the left and ecologists, with the exception of a big part of the old PS, on the right, and smaller parts of the left including the NPA, Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, and fragments of social movements that are either loosely involved or not at all. For example, NUPES so far does not formally include trade unions and civic associations in its structure.

The coalition was hastily put together against all odds, since the alliance that it embodied, despite numerous citizen initiatives for unity that met with a significant response, had proved impossible as recently as the presidential election. At that time, the left appeared seriously weakened with its electoral level at a historical low, or very divided, in particular on international issues, including the war in Ukraine, and incapable of doing the necessary work of re-foundation.

Mélenchon's position of strength coming out of the presidential election allowed him to make a complete political turnaround and propose unity to all, on his own terms, although granting that each official partner party, PCF (Communist Party), EELV (Greens), and PS, was allocated enough winnable seats to have a parliamentary group with 15 deputies minimum).

NUPES made it possible to avoid an electoral disaster for the whole left. And it is a source of great hope for the "people of the left" because it has shown that unity is possible on a globally radical basis. There is a strong rank-and-file sentiment in favor of unity. This could allow unitary frameworks to appear at the local level, responding to a real aspiration on the left. If some local realities point in this direction, until now each institutional party jealously preserved its interests, and is wary of the risk of hegemony by France Insoumise and Mélenchon.

One can consider that NUPES will maintain itself at the parliamentary level, though not without difficulties. But its challenge is to sink roots locally, in citizen and unitary collectives, and join or even give the initial impulse to social mobilizations. Right now, we are far from the perspective of a new party going beyond the existing cleavages, as was the initial project of the NPA, for instance.

### The Long Road to a New Left Party

Mélenchon's authority after the presidential election was key to bringing the left together. However, he has often been an obstacle to building roots in working-class struggles and communities.

Within his loose but top-down LFI, a debate has started on how to develop democratic structures, how to decentralize the movement dominated by his closest lieutenants in Paris, how to build a network of local headquarters and community

hubs, trained teams of marshalls, educational sessions, and how to develop cadre in the sense of more experienced leaders of the movement who can build a stronger organized force. This is not what Mélenchon and other elected officials of the France Insoumise movement want, their immediate goal being access to the government. Against dissident views expressed by often more experienced comrades and organized currents, Mélenchon's followers are tempted to use the primitive libertarian prejudice that demonizes card-holding members of organizations as "encartés" (meaning implicitly card-carrying robots applying a "party line"). Alternatively he may use one affiliated organization against another (Parti de Gauche, PG, and Parti ouvrier indépendant, POI, for instance). In addition, once they are elected, members of Parliament tend to want to lead the movement. However, if LFI is to become a permanent class-struggle force, it needs to have democratic structures and move beyond a movement focused on elections and controlled essentially by one person, Mélenchon.

Beyond LFI and its successive front groups such as the Union Populaire, there is NUPES. The alliance has the potential to develop into a force active at the grassroots, in neighborhoods, trade unions, and communities. It could be a framework for the left to come together in struggle without denying political differences. Again, Mélenchon only appreciates NUPES if he can control it; a good part of the Communist Party fears competition from NUPES and sees the alliance as an electoral and occasional one, and the PS and EELV are hesitant about it.

### The Way Forward for the Radical Left

On the radical left, there's a debate on how to relate to NUPES in general. For example, after being offered to be a part of NUPES, the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) declined to join the electoral alliance.

The NPA was launched in 2009 based on the electoral successes of radical candidates like Olivier Besancenot (who received 1.5 million votes – 4 percent – in the first round of the 2007 presidential elections). Its supporters then hoped to build a new, more radical party that would be able to challenge the political domination of the left by the PS, whose program and practice had become neoliberal. That hope led the LCR, a Trotskyist group with around 3,000 members, to dissolve into the NPA project.

But that proved to be a will-o'-the-wisp. In its place, the vast space opening up on the left of the PS was occupied by former PS minister Mélenchon, first with his "Left Front" (an alliance of his own new Parti de Gauche, or PG "Left Party"), the PCF and Ensemble!, and later with his France Insoumise alone.

Unfortunately, the NPA did not see the need to relate to and collaborate with this newly developing broad anti-liberal left. It reached around 10,000 members early on after its launch but then lost more and more ground as the broader anti-liberal left advanced. Instead of a qualitative transformative expansion ("transcroissance") that justified the dissolution of the LCR, the last few years have seen multiple departures from the NPA and the degradation of its internal climate.

In April and May, the NPA was confronted with the possibility of joining NUPES. In the end, despite much discussion, this perspective was discarded, chiefly because Mélenchon's offer in terms of eligible positions was mediocre and the presence of the PS within NUPES was considered an insurmountable obstacle.

Mélenchon's inclusion of the PS in NUPES is indeed a two-sided sword. On the one hand, many workers still look at the PS at least as an electoral, somehow left expression of their hopes. On the other hand, after years of neoliberal policies under PS president Hollande many other workers and youth have completely broken with this party and are searching for an alternative. One should note also that the present PS is what is left after at least one-third of its leadership and structures abandoned it in favor of the more openly neoliberal Macron coalition.

NUPES gave left parties the opportunity to run together in the elections while retaining their freedom to dissent. Thus, for example, the PS could be criticized and a political alternative promoted. The NPA could have chosen – and, in our view, still can choose – this road, thereby helping to build a class-struggle force within the regrouping on the left.

In our view, the task now is to make the new united formation enduring and active, and capable of responding to the challenges of the situation. That is, to achieve what neither the NPA nor the Left Front achieved between 2009 and 2017. The radical left has an active role to play in this project to move it further toward the left and build its roots in working-class struggles and movements. ■

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At its Congress, held December 9 to 11, – after this article was written – the NPA in France went through a split. Majority and minority statements can be found here: [fourth.international/en/europe/491](https://fourth.international/en/europe/491)



# Electoralism Drags Down Red-Green Alliance



BY BRANDON MADSEN

f BMMADSEN



## A Warning from Denmark: Collapse in Red-Green Alliance vote holds lessons for DSA

The elections to Denmark's Folketing (parliament) on November 1 were unpredictable, nail-bitingly close, and reflected a generalized uncertainty in society about the way forward. The day before the election, 24 percent of those polled still didn't know who they would vote for. Never in Danish history has there been so much last-minute party switching. Even with 99.8 percent of the votes counted, it was still unclear which way the deciding mandate (seat) would go. When the apportionment of seats was finally announced in the last hours of November 2, the result was a razor-thin victory for sitting Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen of the Social Democratic Party, with 90 out of the 179 MPs coming from parties which had given parliamentary support to her previous government.

Despite Frederiksen continuing as Prime Minister, the outcome nonetheless represents a major shake-up of the political landscape. Over 40 percent of the electorate voted for a different party than in 2019, and two new parties entered parliament for the first time. The Folketing is now fractured into twelve different parties, only two of which got more than 10 percent of the vote. At the same time, voter turnout was at a 32-year low (by Danish standards) of 84.1 percent and the number of blank votes increased by more than 19,000.

Further underscoring the political uncertainty is the fact that it took more than a month to form a new government – the longest delay in Denmark's modern history. Instead of being supported by the previous so-

called "red bloc" of left and center-left parties, Frederiksen has this time opted to sever all ties with the left and form a rare "grand coalition" government – the first of its kind since the 1970s – allying with the two main center-right bourgeois parties: the Liberals (Venstre) and the newly-formed Moderates, a split from the former headed by erstwhile Liberal PM Lars Løkke Rasmussen. Grand coalitions are traditionally formed as an attempt to achieve "stability" in times of crisis, and the bourgeoisie are counting on the new government to implement "labor reforms" to ensure workers are the ones to bear the bulk of the burden.

The leftmost party in parliament, the Red-Green Alliance (RGA), unfortunately encountered its poorest national election result in more than a decade, despite a heroic campaigning effort by party activists. There is an ongoing debate within the ranks of the party about how and why this happened. While the dominant bloc within the current leadership has been largely complacent about the party's direction in the aftermath of the defeat, making excuses and pointing to accidental factors – like the electorate's "strategic voting" to ensure the Alternative (a green split from the Social Liberals) got over the 2 percent threshold – these surface-level explanations do not get us much closer to the real reasons. The polling and election data suggest that the RGA not only lost 12 percent of its 2019 voters to the Alternative but also lost 13 percent to the Socialist People's Party (SF), 11 percent to the Social Democrats, and 3 percent to the Independent Greens, while another chunk of potential RGA voters simply stayed home or cast a blank ballot.

Understanding the real dynamics at play behind the electoral beating the RGA has taken is important for the left not only in Denmark but around the world, including in the US, especially as it concerns the future of DSA and its own electoral ambitions.

## The Pressures of Electoral Success

The Red-Green Alliance (in Danish: *Enhedslisten*, meaning "the Unity List") was formed in 1989 as an electoral alliance of three different Marxist parties (Left Socialists, Communist Party of Denmark, and Socialist Workers' Party). It wasn't until 2011 that the party had its big parliamentary breakthrough, tripling its seat count from 4 to 12, while its dues-paying membership grew more than 50 percent in a single year to over 7,700 (keep in mind that Denmark has less than 6 million inhabitants – a similar proportion in the US would correspond to about 400,000 members). It did this by strongly and publicly protesting against the decisive rightward shift of the Social Democrats under Thorning and the SF under Søvnald, as they laid the ground for collaboration with the bourgeois Social Liberal Party.

This electoral success was a double-edged sword for the party: with more mandates came increased parliamentarist and bureaucratic pressures. True, its membership has so far continued to grow, reaching more than 9,000 today, and there remains space for genuine debate within party circles. At the same time, however, its day-to-day workings are increasingly becoming the purview of staffers, and many of the active members I've spoken to report that the level of rank-and-file activity and engagement is dwindling.

"As you win more seats, each of those seats comes with hired staff. As you become increasingly reliant on that staff, and you see that staff as key to the party's political success, you get an increasingly narrow focus on electoral victories."

For most of the RGA's history, it would have been universally acknowledged that the party should control the parliamentary group and not the other way around. But today, most socialist activists would agree that it is closer to the truth to say that the parliamentary group runs the party – or at least that the party is run such that parliamentary concerns (and not movement building) take precedence. As RGA parliamentary candidate and member of the Socialist Workers' Party (SAP) David Rønne put it when I spoke with him on election night: "As you win more mandates, you get more seats, and each of those seats comes with hired staff. As you become increasingly reliant on that staff, and you see that staff as key to the party's political success, you get an increasingly narrow focus on parliamentary and electoral victories."



"Tax the Rich – End Inequality",  
"Vote Red"

Photo: Klaus Münster





“Vote Red”  
Photo: Klaus Münster

It’s important to note that this drift toward bureaucracy and bourgeois parliamentarism cannot be explained by bribery, careerism, or other similarly “direct” forms of corruption. The RGA has taken proactive administrative measures to mitigate careerism that go well beyond most left parties in the world. For example, RGA politicians take only a worker’s wage (an example which more left parties should follow); the party is governed by committee rather than an individual leader; and there are short, strictly enforced term limits (a “rotation” system) imposed by the party both for parliamentary and internal posts. The RGA’s example clearly drives home the fact that the primary pressure toward bureaucracy is a political one, and that administrative precautions alone can never be enough to counter these political pressures. Theoretical clarity, a strong Marxist backbone, and deep roots in working-class movements are required.

### The Cost of Playing Nice

One way that the trend toward parliamentary bureaucratism in the RGA has manifested is that the party has failed to publicly distinguish itself from the strategy of the unabashedly reformist Socialist People’s Party (SF), which for many decades has acted as a pressure group for those who want to pull the Social Democrats to the left. To the average voter this election cycle, the RGA’s approach appeared essentially indistinguishable in this regard – based not only on its messaging during the campaign but also on how its MPs have acted over the three years since the last election.

Much like the SF, the RGA has in recent years largely kept its opposition to Social Democratic policies behind closed doors, in private negotiations, in exchange for comparatively small concessions on environmental reforms and expanding the welfare state. Not only has the RGA backed bills containing provisions that go against what the party is supposed to stand for, it has not even spoken out to publicly expose these rotten proposals by the Social Democrats and justify voting for them purely as a necessary evil, much less attempted to bring public pressure to bear during such negotiations by calling for mass mobilizations.

Some of the agreements that the RGA has voted for or signed onto (in some cases later backing out due to grassroots pressure) have included a police settlement allowing expanded surveillance, an “education relocation” plan entailing massive cuts to universities, a rubbish settlement that leads toward privatization of the municipal waste sector, a racially discriminatory modification to the already-racist “anti-ghetto law” exempting Ukrainians from the restrictions placed on other “non-Western” refugees, an environmental bill emphasizing carbon capture and storage, and a lackluster infrastructure bill that leans too heavily toward building new highways. The party has also softened its policy toward the international organs of capitalist imperialism: the EU and NATO.

Even on the small-but-positive concessions it has been able to secure from the government as part of these agreements, the RGA has not properly touted these as its own. For the most part, the agreements were taken as a whole and hailed as victories in such a way that made the party appear to be in lockstep with the Social Democratic government. As housing justice activist Jørgen Colding-Jørgensen, one of the RGA’s founding members, put it to me during the election campaign: “The party has been campaigning too much on keeping the Social Democrats in power and has not done nearly enough to establish its own independent profile or to help build actual social movements.”

The main reason voters chose the RGA in the first place wasn’t because they were looking for a source of “loyal pressure” on the Social Democrats behind the scenes – the SF had already long filled that role. The voters the RGA can draw are those looking for a real, viable left alternative who will not fall into the same old ruts as the other parties, who will base themselves on the masses and build social movements.

Acting as a principled voice of left protest was key to the RGA’s rise in 2011, but already by 2015 the pressures of bourgeois-parliamentary “respectability” had begun to set in, and this was already hurting its popular support. This fact can be easily lost if one simply looks at the general election results by year – after all, in 2015 the RGA got its best-ever national result of 7.8 percent. At the time, however, this was a disappointing result, representing a loss of nearly half its support relative to 2013, when it was polling at almost 15 percent.

Ali Hansen, a former municipal-level elected RGA representative in Copenhagen, recently wrote in his insightful post-election reflection about why the RGA rose to the number-one party in Copenhagen at the municipal level in 2021 even as its parliamentary support has shrunk:

*The key... must be found in our two different approaches to cooperation with the Social Democrats. In the city hall, we have had a clear strategy of pursuing our own independent policy and not, as SF, following the Social Democrats through thick and thin. [...] The voters rewarded us for our clear positions and firmness of principle.*

*Enhedslisten’s parliamentary group has been more concerned with being a social-democratic companion than leading our own policy. The group’s policy has for many years been bound by “realism” and devoid of any vision.*

*Following a “bad is better than worse” logic has weakened Enhedslisten’s demands on the government to such an extent that our future dreams have become colorless, our faith in change weak, and our expectations low.*

*Being a supporting party to a government should not be a matter of identity, but a tactical matter to be measured within the framework of a clearly defined strategic plan. It is only in the context of such a vision that one can understand why a party must be a support party for a government.*

In that regard, it is notable that the Independent Greens, who won no parliamentary mandates and have portrayed themselves as anarchist-inspired revolutionaries, actually got the largest share of the vote in some of the more working-class and immigrant-heavy neighborhoods such as Tingbjerg and Gellerup, as well as the second-largest in Vollsmose. Most of those 30,000 Independent Green voters almost certainly could have been won over to the RGA if it had shown a real fighting policy.

The RGA certainly did not do any favors to its reputation with immigrant voters when the party’s spokesperson for foreign affairs publicly stated that they “could live with” the government’s plan to send asylum seekers to a refugee center in Rwanda for processing. The party soon reversed course and insisted that it could not accept the plan after all. But, as Socialisten.dk correctly argued in their excellent post-election analysis, “the damage was done, and thousands were left with the impression that Enhedslisten’s support was for sale – and that the price was not actually all that high.”

### Lessons for DSA

These developments in Denmark should serve as a cautionary tale for DSA in the US. In New York, where DSA has the most advanced electoral position in the country, there are already troubling signs of electoralist pressures exerting undue influence on the organization. Proposals for a more independent, party-like DSA and for stricter control of elected officials by the organization were defeated, while a resolution forbidding DSA working groups from publicly criticizing DSA electeds without prior top-down approval was passed.

The most recent trends in Denmark’s RGA clearly show the dangers of continuing in this electoralist direction – even, ironically, from the narrow viewpoint of building electoral support. Let’s heed the warnings and lessons from our Danish comrades, before it’s too late. ■

*Brandon Madsen has been a Marxist and activist since the early 2000s, when he helped organize students at his high school against the Iraq War and military recruitment in schools. He moved from the US to Copenhagen, Denmark, in September 2022. He serves on the Reform & Revolution editorial team and works as a research assistant in the Hearing Systems group at Technical University of Denmark.*



# Bolsonaro beaten, but Bolsonarism still a threat



INTERVIEW WITH LUCIANA GENRO BY CIAN PRENDIVILLE

🐦 @LUCIANAGENRO, 📘 CIANP

**This partial interview transcript has been edited for clarity and conciseness. You can listen to the full audio of the interview here: [tinyurl.com/RuptureRadioBrazil](https://tinyurl.com/RuptureRadioBrazil)**

Brazil's far-right president Bolsonaro has been defeated, beaten in the recent election by center-left candidate Lula da Silva of the Workers' Party (PT). Cian interviewed Brazilian socialist MP Luciana Genro to discuss Bolsonaro's time in power, how he was beaten, what Lula's government will bring, and what the socialist left is doing to continue the fight against Bolsonaroism. Luciana is a leading member of the Party of Socialism and Liberty (PSOL), a pluralist socialist party in Brazil, and she is part of the Marxist group Socialist Left Movement (MES) within that.

*Bolsonaro was just defeated by Lula in the recent presidential election, but it was a very close result. Closer than a lot of people were expecting, at least internationally – 50.9 percent to 49.1 percent.*

Yes, Bolsonaro was defeated by around two million votes which is very, very close - less than two percent of the votes.

*Could you give us a taste of what life has been like under Bolsonaro these last four years? What kinds of policies has he adopted?*

Well, first, we have been in a very deep social and economic crisis since 2014. The pandemic made it

worse, but it's been happening for years. We have an unemployment rate of above 11 percent, with more than 11 million people unemployed. Underemployment affects 23 percent of the population. Jobs are low-quality and many of them are precarious. A survey carried out during the pandemic showed that 20 percent of the population doesn't have enough food. Homelessness increased 31 percent in São Paulo over the two years of the pandemic.

At the same time, Bolsonaro made fun of the people that were dying with Covid. He despised science, despised the use of masks, despised the vaccine.

He increased the destruction of the Amazon rainforest and the expansion of agricultural frontiers, the poisoning of the soil, etc., by cutting monitoring and enforcement of the environmental laws.

*The destruction of the environment, the Covid policy, and so on - this all sounds very reminiscent of Trump.*

Bolsonaro is part of the same phenomenon as Trump - an extreme far right that wants to cut the liberty and democratic freedom of the country. He has said openly that he's in favor of torture, in favor of dictatorship.

He's a completely authoritarian person, but he couldn't implement a dictatorship in Brazil because he didn't have enough strength, and because the bourgeoisie did not entirely cooperate with him. The most important Brazilian TV network, Rede Globo, was in opposition to him, for example. So, he couldn't do everything that he wanted to do, but with a second term, he might have gone further.

*It sounds from the statistics you mentioned like he also failed to deliver economic improvements for ordinary people. But how did he manage, then, to retain such support? How did it manage to be such a tight election?*



Photo: Twitter

He put the public machine at the service of his election in a very criminal way, and with the support of the majority of the National Congress. So, he passed a provisional measure to release something like six billion dollars of cash aid on the eve of the elections. He also lowered the price of fuel and distributed the funds via a secret budget that the National Congress has invented - essentially using public money and resources without any transparency or parliamentary oversight.

He also used the gigantic machine of production and dissemination of fake news, really on an industrial scale, using mainly the evangelical churches as his tribunes to amplify the strength that he already had in the social networks, saying that Lula was going to implant communism in Brazil, that he would legalize abortion, that he would legalize all the drugs, that people who are in prison would all be released - things that are completely outside reality.

Days before the election, there was a lot of harassment. And the owners of the factories and the bourgeoisie in general threatened their employees, saying that if Lula won the election, they would be unemployed. On the day of the election they used the federal highway policy to block buses that were carrying people to vote in the regions where Lula is more popular, saying that they were auditing the conditions of the buses. They tried to avoid letting people get to the polling station.

In this context, the victory of Lula was really a very huge democratic victory. We are saying that it's the most important democratic victory since the fall of the dictatorship that we had from 1964 to '84 in Brazil, because it was really something very difficult to overcome, all these difficulties to win the election.

*Could you tell us a bit about Lula, who narrowly defeated Bolsonaro? What were the program, the manifesto, and the proposals that Lula campaigned on? What were the positives and the weaknesses in his campaign?*

Well, Lula had already governed Brazil for eight years - plus his PT successor, Dilma Rousseff, for more than six years. She was overthrown by a parliamentary coup [a legal maneuver aimed at removing the PT government which was backed by the right]. But they always governed with the bourgeoisie. He basically showed during the campaign that he would repeat this class-collaboration-government project from before. His choice of Geraldo Alckmin as vice-presidential running mate is a clear expression of this policy of collaboration with the bourgeoisie. Alckmin has governed São Paulo for many years, and he's a representative of the São Paulo bourgeoisie, the most important section of Brazil's bourgeoisie.

On the economy, Lula is completely tied to the neoliberal recipe. He is going to have a neoliberal economic policy. But he has also made some important promises during the campaign, like an adjustment of the minimum wage above inflation, emergency aid of 600 real (plus an added amount



per child) to families, exemption of income tax for those who earn up to six thousand real per month (roughly \$500, only slightly below the national average wage). He also promised to renegotiate people's individual debt.

Also, Lula has talked about taxing the billionaires. He's talked about corruption, which has been a big problem in Brazil, including in his previous government. And also the revision of the labor reform - a very bad reform that made employment very precarious and removed important rights. He also talked about strengthening the public universities by giving them more money and increasing access for low-income students.

So, he made some promises that are important to poor people, to the working class, to women's rights, LGBT rights, Black people's rights. It's completely different from Bolsonaro and his behavior.

But we know it's going to be a class-collaboration government. It's clear in his program, and it's clear in his alliance with Alckmin.

It's going to be a government of bourgeois coalition, with some policies directed to the working class and poor people.

The situation is very complicated, because if Lula had not been the representative of a united front against the extreme right, had not made this coalition with the neoliberal progressive sector of the bourgeoisie, he wouldn't have won the election. And we would probably be stuck with Bolsonaro.

***But aren't there elements of Bolsonaro's base that are disenfranchised, poor people, working people that were turned off by Lula's neoliberal policies? Could Lula have appealed to those layers of people with a more radical program - or was this just not in the cards?***

We can't demand Lula to be what he's not. He's not this kind of left politician anymore. So that's the debate we have inside PSOL, because we in MES think that PSOL shouldn't be in the government. We have to be independent, so that we can be a subversive left that tries to get support from these people that have voted for Bolsonaro because they are fed up with the establishment. They don't trust the justice system, they don't trust the politicians, they don't trust the Congress. And they saw Bolsonaro as a person who is external to the system, although he's not. He's a rotten part of the system. But he tried and he managed to appear like someone outside of the system.

So we need to be a subversive left that is in the streets, that is at the demonstrations, that is demanding the rights of the people. That is how we can build support.

Around the time Dilma was impeached, PSOL also had debates about what its role should be. We [in MES] stood for calling new elections, because Dilma had lost the support of the people, because she was running a neoliberal government attacking people's living standards and rights. So, she had lost the support of the working class, and the right wing came with all its strength to try to throw her out of the government.

PSOL didn't call for elections. The government didn't call for elections. This process of division - Dilma is good, she has to stay, or no, Dilma is bad, she has to go - gave Bolsonaro a lot of strength. The Left, including PSOL, all stayed with Dilma. That was, in our [MES's] opinion, a mistake. PSOL should have been against the impeachment, but should have called for new elections, because that would be the democratic solution to the lack of support that Dilma had at that moment.

So now there is again a debate inside PSOL about how to act and how to relate to the government.

We need to sound a note of discord and subversion as we defend the needs of the people, to build a revolutionary left.

***Can you tell us a bit more about PSOL and how it originated?***

We founded PSOL at the end of 2003, when I and three other members of parliament were expelled from the Workers' Party, PT. I was a member of the national parliament. We had a senator, Heloisa Helena. Later on she ran for president in 2006 representing PSOL. We were expelled from the PT because we refused to vote in favor of a pension reform that Lula put forward which was very aggressive against the public servants. That was a very different situation from today. When we started to build PSOL, we had to affirm the need to build an anticapitalist alternative amid all the frustration that was caused by Lula's rapid turn to the right.

In 2003, unlike today, there was an expectation that Lula would run a really left government. But he was rapidly moving to the right. The pension reform was the culmination of this, but when he appointed his ministers, he had already chosen a lot of bourgeois



Photo: Palácio do Planalto, [tinyurl.com/TrumpBolsonaro](https://tinyurl.com/TrumpBolsonaro), Copyright: CC BY 2.0, [creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)

representatives. So, the bourgeois character of the government was becoming clear from the beginning, and we had to leave the Workers' Party because we couldn't be in the party that had transformed into a manager of bourgeois interests in the government. So we had to build an anticapitalist alternative.

***PSOL has grown a good bit in recent years. In the Chamber of Deputies elections, I think you rose this year to over 4 percent, with over 4.6 million votes, right?***

Yes, we now have ten members in the national parliament, and also in the regional parliaments, but we still have a lot of work to do. We have to penetrate the sectors that are targeted by Bolsonarism, such as the low ranks of the security forces, the military, and the more traditional working class in the industrial poles. We are weak in these sectors and amongst the very poor people. PSOL is strong in the universities, among the youth, and in the sectors of the working class that are more organized. But we have to be more organized in the places where people are struggling for life - in the slums, in the big cities.

***The threat of the far right hasn't disappeared. What can be done to fight the far right?***

First, demanding from Lula's government to fulfill his promises and make changes to the benefit of the working class. This is very important to stop the extreme right from capturing all the support from people who are discontented with the government.

We need to have a dialogue with the anti-establishment feeling that we were talking about before. It has fueled Bolsonarism, this anti-regime feeling.

So, we need to sound a note of discord and subversion as we defend the needs of the people, to build a revolutionary left that can show that it's not through the establishment that our problems will be solved, that it's necessary to have a more radical alternative on the left.

We also have to penetrate into the sectors that I mentioned before, mainly the police, because the police are a real stronghold of Bolsonaro's extreme right. We are starting to reach them in my state - I received many votes from the lower ranks of the police because I supported them in their fight for a career - but it's an isolated case, I would say. We have to make this experience more national.

And it's also important to prosecute, judge, and punish Bolsonaro and all the politicians, all the entrepreneurs and the public agents that have committed crimes during this government, violating laws and violating the Constitution. Bolsonaro, especially, must be judged for his crimes. And right now, at this moment, the extreme right is still in the streets of Brazil demanding a military intervention, saying that the elections were fraudulent, and they are completely rejecting the result of the election because they don't accept that Bolsonaro has lost. They are threatening people who have voted for Lula with unemployment. So we have to go after these people and prosecute, judge, and punish them.

***So Bolsonaro is gone, but the struggle against Bolsonaro continues.***

Exactly. ■



# Mass Uprising Continues to Shake Iran



BY MORAD SHIRIN

MILITAANT.COM

## Continuing Mass Struggles Await Working-Class Leadership for Decisive Breakthrough

*Morad Shirin is a member of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency.*

The death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini on September 16, 2022, after her beating by Tehran's 'morality police' three days earlier, sparked off one of the most significant and sustained protest movements in the history of the Iranian regime.

Despite two months of intensified and systematic repression, with more than 330 deaths and many thousands of arrests, the Iranian masses are still protesting throughout the country. There are daily clashes with the riot police and other repressive organs of the capitalist state, particularly in the bigger cities and areas where national minorities are predominant – especially Kurds, Baluchis and Arabs. As each death is commemorated after forty days, the regime attacks mourners, trying to reassert its authority but it meets fierce resistance.

### A Regime Built on Oppression and Exploitation

Jina's state killing follows more than four decades of ruthless repression against workers, women,

### Appeal for solidarity

All protests and struggles by Iran's workers, women, national minorities, and students are treated as 'national security' threats. Solidarity with these struggles can help the Iranian masses achieve victory. Please support the Shahrokh Zamani Action Campaign's activities: [shahrokhzamani.com](http://shahrokhzamani.com)

national minorities, students and youth, writers and artists, LGBT+ people, and so on. Denying the most basic democratic rights of the vast majority of the population through the most brutal forms of oppression is the foundation of this regime.

In the summer of 1981, the Islamic counter-revolution unleashed a brutal and ruthless campaign. It crushed the independent and radical mass movements in Iran: the workers' factory committees (shora), the women's movement, the students, the national minorities, and so on. Once in power, this regime exploited and oppressed workers more than the Shah's dictatorship: levels of workers' exploitation reached one of the highest in the world.

In addition to the long-term dire economic situation, tyranny, corruption, and sanctions, the incompetent and callous handling of the Covid pandemic led to even more stark social inequalities. These conditions led to hundreds of struggles and protests by teachers, pensioners, steel workers, oil workers, medical staff, and others.

Iran was a powder keg ready for a spark.

### US Imperialism, 'Regime Change' and the Right Opposition

Typically, the regime has blamed everyone except itself for the situation in Iran. The regime has said that the Kurdish organizations based in Iraqi Kurdistan have been inciting the recent protests in Iran's Kurdish provinces. Therefore, they have attacked their bases, causing many deaths and injuries.

Historically though, the regime's propaganda has always claimed that US imperialism is trying to overthrow it in favor of a more pro-western government. Hence any protests by workers, women, national minorities and so on, are said to threaten 'national security' and are dealt with very severely.

But although US imperialism has its differences (and sometimes even clashes) with this regime, it knows that this unique form of capitalist dictatorship keeps the lid on the social movements with very heavy repression – thus preventing the workers, women, national minorities and the youth from realizing even their most basic rights. US imperialism is fully aware that over the past four decades this regime has been the best guarantor of capitalist relations of production in Iran and an important base for anti-working-class reaction in the whole Middle East. This is a role the regime will continue to play until it is overthrown in a proletarian revolution.

The bourgeois media and politicians in the US and other imperialist countries claim to support the mass movement, especially concerning women claiming their basic rights. But all they do is boost the most right-wing elements of the opposition, mainly the monarchists. The right-wing opposition – and the various TV and radio stations broadcasting into Iran – are used to put pressure on the regime and to extract further concessions from it. This is part of the imperialists' long-term policy of keeping this most reactionary form of capitalist dictatorship intact – which ensures the stability of capitalist exploitation in Iran.

The imperialists do not have a viable alternative to the



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regime. For now, there is no ‘regime change’ on their agenda.

### What the Regime Really Fears: Workers’ Strikes and Revolts

Just in the past five years, mass protests have included: December 2017 to January 2018 (economic hardship), November 2019 to July 2020 (fuel prices), the summer of 2021 (water and electricity shortages), and May 2022 (food prices). There has also been the headscarf removal campaign of individual women that began in December 2017.

The death of Jina (a young Kurdish woman from Saghez) brought many thousands of women onto the streets – and not just young ones. There has also been wide participation by the youth and other people who have had enough of enduring decades of routine repression, economic hardship, and corruption. This movement involves many layers of society across the country, particularly women, young people, university students, and school children (especially girls). The protests have been most violent in areas with mainly Kurdish, Baluchi, and Arab populations.

Most demonstrators now see the connection between the regime’s policy of oppressing women’s basic rights and its general repressive character, suppressing every class and layer of society: whether in the streets, at school and university, in the factories and places of work, and especially in any dealings with the capitalist state or any of its repressive organizations.

### Workers’ Struggles

Initially, the workers were involved in the mass movement as individuals and were slow to join it through their strikes. So far, the workers in the following plants and companies have gone on strike: Asaluyeh Petrochemicals, Abadan Refinery, Ney Steel, Shadgan Steel, South Pars Central Workshop, Mahshahr Pipe Manufacturing, Kian Tyre (in Tehran province), Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Complex, Lamerd Aluminium Works (in Fars province) and the tanker drivers in the oil and petrochemical industry. It should be noted that with the Internet either shut down or slowed down in many parts of Iran there are bound to be more groups of workers on strike.

Ever since this regime was established in 1981, the main resistance against it has always been from the working class. The proletariat has been the only class that has consistently battled against the bourgeoisie and its state, even during the Iran-Iraq war. Despite the escalating repression, the past five years have seen

an upsurge in the Iranian workers’ movement, with many radical struggles. Just in the past year or so, there have been hundreds of strikes involving the steel industry, railways and trucks, petrochemicals, teachers, and other workers and industries.

Of the many big and heroic struggles, the strikes of the Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Company workers have been the most significant. Over the past four years, its 2,900 workers have gone on strike many times, consistently calling for privatization to be revoked. Through this struggle, their demands evolved to include workers’ supervision (that means control) and workers’ councils. On November 8, 2018, Esmail Bakhshi, a workers’ representative, said that the workers had two options: “One is that Haft Tappeh is run entirely by the workers. We will form a committee and run Haft Tappeh consultatively. Don’t worry. We have all the specialisms. Who else has managed Haft Tappeh so far? Have confidence. Have faith in yourself. We can manage Haft Tappeh ourselves.” The second option was that the state takes over: “... but the state must do [all] ... things under the supervision of the workers’ council and under the general supervision of the workers.”

Unfortunately, Esmail Bakhshi was eventually sacked. However, Haft Tappeh’s radical strikes once again made workers’ control and workers’ councils a real and living demand in today’s workers’ movement – across the country, but especially in Khuzestan province. These demands came out of the bitter experience of the past few years.

The explosive situation in Iran’s working class is such that even when a struggle begins with a very basic demand like unpaid wages, the dynamic nature of strikes and protests eventually poses many fundamental questions about problems affecting Iranian society and capitalism in general.

The only way the Iranian regime can keep these radical workers’ struggles under control is through massive repression, including jailing many activists, flogging workers, and other repressive tactics. In September 2015, it even killed Shahrokh Zamani, a well-known left-wing labor activist, in prison.

### The Uprising’s Prospects and the Question of Working-Class Leadership

The limited level of leadership and coordination in the current street protests is enough to continue them. In some cases, they have even routed the riot police, the Pasdaran (the regime’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard), and the Basiji (a paramilitary volunteer militia) thugs. But these activities by the youth, despite their tremendous courage, unfortunately, cannot in

themselves make the decisive breakthrough which is necessary to bring the regime down and seriously weaken bourgeois state power in Iran. Only the working class, organized as a class, can do that.

The outcome of this uprising, as with all earlier ones, therefore depends on how the working class acts as a class. If workers participate as individuals and not as an organized force with their own slogans, perspective, and organizational initiative, then the whole movement will be defeated. The workers need to intervene as a class for their own victory and to pose a revolutionary leadership for all other exploited classes and oppressed layers. There are only two alternative class leaderships possible: proletarian or bourgeois.

It is important to remember that it was not the street protests – even though they involved a quarter of the population – that overthrew the Shah in 1979. It was the general strike, particularly the oil workers’ strike that posed many political demands, that finished off US imperialism’s second strongest base in the Middle East.

What is therefore needed is a general strike that links the strikes and struggles of workers in all the major industries together with the mass protests of women, youth, and national minorities. In particular, the workers in the oil, gas, and petrochemicals industries – the regime’s lifeline – will have to go on strike.

There is great discontent among workers about the repression and the economic crisis but the necessary self-confidence and revolutionary perspective to intervene together to change the balance of class forces are not yet present.

### The Next Step

Gains like the concepts of workers’ control and workers’ councils are very important in themselves. A very heavy price has been paid for them. But only a clandestine workers’ vanguard party can preserve them in the long term. A Leninist party is the main guarantor of preserving the gains of the past (both the recent struggles in Iran and historical ones from across the world) and linking these lessons and theories to new struggles in every industry, in all provinces, and mobilizing all classes and layers who want to overthrow capitalism. That was the main missing factor that led to the defeat of the 1979 revolution. That is what is needed for victory in the next revolution.

The vanguard – that means the strike leaders and most militant and conscious elements – of the working class holds the key to what happens next. We need more workers’ organizations to take the same position as the Khuzestan Vanguard Socialist

Workers’ Cell and start organizing through their clandestine cells to make the general strike a reality.

We urge workers who have been at the forefront of organizing strikes during the past few years to coordinate and link their struggles to a general strike. That way the workers can unite and win major victories in the class struggle, lead all other exploited and oppressed layers, as well as pose the question of state power. Workers’ strikes and mass protests need to be linked under the same working-class leadership to win; if they remain separate then they will not be able to avoid defeat. Revolutionary working-class leadership is, and will always be, the decisive factor in any mass movement in Iran. If it does not exist, then despite all the heroism and self-sacrifice of the women, youth, and national minorities – and any individual workers who join them – the movement will not succeed.

### December 11, 2022, Update

*Shortly before we went to print, Morad sent us this update*

The Iranian regime has now stepped up the repression even further. So far, two young men have been executed for taking part in the protests. The first one, Mohsen Shekari, was accused of blocking a street and injuring a Basiji mobilization thug. Since these actions were considered as moharebeh – ‘waging war against God’ – he was hanged. This is a charge that can be leveled at any of the over 18,000 detainees who are being tortured, raped and forced to make false confessions.

With nearly 500 killed, including almost 70 children, the security forces are increasingly using pellets to shoot young people in their eyes – and with women, their breasts and genitals, too. Abductions of activists, or anyone deemed a threat, are also on the rise.

Despite the regime’s brutality, the Iranian masses continue their various struggles against it. Several strands of strikes and protests are continuing: nightly street protests by women and young people against the hijab and for democratic rights; the struggles of the oppressed Baluchi people against their violent subjugation (which goes largely unreported because of killings, arrests and internet shutdowns); the struggles of the Kurdish people against national oppression and medieval sieges against their cities and towns; the protests at the funerals of demonstrators (or commemorations of the fortieth day of their death); students’ boycotts and activities inside universities; strikes and other types of action by teachers’ associations and the numerous strikes by industrial workers in many sectors. ■



# 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 growth of DSA since Bernie Sanders's presidential campaigns 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.

We strive 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 sustain life on this 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](https://dsausa.org)! If you want to find out more about joining the Reform & Revolution caucus of DSA, please contact us:

[info@ReformAndRevolution.org](mailto:info@ReformAndRevolution.org)

Please subscribe today to help make our work more sustainable and to allow us to reach a wider audience with Marxist ideas and strategy.

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