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US POLITICS

3 The Biden Years Will Open Big Opportunities for the Left

8 A Socialist Program to Radically Expand Democratic Rights

BUILDING DSA

14 Winning a Dirty Break Under Biden

DEBATES & INTERVIEWS

21 Revolutionary Socialists Debate Strategy for Biden Era, with contributions from:

Tempest Collective

Socialist Alternative

Left Voice

Reform & Revolution

27 Democratic Socialist Break Dance: Three Interviews

Maikiko James, National Political Committee

Andy Sernatinger, Tempest Collective

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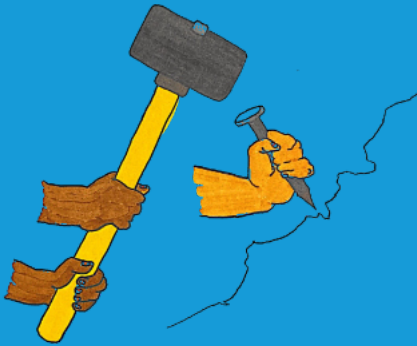
THE CORBYN MOVEMENT 2015-2020

30 What Path Forward for the British Left?

Interview with Dave Hill

John McNally Urges "No Capitulation to Starmer's Witch-Hunt"

14 Winning a Dirty Break Under Biden & The Capitalist State



PHILIP LOCKER & BRANDON MADSEN argue in favor of a “dirty break” strategy, but warn that the way it is often applied in DSA fails to emphasize the goal of splitting from the Democratic Party—or even taking any significant steps in this direction. The task of building a new working-class party is often treated as a prospect for the distant future which does not have much bearing on our practical work today. If this approach continues to hold sway, there is a serious risk that DSA’s efforts will contribute to *propping up* the realignment strategy of Bernie Sanders, AOC, and others rather than to *overcoming* it.

8 Demand Democracy: A Socialist Program to Radically Expand Democratic Rights



ALEX MONI-SAURI highlights the opportunity for DSA to engage with the largest national debate around voting rights and democratic institutions in the United States since the civil rights movement. Trump’s attempts to steal the election failed, but we can’t rely on the Democratic Party and liberal defenders of capitalist democracy to challenge the corporate corruption of our system, much less champion the structural changes needed. DSA could have an impact by campaigning around a bold program, linking calls to radically extend voting rights, abolish the Senate and the Electoral College, and fight for democratic control over the economy.

30 The Corbyn Movement 2015-2020: What Path Forward for the British Left?



STEPHAN KIMMERLE & TOM BARNARD argue that Corbyn’s suspension marks the end of five years of struggle in which working-class people tried to use the Labour Party as a defense against the daily hardships of capitalism. With the end of Corbynism, what’s left now for the movement, and what conclusions can the international left draw from this attempt to fight for working-class interests in the political arena? **DAVE HILL**, a revolutionary Marxist on the national organizing committee of the Labor Left Alliance, explains why he has left the Labour Party, and **JOHN MCINNALLY**, a Marxist and long-time union leader formerly on the executive of PCS (public sector), urges a coordinated fight-back against the witch-hunt aimed at the left by Labour’s new leadership.

The Biden Years Will Open Big Opportunities for the Left

BY ANYA MAE LEMLICH
ILLUSTRATED BY SEAN CASE

Few on the left hold out hope that the Biden administration will be capable of offering a path forward for working people. The Democratic Party’s commitment to pro-Wall Street politics has only been reinforced by Biden’s cabinet choices. Worse still, it’s widely feared that Biden’s attempts to return to “normalcy” will pave the way for a potentially even more dangerous far-right demagogue like Trump to take power.

This places an urgent responsibility on the small but growing forces of the organized left—especially the 85,000 members of the Democratic Socialists of America—to build a serious and fighting political alternative. Yet DSA remains divided over not only strategy, but over what is in some ways a more fundamental question: what is possible for the left to achieve in the years ahead?

Many have drawn pessimistic conclusions from Bernie Sanders’ defeat and the Republicans’ strong showing in November. While DSA formally backs the goal of building a mass workers’ party, it seems there is little confidence in our ability to

take serious steps toward challenging the corporate Democrats in the next four years.

Recently, our comrades at *Tempest* published a piece by Emma Wilde Botta which asks “Is Socialism Winning?” in response to the false optimism especially prevalent in official DSA communications. We broadly agree with their critique of the cheer-leading analysis of some DSA leaders, who declared “WE ARE WINNING” following the successes of DSA-endorsed candidates in 2020.

Of course, it is quite impressive that 26 of the 30 DSA-endorsed candidates won the seats they contested, bringing the total elected DSA members to 155 in 32 states. In her *Tempest* article, Wilde Botta seems to downplay this achievement. But she also correctly argues:

If the post-election assessment is that the socialist Left is winning, then we do not have to do anything differently. That is the logic of electoralism... Electoral victories are not a sufficient way to gauge whether the balance of forces is shifting... [W]e have not yet grappled with some of the limitations of these gains,

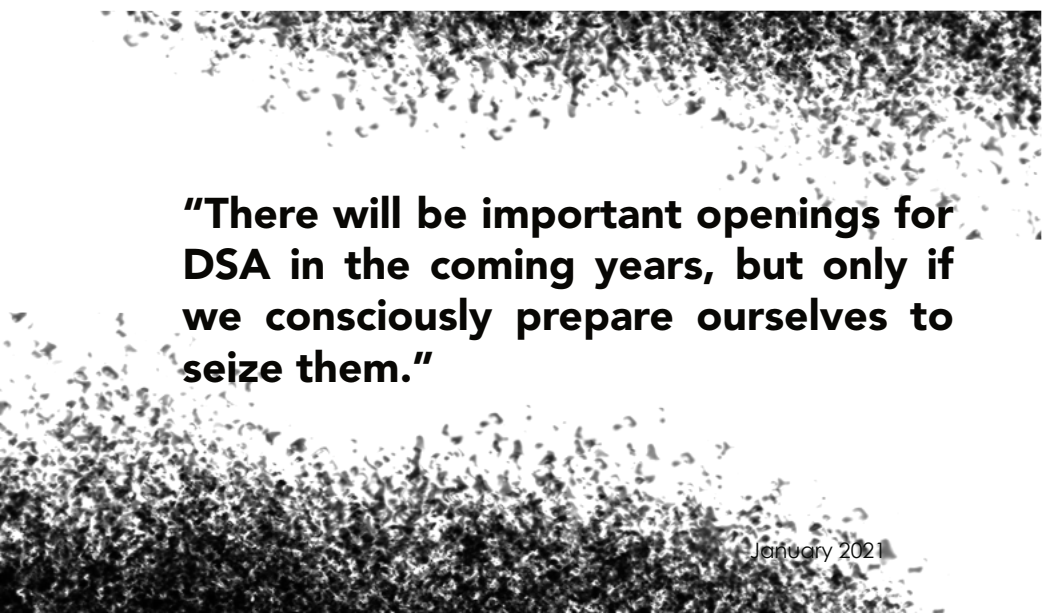
namely how little winning an election actually guarantees. Reforms are won based on the balance of class forces.

But alongside many others on the left, Wilde Botta concludes that “a broader assessment of the political landscape shows that the socialist Left is in a weaker position after this election cycle.” We disagree.

While the left does remain historically weak, we think the mass protests, strikes, and political advances over the last decade—with Sanders’ two campaigns representing the highest political expression of this process—has shifted consciousness to the left, on balance, and increased the confidence and fighting capacity of working people. Equally important, the trendline for the capitalist class points in the opposite direction: the crises of the last decade have dramatically weakened the legitimacy of their key institutions, including both major parties. The growth of right-populism, with backing from a section of the ruling class, is a symptom of their weakness, not their strength.

Looking ahead, socialists have the potential to take serious strides toward political independence and toward building a coherent, mass working class alternative to both Biden and the far-right Republicans. Biden’s promised ‘return to normalcy’ will give way to fresh crises and new, larger waves of mass political participation on both the right and left.

There will be important openings for DSA in the coming years, but only if we consciously prepare ourselves to seize them. To do so means turning the widespread pessimism on the left—with all the accompanying strategic and organizational conclusions—into determined preparation and struggle.



“There will be important openings for DSA in the coming years, but only if we consciously prepare ourselves to seize them.”

The Democrats' Failed Strategy

The left is correct to be worried about the huge vote for Trump, but much of the analysis underestimates the full impact of the centrist Democrats' failure—and what could be achieved if a mass working-class political challenge was organized.

With a deadly global pandemic and more than 300,000 dead in the US, an economic recession leaving 20 million people unemployed, up to 40 million people at risk of eviction, and the largest protest movement in US history for Black lives—it's no wonder the 2020 US election saw the greatest voter turnout since 1900.

Turnout was nearly 67% of the voting electorate. Yet this did not result in a landslide for Democrats. In fact, though Biden squeaked out a win, centrist Democrats failed to make gains all across the board. Even Biden's win failed to provide a real mandate: most of his voters (68%) said they voted *against* Trump rather than *for* Biden in national exit polls. And rather than taking a devastating blow, as many hoped, the Republican Party defended almost all their state and federal strongholds and expanded their electoral base.

Trump was a deeply unpopular, blatantly white supremacist and nationalist president, and hatred for him clearly spurred massive voter turnout by youth and people of color in particular. Youth turnout surged, reaching 53% this year versus 45% in 2016, with 62% of 18–29 year olds voting against Trump. Turnout among Latino voters also skyrocketed, as *Democracy Now* reported on November 11, reaching 64% of all eligible Latino voters, (compared to 48% in 2012 and 2016), with the majority—66%—voting for Biden. 87% of Black voters, an overwhelming majority, voted for Biden. An increase in Indigenous turnout likely played a key role in Biden's win in Arizona and Wisconsin.

Deep organizing and movement building also increased turnout. Community organizing in Arizona's Maricopa County, galvanized by the fight against former sheriff Joe Arpaio, gave Arizona to a Democrat for the first time since 1996. Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib's impressive field game and progressive principles propelled their districts to incredibly high

turnouts, which helped deliver Minnesota to Biden and put him over the top in Michigan. And the Black Lives Matter uprising this summer had a significant influence on voter turnout, as voter registrations for Democrats and independents spiked in June, during the height of the protests.

But an increase in voter turnout helped Trump, too. He received 73 million votes in 2020 compared to 62 million in 2016. Like in 2016, Trump found most of his support among white voters, a majority of whom (58%) voted for him. An analysis of voter demographics by *The Guardian* on November 5 showed that Trump slightly increased his share of higher income voters (those making over \$100,000 a year), in a potential reflection of Trump's pro-rich and pro-business policies. The increase in his popularity with Latino voters is well-documented, particularly in Miami and the Rio Grande Valley, but the percentage of Asian and Black voters supporting him has also increased. In fact, Trump won the highest share of non-white voters of any Republican since 1960.

This fact belies the simplistic, self-justifying liberal narrative that writes-off Trump's base as just a big “basket of deplorables” as Hillary Clinton put it. Clearly, a section of Trump's voters are his hardcore, deeply reactionary base—the white nationalists, racist militias, and those around them who support Trump not in spite of his racism and xenophobia but because of it. But there is clearly a wider layer of Trump voters who, while prepared to stomach Trump's bigotry, are more motivated by their distrust of the corrupt US political establishment.

Even if you measure Trump's hardened far-right base by his “strong approval” ratings—and that's being generous to the liberal narrative—they still represent just 28–35% of the voting electorate. That leaves around 15–22% of voters, at least 24 million people, who voted for Trump in 2020 but conceivably could have been open to a working class challenge to the ruling establishment. It's those 24 million people, plus the 78 million people or 33% of the electorate who did not vote, that the Democrats failed to win over.

They failed because Biden offered no challenge to the unpopular Washington estab-

lishment. He reassured his billionaire backers that “nothing would fundamentally change” if he were elected president. He told voters two main messages: that he was decent and upstanding in comparison to Trump's vulgarity and distastefulness, and that he would get the country back to “normal,” the neoliberal model of growing inequality and legalized corporate corruption of politics.

Since these put Biden squarely in the center of the political establishment, Trump was able to continue painting himself as an outside change-maker—despite being president for four years and handing out tax breaks to corporations and the rich like candy.

No Answer on the Economy

Trump has overseen the worst coronavirus response in the world, criminally downplaying the threat of the virus, actively discouraging people from wearing masks, and offering no government relief to working people apart from one \$1200 check over nine months. Unemployment claims are still high and economic upheaval is far from over, much like the virus. And yet, because he failed to offer a robust alternative, Biden allowed Trump to take over the narrative with two false choices: locking down with no assistance or re-opening the economy.

Biden had no rebuttal. He did not present a generous and robust relief package to make staying home under lockdown possible for workers. He did not propose cancelling rent, utilities, or mortgage payments, or increasing unemployment benefits. He failed to answer people's concrete fears over their livelihoods and ability to survive. He even refused to back Medicare-for-All, despite its immense popularity and the inability of the chaotic and predatory for-profit healthcare system to take care of people.

His central response to the pandemic was to insist on “believing in science” and suggest a nationwide mask mandate. Ultimately, Biden's attempt to pin the catastrophic death toll fully on Trump didn't stick, because he failed to offer a real vision of what an alternative, caring response could be for working people, and failed to address both our public health and economic crises.



Instead of offering any solution to people's fears and struggles, Biden's message centered on the fact that he's not Trump—stable, not chaotic; presidential, not unpredictable. It was a strategy apparently aimed at the “soccer mom” demographic—suburban women displeased with Trump's rhetoric—though equally effective at reassuring corporate America he will stand up to his Party's left-wing.

This strategy seems to have netted Biden more white and wealthy votes, and, combined with high voter turnout and grassroots organizing, was enough to eke out a victory. But beyond securing the White House, this strategy was an abject failure for the Democrats. They lost ground in the House, holding on to a narrow majority. Democrats failed to flip many State Legislatures, the first time since 1946 that so few state chambers switched parties.

Control of the Senate is still up in the air, dependent on both Warnock and Ossoff's run-off races in Georgia. The races remain close, but the Democratic Party and Biden seem more concerned with maintaining their pro-corporate policies than winning. They could help boost Democrats' chances by making the case that if Georgia delivers the Senate to Democrats, they will deliver on popular programs like COVID-19 relief to working class people, a \$15 minimum wage, and Medicare-for-All.

Contradictions in the Democratic Party

Centrist Democrats, beholden to big business, are unable to offer serious solutions for working people—but that doesn't mean that the Biden administration won't pass anything progressive. Some wings of the liberal establishment have drawn lessons from the electoral disasters of the Obama years, with the Democrats' massive losses in 2010 and the rise of the Tea Party in response to the Democrats' strategy of bailing out the banks instead of working people. They understand the need to pass some measures to pacify the left, and to offer some economic relief to their base.

Pressure from Sanders and the Squad, combined with mass protest movements from below, could force Biden to offer some concessions, like cancelling a portion of student loan debt. In fact, Senate

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, along with Elizabeth Warren, has already called for Biden to cancel \$50,000 of student loan debt per person through executive authority.

The left wing of the Democratic Party is growing in both size and strength. Cori Bush and Jamaal Bowman, DSA members from Ferguson and New York, will strengthen the Squad's presence in Congress. All Congressional incumbents who co-sponsored Medicare for All legislation won re-election. Progressive ballot initiatives won across the country, from free universal childcare in Portland, Oregon, to a slate of initiatives, including rent control, in Portland, Maine. It was a successful election for the left, while centrist Democrats underperformed up and down the ticket.

This is no surprise: left policies are immensely popular. A Fox News exit poll showed that an overwhelming majority of Americans (in the 70% range for the following) support a government-run healthcare plan, abortion rights, and offering immigrants a pathway to citizenship. In Florida, 61% of voters approved an amendment to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour—while the majority voted for Trump.

In response, centrist Democrats went on the offensive. In a now-viral leak, ex-CIA agent Abigail Spanberger, who barely held onto her Virginia congressional seat, blamed the loss on the left and said that Democrats should “never use the word socialism again.” Across the board, centrist Democrats are doubling down on the line of blaming left policy—Medicare for All, a Green New Deal, and defunding the police—for their losses. They promise to shy away from bold solutions and continue to compromise with Republicans.

Of course, this is a recipe for further losses, in the 2022 election and long-term. But just because the Democrats may be weak electorally doesn't mean that the party is finished, or that the left can just take over. The Democratic Party is a party by and for the capitalists; big business and their centrist representatives, together with corporate media, maintain a firm grip over the upper echelons of party machinery—as evidenced by their coordinated defeat of Bernie Sanders in the primary. Joe Biden

and the centrist's control over the Democrats has been solidified following Sanders' challenge. They control finances, party policy, and the entire bureaucratic apparatus, and they aren't going anywhere.

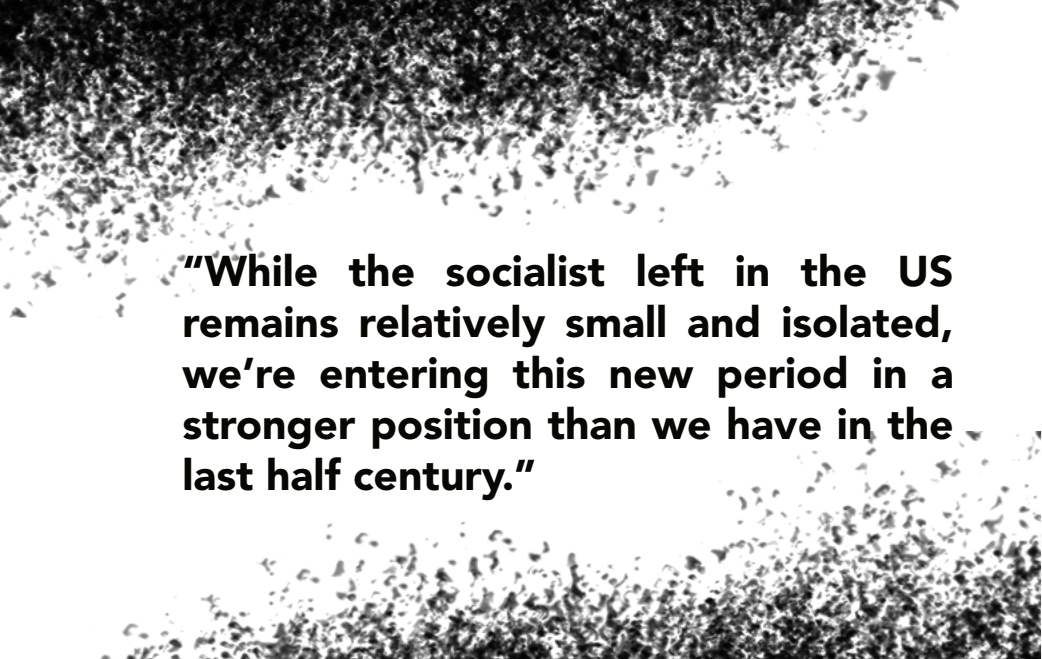
The experience of 2020 should be a sharp reality check for those in DSA backing a “realignment” strategy of trying to take over the Democratic Party. As the Biden administration fails to offer people a way out of the overlapping crises facing US capitalism, the left wing of the party will likely grow in size and influence. Left candidates are set to make further gains against corporate Democrats over the next couple years. As they expand their size and influence, the tensions and contradictions within the party will grow.

But in the context of four decades of growing inequality and rising discontent, the contradictions in the party can't last forever. Corporate Democrats will fight to isolate and sideline the Squad and the Bernie Sanders wing from positions of power and influence, while also exerting immense pressure to attempt to co-opt left leaders. In Chicago, the excitement over the six DSA members elected to city council last year has been complicated recently after Alderman Vasquez capitulated, voting in favor of the mayor's austerity budget, provoking DSA to publicly censure him.

This points to the urgent need for the left to build a powerful alternative—a political force capable of organizing and concentrating working class pressure to keep left politicians accountable. While there are still battles ahead within the Democratic Party, there is no way forward for the left to take it over.

We Are Stronger This Time

While DSA and other left forces are prepared to coalesce behind a strategy to break from the Democratic Party—while recognizing that the active forces are not yet ready to achieve a new mass party—the next years will present significant opportunities to strengthen our position. While the socialist left in the US remains relatively small and isolated, we're entering this new period in a stronger position than we have in the last half century.



“While the socialist left in the US remains relatively small and isolated, we’re entering this new period in a stronger position than we have in the last half century.”

We’re in an incredibly different moment than we were in 2008, when Obama was first elected. Unlike Obama, Biden commands little trust or hope; he enters office with almost no mandate. It’s rare to see a candidate win the presidency while their party loses so abysmally. The relief of defeating Trump and the myth of “normalcy” appealing to many Democratic voters may mean that Biden’s honeymoon could last a few months, but it will be nowhere near as deep-felt or long-lasting as Obama’s, who entered office buoyed by a real sense that the status quo could change. Biden’s win as the “not Trump” candidate means that what little excitement around him exists could wear off rapidly, replaced by disappointment and dismay—particularly as the economic crisis and coronavirus continues to worsen.

The working class has been radicalized over the past 12 years as well. We’ve lived through Occupy Wall Street, the Great Recession, two Black Lives Matter uprisings, a worsening climate crisis, and now the crises of 2020. Millions have been radicalized through these experiences, and have lost faith in the Democratic Party and other key institutions of US capitalism. We’ve seen the Obama-Biden presidency crack down on Occupy Wall Street, send federal troops to beat protesters in Ferguson, and bail out the banks while Black people lost almost half their wealth in the foreclosure crisis.

The socialist left has also changed significantly. We’ve gone through two increasingly popular Bernie Sanders primary campaigns, as well as the rise of

democratic socialists like Ocasio-Cortez. The term “socialist” has become more widespread than ever in the US. And the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) has emerged as a pole of attraction on the socialist left, given new life from an influx of members after the first Bernie campaign, with skyrocketing membership since then. Now with 85,000 members, we’re the largest socialist organization in the US since the Communist Party in the mid-1940s.

This new socialist left, armed with popular demands like Medicare for All and a Green New Deal, has not yet existed under a Democratic president—we’ve only organized under the unfavorable, defensive terrain of Trump. We have a real ability to continue growing in size with the momentum of DSA, and an opportunity to expose the fully capitalist nature of the Democratic Party leadership and use their inevitable disappointment to build support around a socialist program.

But it’s not enough to have passive support for a socialist program. Translating passive support into active organizing means steering people’s immense anger and deep desire for change into a coherent, united front movement that brings together left and working-class organizations and that fights on a common set of demands around common initiatives. If DSA, alongside the Squad, left unions, the Sunrise Movement, Black Lives Matter groups, and other socialist organizations can come together, we could form a coherent fighting challenge to Biden’s administration.

This means coming together around bold common demands, and a clear, agreed-upon political program. Key demands for our moment include the popular, well-known ones: Medicare for All, a Green New Deal, cancelling student loan debt. They also include demands from the Black Lives Matter uprising, like defunding the police and, simultaneously, massively investing in chronically underfunded and exploited Black communities through housing, education, childcare, transit, and social services. And we must come out fighting for a massive COVID-19 relief and safety program: monthly stimulus checks, expanded unemployment, cancelling rent and mortgage payments, an increase in paid sick time, and, additionally, a massive green jobs program to bring people back to work safely.

It’s not enough to simply raise these demands: we need to wage common initiatives around them. Mass protests on inauguration day, demonstrations and direct action, and militant workplace actions like strikes, *all coordinated* and cohered around a clear program, are some of our potential tools. DSA alone, of course, isn’t strong enough to achieve this scale of coordinated action, but it could help to popularize and agitate for what’s needed and set an example wherever possible.

Running DSA candidates in the 2022 midterms—primarying centrist Democrats, challenging Republican strongholds, or running on a democratic socialist ballot line where appropriate—is another way to build up a coherent and coordinated mass socialist movement. DSA candidates should be beholden to a clear political platform, champion a set of socialist demands, and be held accountable when they stray from these, which Chicago DSA aims to require of their candidates following Vasquez’s vote for austerity.

Our strategy must be to build up a left challenge over the next four years that can lay the groundwork for a new, working class political party—one that engages in all aspects of working class struggle, not only on the electoral plane, and one that can ultimately be a tool for the overthrow of capitalism and for the self-emancipation of our class. ■

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

Demand Democracy: A Socialist Program to Radically Expand Democratic Rights

BY ALEX MONI-SAURI

We are in the midst of the largest national debate around voting rights and democratic institutions in the United States since the civil rights movement. This debate is fueled by Republican attempts to suppress the vote and how close Trump came to, again, winning the presidency despite losing the popular vote. It's also fueled by a deepening politicization of the multiracial working class, who are pushing against obstacles to popular power erected by the "Founding Fathers" and generations of ruling-class warfare on democracy in the years since. The historic voter turnout of the 2020 presidential election—67%, the highest in over a century—is an expression of this mass politicization.

Trump's attempts to steal the election are failing because a strong majority of the ruling class prefer Biden's reliably conservative, neoliberal approach over Trump's chaotic politics. But working people shouldn't take much solace in this. The Supreme Court helped Bush steal the 2000 presidential election from Gore, reflecting the preferences of a big section of capital, which leaves us to imagine what would have happened if Sanders was the Democratic nominee instead of Biden. As we saw in the primaries, broad sections of the ruling class would have united in a frenzy to block a Sanders presidency, even if it meant backing Trump.

We can't rely on the Democratic Party and the good, liberal defenders of capitalist democracy to oppose a growing right-populism, even when some sections have a limited interest in doing so. Although in this case much of the ruling class opposed Trump's campaign to steal the election, they would have even more strongly opposed an organized popular movement against a coup—had this proven necessary—like mass strike action, because it would threaten to spill into a wider uprising of working people against capitalist institutions.

The failure of our political system to democratically deliver popular policies, which polls show to be favored by solid majorities, is now dramatically on display. At the time of the election, a Fox News voter poll showed 72% in favor of single-payer healthcare, 71% support for upholding the *Roe v Wade* decision, and 72% support for a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Florida, which went to Trump, sweepingly passed a \$15 minimum wage. And yet, in

the midst of a deadly pandemic, mass unemployment, and economic paralysis, we still don't have affordable healthcare, reproductive rights for all, well-funded social programs, or economic relief. Our police and military budgets remain bloated, jails and prisons full, schools and hospitals understaffed, while popular policies to address these problems are blocked by a corporate-controlled political establishment.

Popular anger with our undemocratic institutions is not going away. And with Trump appointees dominating the courts at all levels, the GOP controlling almost three-fifths of state legislatures, and corporate Democrats controlling the rest, establishment elites are set to further entrench their minority rule.



Sharpening DSA's Program for Democracy

There is a huge opportunity for the Democratic Socialists of America to help shape this debate. The explosive growth in DSA membership over the past four years reflects a mounting dissatisfaction with life under capitalism, and as the largest socialist organization in the US we have a unique responsibility to point the way forward. A starting point would be for DSA to adopt a bold program to radically expand American democracy, from voting rights to deeper-going structural changes; and from there to urge unions, community groups, and every DSA candidate to endorse and champion this program.

Many important reforms, especially around voting rights, can be won through simple votes of state legislatures or voter referendums—and, at the national level, votes of Congress. Other crucial reforms, like abolishing the Senate and electing Supreme Court justices, will require constitutional amendments.

Achieving radical democratic reforms may seem far-fetched at present, given Republican control of most states and the Senate (unless both of Georgia's GOP Senators lose in January), and the Democratic Party's opposition to more than piecemeal democratic reforms. However, we are entering a period of mass radicalization and political tumult; both major parties are deeply divided, and their leaderships face a crisis of legitimacy. There have been many moments of dramatic shifts in consciousness in US history, suddenly making possible reforms that just yesterday seemed out of reach.

But while the crisis of US capitalism may open big new opportunities to win radical democratic reforms, effectively seizing these opportunities will require socialist leadership and mass working-class political organization. DSA should begin championing a radical program of reforms today, linked to a wider program of socialist transformation and full, democratic, working-class control of our economy and society. We think that program should include the following demands:

“We should fight for voting rights for prisoners, people with felony convictions, and all long-term residents (not just citizens), as well as automatic voter registration for all.”

Remove All Barriers to Voting

One of the most basic features of a functioning democracy is universal suffrage—something which has never been a reality in the US. The Constitution initially granted states the power to set voting requirements, and in most cases the right to vote was restricted to property-holding white males, who represented about 6% of the population at the time. Every expansion of voting rights since then has been forced by the pressure of mass movements, and every concession offered by the ruling class has been followed by erosive attacks on voting rights, such as poll taxes, literacy tests, grandfather clauses, and onerous voter registration requirements.

“The president should be decided by popular vote, and the Electoral College abolished.”

The most sweeping method of voter suppression today is felony disenfranchisement, a policy which barred over five million people from voting in the 2020 presidential election due to felony convictions. Coupled with a brutally punitive legal system that disproportionately targets BIPOC communities, this policy results in disenfranchisement for almost 8% of Black adults nationally. In about 30 states, the restoration of voting rights after a felony conviction is dependent on a person's ability to pay legal fees.

Other barriers to access are more tediously disguised, like thinly-spread ballot boxes, eight-hour lines outside polling centers, rejected absentee ballots, unreliable mail service, and racist voter registration requirements. This network of disjointed and inconsistent voting procedures across the US represents its own challenge, but the effects are consistent: in a 2020 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center that examines disenfranchisement measures state by state, each bureaucratic obstacle is shown to disproportionately bar BIPOC, immigrants, and poor populations from the right to vote.

In this period of rapid politicization and mass popular engagement in the voting process, socialists must support a package of radical reforms that represent a real expansion to voting rights. We should fight for voting rights for prisoners, people with felony convictions, and all long-term residents (not just citizens), as well as automatic voter registration for all. The voting age should be lowered to 16. We need universal mail-in balloting, in which all votes cast by the end of Election Day are counted, and a federal overhaul to standardize voting procedures, including equal and abundant access to voting sites in every community and a paid holiday for Election Day.



Abolish the Electoral College

The Electoral College was designed for the express purpose of preserving minority rule. It was conceived at the Constitutional Convention, which was made up of 55 propertied white men who feared that a popular vote might be used to express the popular will. As James Madison noted, the Electoral College also guaranteed southern states’ “influence in the election on the score of the Negroes,” at a time when enslaved people made up 40% of the southern US, and strengthened slaveholders representation in Congress under the Three-Fifths Compromise. Today, the Electoral College still offers inflated representation to voters in whiter, less populated states.

This poses an issue not only for ordinary people, who want democratic expansion to fight for their own interests, and whose ability to express their political will is threatened by the Electoral College; for the ruling class, it represents a threat to the legitimacy of US democratic institutions. The fact that Bush won the White House in 2000 while losing the popular vote, and that Trump did the same in 2016, has deeply undermined popular confidence in US democracy. Because of this, even sections of the ruling class, fearing a decisive delegitimization of their system, are open to getting rid of the Electoral College. This is reflected in the growth of National Popular Vote Inc., a group which lobbies states to sign on to a compact in which they pledge their electoral votes to the winner of the popular vote.

“The makeup of Congress should be determined in a way that reflects the real balance of opinion across the US, with every voter having an equal say, not undemocratically skewed to give voters in whiter, less populated states more control.”

The president should be decided by popular vote, and the Electoral College abolished. Short of a constitutional amendment, this can essentially be achieved if the National Popular Vote Compact goes into effect. So far 16 states have signed onto the NPVC, controlling 196 Electoral College votes; to take effect, it will require more states signing on until at least 270 electoral votes, or half the total, are committed to backing whichever candidate wins the national popular vote.

Although more far-sighted defenders of capitalist legitimacy within the ruling class may authentically want significant

reforms, they are not prepared to wage the kind of struggle that will be needed to win against the short-sighted sections of their class who fear the popular will, or, in the case of Republicans and the firmly-rooted GOP capitalists, fear their narrow partisan electoral interests being undermined. This is a crucial distinction. Unlike the liberal capitalists, the logic of working-class struggle will not limit itself to methods that don’t threaten the wider capitalist order, tending instead toward mass politics, protests, and a broad set of radical demands alongside abolishing the Electoral College.



Abolish the Senate

The Senate is another institution that functions as a check on public interests, and is consequently unrepresentative. As a concession to the less-populous slave-holding states, the framers of the Constitution gave each state two seats in the Senate, regardless of population. Until 1917, Senators were appointed by state legislators, not chosen by the people.

Today, this means that voters in the least populous states (which are also the whitest and most politically conservative) have a disproportionate amount of control and representation in the Senate, allowing for the current Republican Senate majority to exist despite getting a minority of the national vote totals. The concrete implications of this are serious, as outlined in a November 6 *Vox* article, “America’s anti-democratic Senate, by the numbers”:

Among other things, Justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett were all nominated by a president who lost the popular vote and confirmed by a bloc of senators who represent less than half of the country. If the United States chose its leaders in free and fair elections, none of these individuals would serve on the Supreme Court — and it is likely that Democratic appointees would have a majority on the Court.

Again, this represents not only a crisis of democracy for working people, but another fault line in the perceived validity of democratic institutions controlled by the capitalist class—and with that, another opening for socialists to put forth clear demands.

A mass movement for democratic expansion should include a call to abolish the Senate. The makeup of Congress should be determined in a way that reflects the real balance of opinion across the US, with every voter having an equal say, not undemocratically skewed to give voters in whiter, less populated states more control. This will require a constitutional amendment, and for the working class to wage a determined and protracted struggle to achieve it. We should also remember that it wasn’t until 1917 that senators were even elected by a popular vote, and this only changed through a constitutional amendment, won by the pressure of a mass movement.

Democracy for US Territories and Washington, DC

Our demands for democracy must include the people of Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa. The US should not hold territories, and should immediately cancel their debts. Alongside Washington, DC, all territories should be offered a choice of independence or full statehood, including representation in Congress, but it must be up to the people of each “territory” to democratically decide whether or not to accept such an offer.

End Corporate Corruption of Elections

In the 2010 *Citizens United* decision, the Supreme Court ruled that political donations by corporations are protected by the First Amendment and are not subject to restrictions, striking down a previous ban on independent campaign expenditures by corporations and unions. In effect, this legalizes corporate political bribery and total corruption of our elections. When General Motors and Exxon are financing political campaigns, we can continue to expect laws and policies that are more favorable to the world’s super-exploiters than they are to the people or the earth.

As socialists, we know there are a million threads connecting the unhindered accumulation of capital to our institutions of governance—Super PACs, revolving doors between industry and government bodies, deregulation of business and industry. This makes it all the more urgent to wage a collective struggle around concrete demands that will restrict political bribery and make visible the dark currents of corporate and private finances that flow through our elections.

We must organize a mass movement to relentlessly expose and challenge all politicians who accept corporate money, and to demand the Supreme Court overturn the *Citizens United* decision, among other decisions that legalize corporate political bribery. Private financing of elections should be fully transparent and strictly regulated, banning all PACs funded by unlimited donations from business and the wealthy. Instead, only small donations from individuals and workers’ organizations, alongside public financing of elections, should be allowed.

"Private financing of elections should be fully transparent and strictly regulated, banning all PACs funded by unlimited donations from business and the wealthy."

Elect the Supreme Court and All Judges

The death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, in the midst of a highly polarizing and contentious presidential election, brought renewed attention and scrutiny to the Supreme Court. While the collective sense of precarity was heightened by the timing of RBG’s death, the predictably dangerous right-wing agenda of Trump nominee Amy Coney Barrett, and her rushed and anti-democratic confirmation process, the stage was ultimately set by the form of the institution itself. The narrow, archaic structure; the life-long positions, hand-picked by the president; the outsized amount of power wielded by justices—all are features of an institution designed to preserve minority rule and act as a bulwark against the people’s interests.

Now more than ever, big business is using the legal apparatus of the courts to throw huge amounts of money toward advancing their interests, because the policies that help big business (like restricting voting rights, attacking labor rights, deregulating industries, and weakening the role of the civil jury) find very little support in the public arena.

At Barrett’s confirmation hearings, Senator Whitehouse of Rhode Island gave a 30-minute presentation charting the flow of dark money through the courts—a vast, creeping, \$250 million project which the Washington Post describes as “a conservative activist’s behind-the-scenes campaign to remake the nation’s courts.” This includes the Federalist Society, the Judicial Crisis Network, and Donor’s Trust, three anonymously funded groups which have respectively taken over selection of judicial nominees, produced campaign ads for Republican judicial nominees, and served as an identity-scrubbing device for right-wing donors. This apparatus creates very favorable conditions for big business to influence policy directly, while masking the identities and vested interests of donors in pushing their package of right-wing, pro-corporate policies through the courts.

It’s not only at the level of the Supreme Court that right-wing interests are tightening their grip. Trump spent his entire term filling judgeships at lower levels, appointing over 200 judges to federal and appellate positions, packing the courts with reliably conservative justices. This represents almost a quarter of all active federal judges in the US, and 20% more judges appointed (on average) than the past five previous presidents at the same point in their presidencies.

The same legal system that upholds the supremacy of big business also facilitates the racist criminal justice system and brutality of mass incarceration, which is responsible for the world’s largest population of people behind bars. While there’s no simple reform for such a rotted system, we should and must use every tool we have in the fight for our democratic rights. Calls to pack the courts vary widely, with centrist Democrats suggesting an additional two Supreme Court seats, and more radical proposals ranging from six to ten. We must demand a radical expansion of the Supreme

Court, of at least six additional justices, and consider expansion of the lower courts as well. Judges of all levels, especially Supreme Court justices, should be elected democratically, subject to impeachment and term limits.

“Linked to our call for a radical expansion of democratic political rights, socialists need to patiently but persistently raise the call for economic democracy: for public ownership of all major industries, under the democratic control of workers, communities, and society as a whole.”



Democratize Our Economy

Under capitalism, democracy ends the moment you set foot in the workplace. But, as Marx was first to point out, every serious struggle to expand democratic rights for working people will inevitably uncover the lack of real division between political and economic democracy. At the most basic level, socialists should connect the fight for voting rights with the call to radically expand union rights. A starting point could be Bernie’s “Workplace Democracy Plan,” which his campaign linked to the call to “double union membership within Bernie’s first term.”

But, especially in this moment of economic crisis, socialists should go much further. We cannot allow massive corporations like Amazon or General Motors to blackmail entire cities by threatening to leave or eliminate jobs, in order to avoid being taxed fairly or having to pay a living wage. From the shop floor to city council, working people must develop forms of democratic worker and community control over the wealth we produce, and refuse to allow our lives to be run by the narrow drive for profit.

On an even larger scale, multiplying ecological crises pose existential questions about who gets to make the life-and-death economic decisions that will determine the future of our planet. As long it remains profitable to burn fossil fuels and rainforests, we can expect powerful economic interests to corrupt governments and to block or defy regulations. In the final analysis, there is a fundamental contradiction between the profit-driven needs of private capital and the democratic desire of most of humanity to avoid ecological catastrophe.

From the energy industry to the healthcare industry, big agribusiness to big tech, there is growing space for socialists to emphasize how the public interest is completely at odds

with private ownership. Linked to our call for a radical expansion of democratic political rights, socialists need to patiently but persistently raise the call for economic democracy: for public ownership of all major industries, under the democratic control of workers, communities, and society as a whole.

What Will It Take?

In moments of mass radicalization and political upheaval, the popular imagination stretches and the realm of possibility expands. Previous amendments to the Constitution came in waves, as sets of progressive popular demands that were pushed into being by the force of mass movements. In the current moment, the US working class is faced with the compounding crises of capitalism, deeply discredited institutions of democracy, and increasing political precarity.

This year saw sustained mass protests against racist police violence that sparked widespread scrutiny of police budgets and the institution of policing itself, and which resulted in popular demands across the country to defund (and abolish) the police. Fresh experiments and demands around community care and alternatives to policing sprung up, including the demand for democratic oversight of the police. This is just one example of working people pushing back against our undemocratic institutions and actively searching for alternatives; the growing trend of teachers’ strikes, rent strikes, and workers’ struggles against corporations like Amazon point to an atmosphere of rising intolerance for life under capitalism—and real opportunities for revolutionary change.

The capitalist class, which dominates both the Democratic and Republican parties, will never be a fighter for democracy and will work to roll back every reform we win. We will need a political mass movement of the multiracial working class, with socialists pointing the way forward, to win these radical reforms.

With organized and determined mass movements, it is entirely possible to win sweeping reforms that can provide working people immediate relief and offer more favorable conditions for class struggle. But if the underlying economic and social system of capitalism remains intact, the fundamental conflict remains: the interests of private ownership, relentless accumulation and consolidation of wealth, and entrenched minority rule will always oppose the interests of democracy, human rights, and a habitable planet. Because of this, all winnable democratic reforms are temporary and fundamentally unstable under capitalism.

Our institutions reflect an embedded requirement of capitalism, which is the fierce preservation of minority, capitalist-class rule, and the thinly veiled suppression of democracy. As socialists, we know that there are hard limits to meaningful democracy under capitalism, but this doesn’t mean we abandon the fight for democratic reforms.

There is, however, a crucial distinction between democratic reforms within a capitalist framework, and a socialist conception of democracy. While the former seeks to amend the most undemocratic features of our political system, it draws a hard line at economic democracy and leaves the fundamentally conflicted relationship of worker and capitalist, exploited and exploiter, intact. The latter, by contrast, sees political and economic democracy as inextricably linked.

The working class is the most consistent and reliable force for democratic rights, and our historic objective has always

been in the interest of democracy. We produce all of society's wealth, provide all essential services, and make up the vast majority of the population—we should have full democratic rights over our communities, workplaces, and major industries. Fighting for this program of reforms, and building the mass political movement it will take to win them, will open up new opportunities for further expansion of our democracy and for a socialist transformation of society. ■

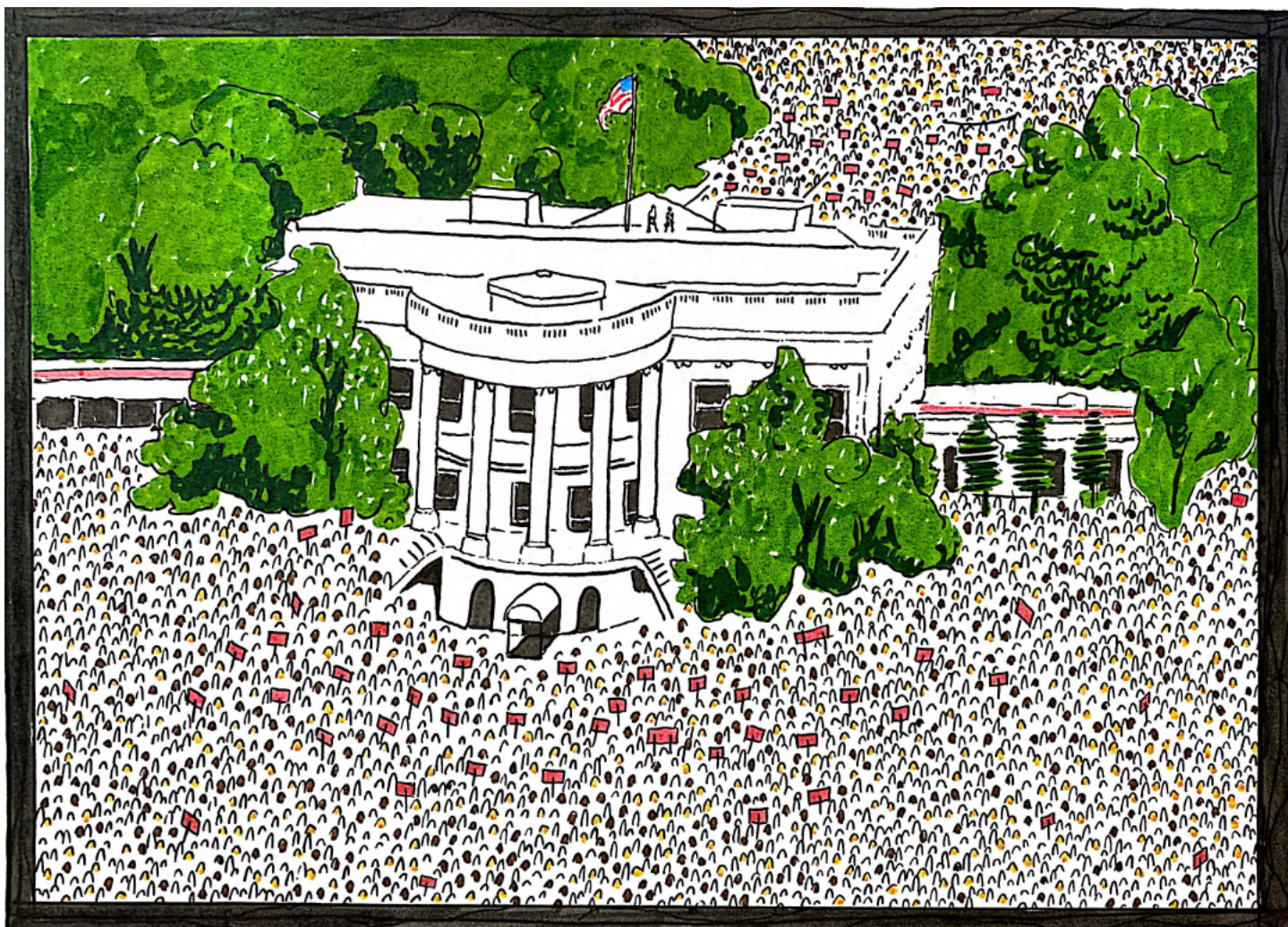
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Winning the Dirty Break Under Biden

BY BRANDON MADSEN AND PHILIP LOCKER

ILLUSTRATED BY ALEX MONI-SAURI



The day after voting in the 2020 general election was over, the moderate wing of the Democratic Party immediately went on the offensive. “We need to not ever use the word ‘socialist’ or ‘socialism’ ever again. . . . We lost good members because of that,” said Virginia Democratic Rep. Abigail Spanberger, attacking the left for what felt—despite Biden winning the presidency—like a lost election for Democrats.

These were the opening shots marking a new stage in the battle between the capitalist establishment that dominates the Democratic Party and the party’s growing left wing centered around Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Behind these left Democrats is a growing support for socialist ideas in society and the emergence of an organized socialist movement in the form of

the Democratic Socialists of America. This new socialist movement has grown over the past five years in a highly contradictory way—mainly through socialist and left-wing candidates running on the ballot line of what former Republican strategist Kevin Phillips described as “history’s second-most enthusiastic capitalist party.”

With Biden taking over as president, these tensions will intensify. It is against this background that a new phase of debate will open up in DSA about how to relate to the Democratic Party, and about what strategy is needed to move toward forming an independent socialist and working-class political party.

At its 2019 national convention, DSA committed to the aim of eventually building a new working-class party. This is a significant

departure from DSA's traditional policy focused on shifting the Democratic Party to the left, much in the way Bernie Sanders framed the issue during his presidential runs.

It is highly notable that the tens of thousands of new DSA members took so little time to start moving beyond the strategic vision of Sanders. Now, the forces supporting a "realignment" of the Democratic Party are a minority in DSA and will most likely be further weakened in the years ahead, given how Biden will govern on behalf of the ruling class and will base himself on the conservative political outlook of the Democratic establishment.

The idea of a "dirty break" strategy currently predominates in DSA. However, the way it is often applied in practice shies away from emphasizing the goal of splitting from the Democratic Party—or even taking any significant steps in this direction. The task of building a new working-class party is often treated as a prospect for the distant future which does not have much bearing on our practical work today. If this approach continues to hold sway, there is a serious risk that DSA's efforts will contribute in practice to *propping up* the realignment strategy of Bernie Sanders, AOC, and others rather than to *overcoming* it.

As committed DSA members ourselves, we believe that as we go forward into the Biden presidency our organization must aim to sharply distinguish itself from realignment-oriented forces. Members' efforts must be consciously rooted in the goal of building DSA into a powerful, independent force, which can become the backbone of a future party. In our view, DSA should have a consistent focus on laying the groundwork—both ideologically and organizationally—for launching a new party as the class struggle heats up. This needs to be reflected throughout our work, but especially in the candidates and campaigns we run.

DSA has a critically important role to play. With over 85,000 members and growing daily, DSA has given an organized expression to the larger politicization of millions through Sanders' campaigns and under the influence of other major movements, most notably the recent uprisings for Black lives. At least for now, DSA offers the most promising stepping stone in the direction of politically independent organizing for the left.

As part of building DSA into a force that can serve as a backbone for a future working-class party, we agree with other dirty-breakers that it is permissible to use the Democratic ballot line and critically support movements and candidates who still have illusions about transforming the Democrats. Critically engaging with left movements and campaigns that emerge in and around the Democratic Party is one important avenue through which we can build the strength of conscious independent left forces within labor and social movements.

At the same time, we should not wed ourselves to the Democratic ballot line. From the same logic that leads us to accept use of the ballot line—namely, building the forces for a left break by any means available—it also follows, as dirty break proponent Eric Blanc explained during a 2018 debate in *Socialist Worker*, that "a viable dirty break strategy requires seeking every opportunity possible to build up completely independent electoral campaigns and formations."



Gains Made

At the center of the growth of the socialist movement over the past period has been a slew of openly socialist candidates running on the Democratic ballot line while attempting to stand out as a distinct force from the corporatist party leadership.

On balance, this has represented a clear step forward for the left in our view. Most significant is the growth of DSA from around 5,000 members in 2015 to more than 85,000 members at the end of its 2020 recruitment drive. This rebirth of DSA and the rise of insurgent left challenges in Democratic Party primaries have been both a reflection of and a contributor to the broader popularization of socialist ideas, left-wing policies, and a basic class outlook that has taken place among millions in US society. The entire process has served to lift the confidence of a whole new layer of left-wing workers and youth by articulating their sentiments, making the popularity of their ideas visible, and raising their sights and expectations.

This has had the reverberating effect of pushing forward and stimulating social struggle, such as in the case of the 2018 teacher strike wave or the recently resurgent Black Lives Matter movement. Many key organizers of the teacher strikes had been politicized in 2015–2016 by the Bernie campaign and/or by joining DSA shortly thereafter.

What is the dirty break?

The Clean Break

The classic Marxist position in the US has been to stand wholly apart from the Democratic Party, and to call for workers and the left to abandon it in favor of forming or joining a socialist or broader working-class party instead. This has sometimes been called a “clean break” strategy. There is a clear, simple logic to this position: the thoroughly corporate Democratic Party is a party of, by, and for the capitalist class; workers should fight rather than submit to their class enemies; therefore, socialists should not work inside the Democratic Party or support its candidates.

The main advantage of a clean break approach is that it offers a clear message that we cannot rely on the Democrats or any political representative of the ruling class. However, recent experience has demonstrated some limitations with this approach. Given the severe weakness of independent working-class forces and low level of class struggle over the last several decades, the newly emerging left and socialist sentiment found its broadest expression not in the form of independent working-class politics but around left-wing campaigns on the Democratic ballot line, such as Bernie Sanders’ two presidential campaigns.

The clean break strategy tended to lead socialists to adopt a rigid tactical approach of opposing—or at least refusing to endorse—Sanders or AOC, which cut them off from effectively seizing a big opportunity for spreading socialist politics among the left-wing voters enthused by their campaigns. While these campaigns are associated with the Democratic Party, it is also

critical to recognize that they express a political dynamic which points towards a clash with corporate politics. Socialists should work to win influence among workers and youth supporting Sanders and AOC as part of gathering the necessary forces to be able to lead a successful challenge to the Democratic Party and form a new party.

Realignment

On the other side, there has been the long-standing “realignment” strategy of fighting to turn the Democratic Party itself into a pro-worker party. This has been the approach that Bernie Sanders, AOC, union leaders, and others at the left edge of the Democratic Party have committed themselves to. (While Sanders historically supported building a left-wing alternative to the Democrats and is still formally an independent, during his two Presidential campaigns he argued for a strategy of fighting to reform and eventually take over the Democratic Party.)

Supporters of realignment argue that the two-party stranglehold on US politics through undemocratic ballot access laws is so strong that it essentially rules out any viable third-party efforts. Therefore, the only option for the left is to attempt to seize hold of the Democratic Party by filling it with left candidates, leaders, and officials who can take it in a different direction.

This strategy has been the dominant approach on the US left since the 1930s and has repeatedly failed. The main leaders of the labor movement unsuccessfully tried to transform the Democratic Party over decades, while refusing to

mobilize their huge resources behind independent working-class politics. A whole section of the civil rights movement entered into the Democratic Party. But rather than transforming the Democratic Party, they themselves were transformed from fighters for radical change into defenders of the status quo. To take one example, Congressman Bobby Rush went from co-founding the Illinois chapter of the Black Panthers to endorsing Joe Biden against Sanders during the 2020 Democratic primaries (after his preferred candidate, Mike Bloomberg, former Republican mayor of New York City, was defeated).

The Dirty Break

DSA members Meagan Day and Micach Uetricht, in their book *Bigger Than Bernie*, summarize the dirty break strategy as follows:

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

In the meantime, we can sharpen the contradictions between the Democratic base—the working-class and generally progressive rank-and-file members of the party—and the wealthy Democratic Party funders who don’t want anything to do with the base’s demands... The idea is to agitate within the party, in full view of the party’s base, in order to engage as many

people in the discussion as possible, making it harder to ignore. As conflicts between the base and the funders grow, the aim is to build up and cohere a powerful working-class pole, whose growing strength will eventually pose the practical question of a split with the Democrats and the creation of a party of our own.

Like the clean break strategy, the dirty break acknowledges the thoroughly corporate nature of the Democratic Party and affirms the need for workers to have a party of their own, separate from both capitalist parties. However, it rejects the tactical conclusion that socialists should only run independent of the Democratic Party in all instances.

Instead, the dirty break strategy argues that socialists can choose the tactic of running on the Democratic ballot line, provided that they maintain a clear socialist political profile and program, raise money independently from working class people, and build independent working-class and left-wing organizations (and not the Democratic Party itself) in the course of the campaign. Its proponents argue that this tactic can serve to build the working-class base for socialist politics that is necessary to carry out a successful break

from the Democratic Party and form a new party at the right moment.

The Party Surrogate Model

Another important aspect of the discussion in DSA is the related, but distinct, concept of the "party surrogate" model, as outlined by Seth Ackerman in his November 2016 Jacobin article, "A Blueprint for a New Party." Ackerman summarizes his model as follows:

[...] a national political organization that would have chapters at the state and local levels, a binding program, a leadership accountable to its members, and electoral candidates nominated at all levels throughout the country.

As a nationwide organization, it would have a national educational apparatus, recognized leaders and spokespeople at the national level, and its candidates and other activities would come under a single, nationally recognized label. And, of course, all candidates would be required to adhere to the national platform.

But it would avoid the ballot-line trap. Decisions about how individual candidates appear on the ballot would be made on a

case-by-case basis and on pragmatic grounds, depending on the election laws and partisan coloration of the state or district in question. In any given race, the organization could choose to run in major- or minor-party primaries, as nonpartisan independents, or even, theoretically, on the organization's own ballot line.

The ballot line would thus be regarded as a secondary issue. The organization would base its legal right to exist not on the repressive ballot laws, but on the fundamental rights of freedom of association.

Ackerman leaves the question of whether to ultimately break with the Democratic Party unanswered. In our view, however, the party surrogate model is not only compatible with the dirty break, but has an internal logic that points toward preparing for a break. In the main text of this article, we argue that a party surrogate can and should be seen as a midwife for the birth of a future party, and that building DSA into a party-like formation is currently the most viable path toward making the dirty break a reality. Of course, the situation could change, so we also need to be open to other viable paths that may present themselves for assembling left forces for a break.

This collective experience has also helped to expose and sharpen the contradictions between the Democratic establishment and its progressive electoral base. These heightened tensions have increasingly led to conflicts between the wings of the party playing out in front of a wide audience of millions rather than being kept among a narrow circle of party insiders.

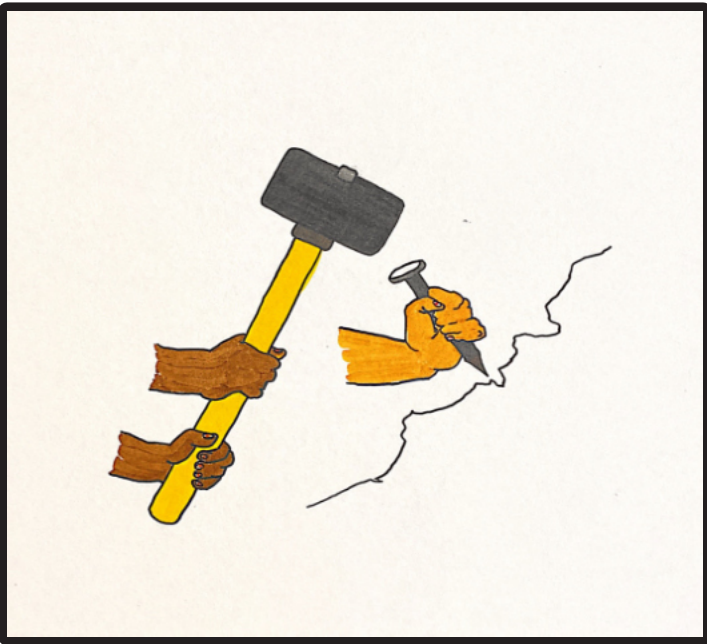
Despite their net positive effect on the movement, however, Sanders and AOC (and many other DSA-backed candidates) are *not* themselves exemplars of the dirty break strategy. Their campaigns have been explicitly tied to a realignment strategy.

The fact that the positive aspects have so far been primary does not erase the limitations and dangers inherent in this strategy; both

aspects continue to exist side-by-side in constant tension. DSA's task is not simply to cheerlead for such campaigns, but to engage with them in a dynamic way that also helps their base understand the limits of the realignment strategy and move toward an understanding of the need for a future break and working actively in that direction.

In our view the dirty break strategy is a legitimate approach that can be carried out in a principled way. But to carry it out in a principled fashion requires a clear recognition of the structural opportunist pressures inherent in the entire approach, and a constant political campaign to combat the gravitational pull of drifting into a strategy of working to reform the Democratic Party rather than breaking it up.

To actually reap the full benefits of the dirty break strategy—of assembling and preparing the forces for a break from the Democratic Party—requires consistently carrying out the policy in practice, not just on paper. Despite a growing number of DSA campaigns in which the candidates and chapters are consciously in support of the dirty break strategy, what distinguishes them from realignmentist campaigns are often nearly invisible in practice. There are enormous pressures to tone down disagreements with other Democrats, especially with those on the soft left of the party, and DSA has so far had insufficient political and organizational counterweights in place to effectively stand up to these pressures.



Problems with the Dirty Break Strategy

Even when the dirty break strategy is implemented with consistency, it still brings with it very real dangers and downsides. Most of these stem from the fact that socialists are attempting to serve working-class interests while operating inside a party that is fundamentally structured around the diametrically opposed interests of the enemy class, the capitalists.

An important danger is that socialists end up linking ourselves publicly with the very forces we are attempting to combat. We can find ourselves in the position of inadvertently giving the Democratic Party an illusory left veneer, building its credibility and “brand” rather than exposing its class character. Or, alternatively, the left can find itself (justly or unjustly) being held jointly responsible for the betrayals and attacks on the working class that are carried out by the party.

Another danger is that the left will often lose in the Democratic primary and then is dragged into funneling its base into supporting the pro-capitalist Democratic candidate (or passively allowing this to happen). Eric Blanc’s 2017 article which coined the term “dirty break” highlighted the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party’s initial refusal to endorse other Democrats. But in practice many DSA candidates, like AOC or Rashida Tlaib, have endorsed standard Democrats.

A large aspect of the attraction of utilizing the Democratic ballot line is that it is an easier path to electing our candidate. However, this desire to run winning campaigns itself exerts a strong pressure toward watering down left policies or lowering our socialist profile. Giving into this electoralist pressure means we will fail to fully utilize our campaigns to raise consciousness and build DSA.

Finally, there is the risk that we lose focus on the goal of working-class political independence and that the “dirty break” strategy becomes nothing more than a rationalization of an opportunist practice of adapting to the Democratic Party and avoiding taking up difficult fights.

Historical experience provides a wealth of cautionary tales along these lines. But falling prey to these dangers is not inevitable. The dirty break framework does provide a legitimate set of flexible tactical options that can progress us toward the central strategic aim of a new mass workers’ party. The issue is whether the dirty break is executed in an opportunist or a principled fashion.

We are not just saying this with the hindsight of recent experiences. At the time of the 2015 Sanders campaign the authors of this article, alongside other comrades, helped open a debate in the Marxist left on the tremendous impact of Bernie’s campaign, arguing for critically supporting Bernie while not hiding our own independent, working-class, revolutionary politics.

In 2019, our caucus again strongly supported DSA going all-out for Bernie on an independent socialist basis:

We in Reform & Revolution believe DSA should actively engage on the field of Bernie’s campaign with the aim of building support for socialist politics. Abstaining from this battle does not strengthen the support for radical politics—it means isolating ourselves from this critical site of struggle and radicalization.

At the same time, we argued that it was necessary for socialists to be politically sharp and push back consciously against opportunist pressures, making sure we were independent from the official campaign not only *organizationally* but also *politically*:

The DSA campaign should not limit its politics to what Sanders puts forward. We can make clear our disagreements with Sanders along with specific proposals for what we think Sanders should do differently. Our DSA campaign needs to reflect this with a clear socialist message and demands in our door-knocking materials, rallies, public statements, social media, etc.

The Sanders campaign will be a site of political struggle, a contested terrain. There will inevitably be debate among Sanders activists over the best policies, strategy, and tactics. A moderate wing will argue for Bernie to subordinate everything to electoral considerations, push him to water down his radical demands and socialist profile, and seek to minimize conflict with the Democratic Party establishment.

In contrast, there is a need to bring together the left wing of the Sanders campaign into an organized force with its own clear agenda in order to answer the arguments of the more moderate wing and to have the maximum impact on the direction of the campaign. DSA can play a critical role in giving a lead to these elements.

What Would a Principled Approach to the Dirty Break Look Like?

In our view, there are four components that are essential in any principled implementation of the dirty break strategy:

A) Building an independent socialist organization. In the present context, that means building DSA on the model of a party surrogate. DSA should democratically decide who to run in what races, and DSA should similarly set the overall political program of the campaign. Candidates should openly promote their DSA membership, and both the candidate and DSA should actively use the campaign to appeal to supporters to join DSA. DSA should also insist that its candidates commit to continue doing this once in office, if elected.

B) Flexible ballot-line tactics, but with an unambiguously independent political profile. While using the Democratic ballot line whenever it is advantageous for building independent left forces, candidates need to do the following:

- Run on a clearly working-class left program.
- Refuse all corporate donations; build an independent working-class financial base.
- Openly identify as a socialist opposed to the Democratic Party's corporate establishment—not just saying this internally within the campaign or DSA, but with a crystal-clear public profile where this is a key theme of the campaign.
- Openly promote the message that the Democratic Party is dominated by corporate interests, and that this campaign is building a working-class alternative.
- Argue that we need a working-class political party structured as a mass-membership, democratic organization.
- Refuse to support corporate Democrats; actively promote challenging as many establishment Democrats as possible.
- Commit, if elected, to not endorse corporate politicians and to actively *campaign* for left-wing insurgent challenges to the establishment.

C) Systematically educate supporters that we are building our forces in preparation for a coming split. This requires DSA plainly hammers away at the following message: *The Democratic Party is a big-business party. When we run on its ballot line, this is part of a tactic to build and organize support for left policies, grow DSA, and stimulate social struggle. Sooner or later, a reckoning with the Democratic Party establishment is unavoidable. We are working to build up our forces and win over the left-wing electoral base of the Democratic Party in preparation for a coming split.*

D) Seek out viable opportunities to run independent of the Democratic ballot line. There are too many cases today where this tactic is never seriously considered—even in circumstances where the legal barriers are minimal or where the left forces are strong enough to overcome them. For instance, New York state has “fusion voting” laws that would allow DSA candidates to run on their own Socialist ballot line while retaining the ability to campaign for the Democratic Party ballot line as well. Why hasn't this been taken advantage of? Because the underlying strategy in

effect here is not, in reality, employing flexible tactics in a drive to break from the Democrats (i.e. a dirty break) but rather *a strategy entirely centered around use of the Democratic ballot line.*

Aside from New York state, clear openings for viable campaigns independent of the Democratic ballot line also exist in other local races across the US. Many cities are entirely dominated by one or the other corporate party; in some cases the other major party doesn't even bother to field a candidate! Electorally speaking, these circumstances make running outside the Democratic Party not only viable but *advantageous*. Rather than having to go up against the establishment candidate in a primary, where the electorate is more heavily weighted toward party loyalists, we can skip straight to campaigning among the more working class general electorate.

Examples of serious campaigns that have been waged on this basis include Nikkita Oliver's strong 2017 showing in the Seattle mayoral race, DSA member Rossana Rodriguez-Sanchez's successful 2019 independent campaign for Chicago City Council, Bernie Sanders' mayoral and Congressional campaigns in Vermont, the 2003 near-victory of the Green Party's Matt Gonzalez for mayor of San Francisco, and Kshama Sawant from Socialist Alternative winning her Seattle City Council seat the last three elections in a row.

What next for DSA?

In drawing up an overall balance sheet of DSA's recent experiences with electoral campaigns, the results are mixed.

On the one hand, DSA has been able to keep up an impressive rate of growth. This is a major achievement that all members should all be proud of, and it constitutes a big step toward laying the basis for a mass socialist organization.

On the other hand, this has largely been done in an opportunist fashion. Despite DSA as a national organization supporting the goal of a new party on paper, in reality it has not actively fostered a clear consciousness around preparing people for a coming break.

Too often, DSA does not democratically select which candidates will run, nor does it usually decide the program on which those candidates will campaign, nor is there much accountability once those candidates are elected. It is far too common for DSA candidates not to actively promote their affiliation with DSA or encourage their supporters to join DSA. In too many cases, the message supporters are exposed to is one of fixing the problems in the Democratic Party. It is quite rare to hear a DSA candidate openly declare that the Democratic Party as an institution represents big business, and that what is needed is a commitment to growing DSA, laying the foundations for a working-class party

Of course, the picture is not uniform across the board. Some cases have been better than others. For instance, it appears from what we can tell that the five-member “DSA for the Many” slate elected in 2020 to seats in the New York State Assembly and State Senate had campaigns that included more of these often-missing elements. Their plan to form a distinct socialist caucus in the legislature (as the six DSA members elected in Chicago have also done in their city council) is an excellent step forward as well, to maintain a

sharp and clear profile in contrast with the rest of the Democrats in the New York State Legislature.

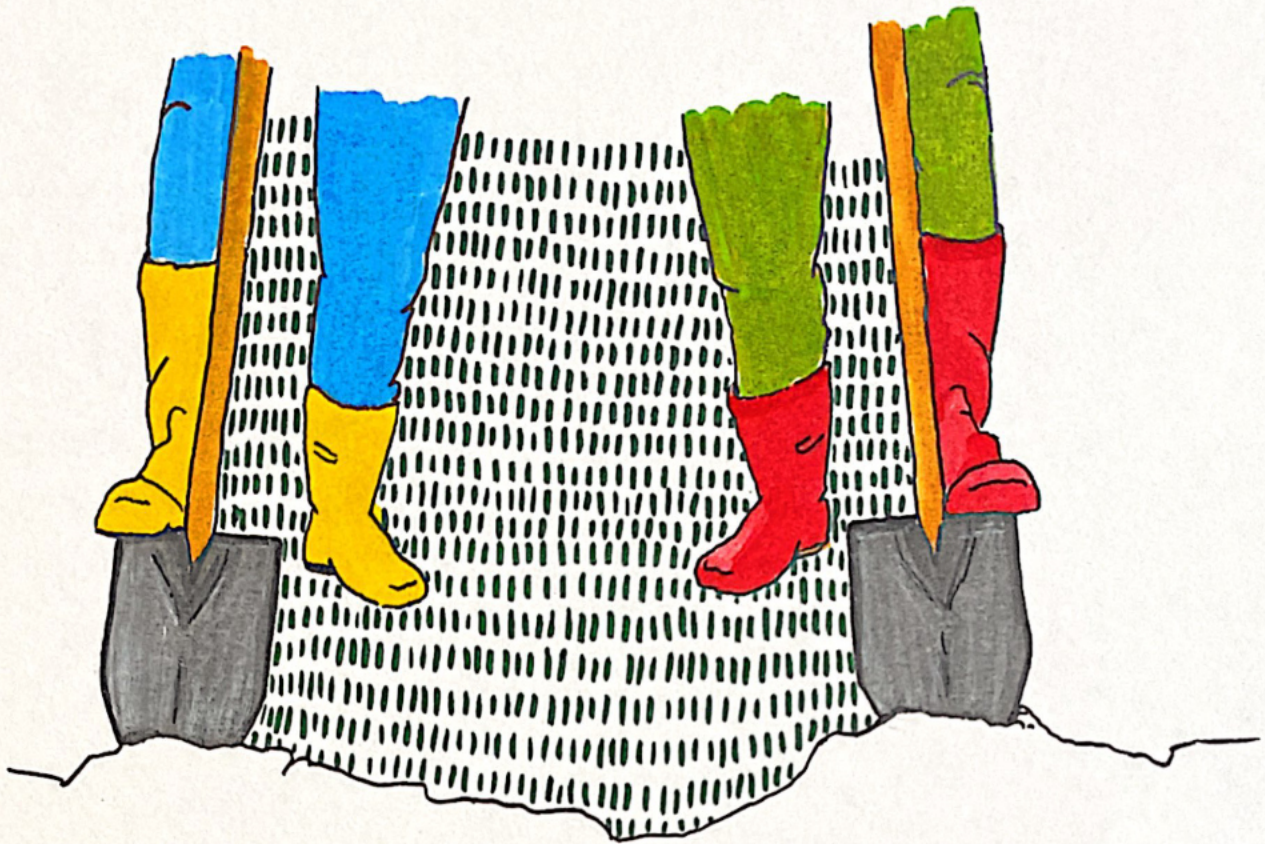
Going forward, the most immediate tasks all center around politically strengthening DSA to more fully play the role of a party surrogate. At its 2021 National Convention, DSA should seek to adopt a clear political platform. There should be open debate in DSA on the question of what a principled approach to the dirty break looks like and how to strengthen our practical work to better align with our stated goal of working-class political independence from the capitalist parties.

Under a Biden presidency, the limitations of an opportunist policy will assert themselves more powerfully. With a Democrat holding executive power, it will become all the more critical for

DSA and socialist candidates to boldly differentiate themselves from the Democratic Party—from Biden's party. If we are able to successfully stand out as a left opposition to the Biden administration, we will have a big opportunity to grow, perhaps to 150,000 or even 200,000 members and take important steps towards building a Democratic Socialist Party. ■

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

Philip Locker is elected to Seattle DSA's Local Council, is a member of the Seattle Education Association, and serves on the Editorial Board of Reform & Revolution.



Debate: “What are the Main Tasks for the Left after the Election?”

Revolutionary Socialists Discuss Strategy

Thanks to Tempest, Left Voice, and Philly Socialists, who took the initiative to ask a number of caucuses in DSA and groups on the revolutionary socialist left to give their perspective on the main challenges ahead.

We've published all eight responses on our website (see: <https://reformandrevolution.org/2020/12/17/debate>), and had space to print the answers from Tempest, Socialist Alternative, Left Voice, and the contribution from our caucus, Reform & Revolution. Check out the contributions from Philly Socialists, Puntorojo, Rampant and the Revolutionary Socialist Network online.



**SOLIDARITY
FOREVER**

The Tempest Collective



“There exists an opportunity for the... creation of class-independent organizations, including a socialist party.”

We launched the Tempest Collective and website in August 2020 to help fill what we saw “as a yawning political vacuum...for the politics of revolutionary socialism from below.”

This was at the tail end of a historic rebellion, a multiracial uprising of 23 million people, in two thousand cities and towns across the United States. And since our launch, the ineffectual to malign response of the government has meant a near doubling of the COVID-19 dead, now approaching 300,000. Meanwhile, we witnessed months of an election campaign whose result has placed the Left in challenging terrain, facing a restorationist, neo-liberal Biden administration; an election which—aside from Trump’s theatrics—has not significantly weakened the forces of the right.

“We look forward to joining in a common struggle with other organizations and comrades in this process, which we hope will see a recomposition of the socialist movement and the forces of revolutionary socialism.”

Despite these challenges, our priorities remain the same. There exists an opportunity for the Left to break an impasse that has bedeviled the U.S. working class for generations, that is the creation of class-independent organizations, including a socialist party, that embody that class in all its diversity. This requires advancing this perspective in DSA

and beyond. It equally requires commitment to fighting the right on all fronts, with no illusions that its defeat will come through the Democrats or a purely electoral strategy.

We hope to strengthen a labor movement that has begun to show signs of life, within and outside of the unions. Our focus is on rank and file activity; activity directed not just on the fights “on the shop floor” but with an eye to social justice and the broader political opening. This is necessary both to reverse the long, slow decline of organized labor over the last decades and to ensure that these defensive structures are not all that exists when we speak of the organized working class.

There has been an international upsurge of feminist organizing—struggles for bodily autonomy and dignity, struggles arising out of the burdens of social reproduction—which have placed women, trans people, and these fights generally, at the vanguard of class struggle internationally. We seek to learn the lessons and to help build comparable movements in the U.S. We should never again be confronted with two candidates—both more than credibly accused of sexual assault and rape—as representing a choice in our “democracy.” We look to a future where the movement has a growing revolutionary socialist wing that would never capitulate in the face of such a choice.

A similar dynamic exists in the existential fight against deepening environmental catastrophe. The weak presence of organized socialists in the climate movement is telling, just when there is such a resurgence of energy from a generation unwilling to

accept the dissembling and deferment of meaningful action. The socialist Left not only has a contribution to make. Any meaningful advances require a head-long confrontation with capitalism.

In recognizing the U.S. as the premier imperialist power, and our obligation as internationalists, we are committed to supporting the revival of anti-imperialist organizing, built on opposition to U.S. empire, and to imperialism in itself. This requires trans-national solidarity between movements and people across the world in similar fights.

Finally, despite the fact the summer rebellion largely receded during the election period, the millions who mobilized have not gone anywhere. The lessons have only deepened—as the leading forces of the Democratic Party attack the movement, and as the murder of Black and Brown people by the forces of the state continues unabated. We know from the history of this country that the anti-racist and abolitionist struggles are inseparable from any meaningful fight for socialism in the U.S. With all due modesty, we are committed to strengthening the organized forces of these movements in any way we can.

We believe that this period of converging crises means growing polarization and radicalization, and not stabilization and restoration. With this will come opportunities for our side. We look forward to joining in a common struggle with other organizations and comrades in this process, which we hope will see a recomposition of the socialist movement and the forces of revolutionary socialism.



Socialist Alternative



"Revolutionary socialists should argue clearly against the left 'using' the Democratic ballot line, even as part of a 'dirty break.'"

Biden's administration will oversee a deep capitalist crisis, and the ruling class has no way out. Biden's "honeymoon," though potentially boosted by a COVID vaccine, will likely be shallow and brief. Deep social, economic, and political polarization will continue and gather steam. The international situation will strengthen these contradictions with revolution, counter-revolution, environmental destruction, and inter-imperialist rivalries, especially between the U.S. and Chinese ruling classes.

In the midst of the pandemic and economic devastation, the biggest protest movement in U.S. history emerged this summer after the racist police murder of George Floyd. Explosive struggles could develop in the next four years around racism, sexism, housing, workplace, healthcare, budget cuts, or a whole host of other issues. These movements will often come into direct confrontation with the Democratic Party, and socialists can work together to popularize a class struggle approach and working class political independence.

As the authority of the Democratic Party leadership decays, a vacuum will grow on both the left and the right. It is extremely likely that the far right will grow under Biden's presidency. This could even lead to the emergence of a far right party. This needs to be met with a working class united front, and the left needs to urgently build a mass independent pole of attraction to cut across potential support for the far right.

Trump attacked socialist ideas relentlessly, and now the Democratic Party leadership is doing the same. This polarization within the Democrats will continue as their

majority in the House shrank and "the Squad," with their 5-7 votes, now effectively hold the balance of power. Marxists should put demands on them to use their authority to mobilize the considerable class anger in society, confront the Democratic Party leadership, and help lay the basis for a new working class party. We placed similar demands on Bernie during his two presidential campaigns. While we have no illusions that AOC, Bernie, or others plan to take this route, we need to point towards the struggle necessary to build the foundations of independent working class political power.

DSA has grown dramatically, and they will continue to evolve and be tested in the coming years. Revolutionaries need to engage in debate with DSA and deepen our collaboration and united front work. New activists coming into struggle under a Biden administration will be much more critical of the dead-end "realignment" and "dirty break" strategies that are dominant in DSA currently. A mass independent working-class party will not emerge from the existing revolutionary left or even from DSA as it currently stands. It will be a product of intensifying struggles, exemplary action from the left, and deepened debates in social movements, the labor movement, and the socialist movement. This does not mean however that Marxists can take a "wait and see" approach to working class political independence.

In fact, the socialist left can play a critical role in pushing forward towards a new workers party. Revolutionary socialists should argue clearly against the left "using" the Democratic ballot line, even as part of

a "dirty break." Alongside a skillful and engaged approach to those with illusions in this strategy, Marxists can also lead from the front with viable electoral action rooted in a class struggle approach.

Our work in Seattle is one example that should be amplified and defended. Kshama Sawant and Socialist Alternative have won three elections as an open socialist despite the richest man in the world, right-wing populists, and virtually the city's entire establishment uniting against us. We helped build and lead movements that won the country's first \$15 an hour minimum wage in a major city and the "Amazon Tax" this year. The ruling class fears that these examples will spread, and this seat for working people, independent politics, and the revolutionary left is under attack again with a right-wing, racist recall campaign. Defending this seat should be a priority for all socialists.

"New activists coming into struggle under a Biden administration will be much more critical of the dead-end 'realignment' and 'dirty break' strategies that are dominant in DSA currently."

Internationalism should be at the core of our analysis, actions, and organization. Worldwide perspectives, struggle, and debates will be instructive for a generation of developing Marxists in the U.S. That is why Socialist Alternative is proud to be part of International Socialist Alternative with sections on every continent.



"A Left that works within the Democratic Party...is nothing but a left cover for American imperialism."

The main tasks for the Left today are three-fold: advance and unite ongoing struggles (for workers' demands, against racism, against climate change), articulate an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist vision, and build an independent socialist party.

The current health and economic crisis caused by the pandemic takes place against the backdrop of the crisis of neoliberalism, which has brought about a partial delegitimization of traditional parties, and the decline of U.S. global hegemony, which makes it impossible for the U.S. economy to secure the material conditions that historically fed the illusion of the American dream. Meanwhile, capitalism keeps generating obscene economic inequalities.

Biden's project is a "restoration" project: to restore the legitimacy of U.S. institutions and the profitability of U.S. corporations. After Trump's blend of rule for the rich and blatant racism and populist rhetoric that undermined the legitimacy of the regime, and amidst the multiple crises and political polarization, this may prove impossible. The working class is desperate for aid, and many voted for Biden in the hope of something better than Trump. The movement against racism and police brutality shook the country this year and unveiled the rot in the regime. And there is polarization: an emboldened Right versus a growing sector of the working class and the youth that is ready to fight neoliberalism, if not capitalism altogether.

In this scenario, the left must try to accelerate the experience of the masses with the Biden administration and show that the only solution can come from the

workers organized as a class. We do this by organizing to fight from day one against bailouts for corporations, pushing instead for universal health care, the expansion of unemployment insurance, rent cancellation for the duration of the pandemic, and more. Building off of the summer's BLM insurgency, we need to put anti-racist struggles at the center and use the fire power of the working class to fight. We must also try to unite labor and anti-racist movements if we want to avoid cooptation and strengthen the fight for socialism as we combat racial oppression.

"Socialists need to break with the Democratic Party, and build an independent working-class party that fights for socialism. This means recognizing and fighting the Biden administration as our class enemy, and not trying to be left-wing advisors for his policies."

And the working class has begun to show its strength, from the teachers' strikes in 2018-2019 to the hundreds of labor actions of frontline workers at the start of the pandemic. But as leftists we have to be more than cheerleaders for labor struggle. The U.S. Left has often failed to combat union leaders who discourage and dismantle rank-and-file militancy, who boycott the push for universal health care, turn their backs on the movement against racism and police brutality, and continue to rally support for Democrats. The fight against the union bureaucracy is at the center of any effective effort to strengthen workers,

unionize new places, and turn unions into fighting organizations. We need a fusion between the most advanced workers in struggle and the socialist movement.

To accomplish this, the socialist left must articulate an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist program. This means charting a path of internationalist working-class solidarity, rejecting both the blindspot on imperialism that characterizes the social democratic Left and the support for bourgeois governments outside the U.S. typical of the campist Left. A Left that works within the Democratic Party or supports its candidates is nothing but a left cover for American imperialism.

Biden enjoyed the support of sectors of the Left in these elections. It is hard to imagine how these organizations could now justify their support while Biden is filling his cabinet with neoliberal technocrats. Socialists need to break with the Democratic Party, and build an independent working-class party that fights for socialism. This means recognizing and fighting the Biden administration as our class enemy, and not trying to be left-wing advisors for his policies.

We in Left Voice are revolutionary socialists—we understand that the fight against capitalism can only be successful with a clear strategy to overthrow the existing regime. But we understand that many people on the left do not necessarily agree with our strategy, and we're ready to join forces with other socialists to build an independent socialist movement. The left is doomed to fail unless we take this necessary step.



Reform & Revolution



“DSA must truly put the break into its dirty break strategy.”

BY BRANDON MADSEN AND STEPHAN KIMMERLE

Revolutionary socialists have hitherto only interpreted DSA and its relation to the Democrats under the coming Biden administration in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.

There are huge opportunities arising out of the movement for Black lives, and from raised expectations for universal healthcare amid a pandemic, no doubt influenced by Bernie Sanders prominently campaigning on Medicare for All.

We have seen the renewal of a broader socialist movement, embodied primarily in DSA: a democratic force driven by activists and local chapters; loose and lacking coherence, but nonetheless promising. Activists face the challenge of how to bring the forces of BLM and this socialist movement together.

Meanwhile, Marxists are confronted with the difficult task of pushing back against the impulse to simply bask in the progress the left seems to be making today using the Democratic Party ballot line. How do we avoid the bulk of the socialist movement winding up with an endlessly short-sighted approach toward what has historically been a graveyard for social movements? Various theories are circulating: a clean break, a dirty break, a party surrogate...

DSA formally stands for what amounts to a dirty break strategy. Unfortunately, all too often the “break” part is relegated to some indefinite point in the future, rather than being used to politically inform DSA’s campaigns today. How can we

help DSA truly put the break into its dirty break strategy?

We in the Reform & Revolution caucus of DSA would like to propose the following to all revolutionary socialists striving toward an independent working-class party:

Let’s all come together, starting now, to discuss how we can prepare for DSA’s 2021 convention season. Let’s unify around a set of bold, concrete steps that we can all advocate for DSA to take up, submitting a resolution that commits DSA to actively building and campaigning for an alternative to the Democrats and a meaningful break.

Revolutionary socialists and others who are already convinced of the need for working-class political independence do not have the weight in society to break masses from the Democrats on our own. DSA, too, remains small compared to the whole US population, but it is weighty enough to at least take some meaningful steps toward that goal *if a significant number of DSA members are convinced to do so*. Convincing them is our task.

We greatly appreciate Left Voice, Philly Socialist, and Tempest organizing this written exchange. Can we use this as a jumping-off point for further discussions about how to move forward together, trying to find common ground? That would also help build the forces of Marxism within the socialist movement and help comrades move beyond a reformist understanding of socialism, toward revolutionary politics.

We suggest that our groups (and any other interested forces) campaign together for a resolution to the 2021 DSA National Convention along these general lines:

A. DSA will launch a campaign to continue its growth with the aim of reaching 150,000 members under a bold slogan like: “Join the Socialists – Toward a Democratic Socialist Party.” DSA will hire 2 full-time staff members to nationally coordinate this campaign for 1 year and reserve another \$100,000 to fund the campaign. In addition, DSA will set up a fund “Toward a Democratic Socialist Party” and ask people to donate to it to increase the resources available for this campaign.

B. DSA’s National Electoral Committee is tasked with identifying the 10 most promising 2022 races in which to run DSA candidates without using the Democratic Party ballot line (DSA may still choose to run candidates on the Democratic ballot line in other races, but these will not count toward the 10). These electoral campaigns will be nationally promoted, and all DSA members currently elected to public office are asked to publicly endorse and actively support them.

If others want to continue discussing, we would happily do our part to help make that happen. The proposal above is a rough, initial sketch to stimulate conversation, and we would be more than happy to be one-upped by better proposals! What’s key is that we seek to act together to push toward addressing the main needs of the socialist movement in this crucial moment. ■





BY VAL ROSS

Democratic Socialist Break Dance

Reform & Revolution spoke with three national DSA leaders about strategy toward the Democratic Party after Biden's victory.

We discussed how to overcome the Democratic Party's dominance over the US left, whether that's breaking clean, breaking dirty, or breaking later, and whether breaking even matters. There's a lively debate within the Democratic Socialists of America, and we look forward to continuing the discussion leading up to DSA's national convention in August 2021.

We didn't have space in this issue to include the full transcripts, but the following excerpts address key questions facing DSA under a Biden administration. In the spirit of comradely debate and discussion, we will continue to invite leading voices of different political tendencies and perspectives in DSA to join us for discussions and interviews. Check out our website at reformandrevolution.org for more.

"WE'LL FIND FASTER OPPORTUNITIES IF WE ARE NUANCED IN OUR APPROACH"

The urgent task is political education, not the formation of a new party, argues Maikiko James, member of DSA's national leadership

Robert Shields spoke with Maikiko James, a member of the National Political Committee (NPC) of DSA who is based in Los Angeles, CA. She is also a leading member of the Socialist Majority Caucus.

At the 2019 convention, the DSA passed that resolution calling for a dirty break. Did you support that resolution and what are your thoughts on the dirty break strategy today?

I don't think it makes sense to do that right now, on November 15th, 2020. It's something we should be talking about in an ongoing way and figuring out if we can grow our power to a point where that is more plausible. Let's get there. Let's get to a place where a party entity makes sense.

I don't believe I supported that resolution at the 2019 convention, honestly. At this moment I still feel chapters need to understand the terrain of where they are. Sometimes it may make sense to run independent and sometimes it may make sense to be on the Democratic line.

I say that not just about the ballot, but also in how you operate in the political machine, wherever you live. I think forming a third party is a lot of work. If all 80,000 of us were like, "Let's just focus on that," maybe something could happen in the next 15 years.

We don't necessarily want to stay in a two-party system forever. I think so much about how our political system needs to be abolished. But I think we'll find faster opportunities and faster leverages if we are nuanced in our approach and find opportunities to both infiltrate and also build independent power.



For me, it's less about the party question than it is about our politics. I think because we're not a cohered organization, we need to spend a lot more time in the political education part of our work, as opposed to building the party side of our work. I think we can't skip that step.

And I'm really excited, being on the training committee, and having lots of comrades who work in political education, with deeper strategy experience than I do. I would be excited to build the space for our members to talk about what [a break from the Democratic Party] looks like in practice, because until we have those conversations, we have too few people that could actually even envision what this would look like on a practical level in this moment. That's my opinion.

"I'M A BREAKER"

DSA is not the formation to break to from the Democrats because it doesn't try to be, argues Andrew Sernatinger from the Tempest Collective

Stephan Kimmerle spoke with Andrew Sernatinger, a labor activist and member of DSA in Madison, Wisconsin. Andrew is a member of the Tempest Collective and has written for *New Politics*, *International Viewpoint*, and *Jacobin*.

You wrote an article together with Joe Evica about how to put the break into the dirty break. You outlined that you've got some sympathy with the dirty break strategy, but that if you look at what DSA is doing, and what the majority in DSA is promoting, this is an abstract target of break and no real steps towards that. How do you see the situation now with a Biden presidency?

There are two issues that I think are separate. One of them is, where are we at in the political context now? And the other is, in a somewhat abstract way, what would we need to do as a strategy?

So in the abstract, I think first, if you're going to break, you have to build something to break to. And I don't care if it's a dirty break or a clean break. At this point I would just say, I'm a breaker. I want to break, so how do we do that? I'm open to how that happens. But how it doesn't happen is—you just don't build anything and you hope that one day it'll just come together. If DSA were

an organization that was like, "We are running with the explicit purpose of building a new party and we are preparing the ground for that party," it could do things like use the national electoral commission to try and make a distinct electoral formation.

I don't love the Justice Democrats. They're progressive Democrats. But what they are pretty good at is making it clear that like, "Oh, you liked this person? Well, they're affiliated with us and you should follow our things and give us money and all that stuff. We'll have other candidates like them." That's not for the purpose of a dirty break at all. But at least they understood that they had to create an independent organization that is coherent.

If we were going to create something coherent, it would have to do something like that. I don't know what you want to call it. I don't have a great tagline, but let's call it "workers' party." Then you'd say this DSA person is involved with that. And all this stuff looks similar in terms of branding and go to this website. Then you create an audience for something more than just the candidate, but for a type of organization.

Why build a new formation, why not do all of that with DSA itself?

I don't think DSA is this thing, because it doesn't try to be that. Michael Utrecht and Megan Day, in their book, [Bigger than

Bernie], have said things like, DSA is that dirty break vehicle, but DSA is not a political party, and it doesn't aspire to be one. It has some flirtations with the idea that there should be a party. But it certainly is not taking any of those steps to be one. And none of the political life of DSA internally is about determining its electoral facing work. All of that stuff pretty much happens when a candidate shows up and says, "Hey, it turns out I'm a socialist and I want to run for this position. Will you support me?" And the chapter says, yeah, right.

Seth Ackerman has promoted this term of a "party surrogate." That could be an attempt to bridge the gap, at least in theory, between what DSA is and the need for a future party. Is this a bridge?

Actually, Ackerman is agnostic on whether or not a separate party needs to exist. And he says that in his article. He does not speak about a party surrogate for the purpose of breaking from the Democrats. He outlines the limitations of the existing system and then says, how could we have something that functions like a party? He's pretty effective in outlining what he thinks that should be, but he does not actually take up any of the tasks of what it would be like to break from the Democratic Party because that's not his aim. And I think that everybody should be clear on that. He's not a theorist of a dirty break, he's a theorist of a political instrument.



"RUN AS A DEMOCRAT ONLY IF YOU ABSOLUTELY NEED TO"

DSA is simply not ready to fully break and become a fully independent party, argues Austin Gonzalez, a member of DSA's national leadership

Ty Moore spoke with Austin Gonzalez, who was elected to DSA's National Political Committee as a member of Build in 2019. Austin is not part of any caucus in DSA today, and continues to play a leading role in the Richmond, Virginia chapter.

In 2019, DSA passed a resolution in favor of breaking with the realignment strategy to embrace a dirty break strategy. What did you think of the resolution at the time? How do you think DSA should position itself to push further toward a dirty break in the next four years under Biden?

I feel that's the question that's on everybody's minds. To answer your first question directly, I did indeed support the resolution at the time because I did and I still believe that DSA's dependency on the Democratic Party is, frankly, a hindrance to our movement, as well as a hindrance to the movement internationally, since an effective US left is just good for the world.

With that said, I should say I've come to believe—from my experiences on the National Political Committee—that declaring ourselves a party whenever we see fit to do so would not be a move that I would be supportive of. Just breaking from the Democrats abruptly and saying we are no longer working with Democrats.

That would be the clean break strategy ...

You're right. And I think, referencing the previous question, there are many internal structures and processes that need to be fleshed out before we can move in the direction of becoming an independent party, which I do believe should be an aspirational goal. I think it is something we should be working toward. And I do think that we are well on the way to breaking with the Democratic Party.

But in the short term, my philosophy regarding working with the Democrats is a simple one, and it is: run as a Democrat only if you absolutely need to.

I see no reason to make a hard declaration one way or the other regarding working with the Democrats, at least now.

You're saying a candidate should run as a Democrat when there's a clear, tangible advantage, but we should be striving to run independently wherever there's not some major disadvantage?

Exactly, yes. But the fact of the matter is that we are currently not at that point nationally. My experiences in Richmond and looking at local races in Virginia which are nonpartisan—to me that's ideal.

That's ideal terrain for getting our feet in the door, so to speak. And I think we should have more of an investment in those sorts of local races as well, to further our independence from the Democratic Party. I do think that breaking from the Democratic Party is the aspirational goal. I think being strategic about it is extremely, extremely important. That does mean working with Democrats. Or let me rephrase that: that means effectively using the Democratic Party ballot line, in the short term.

One of the other people we're interviewing, Andy, wrote an article saying, "Let's put the break in the dirty break" and saying, in practice, there's not a lot of difference between the realignment strategy and most of the electoral work in DSA that is ostensibly touted as the dirty break strategy. What do you think of his critique?

I would have to read that to get a clear idea of what he was getting at. However, from how you have described it, I think that's

definitely accurate. And I think a lot of times people fail to realize that. I think that



is a very interesting point, and one that I would agree with personally.

One idea that Seth Ackerman is most famous for talking about is the party surrogate strategy, the idea of trying to prepare DSA to be more party-like and to run independently, using the Democratic Party ballot line strategically where it's a big disadvantage not to, but developing a platform, developing a program, developing more systems of accountability to try and transform DSA more into a party-like organization. What do you think of arguments along those lines?

Absolutely. For me, that is the short-term goal. Personally, I emphatically agree. My philosophy, as you've referenced, is to run as a Democrat only if you need to. Only if you absolutely need to. And I think that the party surrogate concept is precisely the most suitable for being able to facilitate that sort of development, to move in that direction, and to eventually move away from the Democrats.

We simply are not ready to fully break, to become a fully independent party. Our election laws, frankly, will prevent any sort of success, and our organizational structure is not currently at that level that it needs to be to run a successful party. ■



THE CORBYN MOVEMENT 2015 - 2020

ILLUSTRATED BY BENJAMIN WATKINS

What Path Forward for the British Left?

BY TOM BARNARD AND STEPHAN KIMMERLE

On October 29, the Labour Party suspended its former leader Jeremy Corbyn. Standing in solidarity with Corbyn, we reject the accusations that the Labour Party under his leadership was institutionally antisemitic. There is no basis for these accusations, as many in the British left have pointed out. This was clearly yet another attempt by the right wing to undermine the left leadership Corbyn represented between 2015 and 2019.

In the wake of the suspension, significant opposition erupted inside left Labour circles, including from some trade union officials. On November 17, Corbyn was readmitted to the Labour Party, though not allowed to rejoin the Parliamentary Labour Party – acting instead as an “independent” member of parliament, and therefore unable to run for a seat as a Labour candidate in the future. This qualified readmittance has satisfied no one on the British Left. Some left Labour party activists are still calling for people to leave the Labour Party and form an independent socialist political organization; others say it is important to try to keep the left organized within Labour. Though the call to stay in Labour may not be a viable option, the need to keep as many activists organized as possible – both inside and outside of Labour – seems to be the urgent need at the moment.

However, Corbyn’s suspension marks the end of five years of struggle in which working class people tried to use the Labour Party as a defense against the daily hardships of capitalism. With this end of Corbynism, what’s left now for the movement, and what conclusions can the international left draw from this attempt to fight for working class interests in the political arena?

Below is an introduction to the Corbyn movement, followed by three articles that shed some light on the strength and weaknesses of the Corbyn movement, and highlight two different paths forward for the British left. These paths are laid out by two important British Marxists, Dave Hill and John McNally.

Introduction to the Corbyn movement

In the summer of 2015 Jeremy Corbyn, a left social democratic Member of Parliament of the British Labour Party, was nominated to run for Party leadership. Though regarded as a fringe candidate, centrist Labour MPs who did not politically support Corbyn wanted to make a show of broadening the debate by including a socialist voice. Normally he would not even have made it on the ballot, but changes in the rules of the party (brought by the Blairite wing) made it very easy for new people to join the party and vote for Labour Party leadership.



Ironically, these changes were initiated to consolidate the neoliberal orientation of the party that former Prime Minister Tony Blair had championed. Blair’s leadership of the Labour Party mirrored the policies of the Democratic Party’s neoliberal Clinton wing. Blair’s “New Labour” abandoned a working class agenda, introduced market-based reforms in the education and health sectors, instituted student tuition fees and reduced welfare payments, and refused to reverse the privatisation of the railways. Blair even acted as a partner to the U.S. in its invasion of Iraq.

But the backlash against Blair’s neoliberal politics resulted in hundreds of thousands joining the party in support of Corbyn. He was elected in 2015 with 59 percent of the vote and re-elected in 2016 with 61 percent, despite opposition from the parliamentary wing of the Labour Party. Membership in the Labour Party grew from 200,000 in May 2015 to more than 580,000 by 2020, making it the largest party in Europe. Under Corbyn’s leadership, Labour’s positions moved to the left, opposing the British involvement in the Syrian war, and demanding the renationalization of the railways as well as an end to austerity.

In addition to the growth of the Party itself, a network of activists called Momentum was founded as an organization of left Labour supporters. Controversial since its inception, it focused on developing electoral activism; however, its internal structure was top down, and without democratic structures offered no real way for its members to influence policies, or for chapters to have a say in developing their own campaigns. Initially carried forward by the enthusiasm of tens of thousands of activists, this lack of democracy limited its ability to become a real force in politics.

Momentum was attacked by Labour Party Blairites, who accused it of infiltrating the party to purge parliamentary leaders it found too conservative. Actually, Momentum did not attempt any systematic campaigns against Labour Party Councillors and members of parliament, nor did Corbyn mount any serious battles against Blairites in the party.

Nonetheless, the Conservative and Liberal parties, as well as Blairite Labour Party parliamentary figures struck back hard at Corbyn. A vicious campaign by major media outlets hounded and slandered Corbyn relentlessly. For them, he was too far left, which made him “loony.” They said he didn’t represent Labour’s base. A major campaign was mounted against his so-called anti-semitism, based on Corbyn’s long-standing support for the Palestinian people.

Looming over all of this was the Brexit referendum calling for Britain to leave the European Union, a huge issue for the British people that once again is coming to the fore at the end of 2020. Affected by the dominance of Brexit in popular discourse, and the indecisive stance that Corbyn himself took, Labour lost the election in December 2019 and Conservative Party Leader Boris Johnson was elected. In April 2020, Corbyn resigned and Keir Starmer, a moderate candidate who presented himself as ‘centre-left’ candidate won the Labour Party’s leadership election with 56 percent of the vote.

Starmer initially appeased the left wing of the Labour Party with promises of inclusion, but on October 29, Corbyn himself was suspended from the Labour Party group in the British parliament for his response to a report on anti-semitism in the Labour Party, which was widely regarded by the left as more witch-hunt than objective report.

“Youth Driven by a Belief in Fairness”

**FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVE HILL
BY STEPHAN KIMMERLE**

Dave Hill is a revolutionary Marxist on the national organizing committee of the Labor Left Alliance. Below we print part of an interview with him from before the suspension, and his subsequent Facebook statement on leaving the Labour Party.

Read the full interview at ReformAndRevolution.org

Could you first of all describe for us the situation when Corbyn was elected? On the one side, hundreds of thousands, mainly young people, flooded the Labour Party at that time. On the other side, their active participation in the party was somewhat limited. Would it be correct to speak about the surge into the Labor Party or/and Momentum as an "internet phenomenon"? Was it more of an internet-based, loose engagement, but with a lack of organizing and fighting?

That's not completely fair to say. When Corbyn first came in [as party leader], there was an influx of hundreds of thousands of new members. There were very large Momentum meetings, full of young people- and a lot got organized in Momentum. Back in 2015, the situation was ripe, huge enthusiasm for Corbyn, and, especially, the left social democratic - for the UK, very radical - Labour Manifesto of 2017.

Nowadays most youth have a basic anti-sexism, anti-racism, and environmental awareness, a strong belief in fairness. In contrast, Momentum pretty much (though not entirely) restricted itself to electoralism and didn't do much political education as it should have done.

From the outside, it looked like Momentum never dared to open its own structures for democracy, for new people, for new activists taking ownership. Is it fair to say that it looked like a top-down organization?

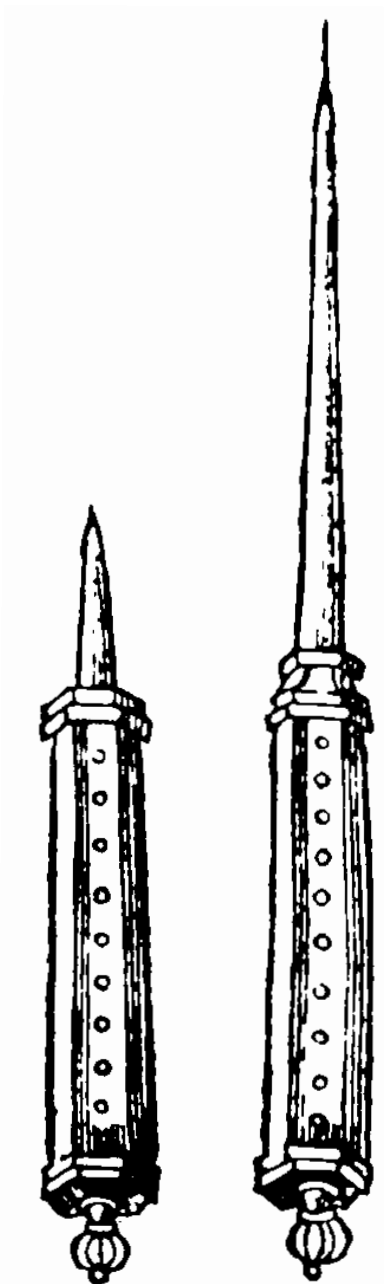
Yes, it is extremely fair to say that. It's not a democratic organization, far from it. People felt no ownership. We got called to meetings, very good meetings. We had really big meetings and they were so successful in getting the votes out. But who organized the meetings? There was no democratic involvement.

Do you have any hope that this could be a turn towards some more radical, more democratic politics?

I don't take this for gospel, but my understanding is yes. I don't put much effort and energy into Momentum at the minute, but I know there are many good comrades within Momentum.

Why did Corbyn lose?

One, the power of the national and international - in particular, the national - capitalist class and its ideological state apparatuses, to use a phrase from Louis Althusser.



The media was relentless. I had been a reader of the liberal left Guardian from the age of 16. I stopped reading it in 2015. Corbyn was such a threat that the Guardian became absolutely vicious in its demonization and hatred.

Then there's the power of the capitalist class within the Labour Party. Not just the Blairites, but the social democrats who believe in capitalism. I mean left social democrats. Should I include Corbyn in this? Social democrats do not want to replace capitalism, but want to make it nicer, prettier, fairer. Not only was Corbyn weak in the face of opposition, but he didn't push for socialism.

Probably more important was the fact that, apart from about 20 or 30 Labour members of parliament, the Parliamentary Labour Party preferred to have a conservative government, or a coalition government, or a Blairite government instead, such was their hatred of Corbyn- and of socialism.

I can give another reason, which is the balance of class forces and the level of political consciousness of the working class, the state of the institutions and organizations of the working class. That plays an important role.

Corbyn and Momentum did not fight for mandatory reselection. This kept the Parliamentary Labour Party in the hands of the right wing without fundamentally challenging it. What's your take on this question of mandatory reselection?

... I criticize Momentum hugely. It was an absolutely huge mistake not to push for mandatory reselection, both for councillors and for members of parliament.

What's the way forward? Mike Wayne wrote on Counterfire: "Here's a collective fantasy that a lot of people are having right now [...]: that Jeremy Corbyn leads a small phalanx of left-wing Labour MPs out of Labour and collaborates in the formation of a new party. This new party would very quickly attract a mass membership base of hundreds of thousands." That's nothing more than a dream, isn't it?

I do read Counterfire every day, and I agree with them on that. It's just a dream. A wonderful dream. But a delusion. There is a tiny possibility. A problem for the Left in Labour and the Left of Labour is that it's pretty crowded out there to the left of the Labour Party, with plenty of organizations who will be fighting each other.

That's why I'm for the time being in the Labour Left Alliance. We organize both inside and outside of Labour. We need to keep an orientation to Labour, because, at this time, and quite possibly, for a long time to come, that's where the bulk of the socialist members of the working class are at the minute. I think there's probably a hundred thousand people who have left the Labour Party since Corbyn's departure as Leader. I think another one or two hundred thousand will go. My analysis is that the Labour Party will go back to what it has been for nearly all its history, a party with the right-wing firmly in control.

In two years' time, there might be none left. But, for now, we're trying to bring those inside the Labour Party and the socialists and communists outside together in a truly democratic organization. Internal party democracy and transparency is a major feature of the



LLA. It should be for the Labour Party, too. So, us Marxists who are still inside the Labour Party fight for its internal party democracy, fight for Corbynite - left social democratic - policies but to move them to the left, as a 'transitional programme', but put emphasis and energy and activism in extra-parliamentary, non-electoralist work, in recruiting to socialism left social democrats inside the Labour Party and outside it, and developing class analysis and consciousness. But Counterfire is right, it sure as hell ain't Starmer who is going to lead a socialist revolution. Or the Labour Party.

On October 29th, only days after Corbyn was suspended, Dave Hill announced on his Facebook page that he was leaving the Labour Party. Below we print his statement.

TODAY, I RESIGN FROM THE LABOUR PARTY- DAVE HILL 29 October 2020

With the suspension of Jeremy Corbyn from the Labour Party, the rightwards stampede of Labour under Keir Starmer has the socialist/ left social democrat totemic scalp it, and its backers have long relished.

It's enough. I'm off. I was in Labour 1961 to 2005, became a Labour Parliamentary Candidate twice, and a Labour Group Leader, left because of Blair, and rejoined because of Corbyn in 2017. Like hundreds of thousands of others, enthused by his integrity, his left reformist/ left social democrat policies for redistributing wealth, taxing the rich, egalitarian policies re social class,

re 'race' and re gender. And enthused by his pro-Chavez, pro-Castro, pro-Palestine, anti-NATO, anti-bombing foreign policy.

As an anti-capitalist, as a revolutionary Marxist, I was not blinded to the historic role of Labour, of social democratic parties, shoring up capitalism in the tweedledum-tweedledee parliamentary politics of capitalist states. But Corbyn gave hope in Britain and worldwide to those left social democrats/ 'democratic socialists', and to Marxists like me, that there would or could at least be hope of some meaningful reforms addressing national and global ecocide, poverty, inequality, injustice.

But Labour is patently, screechingly obviously, once again, under the anti-Left leadership of Keir Starmer, 'the reserve parliamentary team of Capital'. The destruction of Corbynism- left social democracy- by Capital and its structures (such as the EHRC) within and outside the Labour Party, is pretty much proof that Capital will destroy those in social democratic parties 'who ask too much', who threaten Capital/ Capitalists and their profits.

I call on Corbyn and those brave enough within the Socialist Campaign group of Labour MPs to split from Labour and form a new party to the left of Labour, a new socialist party. Many trade unions and Constituency Labour Parties- and probably other socialist groups- would join. In the meantime, and until such times, then I call on comrades within and without the Labour Party to join the Labour Left Alliance, a grouping currently of 2,300 supporters- comrades both inside and outside the Labour Party. Anyone in Sussex interested, message me?

Today, with the suspension of Jeremy Corbyn from the Labour Party, on charges relating to overblown and trumped up anti-semitism, is a watershed day- for me, and I suspect, tens of thousands of others.

The place to fight for socialism, for a democratic Marxist replacement, overthrow, of Capitalism, or even for wide scale reforms and redistribution of wealth, income and power, and for a properly functioning and well-funded NHS, education system and social care system and an ethical foreign policy, is no longer inside the Labour Party.



No Capitulation to Starmer's Witch-Hunt: Fight Back Now

BY JOHN MCINALLY

By John McNally, a Marxist and long time union leader, is a long-standing activist and former member of the executive of PCS, a union in the public sector with strongly left-wing leadership.

This article was first published on November 8, 2020 on Counterfire.org

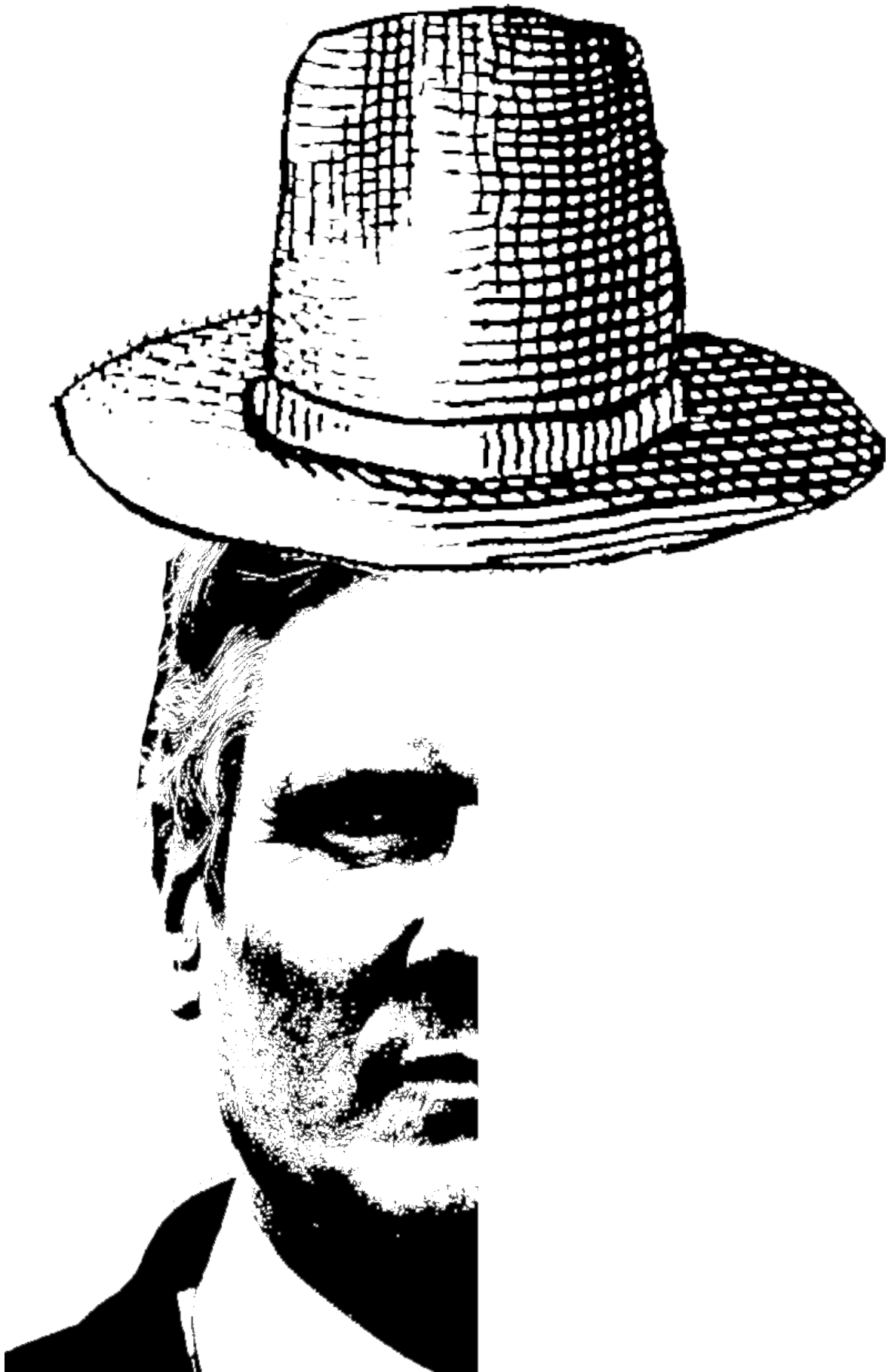
The question isn't 'stay or leave', it's whether or not the left inside and outside the Labour party is going to fight back, argues John McNally

With the full weight of the establishment and media behind them, Keir Starmer and Labour's right-wing are determined to extirpate socialist, anti-war and anti-imperialist ideas from the party, or, at the very least, neutralise them. This is the real strategy behind the suspension of Jeremy Corbyn - it is a declaration of war, and it is class war. Horrified at how close Corbyn came to being prime minister of a Labour government in 2017 on a Manifesto that offered some alternative to cuts, privatisation and austerity the right-wing are determined to ensure it never happens again.

While debate is heavily focused on whether socialists should stay in the Labour Party, the real issue is whether the left is prepared to launch a serious fightback to defeat this McCarthyite witch-hunt. A fightback must be conducted in the party, the trade unions and the social movements through which workers and youth are challenging a system incapable of offering them a safe and stable life. Starmer and the right-wing would prefer the left to cower in compliant silence but will carry out a wholesale purge of activists if required. The left can challenge and defeat this witch-hunt only by an uncompromising and determined fightback in defence of socialist ideas and policies.

It suits the right-wing if activists leave. But that means a defeatist message is sent out to workers and activists that, faced with acts of bureaucratic gangsterism, socialists concede without a fight. Right-wing bureaucracies in the trade unions regularly employ these witch-hunting strategies, and history tells us the only serious response is to build a determined and sustained struggle. For over a hundred years Labour has been the traditional mass organisation of political representation for the working class, to hand it over to the forces of pro-capitalist reaction without a fight would rightly be perceived as an historic defeat.

The ruling class' surrogates and agents in our movement need neither encouragement nor an instruction manual on how to witch-hunt the left. They were as terrified and horrified as the Tories by Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, more so in fact. Corbyn represented a mortal threat to their careers and prestige. For the right-wing it is not enough Corbyn is defeated - he must be broken, crushed and humiliated. Starmer's claim there was no strategy to suspend Corbyn is a lie, but he must now follow through and expel him, anything less would be a setback for him.



Keir Starmer, witch-hunter of Labour's socialist left

The left's response so far has been wholly inadequate to the scale of the attack. If the Labour left and particularly leaders of affiliated unions and MPs who demand activists "Stay And Fight" or "Stay And Organise" do not launch a serious campaign to challenge and defeat the witch-hunt, these will be no more than empty slogans.

Tories in Crisis – Starmer to the Rescue

Class interests are driving the witch-hunt. The ruling class face multiple crises: the pandemic, Black Lives Matter movement, slump, Brexit and growing support for Scottish independence. All this adds a greater depth and urgency to the Tories' aim of dividing the labour movement and crushing any idea there is a socialist alternative to the unfettered market. In times of crisis, right-wing labour and trade union "leaders" always prioritise defence of capitalist interests over those of the workers they purportedly represent. It is no accident the right-wing have chosen this time to launch an attack on the left.

As the pandemic rages it is increasingly clear the Tories are incapable of protecting workers' lives, let alone their livelihoods. Despite raising some criticisms of the Tories' competence, Starmer has failed to expose their role in the slaughter and their kleptomaniac looting of the public finances. As England goes into its second lockdown, he fully backs Johnson's insane decision to keep schools open, and is keen to show he will stand up to the unions. His aim is to take Labour into a government of "national unity", in the "national interest" of course – an open alliance with the Tories.

Starmer aims to reassure the ruling class Labour will abandon Corbyn's Manifesto commitments in favour of the type of pro-capitalist policies that defined Blair's New Labour. Starmer is an establishment man to his bootstraps and he wants to show that as a future Labour prime minister he would be a "safe pair of hands." Ironically, this strategy would ensure Labour loses the next election.

Corbyn Suspended for Speaking the Truth

The ruling class internationally were appalled at the prospect of Corbyn as Labour prime minister of the world's oldest, if rapidly declining, capitalist state. Labelling Corbyn and the left as "antisemites" was an act of ruthless opportunism that expropriated the language and principles of anti-racism and the left all the better to discredit it and to silence criticism of the Israeli apartheid regime. Antisemitism is abhorrent and while it would be absurd to deny it exists in the Labour Party, that can never justify it being weaponized for ulterior political motives to smear those fighting for socialism – the antithesis of imperialism, racism and oppression.

Starmer said those who deny the existence of antisemitism or that it was greatly exaggerated are part of the problem. Corbyn was suspended for contradicting this – for telling the truth. The suspension is not about fighting antisemitism within Labour, it is an attempt to destroy free speech, shut down discussion and provide a catch-all charge for anyone daring to express even the mildest dissent.

It is precisely on this issue the left so far has failed to confront the right-wing. Corbyn's statement should be fully and unequivocally endorsed by the left, and by every left affiliated union leader and

MP. Those spineless, deceitful "lefts" who are acting as apologists for the suspension by criticising Corbyn's wholly justified statement on the EHRC Report are effectively advising him to issue a grovelling apology, a humiliating capitulation that would embolden the right-wing to even greater excesses.

Organize the Fightback Now

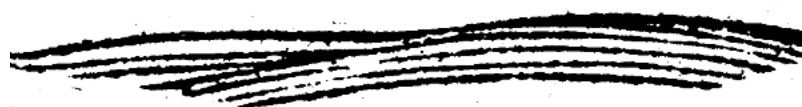
Past errors must be confronted. Under Corbyn's leadership the Labour left naively pushed the idea, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that "unity" with the right-wing was possible. The right-wing reacted to such appeals with open contempt. Failure to drive through mandatory reselection was a catastrophic mistake. In pulling back from holding the Parliamentary Labour Party to the most basic democratic accountability, the Blairite bureaucracy were encouraged and emboldened.

Supplicatory appeals to Starmer for "party unity" won't work. This will not be settled "amicably" or with appeals to goodwill. There can be no unity with people conducting a witch-hunt, they must be taken on and defeated. The right-wing will pursue a scorched earth policy and destroy the party rather than allowing the left to reclaim it. But while that process has begun, it is some way from completion and the left's response is the most important factor in determining the outcome.

The left must demand the suspension is immediately and unconditionally lifted. Demand the EHRC report is openly and democratically debated in the party – no silencing of debate. Left unions leaders and MPs should confront Starmer and tell him to either lift the suspension or face votes of no confidence with the purpose of launching a leadership election to remove him. Mandatory reselection should be re-raised and prioritised as a policy. This is the bare minimum to show serious intent.

If the counter-revolution in Labour is not challenged, a rout of the left cannot be ruled out. In such circumstances calls for a new workers' party will gain even greater currency. Demands for union disaffiliation from Labour will grow. New forces entering the struggle to fight in this period will look to their traditional organisations, the trade unions, including those affiliated to Labour. These workers and youth will demand effective political representation and left union leaders who argue Labour is still the best vehicle to represent the interests of our members and our class will need to explain if that is so why then was it abandoned without a fight.

This struggle is unfolding in a period of multiple crises and rapid shifts in consciousness, not in the relative calm of the 1990's. The right-wing have nothing to offer the working class but the status quo of austerity, cuts and privatisation. The lack of confidence on the Labour left to seriously confront these attacks is in large part explained by the current relative weakness of Marxist ideas and forces in our movement. Despite this, the fightback must be organised now, inside and outside the party, in order to build the type of united front and the widest alliance on a socialist programme that can challenge and defeat both the witch-hunt and the Tories themselves. ■



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