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EDITORIAL

3 A Letter from the Editors

PALESTINE / ISRAEL

4 Socialists & the Struggle for Palestinian Liberation

10 Debate: How to Win Working Class Unity?

LENINISM TODAY

14 Book Review: Lenin Between Catastrophes and Revolution

16 The Legacy and Meaning of the "Vanguard Party"

RENTERS RIGHTS

21 Tacoma: "Grit City" Wins Strongest Tenant Protections in Washington State

CAMPAIGNS FOR TRANS & REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

24 Organizing a Fighting DSA Campaign for Bodily Autonomy

27 Ohio: How a Movement Won Back Reproductive Rights

LABOR

30 Teamsters: Reform the Reform Movement!

33 UAW's Turning Point is a Promise

US POLITICS

36 Know Your Enemy: Fascism in the US

ART & CULTURE

40 Resisting Climate Despair

INTERNATIONAL

44 PSOL Heatedly Debates Relationship to Lula

REFORM & REVOLUTION

48 About Us

reform & revolution

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Articles signed by an author do not necessarily reflect the opinion of our caucus. We welcome letters to the editor and proposals for articles and reviews.

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Lenin: Looking Back to Look Forward



BY THE EDITORS

✉ EDITORS@REFORMANDREVOLUTION.ORG

To open a newspaper, to look at the news app on your phone, or to glance at social media is a misery. The world seems lost in chaos and despair. Abroad, amid the drumbeats of war we see Palestinian civilians massacred in the name of "safety," while in Ukraine and Russia, young people are thrown into the meat grinder of an imperialist war with no end in sight.

In the US, we're faced with a rematch that seems more dystopian farce than reality: Biden vs. Trump. Inflation, no longer at the top of the news headlines, continues to cut deeply into the pockets of the working class, while Congress fails to offer any relief. What is bipartisan? The endless funding for war, and the censure of DSA member and Palestinian congress member Rashida Tlaib for speaking out against genocide on the US taxpayer dime.

People everywhere are striving for answers: How do we get out? Is a different world even possible? As we approach the 100th anniversary of Lenin's death, it's no surprise that socialists are looking to history for answers, to find what lessons are still pertinent from the contested legacy of the key leader of the most successful proletarian revolution in history. What was the secret to Lenin and the Bolsheviks' success? Can those same tactics be useful in different circumstances over one hundred years later?

DSA, with a new NPC elected at the convention in August, faces many challenges, but also an opportunity to step in as a leader in these and other struggles, as an alternative to the deranged Republicans and discredited Democrats. The campaign for trans and reproductive rights gives DSA – if it can move with the necessary urgency – an opportunity to be a factor, rather than a bystander, on two of the most important issues facing working women and queer people. In Brazil, PSOL also faces new challenges with the return of the center-left former president Lula to power after four years of the far-right Bolsonaro, somewhat paralleling DSA's post-Trump challenges in the US.

While it may too often feel like we are in the dark of the night, activists are preparing for the next morning. The labor movement, most recently with the UAW strike



against the big automakers, continues to reawaken. While still not sufficient to stop the war machine, the protests against the US-backed Israeli bombardment of Gaza are some of the biggest anti-war protests in years, and public sentiment, although mixed, has shifted dramatically. Opportunities for radicalization and growing the socialist movement abound.

All of that and more is part of our new edition of the *Reform & Revolution* magazine. If there's one thing for us to take away from Lenin's legacy, it's that, with political clarity and determination, the seed of revolution can find fertile soil, even when things seem dire.

In solidarity,

Brandon Madsen, Rosemary Dodd, Sean Case, and Stephan Kimmerle

Art: Val Ross, @primrose.workshop

The Struggle for Palestinian Liberation



REFORM & REVOLUTION'S STEERING COMMITTEE STATEMENT

REFORMANDREVOLUTION.ORG

DSA's Role in the New Solidarity Movement

The horrific atrocities by the Israeli army in Gaza has sparked an unprecedented Palestinian solidarity movement around the world. While smaller in the US than in some other countries, it is by far the largest ever in US history and has led to the biggest left-wing protests since Biden became President.

DSA has been at the center of this movement from day one. DSA's National Political Committee (NPC) stood up against the establishment's pro-Israeli consensus, issuing a statement on October 7 that correctly emphasized our support for Palestinian liberation. They have also demanded that DSA Congressmembers vote against any military aid to Israel. DSA Congressmembers have been the foremost politicians opposing Israel's assault on Gaza, triggering a major clash with the Democratic establishment. DSA chapters have been actively involved in protests and a regular target of right-wing media attacks.

The conflict is politicizing millions, opening the door for many to draw anti-imperialist conclusions.

The conflict is also politicizing millions, opening the door for many to draw anti-imperialist and socialist conclusions. A strong socialist voice is vital for the success of the movement and to fight for the largest numbers to get organized for an ongoing fight against imperialism and the capitalist system that underlies it.

However, the political challenges posed by this war will require a significant development of DSA's political approach to be able to argue a principled anti-im-

perialist position while advancing policies and tactics that can win the most support in the working class.

1) DSA needs to be more visible and bring socialist politics into the movement

Basic things are needed to provide a higher DSA profile and to openly spread a socialist message: regularly updated DSA leaflets to distribute at rallies and events, DSA posters, and DSA banners with relevant slogans.

The most efficient and politically coherent way to do this would be the NPC and national staff offering these materials. National leadership should also be openly encouraging chapters to intentionally work to recruit and re-activate members.

Unfortunately, DSA's national leadership has so far not done nearly enough to equip DSA with a clear political message and organizational tools along these lines.

2) Democratic discussion on our political message

The war on Gaza has created a politicized atmosphere and major debates in DSA and the wider left. There is a pressing need for democratic debates within DSA, which unfortunately the NPC has not organized. This should be addressed with a series of national meetings of DSA activists to learn more and debate key issues. A structured debate through a DSA members bulletin would also help.

This underlines the necessity for a larger national leadership body, as Reform & Revolution and others argued at the last National Convention, with representation from chapters able to regularly meet, discuss major questions, review the work of the NPC, and help chapters learn from our collective experience.

3) We need principled anti-imperialist politics while avoiding ultra-left mistakes

Here is a summary of our views on the main political issues under debate:

DSA Congressmembers

All of DSA is correctly united in support of the call of the three DSA Congressmembers (Rashida Tlaib, Cori Bush, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez) for an immediate ceasefire. However, we should not repeat the opportunist mistake that DSA previously made in supporting Bernie Sanders without criticizing his positions that were inconsistent with socialist politics (i.e. much of his foreign policy).

Currently, it appears very likely that all the DSA Congressmembers will vote against Biden's request for \$14 billion in new military aid for Israel. Yet in a CNN interview on October 17, AOC indicated she supports further US funding for Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system, an even worse position than her "present" vote the last time Congress allocated funding for the Iron Dome in 2021. The strength of the Palestinian solidarity movement means it is unlikely that DSA congressmembers will vote for military funding this time, but AOC's past actions and recent statements are a warning of significant problems that lie ahead.

While Rashida Tlaib and Cori Bush have been politically stronger, their approach still has limits. Their messaging around this war has reflected more of a progressive and humanist framing rather than an anti-imperialist socialist approach.

DSA should fully support their ceasefire resolution and other good positions, but it is once again prioritizing short term gains by limiting ourselves to simply repeating their message. Instead, the NPC should consciously work to raise, within DSA and in broader society, the call for a ceasefire in socialist terms.

The focus of socialist representatives should be on building mass pressure on the ruling class rather than relying on moral appeals to governmental leaders to be humane. Instead of appealing to international law and the "international community" (a polite euphemism for the major imperialist powers that dominate world affairs), socialists need to explain the only solution will come from below – a mass uprising of Palestinians and workers of the Middle East, with an appeal to the Israeli workers, and workers around the world to join the struggle.

Tlaib has said she stands for "peaceful co-existence" between Israelis and Palestinians – a sentiment all progressives and socialists should support. But



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socialists have a crucial role to play in explaining that such a worthy goal is in sharp conflict with the reality of capitalist rule.

Capitalism has plunged the Middle East into poverty, dictatorship, religious fundamentalism, bloody wars, and imperialist domination. The only way out is for the working and poor people of the region to take power and radically transform Israel, Palestine, and the whole region on anti-capitalist, secular, and democratic lines.

Ceasefire

An immediate ceasefire would mean a halt to Israel's mass slaughter of Palestinians, including thousands of children. However, we should not encourage illusions that a return to the *status quo ante* of October 6 is a solution. Unless there is an end to the underlying oppression of Palestinians and the colonial policies of the Israeli state, a ceasefire would only be a temporary pause before a new round of atrocities, conflict, and war breaks out.

The starting point of any just solution is to end the siege of Gaza, end the occupation of the West Bank, end discrimination against Palestinians in Israel, and secure the right of return for the Palestinian diaspora. This requires a democratic socialist framework that can utilize the resources of the region to provide everyone with high-quality housing, good jobs, education, and healthcare, and can begin to end the myriad forms of exploitation and oppression that torment the Middle East.

Winning Mass Support in the Working Class

To build sufficient pressure to force the US government to call for an immediate ceasefire and end military aid to Israel requires winning support from wide sections of the US working class. The experience of this movement has shown key obstacles that must be dealt with to build that majority support.

The capitalist establishment tries to smear Palestinian solidarity protests as “pro-Hamas” because they recognize it is one of the best ways to marginalize us.

There is significant fear among ordinary people that criticizing Israel is antisemitic. This reflects genuine opposition to antisemitism but is also cynically exploited by the ruling class to justify their imperialist policies. There is also overwhelming opposition to Hamas's targeting of civilians on October 7 and, linked to this, fears about the security of Israeli Jews.

Some on the left refuse to clearly oppose Hamas's attacks on Israeli civilians and employ extreme rhetoric against Israel. This reinforces the concerns of many people, making it easier for our enemies to isolate us. By making clear our opposition to the October 7 massacre of civilians and Hamas's politics we are more able to win support on the key issues: immediately ending the Israeli war on Gaza, ending US military aid to Israel, and most of all, the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

Crucial in addressing these questions among regular people has been the role of Jewish Voice for Peace and other left-wing Jews who have been at the forefront of many of the protests and actions. Their efforts have helped to distinguish between legitimate criticisms of the Israeli state and illegitimate antisemitism. This has given confidence to many others to speak up despite the establishment's efforts to smear Palestinian solidarity as antisemitic.

The experience in the labor movement is also illuminating. A number of unions have rapidly come out for an immediate ceasefire, and even some against US military aid for Israel. In almost all cases these resolutions have been consistent with the approach R&R has argued is needed to win mass support – explicitly opposing Hamas's killing of civilians, calling for the release of the hostages, and opposing antisemitism – while not losing the main focus on stopping the Israeli brutalities against Palestinians.

While the majority of activists trying to address a mass audience have adopted this approach in practice, it is important we draw out clear political conclusions. If messaging is decided on a pragmatic basis we are far more prone to opportunistically pander to prevailing sentiments, as opposed to anchoring our tactics with principled politics.

The opportunist danger of watering down socialist politics under popular pressure is shown by how most DSA representatives treat the violence of the Israel state and Palestinian resistance groups as the same – a false equivalency between the oppressor and the oppressed.

An opposite mistake is made by sections of the left who are against opposing Hamas and its targeting of civilians (for example see the messaging guidance in the former DSA BDS and Palestine Solidarity Working Group's Toolkit, which borrows heavily from the National Students for Justice in Palestine Day of Resistance Toolkit). Many others in DSA, while not adopting their practical conclusions, share the underlying political understanding which leads to these conclusions.

Over time such a contradiction is not sustainable. Our current practical work needs to find a new political understanding that is consistent with it, or the current political assumptions that many have will tend to lead to a change in their practice.

Hamas and October 7

The NPC immediately issued a statement on October 7th which stood out for its clear support for the Palestinian struggle in contrast to many on the progressive left (for example Bernie Sanders and AOC).

However, there was controversy within DSA about it saying “We unequivocally condemn the killing of all civilians.” We are glad that this was included as it signaled sympathy to Jewish people and the vast majority of workers who were appalled by the massacre of Israeli civilians on October 7.

Some in DSA opposed this, arguing it was a concession to Zionist framing. We do not agree with this line of thinking, which rather than fight Zionist framing, actually gives it ample ammunition to use against us.

The capitalist establishment tries to smear Palestinian solidarity protests as “pro-Hamas” because they recognize it is one of the best ways to marginalize us. While centering the Palestinian struggle, we should make clear we oppose Hamas's politics and their targeting of civilians. For example, the R&R statement following October 7 went further than the NPC statement, saying:

We oppose the right-wing, pro-capitalist, religious politics of Hamas. Their targeting of civilians is wrong and counterproductive to the Palestinian cause. We reject the weaponization of people's grief by the Israeli state to launch a horrific assault on Gaza.

We believe the objections to statements opposing the killing of civilians from sections of the DSA International Committee, Red Star, Marxist Unity Group, and the former DSA BDS and Palestine Solidarity Working Group are mistaken.

Many of these comrades identify as communists, yet they ignore Lenin's position. While intransigently fighting national oppression, Lenin argued (using some terminology now outdated but common for his time) in his Theses on National and Colonial Questions for the Second Congress of the Communist International that communists must oppose

attempts to give a communist coloring to bourgeois-democratic liberation trends in the backward countries; the Communist International should support bourgeois-democratic national movements in colonial and backward countries only on condition that, in these countries, the elements of future proletarian parties... are brought together and trained to understand their special tasks, i.e., those of the struggle against the bourgeois-democratic movements within their own nations. The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form.

The same *Theses* also states “the need to combat Pan-Islamism and similar trends, which strive to combine the liberation movement against Euro-



pean and American imperialism with an attempt to strengthen the positions of the khans, landowners, mullahs, etc.”

Such an approach is even more necessary today given that the character of bourgeois national liberation forces in Lenin’s time were far more progressive than Hamas is today. In Gaza, Hamas carries out pro-capitalist policies along with undemocratic repression of independent unions, left-wing political opponents, feminists, and LGBT+ people.

The right-wing character of Hamas is not only bad for the working people under its governance, but also is a significant liability for the Palestinian solidarity movement, reducing its appeal to working people around the world, and weakening anti-occupation movements in Israel.

Ghazi Hamad, a spokesperson of Hamas, declared on November 2 that Hamas was prepared to repeat its actions on October 7 “a second, a third, a fourth” time. This provides fuel to the Israel far-right to rally Israeli Jews behind their call for brutal measures to crush the “terrorist threat.” Further, a large majority of Israeli Jews perceive Hamas’s targeting of civilians in the context of its history of antisemitism.

The most effective strategy for winning liberation will come from the building of a mass movement from below of the Palestinian people.

It speaks volumes that the Israeli regime itself funded Hamas in its early days as a counterweight to Palestinian communist and secular nationalists who they believed were a greater threat. More recently, Netanyahu explained his government’s calculation that Hamas weakens the prospects for a Palestinian state when he stated in 2019 that “[a]nyone who wants to foil the establishment of a Palestinian state needs to support the strengthening of Hamas and the transfer of funds to Hamas.” (Haaretz)

How Can the IDF Be Defeated?

How can the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) – with its massive military superiority over the Palestinians, including nuclear weapons – be overcome?

The history of resistance to imperialism, such as the Vietnam War and the defeat of South African apartheid, shows it is not simply a *military* question, but that *politics* is decisive. The US was defeated in

Vietnam because of the political determination of the Vietnamese people to fight to the death for their national and social liberation, along with the political collapse of support for the war within US society.

As revolutionary Marxists, we argue the most effective strategy for winning liberation will come from the building of a mass movement from below of the Palestinian people.

The First Intifada (“uprising”) in the 1980s saw tens of thousands of bottom-up committees of Palestinian resistance, constituting a democratic mass uprising against Israeli oppression. We stand for a new mass uprising of the Palestinian people, supported by the international working class, along the lines of the First Intifada.

Marxists are not pacifists. A mass uprising against the brutal IDF requires taking up arms, which is the right of all occupied peoples.

The reality of armed struggle, however, means it is essential to have a strategy that does not lead to new purges, new mass displacements, or deepened divisions along national, religious, or ethnic lines. Any democratic or socialist future of the region will have to be one based on cooperation between diverse communities. The idea of ethnically, religiously, or nationally “pure” territories is completely antithetical to such a project.

This is why it’s vital to emphasize support for democratic rights for all, especially minorities. This means unambiguously defending the rights of both the Palestinian and Jewish people living in the region, and openly opposing Jewish supremacism and Zionism, as well as antisemitism and right-wing political Islam.

Such a struggle can defeat the Israeli state by making clear to the Israeli working class, on the one hand, that there will be no peace until Israeli oppression of Palestinians ends. On the other hand, it would need to drive a wedge between the Israeli ruling class and the largest possible sections of its working class and oppressed ethnic groups. This requires extending an offer of a peaceful future together on the basis of defending the democratic rights of both peoples, Palestinians and Israeli Jews. Class appeals have an essential role to play in splintering working-class support for the far-right Zionist government and undermining the social base of the IDF.

Zionism was and is based on the brutal displacement of Palestinians, Bedouins, and other Arab peoples from the land they lived on for generations. There is a deeply rooted colonial and racist consciousness within Israeli

society which is used to support the IDF and to organize racist oppression on a daily basis.

At the same time, Israel is a capitalist society deeply divided along class lines. There are also major ethnic divisions between Jews from Western, Middle Eastern, African, and former Soviet bloc countries. In the months before October 7, Israel was divided like never before over the efforts of the far-right Netanyahu government to move toward a more authoritarian version of the Zionist project.

Movements within Israel for peace and against the occupation (as has happened on a number of occasions) can undermine morale within the IDF. Such a development would be a significant change in the balance of forces in favor of Palestinian liberation.

The Tasks Ahead

The terrible atrocities and suffering of this war underline the urgent need to fight for Palestinian liberation and against US imperialism. The vast majority of DSA has shown its fighting spirit and radical politics by throwing itself into the Palestinian struggle and standing against the pressure to rally around the establishment’s official policy of unthinking support for the Israeli state.

The Palestinian solidarity movement has the historic opportunity to win unprecedented support in the US working class. But leadership will be key. DSA needs to provide a clear socialist voice for the movement. We should project a class struggle strategy for building mass support while actively organizing in our unions, building protests, and contributing to direct actions such as blockades of military equipment at ports and mass occupations of politicians’ offices.

Most of all, DSA needs to assimilate the lessons from this struggle in the form of clear political conclusions. Socialists must avoid opportunism by basing our program on the objective interests of the international working class, not the temporary sentiments of different sections of society. We also need to learn how to avoid ultra-leftism, always striving to build a mass base in the working class and addressing their actual existing consciousness.

The war has clarified the reality of the imperialist interests that Joe Biden and the Democratic Party represent. It is time to cast aside illusions about Biden and the reformability of the Democratic Party. While being flexible in our tactics, we must spread the message that workers and the oppressed should place no trust in Biden and the Democrats, and that instead we must build our own independent movements, organizations, and political party.

The war on Gaza has demonstrated the depths of human depravity. But it also has shown the potential for human solidarity with millions standing up for Palestine. There is no time to lose in the fight against imperialism and oppression. Now is the time to join DSA in building a mass socialist movement, and to join Reform & Revolution to struggle for the revolutionary Marxist politics outlined above. ■



While there is broad agreement in Reform & Revolution on the statement above, there are differing views within our caucus on the national question in Palestine and Israel. While we all are against the Israeli oppression of Palestinians and all fight for Palestinian self-determi-

nation, there are disagreements over if the Israeli-Jewish working class also has a right to self-determination, including the right to their own state. Below are two articles reflecting different viewpoints in Reform & Revolution on this and other related questions.

From the River to the Sea



BY SARAH MILNER, RUY MARTINEZ,
AND JUDITH CHAVARRIA

Israel and Palestine are Interconnected Societies – an Effective Socialist Movement for Liberation Must Call For Revolutionary Integration

Opposition to the genocide in Gaza – and wider Israeli settler-colonialism – has become a primary dividing line between the left and the capitalist class. In our unions, in Congress, and in massive street protests, DSA stands unified behind the call for a free Palestine.

This new protest movement for peace and an end to the occupation presents an enormous opportunity. Hundreds of thousands of Americans are skeptical of the Republican and Democratic Parties' pro-war stances. But experience shows that protests aren't enough. Without clear organization, it was impossible to channel the energy of movements like BLM and Occupy Wall Street into joint demands and sustained political pressure. Thus, these movements failed to win significant material victories or cohere the left.

DSA is uniquely positioned to make sure this time is different. As socialists, we recognize that mass movements must be developed into independent organizations of the working class with a clear message, an internationalist approach, and a focus on capital-

ism as the driving force of imperialism. We recognize the necessity of pushing beyond calls for a ceasefire alone. This war is rooted in brutal occupation, settler capture of land, colonial extraction of resources, and the US imperialist order. We must call not just for a ceasefire, but a *free Palestine*.

Meeting the Moment

To convince people of Marxist ideas, we cannot organize outside of the existing movement. Instead we engage with it, and work to prove ourselves as strong leaders. This means DSA must take the initiative: organizing protests, printing materials, joining and forming Palestine solidarity coalitions, and devoting substantial resources to the struggle. It also means being tactful, but bold with our message. We should argue for socialism as the best route to fight against imperialism, and building socialist organizations as the most effective strategy to end the occupation.

Some comrades in our caucus argue that the self-determination of an independent Israeli-Jewish state is necessary for winning the masses to our positions. But overemphasis on messaging and political formulations designed to appeal to the Israeli working class cannot take precedence over our engagement with the material reality of movements we're a part of. The call for a single, secular, democratic and socialist state with full respect for minority rights is the only proposal which puts forward a clear route for Palestinian liberation.

The “socialist two state solution” is a weak and confusing message. It is an abstract appeal based on an outdated analysis, separated from the material conditions in Palestine, and absent any realistic route through which it could be achieved or advocated for. Were it to be adopted as DSA's position, it would not serve to develop the movement, but rather to separate us from it; it would not connect to consciousness, but confuse people as our position becomes increasingly untenable.

The Necessity of Integration

Each year, Israel occupies more land in Palestine, exerts greater military-political control, and further entwines the societies and economies. As they do, the lines between two peoples become ever more geographically inseparable. The two state solution is not a message around which revolutionary consciousness can be cohered – rather, we must recognize the interconnected nature of these societies and call for a movement of *revolutionary integration*. In this way, we tie together the Palestinian right of return, the rights of the whole working class, and the rights of ethnic and religious minority groups.

The settlement process brings large sections of the Israeli working class into *material* support for settler colonialism, and Israeli society is lurching rightward as settlements grow – creating national consciousness not for the 1948 or 1967 borders, but for seizing all of Gaza and the West Bank. There is also increasing Israeli control over the economy of Palestine. Since the siege of Gaza began, Israel (and its ally Egypt) has had effective control over the imports and exports of Palestine. The working class in Israel and Palestine are not classes of two distinct economies, but a single working class economically integrated but brutally segregated. By confronting these dynamics directly, we target the heart of the conflict, and draw the clearest possible contrast with the root of capitalist exploitation in Israel and Palestine.

Alongside economic integration, a call for revolutionary integration also discerns the existing geographic overlap. Socialist principles oppose ethnic cleansings and ethno-states, and two socialist states must not preserve a majority through banning the immigration or residency of a population. How, then, could Israel maintain a Jewish majority in perpetuity if Palestinians were free to exercise their right of return, or even simply free to move into Israel? The only way to preserve an Israeli-Jewish majority is through population controls – apartheid.

Revolutionary integration recognizes the segregation, dispossession, and exploitation of Palestinians as existing at the heart of Israeli society, and situates

the call to overturn that segregation at the center of building a socialist movement.

The Way Forward

A clear position on Palestinian liberation also requires criticizing the tactics of the current right-wing leadership of the military resistance in Palestine. Our role in fighting for Marxist politics is to help develop the strongest movement possible, and we cannot ignore that Hamas' attacks on civilians, its religious fundamentalism, and its incoherent, ultra-nationalist, capitalist politics weaken the fight for Palestinian liberation. Hamas is very unlikely to lead a successful liberation movement.

The working class in Israel and Palestine are not classes of two distinct economies, but a single working class economically integrated but brutally segregated.

The military-political defeat of Zionism is a task which primarily belongs to the broader resistance movement within Palestine. It requires dynamic tactics, internationalist messaging, and a significant socialist role in the resistance movement. By sharpening our message and training our attack squarely on the apartheid system that upholds this brutal imperialism and colonialism, we empower socialists to connect to and build that movement.

As the war advances, as the two state solution increasingly becomes a clear dead end, and as the complicity of our country becomes unavoidable, the opportunities for a socialist anti-imperialist movement will grow. By staking out a clear and consistent analysis, we will be best situated to convince others in the struggle, as well as the wider working class, of our vision for a liberatory movement in Palestine and the world. ■

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One Land, Two Peoples



BY PHILIP LOCKER

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The Right to Self-Determination of Both Peoples is an Essential Weapon for Winning Palestinian Liberation

The idea of a “two-state solution” has been deeply discredited as a result of the total failure of the Oslo Accords. After 30 years, there is still no credible prospect of an independent Palestinian state. Israeli settlements and military checkpoints have grown dramatically throughout the West Bank. The legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority has collapsed, with it rightfully being seen as jail wardens for the Israeli military.

Most progressives, and even some radicals, supported the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, as did many Palestinians and Israelis. But revolutionary Marxists opposed it, arguing that an agreement brokered by imperialism – against the background of the PLO leadership embracing capitalism following the collapse of Stalinism – would inevitably fail to deliver Palestinian liberation.

While most Social Democratic and Kremlin-aligned Communist Parties supported the creation of Israel in 1948, the Trotskyist Fourth International stood against the stream and opposed it as a crime against the Palestinian people.

However, 75 years have now passed since then. Several generations of Jewish people have been born in Israel and have developed a national identity. Any idea that they will “return home” is fanciful – or, if taken seriously, would require a war of ethnic cleansing that the current balance of power virtually rules out. The Israeli ruling class

leans heavily on this exact fear among Jewish people to whip up opposition to Palestinian national aspirations, raising the specter of a one-state solution with a Palestinian majority under the leadership of Hamas.

Almost 10 million people inhabit Israel, 73 percent of them Jewish. About 5.5 million people live in the West Bank and Gaza, most of them Palestinians, and millions of Palestinian refugees reside in neighboring countries. The reality is that there are now two peoples with two very different national identities in what historically was Palestine.

This is not a symmetrical situation. The Palestinian people are oppressed and Israel is the oppressing power (backed by US imperialism). Socialists are not neutral – we support the Palestinian struggle against Israeli subjugation.

To achieve victory in that struggle, it is vital to address the realities on the ground, taking into account the national rights and fears of both peoples. This is also a point of reference for workers internationally who want to see an end to Palestinian oppression and safety for Jewish people in Israel. For example, acknowledging the rights of Israelis is crucial to being able to pass strong ceasefire resolutions in unions in the US.

Right to Self-Determination

As socialists, our commitment is not to one or two states, but to:

- The national and social liberation of the Palestinian people.
- A democratic solution based on equality, not domination and imperialist meddling.

- Ending poverty in Palestine and Israel. The huge wealth of the region must be brought under democratic control to meet the needs of all the people.

It would be clearly preferable if a majority of the working people in Palestine and Israel both choose to form one democratic, secular, binational state. But the unfortunate reality is that after decades of horrific conflict there is deep distrust of “the other side” in both communities. Large majorities of both peoples are totally against any solution that leaves them as a minority, lacking confidence that the other side would protect their rights.

Palestinians have experienced the *Nakba*, discrimination within Israel, occupations of the West Bank and Gaza, and the “Oslo peace process” leading to ever-growing settlements. They are determined to have their own state where they are the majority.

After the experience of the Holocaust, the anti-semitism of Hamas and Middle Eastern regimes, and the ongoing antisemitism and violent attacks on Jewish people, including in the US today, there are deep fears among Israeli Jewish people about being an oppressed minority.

Our aim as socialists is to overcome these divisions and build working-class solidarity across national lines. The best tool to achieve this is defending the *right* of self-determination of both peoples. Lenin fought for this not because Marxists aspire for more nation-states, but to be able to win the maximum working-class *unity in the class struggle today*, and in an international federation of socialist states in the future.

Defeating Zionism

As explained in the R&R statement on pages 4 to 9, the driving force of Palestinian liberation will be a mass Palestinian uprising, including with arms. Splitting sections of the Israeli working class away from its ruling class is essential to the success of that struggle. One side of this is making clear to Israeli workers that there will be no peace without justice for Palestinians. This militant stance must be combined with another side – an offer to Israeli workers for a peaceful future where their rights will be respected, including their right to self-determination.

On this basis it is possible to win the confidence among both peoples that they will not be forced into a state they do not believe can represent them. And such confidence is a necessary prerequisite for Palestinians and Israelis to be able to *choose* to coexist in one state.

The insistence that Israel *must* be replaced with one *majority Palestinian* state “from the river to the sea” –



even with promises that it would be secular, democratic, and with full minority rights for Jewish people – instead will drive the vast majority of Israeli Jewish people (and many people sympathetic to the fight against antisemitism internationally) into a deepening resistance against this threat to “their state.” In effect, this strengthens Zionism.

But how could Israeli Jewish people have their own state where they are the majority – if they wish – without Palestinian oppression? Answering this fully would require a full article, but here we can outline some basic principles. Any state socialists call for must include full rights for minorities. This fully applies to any legitimate Israeli state. It must be fundamentally different from Israel today – democratic, secular and with no oppression of Palestinians or any other minorities. Economically, it would need to cooperate closely with Palestine.

However, this can still be a state with a Jewish majority if Israeli Jewish people feel they need it (next to a majority Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank with a Jewish minority). This does not include any right to place Jewish people above others, or any policy of expansion or occupation.

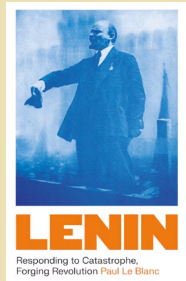
To overcome the oppression of Palestinians, there must be a focus on rebuilding their communities by appropriating the wealth of the capitalists. The redistribution of wealth is also the only basis to realize the right of return of all people to their towns and cities, if they wish, by providing significantly increased housing, jobs, and social services.

That is one of the reasons why the struggle for Palestinian liberation is deeply intertwined with overthrowing the Israeli ruling class, the corrupt Palestinian ruling elite, the reactionary capitalist regimes throughout the Middle East, and the expulsion of imperialism from the region. ■

Philip Locker is a member of Seattle DSA and the Steering Committee of Reform & Revolution.



Book Review | Lenin Between Catastrophes and Revolution



BY STEPHAN KIMMERLE

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On Paul Le Blanc's Appeal to Bring Leninism to the 21st Century with his New Biography

Climate catastrophe, increasing imperialist tensions, exploitation, and oppression – *what is to be done*, one asks, especially given the weak and fragile state of the Marxist left? In his new biography, *Lenin – Responding to Catastrophe, Forging Revolution*, Paul Le Blanc seeks to build a bridge between the current catastrophic state of the world and Lenin, showcasing what he sees as the most important contributions – and struggles – of the Russian revolutionary.

Defending a revolution against imperialism and economic decline, the Soviet Union turned into a caricature of what Lenin was fighting for.

Le Blanc reflects on what he hopes to leave for future generations in this work: “In my twilight years, I envision future catastrophes. Those who outlive me will experience these in ways I will not. Studying an outstanding revolutionary who sought to make his way through past catastrophes might be helpful to people I leave behind.”

Aspiring Workers' Democracy – Defending the Revolution

Le Blanc merges biography with an attempt to present Lenin's main ideas. But the thread that coheres the book is the story of *revolutionary action*

that Lenin stood for and the fate of that revolutionary practice: “The first seven chapters of this book present a coherent arc of development in Lenin's revolutionary perspectives. The eighth chapter indicates how that coherence was shattered,” writes Le Blanc. “[I]t doesn't make historiographical or political sense to focus on Lenin's first 48 years without seeking to comprehend his last five years.” However, how are these five years of being in power at the head of the first workers' state – the culmination of a lifetime of revolutionary activity – a “shattering” of Lenin's coherence? These are the two dimensions the book offers to answer this question:

1) Le Blanc describes Lenin throughout his political life as a fighter for the democratic self-liberation of the working class, by and through the working class itself – only to see the state he presided over turned into an increasingly bureaucratic, dictatorial force.

Writing at the eve of the October revolution in *State and Revolution*, Lenin restored the radical legacy of Marx's conception of a workers' state: a state for the first time in history to reject class society, a state that will therefore “wither away” as soon as the working class develops society economically, socially, and culturally. Despite these noble ideals, the workers' state suffered from increasing repression, growing like a cancer.

2) Lenin was an internationalist, and demonstrated the link between the looming revolution against Tsarism and world socialist revolution. He viewed the success of an upheaval in Russia – necessarily limited due to the low economic and social development in Russia at the time – as an overture for the liberation of the toiling masses in the advanced capitalist countries. But when the revolution in Western Europe stalled, this internationalist, anti-repression fighter who sought to put power in the hands of

working-class people found himself at the head of an isolated and economically underdeveloped state.

Defending a revolution against the terror of imperialist invasions and economic decline, the Soviet Union turned into a caricature of what Lenin was fighting for. The freedom of the first workers' state and the lively workers' councils (“soviets” in Russian), under conditions of civil war and isolation, devolved into a repressive and bureaucratic one-party state.

Did Lenin lead to Stalin?

Lenin is frequently accused of spreading violence and preparing the ground for Stalinism, a regime of one-party dictatorship that killed its opponents in camps and show trials, all in the alleged name of communism and Marxism-Leninism.

Le Blanc defends the legacy of Lenin, showing how his last struggles in 1922 till his death in January 1924 were marked by rebellion against the bureaucratization of the first workers' state and his party, the Bolsheviks.

Le Blanc compares the fate of the Russian Revolution in 1917 to the arc of the French Revolution after 1789, when the Jacobins tried to defend their aims of liberty and equality by all means necessary, only to be overthrown by their own degenerated party. In the end, the French Revolution brought about Napoleon Bonaparte, a dictator that crushed all the democratic achievements of this bourgeois revolution.

Le Blanc defends the legacy of Lenin, showing how his last struggles were marked by rebellion against the bureaucratization.

Here, Le Blanc could provide more explanation of the comparisons he makes since it is rare for activists today to have deeply studied the French Revolution. He could also be more explicit about the point at which the Russian revolution turned into counter-revolution, when a privileged, bureaucratic elite solidified its political power over the working class but still maintained the economic achievements of abandoning capitalism and all feudal structures in Russia.

Imperialism and the National Question

While Le Blanc clearly outlines how Lenin viewed imperialism, the book falls short in its presentation of Lenin's thoughts on the national question. Lenin analyzed the intersection of oppression along both



The Leninist Party

There can be no acknowledgment of Lenin's contribution to Marxism without highlighting the role of a revolutionary party, the party that allowed the working class in Russia to take power.

Le Blanc rightfully insists on the pluralistic, lively and democratic character of Lenin's organization, “a dynamic revolutionary collective forging strategy and tactics through discussion and debate.” A full article in this magazine dives into this question.

Art: @other_boi

class lines and lines of nationality. While rooting his theory and practice of change in the power and unity of the working class, Lenin fully acknowledged the need to fight any and all forms of oppression on their own terms. This is a colorful application of Marxism that can bring insights to activists today that wasn't fully explored in this short book.

However, the contribution of Lenin and his co-thinkers to the united front pops up numerous times, as does the link between the struggle for reforms and the aim of socialist revolution. Le Blanc quotes Lenin:

We make use of every reform (insurance, for example) and of every legal society. But we use them to develop the revolutionary consciousness and the revolutionary struggle of the masses.

Lenin – Responding to Catastrophe, Forging Revolution can help a new generation of activists forge the way forward out of the looming catastrophes, as it is, as Le Blanc quotes Lenin, “more pleasant and useful to go through the ‘experience of revolution’ than to write about it.”

Stephan Kimmerle, he/him, is a Seattle DSA activist. He's been involved in the labor and socialist movement internationally – from being a shop steward in the public sector in Germany to organizing Marxists on an international level. Now, he is working part-time jobs while being a stay-at-home dad of two wonderful children.



The Legacy and Meaning of the “Vanguard Party”



BY BRANDON MADSEN

f BMMADSEN

The Role of a Revolutionary Party 100 Years After Lenin’s Death

The victory of the 1917 working-class revolution in Russia is rightly regarded as one of the most important events in human history. The party that helped more than any other to bring that revolution to success was the Bolshevik Party. No wonder that for generations socialists around the world have attempted to analyze it and discover the “secret sauce” that made this party what it was.

Beyond the specific case of the Bolsheviks, the general idea of a “vanguard party” is itself strongly associated with Lenin – but it is also arguably one of the most contentious and widely misunderstood concepts in all of Marxism, both among adherents and detractors. Does the “vanguard” refer to the party itself, some aspect or section of the party, or its social base? Is the vanguard a part of the working class or something external to it? Why does Lenin believe it is necessary, and was he correct? A curious person searching in a modern “Google it!” way for quick answers to these types of questions will almost immediately be met by different and mutually contradictory answers from different sources, and authors arguing different sides are all able to find Lenin quotes that seem to support their claims.

According to one interpretation, the Marxist party (or its leadership) is the self-appointed vanguard of the working class, which the workers are then

obliged to follow. This is essentially the conception taken up by the Stalinist bureaucracy in the former Soviet Union to identify itself as the sole legitimate voice of the proletariat, attempting to imbue its own top-down edicts with the authority of the working class as a whole. Some latch onto this caricatured version to dismiss the concept of the vanguard party entirely.

But even aside from the obvious potential for cynical misuse in justifying an already-existing one-party state, going outside of that context doesn’t rescue the situation; it actually leads to still-deeper problems. For example, if you have multiple organizations with different politics and approaches all claiming the title of “vanguard party” (or at least claiming in essence to be building towards creating it, regardless of whether they use that precise phrase), how is one to know which is the “real” vanguard party – if any? How is this tested concretely?

Seeing the vanguard as something inherent to the party itself leads to circular logic and self-justifying conclusions. If we want this concept to be scientific, then we need a more objective basis for it.

The Vanguard Is Part of the Working Class

A more useful way of looking at the vanguard is as a section of the working class, just as the vanguard of a military force is part of that force, not something external to it or grafted on from above. It is



the division which seeks out the enemy and tries to secure ground first, in advance of the main force.

In order for the ruling class to maintain their privileged position, the broad mass of the exploited and oppressed classes cannot act upon the stage of history on behalf of their class interests. Political activity of the majority of society is only allowed to occur in short bursts. Co-option and pressure from above is used to limit the scope and duration of social movements and upheavals, reinforcing their temporary and peaky nature.

The vanguard of the working class represents the special exception to this general rule: the small but significant layer of organic leaders, pioneers, and trailblazers that becomes politically active and aware before the rest, and more consistently. This is the layer that stays consciously engaged over the longer term, even as individual social movements rise and fall, serving as a collective memory for the class as a whole, assimilating lessons and patterns drawn out through the collective experience of struggle.

The vanguard *party*, then, is that political group which is able to concentrate and organize this naturally-occurring layer, to help it learn and lead not only organically but also consciously: growing its size, maximizing its impact, and deepening its understanding, helping to squeeze every last drop of knowledge out of its experiences in the struggle. A vanguard party proves itself as such by demonstrating its ability to win over, retain, and provide useful assistance and guidance to these layers in carrying out and preparing for the historic tasks of the proletariat, ultimately leading up to the conquest of power.

The party acts as a neural center connecting the leadership to the moods, experiences, and struggles of the wider working class and allowing for a dynamic, unifying interchange between the two forces. The only way the party can effectively play this role is if it concentrates and integrates the vanguard of the working class into itself. The working-class vanguard is a thinking and active layer that needs to be convinced, won over through both discussion and common struggle, in order to achieve this concentration.

What Is To Be Done?

Unfortunately, Lenin himself played a role in generating some of this confusion via his infamous

passage in Part II of *What Is To Be Done?* (published 1902):

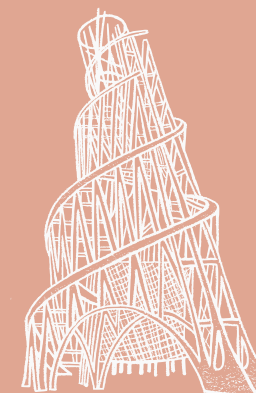
Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers... would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness.

This passage was itself inspired by previous material along the same lines by Karl Kautsky, whom Lenin later broke with quite decisively as World War I began. (It is also worth noting that “Social-Democratic consciousness” in this historical context essentially meant revolutionary socialist consciousness, not what the “social-democratic” parties of today represent.)

Lenin himself never used this formulation again, and even within the pages of that same text called it a “blunt formula” and “sharply simplified.” In subsequent years – even long before 1917 (for example, in the preface to the 1907 collection *12 Years*) – he characterized this passage as an exaggeration that should not be taken out of its historical context. Lenin argued that this exaggeration was necessary at the time to polemically bend the stick away from the opportunistic ideas advocated by the so-called “Economists” in Russia who denied the importance of a revolutionary party.

But there is not full agreement among Marxists on whether, by his retrospective comments, Lenin meant to indicate that what he said in the passage was actually incorrect or merely that he placed disproportionate emphasis on it at the time. Some devoted Marxists and DSA comrades – such as Henry De Groot, writing in a piece published in *Cosmonaut* – have certainly argued the latter. Henry links this to an interpretation wherein the vanguard layer serves as a transmission mechanism for disseminating the ideas of the party into the broader working class, and as a source of promising prospects who can be trained by the party into being intellectuals themselves.

This interpretation is much better than the Stalinist conception of the vanguard, in that it recognizes the vanguard as part of the class itself, but it is still unbalanced. It puts a lot of emphasis on the need for socialists to resist the ideological pressures of the mass of the workers towards reformism, and to continue educating them with socialist propaganda, meanwhile paying little attention to the positive influences





that mass pressure from the working class can have on the party. While making general nods towards dialectics, the view expressed so eloquently in Henry’s article is ultimately rather one-sided, largely missing the other, bottom-up side of the vanguard’s role as a medium that transmits the influence of the working class onto the party and other sections of the wider movement. Even Lenin would not have been able to play the role he did without this influence and bidirectional interplay.

What Was Actually Done?

The working class can be – and at crucial turning points often has been – to the left of even the most conscious and organized Marxist groups. Not long before the October 1917 insurrection, Lenin wrote about how to decide whether to boycott the bourgeois pre-parliament: “Class-conscious workers must take the matter into their own hands, organize the discussion, and exert pressure on ‘those at the top’ [of the Bolshevik Party].” This was not a matter of the party leaders educating the workers, but vice versa.

Around the same time, Lenin wrote on the topic of insurrection, saying that it “must rely not on conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class ... a revolutionary upsurge of the people ... that turning-point in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height.”

The political pressure of the mass of the workers isn’t something to be resisted or shut out by the educated Marxist leadership, but danced with, integrated, surfed like a wave. Numerous partially-correct metaphors abound, but the core idea is that there must be a dynamic exchange and productive tension. And this is precisely the whole point of the vanguard party model: establishing and maintaining a dialectical interplay between these forces. It’s not a question of a one-way transmission – and that’s exactly the factor that made Lenin’s statement in *What Is To Be Done* a one-sided exaggeration. It may have been useful for winning a specific argument at a specific point in time, but in later years it would prove a hindrance for those who clung to it.

Lenin himself did not cling to it in 1917. At that time, Lenin was seen by many – both by his own comrades and by his longtime ideological opponents – as breaking with established “Leninism” and falling into a framework of “revolutionary spontaneity” and

even “anarchism.” (For a good summary that cites lots of primary sources, see Marcel Liebman’s *Leninism Under Lenin*, Part II, Chapter 3.)

The most likely explanation for this apparent change can be found in the different circumstances of struggle – the smaller-scale propaganda work that was necessarily the focus during the years of mostly underground and illegal work under tsarism demanded a different method of party organization than did the much more open period of relative freedom of speech and heightened mass participation linked to the gains of the February 1917 revolution that overthrew the tsar.

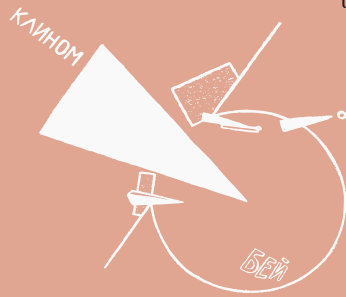
This hypothesis is supported by the timing of the change, which we first see in the aftermath of the February Revolution, when Lenin proposed the April Theses. At that time he said, “We don’t want the masses to take our word for it. We are not charlatans. We want the masses to overcome their mistakes through experience.” Shortly thereafter, in May, he also said that “‘the country’ of the workers and the poor peasants... is a thousand times more leftward than the Chernovs and the Tseretelis, and a hundred times more leftward than we [Bolsheviks] are.”

This was no empty phrase-mongering on Lenin’s part. As if to illustrate his point, a worker came up to the Socialist Revolutionary leader Viktor Chernov at a July demonstration, shaking his fist and shouting, “Take power, you son-of-a-bitch, when it’s given to you!”

Though these remarks were addressed to the more moderate socialists of the SRs, on this question a similar sentiment could have applied to much of the Bolshevik Party and its leadership, a significant chunk of which spent the April-to-October period rejecting the need for insurrection and the taking of power up until the last possible moment. Indeed, some important leaders refused to acknowledge its necessity until after it was already done.

The Battle of Ideas: Being Determines Consciousness

A Marxist analysis of the question of consciousness starts with the declaration: Material being determines human consciousness – not mechanically, but as a framework for the battle over ideas. Ideas reflect material interests in society. The proletariat is “the only class that is consistently revolutionary,” as Lenin writes in *State and Revolution*, because its material exploitation is central to capitalism, and its only path to liberation lies in overthrowing all



class-based property relations and establishing a socialist society. The working class is a product of capitalism, but it can’t fulfill its objective needs within capitalism. Therefore, the only class that has a consistent, unambiguous material interest in socialist ideas – and the potential power to bring them to fruition – is the working class.

How does this relate to Marx’s famous quote that the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class? Ideas in a class society are a battlefield. The limitations of how far working-class consciousness can develop are not an intrinsic or static property of the class itself but a product of the balance of forces on the ideological battlefield. The dominant ideas even in working-class organizations like unions and parties – even revolutionary parties – are subject to enormous pressures.

The more influence workers’ organizations win in society, the greater the bourgeois pressure. The union and party bureaucracies act as a transmitting medium for these pressures. Direct and indirect pressures of this sort are the reason the working class often finds it hard (though not, as in Lenin’s 1902 exaggeration, impossible) to find its way to revolutionary socialist understanding.

It is precisely these ever-present pressures of the ideological battlefield that make the concept of a purely “spontaneous” revolution nonsensical. A conscious and organized force is needed to push back, lest these pressures knock our organizations and movements off-course in decisive and often fatal ways. One can either enter into this battle of ideas or abstain from it, but either way the idea of the movement developing on its own through its own inner logic is off the table from the start.

What social forces exist, then, that are capable of pushing back against the influence of capitalist ideology within the working-class organizations?

If Lenin were right in 1902 that socialist consciousness must come from outside the working class, then the counterweight to the pressures visible on the Bolsheviks in 1917 would have come from some middle layers of intelligentsia. That, of course, is not what happened.

When the leadership of the Bolsheviks around Kamenev and Stalin trailed the Mensheviks in supporting liberal leaders after the February revolu-

tion, Lenin based his opposition to them on the advanced layers of the working class, the party membership, and the social-democratic cadre in the factories.

The working class in Russia was aiming for a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and tsarism to replace it by a state based on soviets (workers’ councils) to abolish private ownership of the means of production. That consciousness developed not merely because of intellectuals bringing such ideas to the masses or party leaders educating workers; it developed primarily out of the objective needs of the workers, and their collaborative participation in the class struggle through their own organizations. What an experienced vanguard was needed for was to enforce those ideas in the Bolshevik Party – and, through it, in society at large.

For a Marxist understanding of the relation of forces in 1917, it’s decisive to not only allow for but to expect that the working class will develop a revolutionary-socialist consciousness, as Lenin thankfully did. Marxists armed with this outlook can then help the working class to fully enforce its interests through a well-educated vanguard and a democratic revolutionary-socialist party that is rooted in this vanguard.



The Working Class and Revolution

The February 1917 Russian Revolution demonstrates much about the organic revolutionary dynamics of the working class. Absolutely no party had organized, planned, prepared for, or directly led it. It came as a surprise to leaders in every corner of the political landscape, who then had to rapidly struggle to catch up. In that sense, observers were quick to describe it as “spontaneous.” Trotsky deftly articulates this (and many other features of the situation) in his *History of the Russian Revolution* (Volume I, Chapter 8). To take one snippet:

The theory of “spontaneousness” fell in most opportunely with the minds not only of all those gentlemen who had yesterday been peacefully governing, judging, convicting, defending, trading, or commanding, and today were hastening to make up to the revolution, but also of many professional politicians and former revolutionists, who having slept through the revolution wished to think that in this they were not different from all the rest.



But at the same time, if one looks at the slogans and policies followed by the masses, these were not improvised on the spot but show clear signs of influence from the socialist propaganda of the whole preceding period since the failed 1905 revolution. It suddenly became clear that the workers had not been asleep since that previous attempt but watching and assimilating. Furthermore, there was in fact leadership, but it came precisely from the organic “vanguard” layer of the workers themselves – those countless, nameless heroes of the movement who were quietly learning and absorbing the lessons and slogans over the past decade, weighing different ideas in their minds, semi-consciously making themselves ready to fill the role of leadership organically as soon as its need became pressing.

Of course, this partial leadership was also lacking in many ways – it was no accident, for instance, that the bourgeois liberals and their right-socialist collaborators were so easily able to co-opt the situation and place themselves at the head of the new bourgeois state despite having no role at all in the upsurge that ousted the tsar. But frankly, *all* parties, including the Bolsheviks, were lacking in their ability to counter and respond to this adequately. It took the return of Lenin and his *April Theses* to start to turn the ship around. And when it was turned, it turned decisively towards basing itself on the vanguard of the working class, bringing tens and eventually hundreds of thousands of this layer into the ranks of the Bolsheviks over the course of the year’s developments.



The true historic role of the vanguard party, then, is not to “introduce” the revolution from the outside, but to help guide it to success from within – provided it has trained, prepared, and embedded itself properly within the working-class movement in a way that makes this possible. This is the type of party Marxists should be trying to build toward.

Contemporary Complications

As difficult and fraught as the questions were during Lenin’s time, today they are even more complicated by the overall state of the workers movement internationally.

The “vanguard layer” today is largely missing as a distinct force in many places, including the US. There are prominent individuals, and there is the mass, but the vanguard as a coherent layer is only just starting to re-form from primordial beginnings.

Today’s Marxists therefore have a dual task. We not only have to try to win over and consolidate the vanguard but actually help it to form in the first place by speeding the creation of wider-based working-class organizations like unions and broad left parties. Again, this does not mean that for now we set Marxism aside and put that off until the future, after the vanguard has been built up. It means we have to do both at the same time, to see them as one integrated task with multiple sides to it. This might sound impossible – to build the car while driving it, so to speak – but this is one of those times when metaphors and analogies break down, where one has to look at the situation concretely rather than relying on existing formulas.

Those same forces of bourgeois ideology that try to stop revolutionary consciousness from developing are also trying to stop the formation of a working-class vanguard. In the union bureaucracy, for example, the rotten deals made between the bureaucrats and the bosses are rotten not only because of their content but also because of how they are secured. Top-down negotiating and backroom deal-making are ways of depriving the working class of gaining much-needed experience in active struggle for their own demands – the very types of experiences that allow a vanguard to start forming. The fight for speeding up the formation of a vanguard will be most effectively carried out with a conscious framework implemented by organized Marxists fighting for their ideas.

Brandon Madsen, he/him, has been a Marxist and activist since the early 2000s, when he helped organize students at his high school in Bloomington, MN, against the Iraq War and military recruitment in schools. He moved from the US to Copenhagen, Denmark, in September 2022. He serves on the Reform & Revolution editorial board and works in the Hearing Systems labs at Technical University of Denmark (DTU). He is a member of the trade union IDA (Ingeniørforeningen i Danmark).

‘Grit City’ Wins Strongest Tenant Protections in Washington State



INTERVIEW WITH JENNIFER BARFIELD AND TY MOORE BY RAMY KHALIL

@JENNXIST, @SOCIALISTRAMY, @TYRONMOORE

DSA Led a Broad Union-Backed Coalition in Tacoma Linked to a Vision of Building Working-Class Power

In Tacoma, Washington, DSA built a large coalition behind a successful ballot initiative campaign to win the strongest protections for renters in the state. Organized as Tacoma for All, the campaign faced corporate opposition that shattered all spending records for Tacoma elections. Voters narrowly approved Initiative 1 in November, establishing a “Tenant Bill of Rights” for over 100,000 renters.

Ramy Khalil talked with Jennifer Barfield and Ty Moore about how Tacoma for All pulled off this impressive “David vs. Goliath” victory. Jennifer is a member of Tacoma for All’s Steering Committee and the Tacoma Education Association. Ty is the Campaign Manager of Tacoma for All. Jennifer and Ty are also members of the Tacoma DSA Steering Committee. Ramy served as the Tacoma for All Campaign Co-Manager. All three (Jenn, Ty, Ramy) are members of DSA and its Reform & Revolution caucus.

What would you say are this election’s main achievements?

Ty: Apart from winning the strongest tenant protections in the state, this campaign transformed Tacoma DSA. Initiative 1 was the dominant debate in the election, and our grassroots labor-community coalition defeated the combined strength of the mayor, City Council, the Chamber of Commerce, two powerful statewide landlord associations, and \$200,000 from the National Association of Realtors.

DSA is now a major player in local politics. By uniting most unions and progressives into this sharp fight with the political establishment, we opened a new political space for independent working-class politics to develop. Our alliance with United Food and Commercial Workers Local 367 was the central pillar of this fight; the victory has only brought DSA and UFCW 367 closer.

And within DSA we’ve developed a politically experienced, audacious leadership team that has earned the credibility to initiate even bigger fights in the years ahead.

Jenn, you’re a public school office worker. How will the Tenant Bill of Rights help school families?

Jenn: I work with some amazing counselors and staff at my school. Our families get access to food, clothing, school supplies, books, toys, etc., but even with this assistance, it feels like every week we hear from another family that is being evicted, moving into a shelter, or otherwise struggling to make rent.



It's painful to watch people try so hard only to be told they don't make enough to qualify for an apartment, or to find out that a family spent the summer living in a tent because they were evicted and now they can't get into an apartment. I've seen students who were thriving forced to move away from their friends and school community, a place where they felt a sense of safety and belonging, to move into shelter in other counties because Pierce County didn't have adequate space.

DSA built a broad diverse coalition, while also providing the necessary political leadership, especially in moments that required defying the political establishment.

Families should be protected from the trauma of being unhoused, which has lasting impacts. The Tenant Bill of Rights will help keep students housed during the school year, providing some stability and security for families.

What are the main policies in the Tenant Bill of Rights?

Jenn: Initiative 1 requires landlords to give six months' notice of a rent increase, limits move-in fees to no more than one month's rent, and caps late fees at \$10 per month. Before a landlord can raise the rent, their building must comply with health and safety laws.

But I think the most significant protections are the rental relocation assistance and eviction defense provisions. When a landlord raises rent by 5 percent or more and a tenant can no longer afford the unit, landlords will have to pay rental relocation assistance equal to two months' rent.

Tacoma for All collected over 7,200 signatures to qualify the initiative for the ballot. We knocked over 20,000 doors, made nearly 22,000 calls, and sent 141,000 text messages. We raised \$122,400, with over 470 individual donors – 85 percent of whom are from here in Tacoma and Pierce County, whereas over 90 percent of the opposition's \$371,000 was from outside Tacoma.

If a family with school-age kids falls behind on rent, they can't be evicted during the school year. And no one can be evicted for late rent during the deadly cold months from November through March.

Could you talk about the coalition, Tacoma for All? And what roles did DSA and United Food and Commercial Workers Local 367 play?

Ty: This campaign began over two years ago. Within DSA, we understood that the only path to housing justice was by building a broad coalition, with labor at its core, prepared to take on the big landlords and political establishment. At the same time, we knew socialist leadership was needed to break through the hesitant consensus culture that dominates progressive political circles.

In this context, UFCW 367 emerged as a critical ally. Several DSA members were rank-and-file leaders in the union, and over time the entire leadership came to embrace the campaign. Despite decent wage hikes in their last contract, UFCW members were hit hard by 43-percent rent hikes over the last five years. They were pissed at the inaction in City Hall and felt betrayed by labor-endorsed Democrats on the City Council who'd refused to support hazard pay for grocery workers during Covid.

So Local 367 was fed up with polite lobbying and ready for a big public fight. Their early support helped swing the labor council and other unions behind us, and UFCW threw \$17,000 and lots of staff time into the campaign.

In a press release, the Rental Housing Association of Washington declared, "The Socialist Party of Seattle is taking to Tacoma their failed public policies." Why did voters in Tacoma – a blue-collar military town next to the military Joint Base Lewis-McChord – approve the strongest protections for renters in the state rather than liberal cities like Seattle or Olympia?

Jenn: Tacoma has a nickname, "Grit City" – an ownership and celebration of its blue-collar, working-class roots. In recent years, Tacomans have seen costs for everything increase while wages stagnate. When something as basic as the right to a roof over your head is threatened, people feel motivated to act. Billionaire investors have swooped in, gobbling up housing stock in Tacoma, raising rents, and forcing out working-class families who have called Tacoma home for generations.



Activists proudly celebrate their historic victory on election night

We connected with folks' frustrations and combined our electoral campaign with activities that empowered low-income workers, who often get ignored. For example, when a billionaire landlord threatened to evict a substitute teacher named Cathy Pick, we organized a petition, a fundraiser, and a protest. We got the media to highlight how Initiative 1 would stop evictions of educators, and we succeeded in stopping the eviction!

What are your main conclusions? How could other DSA chapters and organizations win big victories like this?

Ty: I'd say two strategies proved decisive.

First, DSA built a broad, diverse coalition, while also providing the necessary political leadership, especially in moments that required defying the political establishment – all Democrats. This sometimes caused tensions with coalition partners, but proved vital to our victory.

This is essentially what Marxists call a "united front." DSA encouraged a wide coalition of progressive forces moving into a common struggle, while advocating for class-struggle strategy and tactics.

I think even within DSA this approach is too rare, since there are often big pressures from allies to

avoid necessary clashes with Democratic Party elected leaders and others. Or to avoid these pressures, some socialists adopt a sectarian approach and refuse to do what it takes to build an effective coalition with powerful labor and progressive leaders we disagree with.

Second, we combined a bold vision of building toward the socialist transformation of society with a tactical assessment of where we can mobilize people to make a breakthrough today. In the Marxist tradition, this is part of what we call the "transitional method." We met working-class folks where they were at, encouraged their self-confidence and self-organization, and together we all took a big step in the direction of working-class political power and democratic socialism.

What's next for Tacoma for All and DSA?

Ty: This fight isn't over. We expect a legal challenge from landlord groups, and some landlords have openly threatened to retaliate or just refuse to implement the new tenant protections. So we're gearing up for fights on both these fronts. More broadly, DSA is considering running candidates for upcoming local seats and, potentially, a big 2025 ballot initiative campaign to create a social housing developer, similar to what Seattle voters approved in February. ■

Organizing a Fighting DSA Campaign for Bodily Autonomy



BY JUDITH CHAVARRIA

@WITHOUTJUDITH

To Build an Exciting and Flourishing Campaign, a Clarity of Vision is Needed

At this year’s DSA Convention, delegates voted to adopt a national campaign for trans and abortion rights (“A Fighting Campaign for Reproductive Rights and Trans Liberation”) after organizers fought to change the agenda. They democratically chose to be a part of this critical battleground, and now it’s an opportunity for DSA to get behind an energizing national campaign at a time of stagnation and loss in membership.

People are increasingly willing to fight back – but our movement needs organization and leadership.

As chapters across the country prepare to organize around bodily autonomy and our national leadership is cohering a body to coordinate the campaign – the Trans Rights and Bodily Autonomy Campaign Commission (TRBACC) – an organizational commitment to bold strategies, nationwide support, and independent socialist politics will be necessary to build the fighting power of DSA and make this campaign a success.

The Struggle for Liberation

The Supreme Court’s vicious attack on reproductive rights has made the precarity of those rights clear to millions of working-class people. The recent wave of transphobic attacks, led by reactionary media and politicians, has also emboldened a far-right movement which seeks to legislate trans

people out of existence through violent policies and bans. Sarah Milner and Spencer Mann explain in R&R’s position paper on trans liberation how these attacks are rooted in the capitalist system:

The capitalist system undermines bodily autonomy. Exploitation turns the worker into a machine for profit – they lose control of their own body as they perform tasks for wages. This oppression extends elsewhere in society. Capitalism tells people where and how to live, how to dress, and how to act. It polices our behaviors through force and the market. The rights trans people are fighting for – personal autonomy, healthcare access, and an end to the patriarchy – are rights that would benefit every person in society.

Understanding the complex ways the ruling class maintains its power over working-class people, and over all parts of their lives, is a first step in figuring out how to fight back. Queer and trans people’s lives have always occupied an uncertain political position under capitalism. What’s next? As the far-right continues its assault on abortion and gender-affirming care, people are increasingly willing to fight back – but our movement needs organization and leadership.

The battle for trans liberation and reproductive rights has been fought for decades. What we decide to do now will be the key to making our mark in a very long history. We can’t create lasting change by subsuming our politics to ineffective liberal forces who have utterly failed to stop the far-right and Republican Party from stripping away our rights; rather, we need to make the most of our political independence by differentiating a socialist approach from ones which continuously cede ground to the far-right. Not only does this mean speaking for ourselves within a broader movement, it also means winning leadership of these movements with decisive action wherever possible.

Sketching a National Campaign

DSA’s trans and reproductive rights campaign should coordinate a kickoff and national day of action, each of which can be flash points of organizing and coalition-building on the local and national levels. Public-facing events such as these help cohere our efforts, allowing us to make a nationwide political impact, even as most concrete campaigns are by necessity fought on the state level.

Every part of DSA has a role to play.

Every part of DSA has a role to play. The National Electoral Committee should encourage DSA elected officials to actively promote the campaign and make the struggle for bodily autonomy a legislative priority; creating socialist consciousness by synthesizing these battles with the labor movement gives a paramount role to the National Labor Committee; building an international movement around the rights of trans refugees will require close coordination with the International Committee; and the Queer Socialists Working Group can become a permanent home for the movements we build for queer rights.

Furthermore, chapters should be encouraged to organize pressure campaigns, mutual aid efforts, and electoral projects that fight for queer and reproductive rights based around a class-struggle strategy which puts independent socialist politics at the forefront. Wherever there are ballot initiatives around trans and reproductive rights, chapters can orient to them on a strategic basis while stressing that our rights will remain fragile for as long as capitalism remains intact. It’s also imperative that the struggles in red and blue states be connected through a single, unified political message. By having members

speak across chapters, share tactics and strategies, and coordinate as much as they can, we can put this message into practice to show that the nationwide socialist movement is waging an interconnected, coordinated struggle like no other.

We also need bold, unifying demands that can bring new people into the organization and link the struggle for bodily autonomy to a socialist horizon. Nationally, the campaign can fight for the repeal of all bans and restrictions on the fundamental right to healthcare and for a universal healthcare system that covers gender-affirming care and abortion. DSA chapters can also begin offering a positive alternative to capitalism by demanding union protections, housing justice, and sanctuary laws as part of a broader program. As people begin fleeing their home states for legal abortions and gender-affirming care, demands such as these can become a guiding light for battles big and small.

YDSA has an important role to play as well. Young, radicalizing queer students are looking for a way to fight back against far-right attacks. This campaign could serve as a chance to develop the political confidence of YDSA members while connecting them to struggles off campus through shared actions with their respective DSA chapters. Between them, queer and radical youth in and out of college can find a strong political home in the organization.

The Weeks and Months Ahead

What happens at TRBACC’s initial meetings will be critical for getting all of this started. There is a significant danger in not moving decisively enough to create an exciting and flourishing campaign. R&R member Sarah Milner, who is on the commission, says, “leadership

The ABCs of Strong Local Campaigns

Arrive at a Vision for the Campaign

Local campaigns will vary in size and scale from chapter to chapter. It’s important that DSA members hold discussions with one another about goals, demands, and messaging to make sure that a robust plan of action can be put forward to their chapters. A formal leadership structure should also be established – democracy is the foundation of an effective class struggle approach!

Begin Developing a Campaign Strategy

Every campaign needs events capable of putting our politics into action! A rousing local kickoff, public facing rallies, and politicized mutual aid are just some of the ways we can build momentum for a national day of action. We should be attracting new people to organizing while connecting them to a broader socialist program.

Commit to Growing DSA

With good strategies and a bold vision for local campaigns, socialists can make significant inroads in the struggle for trans and reproductive rights. *But we need to keep the pressure up!* Chapters should be using these campaigns to grow DSA and build the leadership and organization necessary to facilitate a rupture with capitalism.

needs to work closely and consistently with chapters to set up local campaigns. It can't just be an email or a tweet – we need to meet, week after week, with chapter liaisons to help them strategize and plan.”

We can't create lasting change by subsuming our politics to ineffective liberal forces who have utterly failed to stop the far-right.

Alongside contacting every chapter and offering guidance, TRBACC should also provide meaningful resources and materials. A campaign toolkit similar to the one developed for our labor solidarity work, for example, could immediately provide shared messaging and political clarity as chapters begin to participate in the campaign. The commission's role should be to get DSA fully involved, and that means making the most of our potential as a mass organization.

We need to prove ourselves in action, showing that we're the best fighters for issues people care about – and we can begin doing that now. DSA's participation in struggles for bodily autonomy today, as well as against austerity, imperialism, and war, will be the

basis for a revolutionary party tomorrow. TRBACC can help facilitate this process by coordinating the fighting campaign convention delegates voted for.

For a Fighting DSA

DSA is capable of forging a movement that is greater than the sum of its parts. At the chapter level, on-the-ground organizers must recognize their efforts as fostering the consciousness and organization necessary to fight for the rights of oppressed and working people everywhere; internally, this campaign can be part of the difficult work of turning DSA into a truly nationwide, member-led organization. That's going to require a concerted effort linking every battle, every local campaign to a common socialist banner.

Every chapter should consider joining the campaign by passing a local resolution. We're fighting not just for ourselves, but also the future generations of queer and working-class people who deserve to live freely and without fear. That's an immense responsibility – and a challenge we must learn to overcome in the present. ■

Judith Chavarria, they/she, is a member of the YDSA chapter at Florida International University and DSA's Reform & Revolution caucus. She is the co-chair of the Miami DSA Bodily Autonomy Working Group.

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How a Movement Won Back Reproductive Rights



BY LUKE BRANAGAN



The Battle for Reproductive Justice Transformed DSA in Ohio

A hundred-year-old process allowing Ohio voters to amend their own constitution has become the last hope for abortion rights activists – and the last bulwark against the right's corruption. These historic battles are transforming DSA and preparing the next generation of socialists for the many struggles ahead.

When the basic right to bodily autonomy was undemocratically stripped from the working class in June 2022, Ohioans immediately felt severe consequences. A trap had been laid years earlier in 2019, when Governor Mike Dewine signed Ohio's now infamous "heartbeat bill" into law. The bill was a triumph of the Ohio Republican majority's wanton cruelty, having no exemptions for cases of rape, incest, mental health, or age of the patient. While the bill did include a measure that allowed exemptions to "avoid a serious risk of substantial and irreversible impairment," critics pointed out that the wording was vague and heavily dependent on interpretation.

Roe v. Wade was overturned by the United States Supreme Court against the will of a majority in the US. Ohio joined other GOP-dominated states in passing barbarous "trigger bills" that restricted routine but life-saving abortions. The heartbeat law stipulated that abortion is illegal in the state of Ohio after six weeks of pregnancy. This is before most people begin to notice any signs that they may be pregnant.

One woman was turned away from care for days while bleeding out from complications related to a miscarriage, only to find out that the hospital was avoiding the legal liability of saving her life. Mean-

while the governor assured the media that women would not be rejected from receiving care if they met the criteria for the exemptions. In July, when a ten-year-old victim of rape had to flee Ohio to receive an abortion in Illinois, the attorney general denied that it even happened, citing the exemptions that would not have protected the child. Affidavits were later released documenting dozens of minors forced to undergo the same traumas.

The heartbeat law was finally stalled in Ohio courts in September 2022, and was indefinitely paused in December, pending legislation. But not before 1,000 Ohio physicians drafted and signed an open letter of dissent titled "A Message to our Patients on the Loss of Reproductive Rights."

The urgency of the campaign motivated thousands of working people to donate their time and energy

The letter jump-started the movement to counter this heinous reversal of basic rights. Within months a coalition had formed while advocates and allies prepared for a long struggle ahead. Thousands of volunteers from all over Ohio committed themselves to the legal and electoral struggle to overcome the twisted agenda of the politically dominant Republicans, whose gerrymandering and scheming represent a tiny minority of Ohioans.

The coalition for reproductive rights, centered around the NGO Protect Choice Ohio, decided that the best course of action that protected reproductive rights for Ohioans was a constitutional amendment that couldn't be easily taken away by a powerful



minority. Abortion rights groups had the language for the Reproductive Rights Amendment approved. The urgency and importance of the campaign motivated thousands of working people to donate their time and energy while money poured in from individual donors and progressive organizations.

A Movement to Change the Constitution

State constitutions had become the battleground for abortion rights in other states as well. In Kansas, an amendment that would enshrine no reproductive rights in the state constitution was shot down by 59 percent of voters in August 2022. In November, voters rejected a similar amendment in Kentucky. Abortion has been functionally illegal there since 2019, and a coalition emerged to protect the constitution from further tampering. Louisville DSA was instrumental in mobilizing voters to turn out to defend their rights; their text banking campaign reached over three million Kentuckians. They also received organized support from DSA chapter members in neighboring states including Ohio.

In neither of these campaigns did the vote rejecting the constitutional amendment exceed 60 percent of voters. In the entire history of citizen led ballot initiatives in Ohio, none have ever passed by a supermajority.

In February 2023, Republican anti-abortion legislators attempted to increase the amount of votes needed to pass a citizen-led amendment to a supermajority – a plan to make the passing of a popular

constitutional amendment historically impossible. The election was to be held on August 8, but in April the Republican-controlled legislature had passed legislation making August elections illegal. The move was extremely divisive, even on the right. *80 percent of contributions to Issue 1 came from out of state, including \$1.1 million from an Illinois billionaire, and another \$900k from the Catholic Church.*

By May, the campaign against the Republican counter-offensive was in full swing. DSA chapters all over Ohio were part of the coalition fighting for the constitutional amendment, organizing canvassing and tabling events all over Ohio. The most pressing task for abortion rights volunteers was getting the 400,000 valid signatures to have the constitutional amendment added to the November election.

Columbus and Cincinnati DSA members took what they learned in Louisville and elsewhere to organize our local campaigns. Chapters all over Ohio mobilized, setting up text banks and community outreach to make voters aware of the August 8 special election. Ohio chapters started coming together and supporting each other in a way that hadn't occurred in the years since the pandemic. DSA national representatives also advised Ohio campaigns to help organizers integrate more ambitious and effective tactics to ensure our success. Many chapters and organizers hadn't been this active since the Bernie 2020 campaign. Since the coalition was so broad and awareness of the issue was high, it was an opportunity to get involved and talk to working people about socialist politics, and connect this struggle with the broader fight for the freedom and liberation of people's bodies from being controlled by reactionary state legislatures. Despite the publicity Ohio conservatives had received around their mass misinformation and social sabotage campaign, the material effect and support for the Republican campaign was low.

DSA Deeply Involved in the Campaign

Meanwhile, bodily autonomy activists were building their campaigns using DSA's national electoral strategy and field operations to target traditionally working-class areas. These campaigns were high-energy and high-commitment, with democratic buy-in from chapter members. Text banking campaigns carried out by Ohio DSA chapters reached anyone who had ever participated or shown any interest in DSA, as well as hundreds of thousands of Ohioans identified as being reliable progressives. Nearly every medium to large outdoor event in the state was virtually swarming with volunteers doing voter registration, collecting signatures, and talking to working people,

and DSA chapters frequently mobilized members to help connect the struggle with socialist feminist messaging.

The movement had gained traction with working voters, while socialists ready to fight for abortion rights from all over the country supported each other with material, time, and experience. By late July, over 700,000 signatures estimated to be needed to meet the signature threshold were turned into the office of Secretary of State, and organizers geared up for the last few months of the fight.

When the August 8 vote finally arrived, there was an energy like a presidential race. Ohio voters mobilized en masse, utilizing early voting, absentee, and in-person options to cast over 700,000 votes. The Republican initiative was defeated by 57 percent of voters. If the goal was to discourage democracy, the effect was to activate hundreds of thousands of Ohioans to participate in it. Voter turnout had more than quintupled compared to the previous year's August 8 special election.

Emboldened by the hard-won victory against anti-abortion special interests in August, DSA chapters continued the push to win reproductive rights, and took our place in the coalition opposed to rampant political corruption from so-called advocates for life. The Columbus DSA chapter's Access for All campaign, with input from the Louisville struggle and DSA national organizers, knocked on almost 3,500 doors and asked voters to sign pledge cards stating their intention to vote yes on Issue 1.

"I'm genuinely shocked at how positive the response has been. Engagement and buy-in are much higher than expected. People are willing to engage with DSA, not just because we have the most popular program, but our strategy is very targeted around working-class neighborhoods with a high density of DSA members. This has to be our turf, these have to be the people who know us and believe in us," said Columbus DSA steward for the Access for All abortion rights campaign, Evan D. DSA chapters from all over Ohio continue to trade information and work together to maximize impact.

Republican cheap tricks continued to create obstacles and confusion around the issue when anti-choice extremists on the Ohio Ballot Board rejected the language for the amendment submitted by the people in another ploy to derail democracy through disinformation and confusion.

57 Percent for Abortion Rights

On November 8, 2023, over 3.8 million Ohioans went to the polls to vote on Issue 1. Fortunately, we have cause for celebration as the amendment passed with 56.6 percent of voters choosing their rights over the twisted will of the political class. Activists and volunteers congratulated each other on their hard work carried out over the last year and a half, and millions of Ohioans breathed a collective sigh

Photo: David, tinyurl.com/WomensMarchDavid, Copyright: CC BY 2.0 Deed, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en

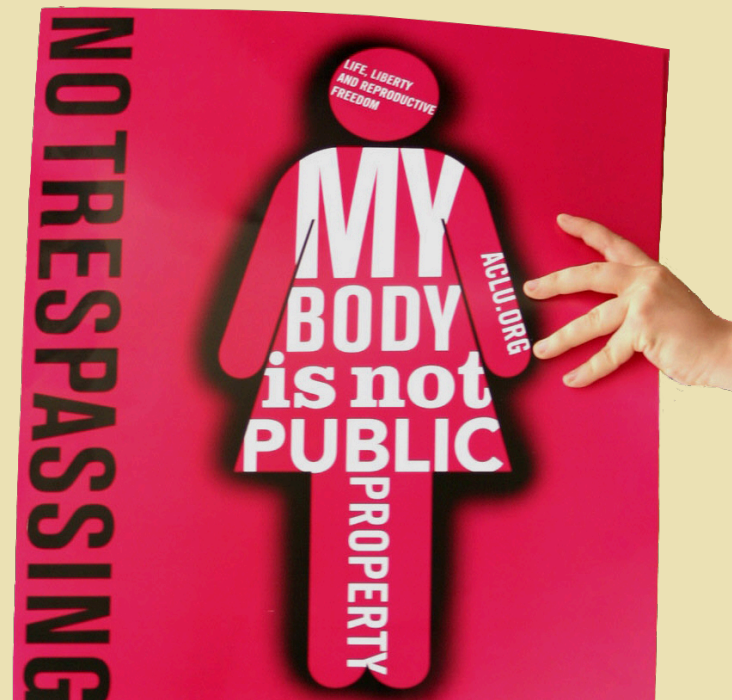
of relief as this amendment is a clear step forward for the right to access necessary medical treatments. Progressives across the country joined us in celebration of democracy and hope. Disaffected and politically-alienated workers watched these events unfold, demonstrating the power of collective action in the fight for democracy, and many people who rarely or never vote came out in support. Conservative donors will surely think twice before funding more attacks on abortion rights: Issue 1 raised nearly \$40 million to the opponent's \$26 million, \$14.7 million of which was blown on the failed illegal August election.

But the fight isn't over yet. Ohio Republicans, despite giving lip service to the results of the election, have shown time and time again that they don't believe the laws and constitution apply to them. The same criminal theocratic extremist politicians who passed trigger legislation a few years before the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* are drafting and approving the language for anti-trans legislation in Ohio, and the struggle for medical access will surely intensify.

Our successes show us two things: First, we – the socialist movement – have to contribute to building the movement of working-class people to defend bodily autonomy. The Democratic Party leadership might be interested in fundraising on this issue and driving up voter turnout. However, they do not use their power to build a real movement, bottom up. And that's no accident.

Second, we can build the backbone of such a movement through offering a much broader, socialist vision to change society, build working-class power, and win people to join DSA. ■

Luke Branagan, he/him, was a delegate to DSA's 2023 National Convention, serves as labor steward for Columbus DSA, and is one of the co-organizers of the Columbus, Ohio, branch of Reform & Revolution.



Reform the Reform Movement!



BY CLAIRE SCHACHTELY

A UPS Worker Breaks Down the New Union Contract and Why it Comes Up Short

In summer 2023, thousands of workers and community members prepared for 340,000 Teamsters to strike UPS in what could have been one of the biggest strikes in modern labor history. After a breakdown in contract negotiations, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) staged practice pickets all over the country. A walkout appeared imminent. But on July 25th, the release of a tentative agreement (TA) by Teamster president Sean O'Brien caught workers off guard, precluding the groundbreaking strike and bringing a year-long contract campaign to a sudden halt.

The TA generated mixed feelings and confusion among UPS coworkers. Although O'Brien was more transparent throughout contract bargaining compared to previous administrations, the practice of closed bargaining continued and many workers were iced out of negotiations. This is an overall theme of the new administration: improvements and a reformist direction, but an unwillingness to overcome structural shortcomings that limit union democracy and worker autonomy.

The “Historic” Contract

Leadership of the largest private sector union in America dubbed this the “strongest” contract ever. After years of concessions, any basic contract modifications can be spun as a victory. Partially due to much-needed raises, low expectations, and a “vote yes” campaign from union leadership, the contract sailed through voting and was ratified by 86.3 percent. However, the deal falls short, particularly for the vast majority of UPS Teamsters who are part-time warehouse workers.

UPS conceded to the elimination of the previous tiered-wage system for drivers, called the 22.4 tier. But in its place, a new tier was added. Now, newly-hired part-time workers make several dollars less than their coworkers performing equal work. Companies like UPS love creating tier systems, not only to save on the cost of labor, but also to pit workers against each other and against the union. The tiered-wage system also incentivizes UPS to generate turnover, as new workers come at a substantially lower cost.

O'Brien was more transparent, but the practice of closed bargaining continued.

The contract also comes up short in improving workplace conditions. A major demand in the contract campaign was protection against excessive heat. For years, drivers did not have air conditioning in the brown delivery trucks. The Teamsters successfully fought to have AC installed in the trucks, but only in new vehicles. With a slow turnover in replacing trucks, drivers will continue working in the same conditions that have tragically injured and taken the lives of several workers. On our increasingly warming planet, water breaks and ice machines are not enough – we need AC.

The contract doesn't fix the day-to-day workplace conditions that workers face on the shop floor: over-supervision, excessive speed ups, and lack of respect. This is, in part, business unionism in action: union leadership focuses on the economics during contract negotiations and they prioritize this over making structural changes that will empower the rank and file and challenge corporate power.



Photo: Jamie Partridge

Union Leadership

When O'Brien was elected in 2020, he vowed to deliver a strong union contract for UPS. He led UPS Teamsters through a year-long contract campaign, the likes of which hadn't been seen since 1997, the last time Teamsters struck UPS nationwide. His administration got members excited and engaged in a way the Teamsters only had a distant memory of. A major shift felt like it was happening within the labor movement – the largest private sector union in the US had leadership that would genuinely take on corporate power instead of cozying up to it.

But over time, O'Brien's politics and class interests revealed what type of unionist he is. He said, “I work with billion dollar corporations like UPS ... and we collectively work together. Why? To create jobs, but also to make their businesses as successful as possible, because if their business is successful, our members are going to be successful.”

This notion makes the incorrect assumption that wealth generated by UPS workers is distributed fairly among the employees. The astronomical profits that shareholders accumulated while workers struggled demonstrates that the company's success has little bearing on the workers. This is another element of business unionism: focusing union energy on keeping businesses economically profitable and successful. Union officials may side with employers and the billionaire class in order to help businesses stay competitive.

Additionally, business unionists view themselves as representing a group of workers who just have occasional flare ups with their bosses rather than operating on the understanding that the entire working class will constantly be in struggle with employers due to the nature of capitalism, which pits the interests of the owners against the workers.

O'Brien did not challenge the notion of business unionism in the way we had hoped for upon his election, but he did reveal a nuance. His fiery rhetoric about taking on UPS headfirst to win a strong contract gave him credit as a militant business unionist.

Compare O'Brien's rhetoric to that of UAW president Shawn Fain, who said Ford's recent TA is about “more than just economic gains for auto workers. It is a turning point in the class war that's been raging in this country [...]. This contract is more than just a contract, it's a call to action to workers everywhere to organize and fight for a better life.”

Leaders who orient towards class struggle are taking on corporate America, delivering strong union contracts, and fighting for the entire working class to build power against the capitalists.

This is a step closer to Joe Burns's concept of class-struggle unionism, which recognizes the exploitative nature of capitalism and aims to combat it with a labor movement that prioritizes the demands of the working class.



O'Brien post on Instagram: Any kind of dissenting opinions or "vote no" sentiment was viewed by the leadership as destructive and "anti-union".

Ratifying the Contract and the "Vote No" Movement

Despite the contract's concessions – a tiered wage system, allowing gig workers, no cost of living adjustment (COLA) in the pension, driver-facing cameras, limited protections for excessive overtime, automation replacing warehouse jobs, and few meaningful changes to workplace conditions – the IBT was in full support of the agreement.

Using our union dues to campaign, union leadership mobilized and pushed members to vote yes on the agreement. O'Brien posted, "Anyone who calls our contract concessionary is lying...it is truly historic. Anyone who tries to sell you something else is selling you short." Any kind of dissenting opinions or "vote no" sentiment was labeled as destructive and "anti-union" by the leadership.

Powers outside of union leadership also influenced how workers voted on the TA. The capitalist media was quick to uncritically support the TA, praising the fact that a strike was averted. Biden applauded the TA as an example of good faith negotiations. Labor Notes and Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) also praised the TA, which was disappointing as they had previously acted as watchdogs of the union. TDU was a major player in getting O'Brien elected, despite several charges against him from the union, including O'Brien threatening and intimidating members of Local 251 for running an election

campaign that challenged local leadership. TDU as a reform caucus was known for fighting corruption and democratizing the union through incremental change. But orienting towards O'Brien severely limited their power to push back on the contract.

Despite the barriers, a "vote no" movement emerged from the rank-and-file group Teamsters Mobilize, as members (rightfully) felt we deserved more out of the contract. They challenged the administration and helped workers understand we could get a better contract, and with that a better livelihood, if we voted no.

The Response From the Left

In Spring, DSA launched nationwide support for the Teamsters contract through the Strike Ready campaign. The campaign pushed to get chapters across the nation to pledge support for UPS workers if we went on strike. It united DSA nationally around a campaign, the likes of which hadn't been seen since Bernie ran for president. This did a lot to build DSA internally, but it did not go far enough.

DSA offered conditional support depending on the occurrence of a nationwide strike, but when we didn't strike, the campaign ended. DSA leadership simply vowed to stand with Teamsters, "as they vote to accept or reject the TA."

DSA should have weighed in and had an opinion on this contract and how it relates to the entire working class. This neutrality appears to be motivated by letting the UPS workers lead DSA, and not the other way around. But this theory of change leaves out analysis of political conditions and the actual state of working-class consciousness in the US.

On a practical and local level, UPS workers had no idea what the DSA Strike Ready campaign was, there was not adequate engagement with the rank and file for this campaign to be on workers' radars. Overall, the Strike Ready campaign did more for DSA than for UPS workers.

Instead of abandoning the campaign and taking a neutral stance, DSA should have had a plan B on how to orient to workers if a concessionary TA was released. UPS workers faced enormous pressures from the company, the capitalist class, and our union leadership. We needed support in the time between the TA and the contract ratification. ■

Claire Schachtely, she / her, is a Teamster at a UPS warehouse and a member of DSA's Reform and Revolution caucus.

UAW's Turning Point is a Promise



BY MARA RAFFERTY

@MARAPALOOZA

The Strike at the Big Three Automakers Showed the Changes that have Happened in the UAW – and the Challenges to Come

This year's UAW contract campaign at the Big Three automakers (General Motors, Ford, and Stellantis, formerly Fiat Chrysler) represented a historic step forward for US labor unions. It was one of the largest and most well-publicized contract campaigns in recent years, and it represented yet another step forward in the labor resurgence that's been sweeping the country. As a major manufacturing strike in a key industry in the US, it got extensive press and media attention, and brought the debate about our rigged economic system into the national spotlight in a way it hasn't been since Bernie Sanders' presidential campaigns. The strike was also a key moment in the movement for environmental justice, and its militancy highlighted what is possible through a radical decades-long struggle for reform within labor.

A Class-Struggle Strike

Under newly-elected leaders from the Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) slate, the union approached the Big Three contract campaign with a strong drive to win over the sympathies of working-class people across the country. From the outset, new UAW president Shawn Fain served as a spokesperson for direct appeals to fight to make up for their losses since the Great Recession. "Record profits should mean record contracts," was not just aimed at the Big Three, but employers across manufacturing and the broader US economy. Fain spoke early in the campaign about why the union was fighting for a four-day workweek with no loss in pay, talking about how all working people need more holidays, weekends, and time off to live full lives as human beings.

The vast majority in the US polled in September and October supported the strike, including conservatives and Trump voters.

A More Democratic Strike

The Big Three auto contracts cover 140,000 members. The massive, nationwide scope of the negotiations, together with the longstanding lack of democratic life within the union, has for decades meant that national UAW contract campaigns are heavily top-down affairs.

The Fain administration has taken major steps to open up the process, and the Big Three Bargaining Convention was vastly more open and democratic than its predecessors. During the campaign, Fain used Facebook Live streams to speak with members each week, sharing relatively in-depth summaries of key points in the negotiations with members. These livestreams have been a hallmark of Fain's presidency, and their spontaneous, genuine, and often irreverent tone has signaled that the leadership is speaking to people in a much more unfiltered way than before. However, this doesn't mean that the key decisions about the strike weren't made by the leadership behind the scenes. Fain's announcements have been very much that: announcements about what's happening – a way of keeping members in the loop about a process that they don't have direct control over on a week-to-week basis, beyond strike authorization and tentative agreement (TA) ratification votes.

We should be balanced, recognizing that a nationally-run negotiation process does need to be centrally coordinated and centrally run, and having an elected, empowered leadership is essential for that. At the same time, we should look clearly at ways that the union can go further in developing participatory democracy in the context of contract campaigns.



Photo: Joe Brusky, tinyurl.com/UAWStrong, Copyright: CC BY-NC 2.0 Deed, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/

Stand-Up Strike Strategy

Take, for example, the stand-up strike strategy and the process by which it was arrived at. There's much that can be said about it. Some have made an argument that the union could have won more, and set an example for US workers, by waging a full strike of all members from the very beginning. The merits of that can and have been debated in the opinion pages, but what's important is that they weren't debated in the ranks of the union beforehand.

Throughout the strike, the news media attempted to paint Fain and UAW leaders as the unilateral directors of the strike – and despite the wild exaggeration of this anti-union rhetoric, there was a grain of truth about how decisions were made. Members listened for livestream updates on Fridays, a process that kept them in the loop but not feeling fully empowered about making decisions. Members talked about being called out onto picket lines, and wondering when a settlement would be reached so they'd be called back to work, and even where there was a willingness to go along with the group, there was a pervasive attitude nationwide that the leaders were calling the shots and the members were following.

The leadership took important steps to strengthen rank-and-file involvement, from encouraging plans to form strike committees, training them in holding “10-minute meetings” on the shop floor, training picket captains, etc. However, there was little feeling at the plant level that the decisions of members in their workplaces would substantively change the strategy for the strike.

In his livestreams, Fain would talk about how he had conferred with the leadership of union locals in making decisions about which plants would strike and when. It says something that this was a step forward from the way the previous GM strike, as well as other decisions in the UAW, had been made. However, there's much room to deepen democratic participation in future strikes. The huge online engagement of members during this strike is a promising start. Especially in the age of remote meetings, social media, and systems for online discussions

and online voting, there's much room to explore more direct decision-making among members.

Democracy on the Shop Floor

In a future strike, individual workplaces and plants could have more local meetings for discussing strategies about the strike. Being able to discuss at the local level and pass ideas and feedback up to the national level would help the union to make decisions that even better reflect the drive of its members to fight when it's time.

Leaders of union locals can encourage members to play an even bigger role in the internal life of the union, whether that's as shop stewards, picket captains, or just doing the hard day-to-day work of organizing for grievances or to keep membership up in the post-Janus era. In the context of the stand-up strike, if that were to be used as a tactic in the future, individual plants could take votes to go out on strike at key moments. Even this single change would be a way to give individual members more buy-in and more say about the strategy throughout the strike. It'd necessitate members being even more clued in to what was happening in negotiations, and give them direct control over the steps they are taking against the boss.

The contract ratification process can also be even more inclusive and participatory. Right now, tentative agreements follow a lengthy path from the bargaining team to a wider national leadership, then to the leadership of regions, then to the leadership of locals, and finally to the membership. In the meantime, membership is informed about the contract through white papers, info sessions online, town halls, etc.

It's worth noting that the agreements are hundreds of pages of complex policies, and it is well worth it to have mechanisms to explain the changes to members with context, rather than asking everyone to sift through hundreds of pages of fine print. Still, the number of steps before the agreement goes to a membership vote, together with the fact that members go back to work while the agreement is pending, all give a large amount of weight in favor of the agreement reached by the bargaining team.

In this concrete case, despite the “No” votes of several key local unions, it seems clear that the historic gains in the contract would have led the members to ratify it had it been directly submitted to them. Members across the union view the strike as a success. Still, with hard fights and hard decisions ahead, we have an urgent task of building the confidence of members, as a nationwide body, to directly control their own contract fights and have ownership over them.

New Direction for the UAW?

The lack of rank-and-file involvement isn't specific to the UAW; nationwide and across industries, our unions need more empowered members playing a more vibrant role in their unions' day-to-day organizing. The process of reforming the UAW has shown an incredible example of how unions can shake off ossified and bureaucratic leadership, and how movements for internal reform can translate directly into more militant strategies that win significant changes and benefits that go directly into members' pockets.

However, with a razor-thin margin of victory in the 2022 UAW elections for a new leadership based on democratic change, those of us seeking to reform the UAW can't rest on our laurels. It's time to push forward in the fight to strengthen rank-and-file democracy in the union and create a cohesive democratic body of workers, where a return to the dictatorial and aimless Administration Caucus is both undesirable and impossible.

The UAWD slate that won office in 2023 ran on an anti-corruption and pro-transparency agenda, as well as concrete demands for the Big Three Campaign. There's clearly more to do on those fronts, but it's also worth noting that many of the demands in the anti-corruption arena were in reaction to the old Administration Caucus leadership. Now, with the Administration Caucus out of power, the UAWD movement has work to do to define how it intends to strengthen democracy when it holds power.

Another caucus within the UAW, the newly-minted Western States Organizing for Power caucus, was incorporated this year, and brings a promising focus on member-driven campaigns, participatory bargaining, increased focus on member organizing, organizing the unorganized, and strengthening the UAW's campaigns for racial, economic, and social justice.

UAWD and WSOP represent promising trends in terms of members being able to fight to improve their union from within.

UAW members inspired the working class in the 1936 sit-down strike, and have now inspired the working class again in 2023. Moving forward, as the labor movement faces crises and dangers beyond imagination, now is the time for the union to continue showing the way forward to build the kind of militant, democratic, rank-and-file-led movement that is needed to challenge the corporate class and the system of capitalism itself. ■

Writing here in a personal capacity, Mara, she/her, has been a member and organizer in the UAW since 2016 and is a member of the Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) and the Western States Organizing for Power (WSOP) caucuses. She's a member of DSA and Reform & Revolution.

Putting the Justice in a Just Environmental Transition

Already, battery and electric vehicle (EV) plants opening across the US are paying low wages for difficult work in hazardous conditions. Not only are jobs getting worse, they're getting fewer; since EVs have vastly fewer parts than combustion vehicles, the transition to EVs will leave tens of thousands of workers out in the cold without a job.

When climate policy means eliminating good jobs and creating shoddy jobs, it shouldn't be surprising when working-class people oppose it.

Throughout the strike, the UAW made justice in the electrification transition a key demand. The union bargained hard for – and won – important policies like job guarantees for those whose jobs have been eliminated, prevailing wages at joint ventures, the right to strike over plant closures, and, maybe the crowning achievement, the application of the GM Master Agreement to battery plants nationwide.

Moving forward, it will be an uphill struggle to win fair conditions at Tesla, non-union vehicle manufacturers, and the myriad supply chains that support them. Beyond that, there are battles to be fought in other industries like energy production, construction, and freight transportation. The UAW strike shows what a more just transition could look like: one where workers are guaranteed good, union jobs.

Know Your Enemy: Fascism in the US



BY JONATHAN KAY

Understanding the Far-Right Threat in Order to Fight It

The growth of the far right in the US has taken on troubling proportions. Stimulated by the success of Donald Trump's far-right populism, small but nonetheless dangerous openly-fascist groups are mushrooming alongside the radicalizing right wing of the GOP. The neoliberal political system that has been dominant over the past half-century is deteriorating, increasingly marked by widespread anger and frustration with politics as usual.

Fascism is not just right-wing authoritarianism; it is a reactionary movement unleashed in response to the rise of working-class challenges to capitalism.

This is driving a huge polarization in society, with many people searching for a way to win economic, racial, and gender justice and developing left-wing ideas; meanwhile, other sections of society are increasingly turning to nationalism, racism, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia.

While the far right has not shown an ability to win majority support in society, that has not stopped them from trying to enforce their views on society by building an active and organized political movement around far-right ideas and stirring up culture-war battles to drive wedges wherever they can (while still enlisting the help of billionaire backers at every opportunity).

It is this movement-based nature of the current far-right threat that makes it especially serious, with

worrisome parallels to the early stages in the development of fascist movements in the 1920s and '30s. Alongside white supremacy, today's neo-fascist "traditionalists" often focus on gender and sexuality, placing the blame on forces such as the LGBTQ movement for the "degeneration" of society and seeking to squeeze trans and queer people out of existence. The urgency of this threat means we need to take seriously the task of studying the nature of these types of movements and how best to fight back against them.

What Is Fascism?

Since Donald Trump's election in 2016, fascism has become a household term in the United States, though in a confused and often shallow way. Entities as disparate as Russia, Iran, supporters of Donald Trump, supporters of Joe Biden, and Barbie have been called fascist on large platforms by people with ideologies as diverse as their targets. Some Marxist traditions reject the dominant impressionistic usage of the term in favor of more precise, scientific descriptions of fascism, but at times use definitions so restrictive that nothing besides the 20th century fascist movements of Germany and Italy could ever satisfy the criteria.

To most effectively fight fascism, it's necessary to differentiate it from other authoritarian trends and understand its historical development and significant parallels to current developments. This can help the socialist and labor movement today to identify what actions can be taken to defeat these threats.

An early attempt at a scientific definition of fascism was developed by the Marxist Leon Trotsky. In his 1932 work *What Next? Vital Questions of the German Proletariat*, he wrote:

At the moment that the "normal" police and military resources of the bourgeois dictatorship, together with their parliamentary screens, no longer suffice to hold society in a

state of equilibrium – the turn of the fascist regime arrives. Through the fascist agency, capitalism sets in motion the masses of the crazed petty bourgeoisie, and bands of the declassed and demoralized lumpenproletariat; all the countless human beings whom finance capital itself has brought to desperation and frenzy. [...] And the fascist agency, by utilizing the petty bourgeoisie as a battering ram, by overwhelming all obstacles in its path, does a thorough job. [...] When a state turns fascist, it doesn't only mean that the forms and methods of government are changed [...] but it means, primarily and above all, that the workers' organizations are annihilated; that the proletariat is reduced to an amorphous state; and that a system of administration is created which penetrates deeply into the masses and which serves to frustrate the independent crystallization of the proletariat.

The more the capitalists' normal methods and institutions start to seem inadequate for stemming the crisis and preventing workers from taking power, the more willing the bourgeoisie is to let fascism – the political embodiment of the impotent rage and terror of the socially frustrated middle strata – off the leash.

Why the Petty Bourgeoisie?

Leon Trotsky correctly identified the class base of fascism as the petty bourgeoisie, spurred onward by finance capital in a useful but contradictory relationship.

The big bourgeoisie, and specifically finance capital, have the predominant influence over capitalist society, but in a period of critical instability their numbers are too small and their influence too diffuse to directly maintain the usual degree of control over society. The middle classes are significantly more numerous than large capitalists and, crucially, they are incapable of an independent role in class struggle. Being petty bourgeois is an unstable position in capitalist society: they are constantly in danger of being pushed down into the working class and the only lasting escape is either through a workers' revolution or becoming bourgeois. They are a follower class, and will tend to support whichever class seems to offer the greatest hope of a stable future, with splits regularly developing between different layers who take on different allegiances.

When society is running relatively smoothly, capitalists maintain their rule over society with ideological

dominance (such as through media, churches, and schools) and the repressive apparatus of the state. However, things are not running smoothly. Desperation over economic decline, wars driven by US imperialism trying to impose its rule on a disintegrating world, a collapse of the neoliberal order without any replacement in sight – all of that leads to an increasing search for an alternative. This has been expressed recently in many ways on the left: the Black Lives Matter movement, attempts to rebuild labor, the million-strong campaigns of Bernie Sanders for a "political revolution against the billionaire class," and the growth of DSA. However, the reaction to capitalist decline has also been visible on the right, from the Tea Party movement to a radicalizing evangelical movement to Donald Trump's populism.

In times like these, the repressive forces of the capitalist state are emboldened and authoritarianism becomes increasingly visible.

Historically, we see that in the periods immediately before the rise of fascism, business as usual for the bourgeoisie has driven society to the brink of collapse. Capitalist authoritarianism is no longer enough to keep people in check. The middle classes feel this, and become increasingly agitated as they see no way out through their own power.

If the working class does not offer a lead toward a socialist alternative to the capitalist crisis, the situation is ripe for the bourgeoisie to finance the most extreme elements of the middle classes, to train them, to arm them, and to direct them against the elements of society protesting the crisis.

Fascism is not just right-wing authoritarianism; it is a reactionary movement unleashed in response to the rise of working-class challenges to capitalism, aiming to end the threat with the barrel of a gun. It is born of highly-decayed capitalist societies and exists only to extend the life of the decaying body.

Where Are They Now?

Many in the United States see Donald Trump and the most recent wave of extremist right-wing Republicans as evidence that we are living under



Art: Sean Case



Donald Trump to the Proud Boys: “Stand back and stand by”.

Photo shows the Proud Boys at the Million MAGA March in Washington, DC in December, 2020. Photo: Geoff Livingston, tinyurl.com/ProudBoysMAGA, Copyright: CC BY-ND 2.0 Deed, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/

fascism. Indeed, organic reactionary leaders are emerging out of or affiliating with right-wing paramilitary groups like the Three Percenters (Lauren Boebert) and Oathkeepers (Paul Gosar), which are fertile ground for developing the leadership of a future fascist movement. But it is important to our strategy to draw out two significant distinctions.

First, we should acknowledge the difference between fascism and other forms of authoritarianism. Fascism is a specific form of reaction, not an umbrella term. In most cases the degree of martial domination of society described in the Trotsky quote above is neither necessary nor desirable to the big bourgeoisie and the mass of the petty bourgeoisie.

The second distinction important to our strategy is the difference between a fascist individual and a fascist movement. A fascist individual may personally like fascism, be inspired by it, or emulate its politics, but a fascist individual is meaningless without a fascist movement and the conditions that produce such a movement.

Giorgia Meloni, the Italian prime minister, is, despite her occasional protest, almost certainly an ideological fascist. She was the president of a fascist youth organization and loves to publicly praise Mussolini, but she rules like a fairly standard hard-right nationalist. That is, she is virulently anti-LGBTQ, anti-immigrant, and is in favor of restricting abortion rights, cutting taxes for the wealthy, and increasing protective tariffs. She has so far been content to use her bully pulpit and achieve mostly incremental parliamentary gains. There has been no crisis significant enough to require or enable more direct intervention and there is as yet no mass base to carry out fascist forms of direct action. In this way, despite being a fascist individual, her government has not made a fundamental break

from other right-wing governments in Italy, such as that of Silvio Berlusconi or Giulio Andreotti.

Similarly, Donald Trump, despite adding fuel to the rising fires of all that is most socially repugnant in America, governed surprisingly similarly to previous Republican administrations in terms of most of the policies he enacted. Whether an individual is fascist or not can be an interesting or useful question, but it is impossible to see inside a person’s heart, and it is more essential to understand the conditions that individual operates within. For fascism, that means focusing on the movement and the potential for such.

The Kernel of Fascism

What we are witnessing today is the creation of a poisonous soil where future fascist movements can grow. Racist, nationalist, anti-worker, misogynist, homophobic, and transphobic ideas are tested out, developed, and fine-tuned to arouse the rage of people who feel displaced and left out of society. A movement is being built, not necessarily to win a majority in society, but to force through a rollback of rights won over decades past.

Trump’s administration both emboldened the hard-core of a future fascist movement and temporarily marginalized them among broader layers of society. This marginalization in turn helps to solidify that conscious core of the far-right, sharpening their break from the standard capitalist political spectrum and expanding the potential base for future fascist projects.

The most striking example of this is the January 6 riot at the US Capitol. Paramilitary organizations like the Proud Boys and Oathkeepers were the most coordinated elements of the riot, but they carried behind them a group mostly composed of small business owners and white-collar professionals. The lumpen

and criminal elements that have historically accounted for the majority of right-wing extremists in the US were also present, but in this case they constituted less than a third of the participants.

These groups are the core that fascism is most likely to organize around, and it is extremely concerning to see them put into motion. But the ultimate effect of the fiasco of January 6 was a marked shift in public consciousness away from (an admittedly poorly-defined) “extremism,” towards a desire for the more mundane capitalist authoritarianism we are used to, and a temporary increase in state repression against these neo-fascist forces.

How to Fight Them

Socialists and the labor movement cannot rely on the tools of bourgeois state repression to fight fascism, as those tools are under the direction of an enemy class and are indeed well-suited for fighting a workers’ movement. Today the capitalist state might express an interest in reducing the activities of pre-fascist forces. Tomorrow the capitalist class may be more interested in reducing the activities of working-class and socialist forces and the actions of the state will follow.

Fighting fascism and the far-right has two main tasks. On the one hand, it is about offering a way out of the crisis of capitalism through building a socialist movement with strong, independent working-class organizations. On the other hand, it is about building a united movement against the fascists and the far-right.

These two poles go together: while not shying away from joining coalitions to actively oppose the far right, the differences between socialist/working-class policies and other ideas in such coalitions need to be made visible. It will not work to fight the right if socialists and labor appear as an appendix of the pro-capitalist Democratic Party.

It is easier to win workers in red states away from Trumpian ideas and toward socialist ones than to convince them to support the corrupt Democratic Party. Bernie Sanders’ campaign showed the deep potential for building support for socialist and working-class ideas – and also the limits of what can be realistically achieved within the Democratic Party.

Unlike the ultraleft refusal to engage in negotiations or joint actions with the reformist organizations at all, such as that seen under the Comintern’s 1928-1934 “Third Period” policy (which considered even

the reformists and liberals to be “social fascists”), a united-front approach recognizes the seriousness of the far-right threat and the need to direct the combined efforts of the widest possible sections of the workers’ movement against it.

And unlike tactics that do away with organized opposition to the dominant reformist organizations by accepting a joint program of action with liberal capitalist forces even in governments – such as the Comintern’s 1934-1939 “Popular Front” policy – a united-front approach stems from a recognition that forces such as the pro-capitalist center-left parties and trade-union bureaucracy are still ultimately enemies to be defeated, with any compromises or coordination with them being purely tactical and situational.

The task is to build a working-class party that can fight the far-right threats and offer an alternative to all capitalist policies, including liberal ones.

Something akin to the Popular Front theory of antifascism is also widespread on both the anarcho-liberal and right-reformist wings of DSA, in which the need to defeat Republican fascists is so overwhelmingly dire that we cannot afford to take any action which harms their other ostensible opponents, the Democrats, who are more powerful than us and thus must be propped up until the fascist threat is over.

The Popular Front theory does not contend with the fact that fascism arises precisely out of the collapse of the society dominated by these liberal organizations, and that if they were not already hated and distrusted for that failure and instability there would not be fascism. Nor does it contend with the fact that these organizations are not particularly committed to fighting the rise of fascism. Democrats will condemn Republicans as fascists at the same time as they fetishize bipartisanship.

Most damning, the Popular Front does not propose a method by which we are to secure a base for ourselves among workers who are appalled by the far-right and by the Democrats, and who are desperately searching for a way forward. ■

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Resisting Climate Despair



BY MEG MORRIGAN

Breaking the Hegemony of Fatalism in the Face of the Climate Crisis and Capitalist Decline – with Solarpunk and Acid Communism

The world is careening towards climate catastrophe at ever-increasing rates. The overwhelming sense that there is nothing to be done is pervasive, especially as the understanding begins to spread that most of us are not contributing to the lion's share of emissions personally, but that corporations and the ultra-rich are the culprits who are dumping obscene levels of pollutants into the air, water, and earth.

It is paramount that we overcome fatalism and enact a new kind of radical imagination, a cultural rejection of despair in favor of optimism.

"It is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism," Mark Fisher wrote in his seminal book *Capitalist Realism*. Fisher outlines how the hegemony of neoliberal ideas – their claim that "there is no alternative" (Margaret Thatcher) – turned into the biggest obstacle for change. Drawing a parallel to the 1960s and '70s, Fisher reminds us of the expectations of that time, that for a whole layer in society revolution seemed not just realistic, but inevitable. Fisher writes:

Of course, we now know that the revolution did not happen. But the material conditions for such a revolution are more in place in the twenty-first century than they were in 1977. What has shifted beyond all recognition since then is the existential and emotional atmosphere. [...] We must regain the optimism of that Seventies moment, just as we must carefully analyze all the machineries that capital deployed to convert confidence into dejection. (from Introduction to Acid Communism)

So, if humanity is going to have any kind of shot at survival on a mass scale, it is paramount that we overcome fatalism and enact a new kind of radical imagination, a cultural rejection of despair in favor of optimism. Indeed, avoiding the worst of climate disasters will go hand-in-hand with the end of capitalism, linking these two imaginaries inextricably.

Dystopia, Doomerism, Eco-Horror

The public imagination exists in our art and media, and especially our fiction. It is how we communicate our ideals, our hopes and dreams, our fears. When we look towards it to understand society's feelings about climate change, indeed about our future in general, we overwhelmingly see despair. Novels set in nightmarish futures of authoritarianism and violence are extremely popular; just think of *The Hunger Games*, *The Road*, *The City of Ember*, and hundreds more.

In film, many titles that deal with the environment and humanity's relationship to nature fall into the category of "eco-horror," a subgenre of horror that examines nature as a malevolent force set upon destroying humanity in much the same way it has been destroyed. Such films include *Annihilation*, *The Happening*, *The Birds*, and more. Occasionally one of these films might end with some level of optimism, but more often the final moments show the destruction of society and devolution of humans back into nature. Essentially, collapse.

A similar but distinct genre is that of the disaster movie. Think *Twister*, *The Impossible*, and *The Day After Tomorrow*. In disaster films nature also plays the villain, less in a malevolent and more in a ruthlessly violent way; but unlike in eco-horror the focus of these films tends to be on the triumph of human spirit over even the worst of nature. In disaster movies, people win; in eco-horror, generally nature wins.

One popular example is the video-game-turned-TV-show *The Last of Us*. It is set in a world that has been ravaged by a global outbreak of a cordyceps fungi that has evolved to infect human hosts, turning them into mostly mindless but

violent creatures. In this post-apocalyptic world what remains of society is a dystopian nightmare – the cities that remain are under martial law, while smaller rural communities rely on fierce control and policing of their members to maintain safety from outsiders. Combining malevolent mushrooms with a zombie apocalypse and ensuing societal collapse makes this a perfect example of eco-horror: humans are literally reclaimed by the forces of nature and in turn become agents of nature's wrath. However, the possibility of immunity and a potential cure gives it a slightly more hopeful edge.

Most of our imagination is focused on distraction, escapism, and fantasy.

These are just a handful of efforts to discuss environmental issues in art and media. If we take a broader view, these represent a relatively small portion of the media produced and consumed worldwide. Most of our imagination is focused on distraction, escapism, and fantasy. It is painful to face the realities of late-stage capitalism and imminent climate catastrophe. It is telling that some of the most popular entertainment of our time are murder and crime stories, glamorizing and fetishizing crimes of rage and despair that are often the direct result of our economic and political reality – capitalist realism made trendy.

Resisting Doomerism – Embracing Acid Communism

One of Mark Fisher's last works before he died was titled "Introduction to Acid Communism," the beginning of a book he would never finish. Many have since taken up the debate as to what exactly he meant by the phrase *Acid Communism*, but my understanding of it is this:

Much in the way LSD has the ability to open one's mind and create a profound sense of connection to nature, the universe, and one's fellow humans, so too do artistic expressions have qualities of transcendence and connection that create potential avenues for political radicalization. Fisher goes out of his way to clarify

Climate Optimism in Social Media

The solarpunk genre is especially beginning to grow in social media circles. Posts under the solarpunk hashtag on TikTok regularly gain hundreds of thousands of likes and are widely reshared. But even a cursory glance through TikTok and Instagram hashtag feeds show the same images being shared over and over. There is room, even hunger, for more artists to create and share art that imagines radically sustainable futures. Here are just a few of my personal favorite "climate influencers":

@joan_de_art is a self-proclaimed "social worker by day, solarpunk artist by night" on Instagram whose widely shared drawing "Our Environmental Dream-house" taps into the current Barbie-mania with a climate-positive and communal twist. (See below)

Author, environmental journalist, and BookTok-er **Sim Kern** (@simkern on TikTok) not only explores climate issues in their writing, including their most recent novel "The Free People's Village," they also have an ongoing TikTok series called "Solarpunk Grampy" where, using the aged filter, they talk to imaginary future generations about the incredible climate-positive society they live in and take for granted, using the "back in my day" trope to point out the utterly ridiculous and unsustainable habits of today.

Oli Frost (@olifro.st on Instagram) is a musician making "novelty songs about the climate crisis, mostly." Perhaps his most "viral" hit has been "The Vampire Conspiracy," which begins, "Of course climate change is a conspiracy made up by socialist vampires to push policies. A greener, fairer world, that's our evil plot. Free-range organic humans have the most delicious blood!"

Eco-rapper and comedian **Hila the Earth** (@hilatheeearth on Instagram) also makes novelty and educational songs and videos for the social media age, singing and rapping about everything on this "Wet Ass Planet" from mushrooms to the ocean, often while wearing a giant Earth costume or costumes of other Earth creatures. She also recently performed in a climate drag show hosted by drag queen, National Park ranger, and another of my favorite social media environmentalists, Pattie Gonia (@pattiegonia on Instagram).

These are just some of the more prominent artists centering their work on climate optimism, and they show the depth and range of creative expression that can be utilized towards this end. But while they have millions of followers between them, their reach is still inherently limited, as is any individual artist. There is so much space for yet more artists, working in all mediums, to create art that envisions positive and radical responses to climate change, encourages people to embrace nature, and generate climate optimism.

that he does not simply mean that if everybody just dropped a tab then we'd have a socialist revolution, but instead goes into depth about the ineffable, nearly hallucinogenic effect that art, music, dance, films, theater, and community gatherings can impart. This suspension of reality and rising to a higher mental, emotional, even spiritual plane represent a vital opportunity to grow political consciousness in ways that people can connect to on a different level than a debate or book study might have.

Essentially, Acid Communism is a call for radical imagination. It is Fisher's answer to "capitalist realism," the hegemonic sentiment that it's not realistic to expect anything except capitalism's continued dominance. To counter what "the last forty years have been about," according to Fisher: "the exorcising of 'the specter of a world which could be free.'"

Revolutionary Imaginaries: Afrofuturism, Solarpunk, and more

There are already artists who are exploring the potentials of imagining new, hopeful possible futures for humanity.

Science fiction is one area that contains infinite possibilities for a revolutionary imagination. Though the purview of sci-fi is typically things like space and time travel, some authors take a more grounded approach. Writers in the subgenre of Afrofuturism are an excellent example. Though diverse in tone and content, Afrofuturism imagines a future Earth where the African people are finally raised to the level of political and economic power that their continent's vast natural resources should provide, if it weren't for the insidious intervention of the white West. Octavia Butler is a paragon of this genre, and another popular and noteworthy author is NK Jemisen, whose short stories and novels explore many different aspects of an Earthly society that is built on equity, justice, and African power.

Another author exercising a radical imagination is Kim Stanley Robinson. In his books, such as *2312* and *New York: 2140*, Robinson explores a future Earth society that is more in harmony, both with nature and within humanity. *The Ministry for the Future* is a particularly compelling work. Set in the extremely near future, approximately 2030 to 2050, it is an imagining of how humanity might finally deal with the climate crisis. Though it is considered "sci-fi," it is thoroughly researched and feels realistic, depicting scenes of extreme weather catastrophes like a deadly Indian heatwave and the flooding of Los Angeles which in turn catalyze humanity towards climate action.

Robinson's works are some of the most prominent examples of the solarpunk subgenre. Solarpunk is a sort of spin-off of other sci-fi subgenres, such as steampunk and cyberpunk, but whereas steampunk imagines alternate histories where modern technologies are created using analog mechanics and cyberpunk imagines often dystopian futures where computer and robot technology permeates every aspect of life, solarpunk imagines worlds both present and future wherein nature holds the most power in society, not human institutions. This is a relatively new but growing genre. It is important to point out that solarpunk is not just a genre of creative fiction, but is also being embraced as an actual movement striving for a post-capitalist, eco-socialist future.

A Diffused Media Landscape

The media landscape has dispersed over several streaming and social media platforms, and not everybody uses every service. This complicates the idea of a "cultural touchstone" – something that nearly everybody has seen and understands. If you don't shell out for a premium HBO subscription, you may not have seen *The Last of Us*, for instance.

This may seem like a death knell for any idea of climate optimism "going viral," but in fact it opens the field up to a more diverse array of content that can reach into all facets of society. In fact, it is silly to hope that one single work could possibly have the kind of global impact that is needed. We need artists of all types to embrace climate optimism and center their art on it. We must reject capitalist and climate realism and embrace alternative imaginations of a future in harmony with Earth and each other.

But eco-positive art is not the end. It is only one very important step in our transformation of society. A deluge of climate positive art can help tip the scales of cultural hegemony away from doomerism and towards revolutionary optimism, but it will be empty and void without a robust mass movement for climate justice, environmental equity, and eco-socialism behind it. We must begin making these cultural shifts now. Without a decisive break from capitalism we will never win a just transformation of society, and every small reform won along the way will be subject to rollback, declawing, and counter-reforms. The cultural movement towards climate positivity must go hand-in-hand with a socialist revolution. We have a world to win!

Meg Morrigan, they/them, is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America and the Reform & Revolution caucus.

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PSOL Convention Heatedly Debates Relationship to Lula



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Should Socialists Ally with Lula or Prepare to Oppose His Government?

Twelve months ago, the left across the globe breathed a collective sigh of relief as we heard the far-right president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, had been beaten by the center-left former president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. One year later, the tensions and struggles in the Brazilian socialist party, PSOL, are a cause of concern for us all, argues Cian Prendiville, an international observer at PSOL's recent convention.

I was honored to attend the 8th National Congress of Brazil's broad socialist party, PSOL (Partido Socialismo e Liberdade – "Socialism and Liberty Party"), from September 29 to October 1. Almost 450 delegates came together, representing 53,000 activists who participated in local and regional conventions. They were joined by many more national and international observers keen to follow the debates. The traumas of the last decade weighed heavily over the convention, as we gathered in the same city that only months beforehand had been the site of the Bolsonaroist "insurrection."



PSOL Navigating Rough Waters

The election that brought Lula back into office was very closely fought. A swing of 0.9 percent from Lula to Bolsonaro would have seen the outcome reversed. The far right did not accept the election results, with thousands of Bolsonaro supporters storming the National Congress, Supreme Court, and Presidential Palace, and calling on the military to stage a coup.

Bolsonaro's four years as president were disastrous for workers, indigenous people, women, LGBT+ people, and the planet. His COVID-denialism saw 700,000 people die as he put the profits of big business before protecting and supporting people. Deforestation of the Amazon increased dramatically, with 10,800 square kilometers being chopped down in 2020 alone. He attempted to atomize workers and cripple their unions, outlawing the collection of union fees at payroll level, and pushing deregulation and casualization of work.

The specter of Bolsonaroism still haunts the country, with the right having a majority in Brazil's National Congress and controlling many key states and cities. Just days after the PSOL convention, public transit workers and water workers in São Paulo went out on strike against the privatization plans of the right-wing governor. Lurking in the shadows is Bolsonaro himself, plotting another run for president in 2026.

These are the rough waters that the broad socialist party PSOL is trying to navigate. In last year's elections PSOL backed Lula, but after a serious debate they agreed not to join his government, pointing in particular to the inclusion of many neoliberal and right-wing politicians as ministers in the coalition. However, it was nonetheless agreed that indigenous activist and PSOL member, Sônia Guajajara, would accept the invitation from Lula to be a minister in his government and to form a new Ministry of Indigenous Peoples. This was seen as a historic attempt to undo some of the centuries of oppression they have faced.

It was against this backdrop that PSOL held its convention (the 8th PSOL National Congress) from September 29 to October 1, 2023.

A Divided Convention

At the convention, two main blocs became clear. Por um PSOL de Todos as Lutas (PTL – "For a PSOL of All Struggles") were a clear majority from the outset, with the Bloco de Esquerda ("Left Bloc") a militant minority. Within each bloc were numerous different groupings, and a veritable alphabet soup of acronyms to learn.

According to the PTL majority, the party is divided between those who understand the threat from the far right and those who don't. They argue the Left Bloc has been slow to realize how serious the threat of fascism is, and that they risk aiding the far right by focusing on opposing the Lula government. PTL is led by PSOL Popular, an alliance of two big organizations: Primavera Socialista, who have been part of the leadership of the party since its founding, and the newer Revolução Solidária (RS) mentioned above. RS is closely aligned with Guilherme Boulos, who is considered by some a possible future "heir" to Lula, winning his endorsement in the run for mayor of Brazil's largest city, São Paulo, next year.

The left wing of PTL, Semente, succeeded in pushing for PSOL not to join Lula's government, and have called for criticizing the PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores – "Workers' Party," the center-left party Lula represents) when needed. However, along with their allies in PTL, they see Lula as a uniquely popular figure able to challenge Bolsonaroism, and they emphasize the importance of united fronts with the PT and Lula. While there are debates within PTL on the precise balance of collaboration and criticism, they are united in

seeing representatives like Boulos as key to winning support from PT to PSOL.

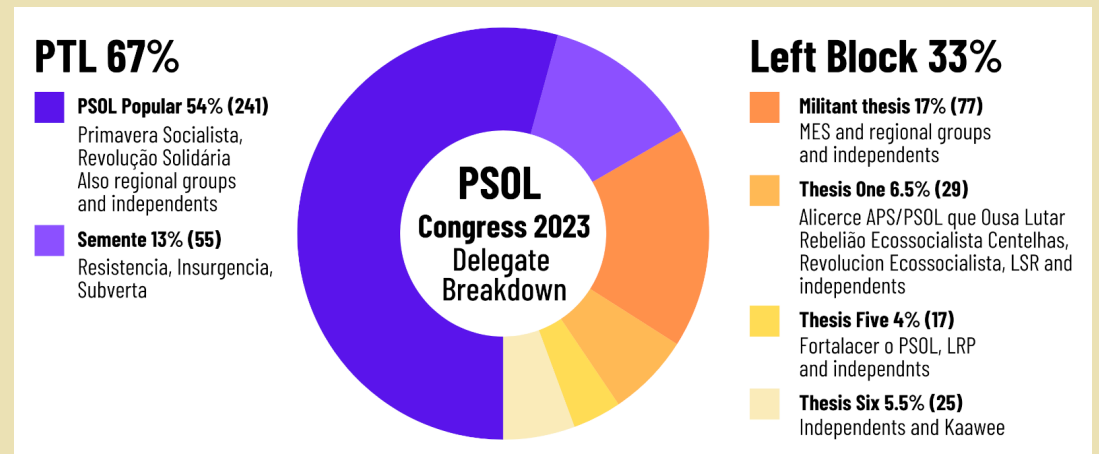
For the Left Bloc, the core issue is the need for independence from the Lula government and to appeal to those workers and poor people who are not Bolsonaroists but are skeptical of the PT. They believe more and more people are likely to grow frustrated with Lula and his coalition with right-wing individuals and parties, as they manage a capitalist system in crisis. While supporting united front work and alliances with PT, they emphasize the need for independent socialist messaging in that. They criticize PSOL's current leadership for not doing this and instead blurring the lines with PT. In particular, the Left Bloc warned of a slow drift into joining the Lula government.

Further conflicts and debates in the party are likely, too, particularly over relations with the Lula government.

(For reporting on further convention debates around topics like Lula's first budget, tax reforms, election strategy for 2024, and more, read the extended version of this article online at ReformAndRevolution.org)

A Fight Over the Apparatus

The final session of the convention proved the most controversial, as debates over division of key positions within the party apparatus spilled over into physical confrontation and violence.





The convention elects an executive board to run the party for three years, but within that there are three key positions: President, Treasurer, and head of the party's publishing and educational foundation. According to PSOL's founding statutes, the first two positions are elected by proportional representation, with President going to the biggest tendency and Treasurer going to the second-biggest, while the chair of the foundation is appointed by the President. Because only two roles are elected, the threshold for getting at least one of the two roles is winning a third of the votes. This means that so long as the minority have one-third of the delegates, they would take the Treasurer role, while the majority take the Presidency.

Far from resolving the conflicts, it seems the convention has heightened them.

In PSOL's 3rd National Congress in 2011, which was very divided, they feared this system would make the functioning of the party very difficult. Instead, a new system was agreed, in which the chair of the foundation is also elected at convention, going to the third-biggest tendency. Because there are now three roles up for election, the threshold for winning at least one is lowered to a quarter of the vote instead of a third, making it harder for one tendency to take all three positions. This is the system that has been used for the last five conventions.

This year, the Left Bloc was diminished, leaving PTL with around two-thirds of the delegates. In the final run-up to the convention, a proposal emerged to revert to the original process, which could have

allowed PSOL Popular to take the two party roles and Semente to get the foundation role, leaving the minority with none of the positions.

This unleashed a major struggle inside PSOL. One of the Marxist organizations in PSOL, Movimento Esquerda Socialista (MES), called it a "coup" and warned it could split the organization. There were allegations that a supporter of the majority offered jobs or other benefits to delegates of the Left Bloc to get them to leave the convention without voting, and counter-allegations that the Left Bloc were trying to get Semente delegates to break with the democratic centralism of their groups and abstain. In the end, it seems that three Left Bloc delegates did leave and two from Insurgência (part of Semente in PTL) said they would abstain, ending the two-thirds majority, unless the proposal was dropped. This led to a last-minute amendment to follow the same compromise as before, with PSOL Popular winning the two party positions and MES taking the foundation role.

Convention Heightens Tensions

This outcome, however, was extremely contentious and sparked a physical confrontation near the end of the convention. Rival groups squared up to each other at the stage. There are allegations of pushing, and I personally saw a punch being thrown, all of which is now being investigated by the party. This investigation will likely be an ongoing flash point in the party, with rows about it already spilling over to social media.

Further conflicts and debates in the party are likely, too, particularly over relations with the Lula government and alliances with anti-Bolsonaro parts of the right in next year's elections. For instance, the Left Bloc are warning that the new majority for PSOL Popular will bring the party closer and closer to the government, or even lead to PSOL failing to oppose anti-worker measures from the government, especially because PSOL Popular are no longer reliant on Semente. They warn that if this happens they will vocally oppose it, setting the scene for further public debates in the future.

Far from resolving the conflicts, it seems the convention has heightened them, and the waters ahead are more treacherous than ever. ■

Cian Prendiville, he/him, is a member of RISE, a revolutionary eco-socialist network in People Before Profit (PBP) Ireland, and was an invited observer at the PSOL convention. He was previously a socialist city councillor and parliamentary candidate in Limerick City and was a member of the PBP Steering Committee from 2021 to 2023. He is currently the chief editor of Rupture magazine, podcast, and website.

Five Reflections from the Outside

❶ PSOL has managed to build a very significant party that is known in every town and city, and within which there is a high level of discussion of eco-socialist ideas. They have rejected the isolation and insular approach of many socialist groups, and built something which has huge potential, at a scale beyond anything I have experienced.

❷ In many ways, the debates at the PSOL convention were more politicized than those I've observed in People Before Profit in Ireland or DSA in the US, with various tendencies outlining developed political theses and analysis for the convention. However, the main thrust of the actual debates seemed more theatrical than theoretical. It's not just the culture of competitive chanting, but the debates themselves tended to see a lot of harsh characterizations of opponents – for instance, as coup-plotters, or as abstract academics unconcerned about poor people – rather than real comradesly debate.

❸ The venue, decorations, booklets, and general professional set-up were very impressive. However, the big budget of PSOL seems to be reliant on massive state money for political parties, with very little independent fundraising. While some tendencies adopt a policy where elected public representatives only take a worker's wage, PSOL itself has no such position. This adds to tensions, especially given the low wages and insecurity Brazilian workers face. Jobs and money therefore became both weapons and battlegrounds in the debates. The maneuvering over control of the foundation was an alarming example of this, and I would be concerned that a "winner-takes-all" approach in the future would lead to a split.

❹ While PSOL has officially agreed to remain independent of the Lula government, precisely what that means is very unclear. At a session for international visitors hosted by Minister Guajajara, I asked about the tensions she felt being a minister while PSOL as a party were not in government. She replied that "PSOL are in government because I am there," something that at least the Semente wing of PTL refutes. In reality, it seems an awkward compromise has been adopted, within which PSOL are moving inch-by-inch into a class-collaboration coalition. There is a real danger of the party being tied up in knots if controversial government policies or issues emerge, allowing Brazil's right-wing forces a clear field to capitalize on anger if Lula's government fails to deliver on the hopes of its mass base (as seems very likely).

❺ Sometimes leftists internationally can cry wolf, with warnings of an impending fascist threat. However, the threat of dictatorship, while set back for the moment, is very much real in Brazil. The strength of the far right, including their militias and military supporters, is beyond any comparisons with the US or EU. Military coup is a definite possibility in the decade ahead, and fighting that threat is crucial. This means united -front work, and within those united fronts ensuring there is a militant socialist alternative to the government to be a pole of attraction as capitalism's crises deepen. There is an inevitable contradiction between Lula's coalition – which encompasses right-wing politicians, big businesses, and capitalism – and the desires of workers, women, indigenous, and young people for a decent quality of life. The clash between those opposing forces could fuel further crises, and lead to shifts right or left in the years ahead.



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