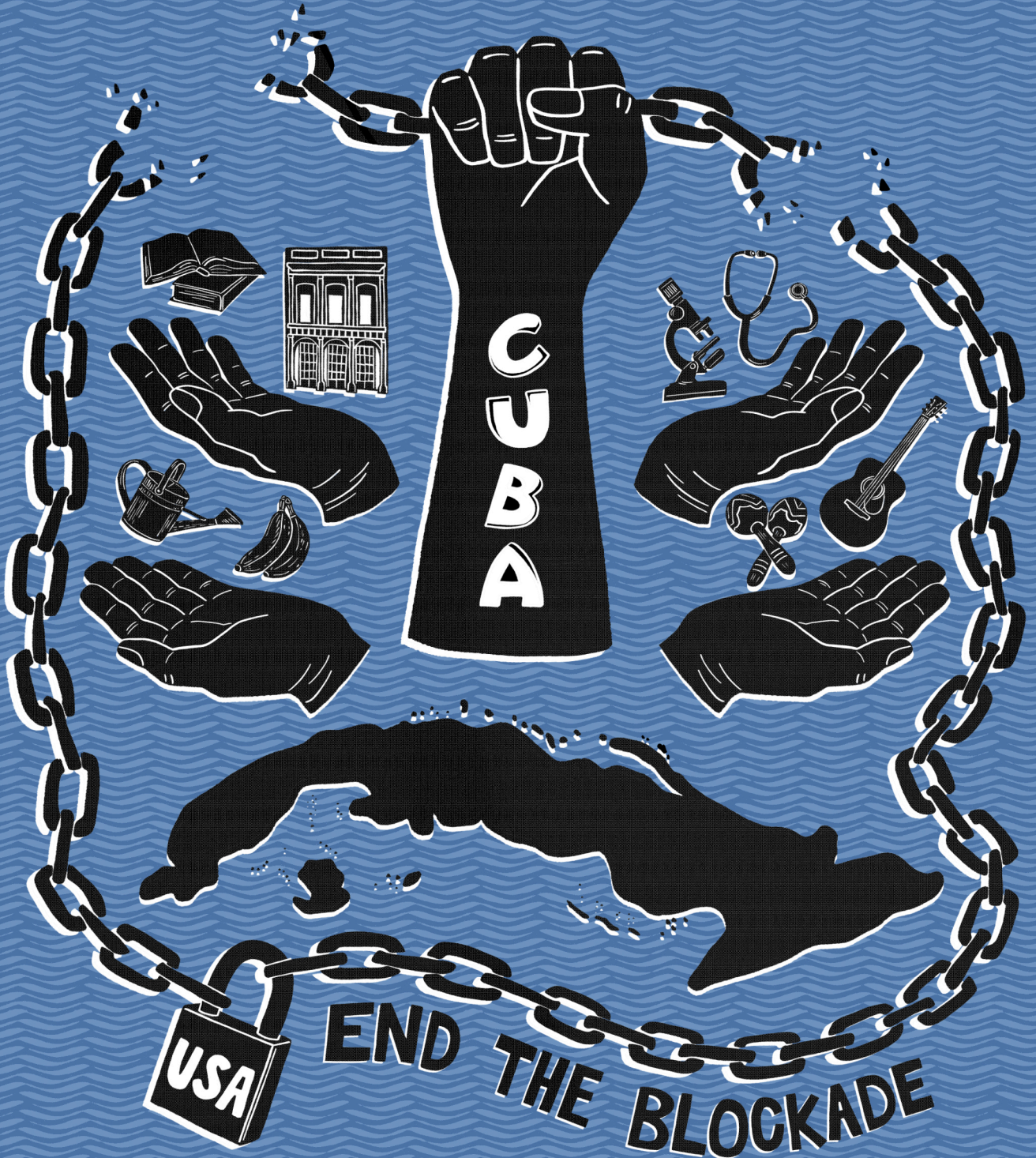


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Where is the Socialist Movement Going?



BY THE EDITORS

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The 2024 presidential election is a grim reflection of the one before, with Donald Trump and Joe Biden facing off again. Since Biden took office, social movements are stuck in an ebb that has resulted from challenges they were unprepared to face. This includes movement and labor leaders trailing the Democrats, and trying to pump the brakes as soon as they're in power.

This ebb has been interrupted over the last few months by a significant movement for solidarity with Palestine, after the 75-year occupation reached another breaking point with the US-funded war on Gaza. Despite its relatively small size, the boldness with which the movement has broken from the mainstream ruling-class consensus of support for Israel has been striking.

While this offers an important opportunity for the left and DSA, and many DSA comrades are deeply involved in this struggle, DSA nationally is again primarily looking inward. Years of poor leadership have led us into a budget crisis with a deficit of over \$1,000,000.

In this issue of *Reform & Revolution* magazine, we therefore look at a key question: *Where is the socialist movement going?*

We believe that DSA can overcome the challenges it's facing right now if it begins taking steps toward becoming a campaigning organization, returning to bold demands and strategies which can break through the awful prospects of today's political situation. Tens of thousands of people joined DSA in the struggle against Trump because we were able to present a class-struggle alternative to the politics of the capitalist class. Living up to that not only means democratically facing our internal problems head on, but offering a renewed and fighting vision for democratic socialism today and into the future.

Within these pages, we also take a sober look at socialism's prospects internationally. The Cuban Revolution successfully ousted the dictator Fulgencio Batista on New Year's Day, 1959. This year is beginning with no such revolutionary inspirations. US imperialism is anemically stretching across the globe, throwing it into a maelstrom of war and poverty, while Cuba, the last tie to the half-finished revolutions of the 20th century, suffers from an unbearable blockade and a moribund bureaucracy. A reflection from DSA's recent delegation to Cuba shows that things can't continue the way they have been for so long with an uncertain future ahead.

We hope the reflections on movements, revolutions, and revolutionaries which are contained here point to routes forward in a world in flux.

In solidarity,

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



Sleepwalking Into a Nightmare



BY ROSEMARY DODD

📷 MARXIST_BARBIE

Trump or Biden – The Outlook is Bleak. But it’s Even Worse if DSA Continues Without a Bold, Visible, Socialist Set of Demands

When I last wrote an article looking to the future in the US (“Sustained Pessimism,” May 2023), I wrote of the malaise and stagnation that has permeated society in general and the left in particular. After the boost in worker and socialist organizing starting with the Occupy movement and culminating in Bernie Sanders’ two presidential runs and the explosive growth of DSA, there has been a lull in social movements under Biden and a slow-burn crisis in DSA.

Now, at the dawn of 2024, things are still bleak: US-backed genocide careening towards a regional war in the Middle East; a presidential rematch between two ossified political relics; record carbon emissions; and a left that is as yet unable to offer a viable alternative to the millions dissatisfied with the status quo.

But it’s vital not to lose sight of the possible. The objective situation is riper than ever for revolutionary organizing and the left is on better footing than it was pre-Occupy, but without a proactive shift in strategy and learning the lessons of the recent past, socialists will have no way to build on the explosive movements sure to come.

Eroding Trust in US Institutions

There’s a chasm between people’s expectations and reality, leading to the undermining of the authority of capitalist institutions. This is perfectly distilled in the US presidential elections: two historically unpopular candidates are overwhelmingly likely to once again be the top options for US voters in November.

Speaking right before the January 2024 Iowa caucuses, Doug Gross, a Republican lawyer, said, “You get the feeling in Iowa right now that we’re sleepwalking into a nightmare and there’s nothing we can do about it” (*New York Times*). This sense of doom is keenly felt on both sides of the political spectrum. According to a November 2023 Monmouth poll, 69% of voters are not enthusiastic about Biden vs. Trump.

What’s the only hope for Democrats in November? The Republicans.

Despite a relatively strong start to his presidency with the American Rescue Plan, Biden is hemorrhaging support. According to 538, a website that aggregates opinion polls, his approval rating is at 39%, far lower than presidents who have won a second term historically. The Covid-era neo-Keynesian social programs under Trump and Biden that pulled millions out of poverty have been allowed to die a quiet death by Biden’s Administration. Additionally, his enabling of the genocide in Gaza is wildly out of step with the Democratic base, 76% of whom want a ceasefire (*Data For Progress*).

Biden is also losing ground with key demographics. After supporting Biden in 2020, young people and Hispanics now prefer Trump 37 to 33% and 39 to 34%





Mass protest marked Trump's first term. This is not guaranteed for a second Trump term.

Photo: Mark Dixon, tinyurl.com/wmarch2017, Copyright: CC BY 2.0 Deed, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en

respectively. Black voters have dropped their support for Biden from 87% in 2020 to just 63%, and one in five Black voters say they plan to support a third party candidate (*USA Today*).

What's the only hope for Democrats in November? The Republicans. In lieu of a platform for what they could accomplish for people, Democrats plan to win with a two-pronged strategy: January 6th and abortion. As Biden said at a January 5th campaign event, "Democracy is on the ballot. Your freedom is on the ballot." When it comes to abortion, they're not promising to actually reinstate rights, but correctly pointing out that Republicans will further restrict them. Based on Democrats' higher-than-expected performance in the midterms, this strategy might just work.

Trump is also limping into this race. By and large, people in the US are disgusted with January 6th, and Trump's legal issues, while a rallying point for his base, are likely to turn off independents, especially if he is convicted of a crime. While current polling suggests Trump will narrowly win, the race remains a toss up.

Critically, there's a surge in interest in third party candidates. Political eclectic Robert Kennedy Jr. is garnering a whopping 21% of voters, the highest support for a third party candidate since Ross Perot. Jill Stein and Cornel West are polling at 3% each (for context, Green Party candidate Howie Hawkins received 0.26% of the vote in 2020).

Of course, these numbers will likely be suppressed in the actual election as voters hold their noses and vote to block their least favorite candidate. But this hunger for an alternative needs to be a lesson for the left: if weak and ideologically incoherent campaigns are garnering approximately a fourth of support from the electorate, there's a major opening for a serious left alternative in politics. As the weakness and conservatism of the Democrats paves the way for another potential Trump Administration, it's more urgent than ever to build a democratic socialist party.

Election Shenanigans

Bourgeois democracy in the US, already a far cry from being truly democratic, seems determined to further delegitimize itself this election cycle. The Florida Democratic Party has canceled its primary altogether. Likewise, Biden will be the only option in the Democratic primaries in Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

There is also an effort to remove Trump from the Republican primary ballot over his role in the January 6 riot. Some on the left have welcomed this move, with Cori Bush tweeting, "The former white supremacist-in-chief has no place near the Oval Office, or any office for that matter." This position is understandable: why not use every tool in our arsenal to prevent a racist reactionary from returning to office? However, this would be a gift for the far-right, a fast track to radicalization for Trump's base.

The task is to *politically* defeat Trump and right-wing populism, and relying on the capitalist state to remove undesirable candidates from the ballot would not only be used against left-wing candidates in the future, it would also make it impossible for the left to peel away some sections of Trump supporters with a working-class platform. The Supreme Court has agreed to rule on the matter and will almost certainly allow Trump back onto the ballot. But DSA and our electeds should not align ourselves with this counterproductive strategy.

Bad or Worse?

What will the next administration look like? At the core of the answer is the inability of capitalism to offer a better future.

When it comes to the economy, Biden has achieved something closer to a “soft landing” than I predicted in “Sustained Pessimism.” Inflation has slowed and the economy has so far not fallen into recession. However, living standards for workers and the middle class have been eroded, and key aspects of cost of living continue to grow significantly. According to real estate data provider ATTOM, the median price of single family residences have become less affordable (when compared to wages) in 99% of the counties analyzed as of September 2023. With basics like housing and food still breaking the bank for many working-class people, it’s not surprising that 64% disapprove of Biden’s handling of the economy (CBS).

The best case scenario for the economy is sluggish growth, while the devastation of the environment and imperialist wars lay the groundwork for future brutal crises. Despite this economic outlook, Biden’s lack of campaign promises suggests that we’ll see more of the past two years, with few of the social programs and progressive executive orders of his early presidency.

But what would Trump round two look like? Major liberal outlets run with sensational headlines about the “end of democracy” and “dictatorship,” but these warnings are nothing new and, while horrible things did happen during Trump’s first term, none of the most dire warnings came to pass. But could this be a case of the establishment media that cried wolf?

More likely than an authoritarian coup is a continuation of Trump’s pro-billionaire agenda.

During his first term, Trump was successfully blocked on key aspects of his agenda by the so-called deep state and very well may have learned the lesson to appoint an even more radical administration in the future. And as futile as January 6th was, it was a bridge crossed that changed both Trump and his supporters.

More likely than an authoritarian coup, however, is a continuation of his anti-worker, pro-billionaire agenda. For instance, replacing Biden’s relatively pro-worker NLRB with billionaire class lackeys will empower corporations like Starbucks and Amazon to quash their fledgling unions.

On foreign policy, while it might be difficult to imagine a president more accommodating towards Israel than Biden, Trump would be worse. He has a history of complete support for Israel (moving the US embassy to Jerusalem) and disdain for Palestinian lives (blocking \$200 million in aid for Gaza in 2018).

However, the most radical part of Trump’s agenda will likely be on immigration. Despite criticizing Trump’s immigration policies on the campaign trail, Biden has largely left them in place for Trump to build on in the future. In truly Hitler-esque fashion, Trump has insisted multiple times that immigrants are “poisoning the blood of our country.” If elected again, Trump is likely to more effectively go after immigrants, all while stoking a culture war blaming them for the woes of American workers.

Under Trump 1.0, the left grew and DSA exploded in membership and activity. This is not guaranteed for a second Trump term without the right analysis and slogans. During his first term, the left went on the offense with bold calls for Medicare for All, student debt cancellation, a Green New Deal, and a political revolution against the billionaire class. A demoralized, timid left that is not offering an alternative to capitalist policies will not be able to attract the numbers necessary to fight back.

Movement Lessons Unlearned

As the country is gripped by another presidential cycle, DSA so far has no answer for workers wondering how to engage in this bleak political situation. Prominent DSA electeds, like AOC and Cori Bush, as well as local DSA candidates, will mostly uncritically endorse Biden. Without a clear, independent approach, DSA will be sidelined in the coming year. To read more on potential ways DSA should engage in the elections, see pages 8 to 11.

DSA went into the August 2023 Convention in a state of decline. Delegates elected a new, more left-leaning National Political Committee (NPC), which was a step in the right direction. However, the staff-driven state of the organization has remained, with changes here and there but no fundamentally new direction. The resignation of 12-year National Director Maria Svart offers an opportunity for the left majority on the NPC to steer the organization away from tailing the Democrats.

The eruption of the Palestine solidarity movement has raised DSA’s profile and chapters have in some cases done remarkable work organizing coalitions and engaging in powerful protests. However, there has been a lack of political and organizational leadership from DSA nationally. While our national leadership has put out statements and created a

webpage encouraging members to call their Congressional representatives to demand a ceasefire, it could be doing so much more: sending out model leaflet and picket designs to chapters; creating coalitions; organizing national days of action.

There has been a lack of political and organizational leadership from DSA nationally.

The situation in Gaza is changing the way an entire generation sees Israel-Palestine and US foreign policy. Tens of thousands of newly activated people have joined close to 2,000 protests as of the end of November 2023, showing that Palestinian liberation has moved into the mainstream. The Palestinian solidarity movement at large is characterized by a liberal, pacifist orientation with some ultraleft elements. Jewish Voice for Peace has done powerful work undercutting the idea that being pro-Palestinian and antisemitic go hand-in-hand. This movement will also create even more openings for the left to drive a wedge between youth and workers and the Democratic Party.

Though so far on a smaller scale, the Palestinian liberation movement is the latest in a string of protests in the past decade: Occupy, the Women's Marches, and the Black Lives Matter movement, among others. These were some of the biggest protests in world history, but none of these movements have achieved substantial victories. There is a reluctance within DSA and the left to learn the lessons of the limitations of these movements, leading to a tailing of mass consciousness and a failure to boldly put forward a socialist strategy for victory.

These organic upsurges in society will continue, sometimes at explosive new levels, but protest alone without leadership and a winning strategy will continue to burn out into demoralization with little to show for it in terms of concrete victories. However, even movements with no path to victory still have the power to shift consciousness, to leave radicalized ranks of youth and workers in their wake waiting for the right conditions to rise up again. ■

Rosemary Dodd, she/her is a bartender and a member of DSA's Reform & Revolution caucus; she was a member of the Steering Committee of DSA in Portland, Oregon, and is now active in DSA in Asheville, North Carolina.

Reproductive Rights

Despite the stripping away of abortion rights with the Supreme Court's Dobbs decision, we have not yet seen a new mass movement on the scale of the Women's Liberation Movement, in part due to a woeful lack of leadership from feminist organizations like Planned Parenthood. That doesn't mean there's not ample potential for such a movement to erupt in the future: there's a simmering anger in society that's amplified with every new restriction and horror story.

Battles on the state level in the form of ballot initiatives show the vast potential this issue has to activate people, particularly women. DSA chapters have been heavily involved in many of these ballot initiatives. However, DSA nationally has not yet jumped into the fray.

The TRBACC initiative, passed at the August Convention and intended to provide a unified lead to the organization on abortion and trans rights, has been repeatedly delayed. However, it has now opened up to allow members to join the discussions more directly and is developing its next steps.





Facing a Biden-Trump Race: How to Build Toward Independence?



BY PHILIP LOCKER AND STEPHAN KIMMERLE

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Let's Promote a Democratic Socialist Party

Joe Biden has overseen a blatant imperialist agenda of supporting Israel's brutal war on Gaza, bombing Yemen, waging a proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, NATO expansion, a criminal increase in the Pentagon budget, and a growing conflict with China. Here at home, Biden has failed to deliver for working people who are increasingly dissatisfied with his policies.

DSA's primary objective intervening in the 2024 presidential election should be to promote socialist policies and build support among working people that we need our own political party as an alternative to both far-right Republicans and Wall Street Democrats.

However, the main sentiment on the left of DSA is to ignore the presidential election given there are no good options. We disagree.

No Endorsement for Biden

While DSA is not yet strong enough to simply launch a new party, it absolutely can politically make the case for a mass workers party (just like we do for Medicare for All or our larger vision of democratic socialism). The best way to advance that this year is by building DSA into a larger and politically stronger party-like activist organization.

However, there will be no avoiding in labor and social movements, as well as in discussions with our families, friends, and co-workers, the upcoming presidential election. It will be at the very center of US politics this year. It already is.

Almost all unions and progressive leaders have endorsed, or soon will endorse Joe Biden and will actively campaign for him. DSA should not be silent

about this bankrupt policy. Instead, we should publicly announce we will not be endorsing Biden. Our position needs to be crystal clear: Biden and the Democratic Party do not represent us – they are ruling in the interests of US capitalism and imperialism.

This message needs to be amplified by DSA's highest profile public representatives, DSA members elected to Congress, state houses, and local offices. We also need to raise this in our unions, opposing the union bureaucracies' class collaborationist policy of endorsing and spending hundreds of millions of dollars promoting Biden as a "friend of labor."

We need to build support for the idea that we need our own political party.

DSA can stand out and grow this year by confidently making the case that working people are politically disenfranchised by the corporate Democrats and right-wing Republicans, and that we are fighting to build a political alternative that actually represents the 99%.

What About Trump?

While starting from a position of political independence from Biden, there is clearly another dimension of this election that needs to be factored into our position – Donald Trump. Tens of millions of workers' and oppressed people's central concern will be making sure Trump is defeated.

They correctly recognize that Trump represents the biggest threat in this election. A second Trump term is likely to have a more right-wing character than even his first. Much of Trump's more radical policies were obstructed by the Republican estab-

lishment and the deep state in his first term. January 6 represented a turning point, with Trump now even more independent from the GOP elites. All signs point to Trump installing a more loyal and battle-tested administration that will fight to implement his policies.

Trump is preparing the ground to unleash a ferocious campaign of police-state terror against millions of undocumented immigrants. He will overturn less hostile union policies of Biden's NLRB. Trump will step up the assaults on abortion and LGBT+ rights. Fossil fuel production will be further unleashed. Police will be even less restrained and promote a more aggressive law-and-order agenda. Trump getting elected will create an even more favorable climate for far-right forces to spread their poison of racism, sexism, xenophobia, and attacks on LGBT+ people.

What should DSA say about these fears? It damages our credibility, and more importantly it is simply untrue, to claim that workers have no stake in the outcome of this presidential race.

Our emphasis needs to be on building powerful mass movements that directly protest against Trump while also building a broader fight-back against big business.

Tens of millions of workers and oppressed people's central concern will be making sure Trump is defeated.

But what about who to vote for in November? If we want to actually engage in mass politics, for example in our unions, we need to take into account that, despite not being enthusiastic about Biden, millions of working-class people will vote for him to avoid the greater evil of Trump.

DSA's criticism of Biden and the corporate Democrats will be more powerful if it truly resonates with people's experience. We do not have to deny the differences between Biden and Trump, between a poison that is slowly killing us (Biden) versus the more urgent danger of an unleashed maniac with a finger on the US nuclear arsenal (Trump).

① Who to Vote for in the Presidential Election?

DSA should argue that it is reasonable to try to avoid Trump, but that this needs to be linked to a strategy to overcome the corporate domination of politics altogether. In the approximately 40 "safe states" where the winner will undoubtedly be Biden or Trump, we should call for a vote for the strongest left challenger while expressing sympathy for everyone voting for Biden to stop Trump.

In "swing states" – around 10 states that are actually contested – we should urge DSA members and left-wing voters to vote

Against Ultra-leftism and Opportunism

This position is not the default in DSA. Many activists in DSA separate expressing their radical views from seriously fighting to win the working class to socialist politics on the actual terrain that workers are engaging with.

However, if we are serious about building a mass party, that is the challenge. How to win majorities for our positions in our unions? How to put pressure on the Squad and others to promote independent working class politics? Trying to ignore the number one political discussion of working-class people means in practice to let them – the Squad and labor – off the hook with their opportunism toward Biden.

There is a peaceful coexistence between a more radical, communist sentiment in DSA which ignores the presidential election and a more reformist section of DSA who goes along with our elected representatives endorsing Biden. A central task for Marxists is to break up and ideologically defeat this false approach.

We need a serious orientation to mass politics (as opposed to radical rhetoric and policies that are disconnected from an orientation to mass struggle), carried out on principled socialist lines (in contrast with an opportunist policy of taking the line of least resistance, promoting the immediate goals of the movement while losing sight of the overall objective interests of the working class).

DSA – especially the new left-wing majority on its national leadership (Red Star, Marxist Unity Group, Bread & Roses, and two anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist independents) – giving a free pass to AOC and other DSA representatives endorsing Biden is in effect, regardless of intentions, a opportunist policy. Radical rhetoric about communism, revolution, anti-imperialism or anti-Zionism does not alter its opportunist character.

for Biden to block Trump, but with no endorsement of Biden, nor any false promotion of Biden being “on our side.” While calling for a *tactical* vote to stop Trump in these swing states, our message should remain clearly oppositional towards Biden. In *all* 50 states our emphasis should be on workers and young people getting organized, joining DSA, and building working-class movements and organizations.

Is this too complicated? Actually, we believe that the overwhelming sentiment among progressive workers and oppressed people will be to vote for Biden as the best way to stop Trump – without much hope in Biden. Acknowledging this, and recognizing the reality that Trump is the greater evil, helps us to fight back against unions and elected socialists prettifying Biden and the Democratic Party.

DSA Congressmembers need to clearly separate themselves politically from Biden, which is most clearly summed up by refusing to endorse him. Demanding they do this without denying the need to also engage in the battle to defeat Trump (building movements in the streets and urging a vote for Biden in the swing states), offers them a fighting chance to avoid being cut off from a major part of their base without falling into opportunism.

And in the approximately 40 “safe states,” there is no reason why DSA and our Congressmembers should not promote a vote for the strongest left-party challenger for president. A clear stance for a tactical vote against Trump in swing states allows us to have a much more forceful intervention in safe states in the labor movement and with our elected officials. This will resonate much better with an appeal in all states to build a future working-class party by joining DSA today.

For example, last year AOC announced she was endorsing Joe Biden in largely positive terms. DSA should push for AOC to change course by publicly withdrawing her endorsement of Biden while still expressing sympathy with all people who will vote for him to avoid Trump. She should urge her supporters in New York (a safe state) to vote for the strongest left challenger, and most of all, to join DSA so we can build a political alternative to avoid being stuck in this mess in future elections.

Unfortunately it appears likely that there will not be a dynamic left-wing presidential campaign this year. Cornel West’s campaign had real potential, but it has been very poorly run and undermined by a series of tactical mistakes. We might be left with a relatively insignificant choice between Cornel West, Jill Stein from the Green Party, and Claudia De la Cruz from the PSL. Still, DSA’s main aim should be to engage in the mass discussions around the presidential election and equip activists in labor

and social movements with a stance that takes the fears about Trump seriously without promoting illusions in Biden and the Democrats.

② Down-Ballot Races

Reform & Revolution has never shied away from criticizing our elected officials. However, we also recognize the advantages of having comrades like Rashida Tlaib, Cori Bush, and AOC in Congress to do things like to stand up against the war on Gaza. Super PACs like Democratic Majority for Israel are spending fortunes to unseat Left representatives this year. DSA does not have to stop its criticism of their weaknesses to go all in to defend them – while promoting our socialist policies.

Down-ballot, our priority should be to run candidates who openly promote socialism, recruit to DSA, and act as accountable representatives of DSA during the campaign and after getting elected.

③ Ballot Initiatives

There will be a number of ballot initiatives on the state and local levels. Democrats and major feminist organizations often use these campaigns to just “Get Out the Vote.” However, these campaigns also reflect real aspirations to defend and expand reproductive rights or other positive reforms. DSA has shown in previous campaigns in Kentucky, Ohio, and elsewhere how we can use ballot initiatives to organize working-class people and raise expectations beyond what the Democrats are prepared to offer.

Local ballot measures, such as the renters rights initiative in Tacoma in 2023, have shown the potential to intervene in elections and build socialist consciousness.

④ A Socialist Manifesto

To connect the dots DSA needs to develop a program, a kind of election manifesto, of what democratic socialists are fighting for and how all of the candidates and ballot initiatives we support are linked to building the socialist movement.

Such a manifesto should promote transformative demands like ending all military aid to Israel, slashing the Pentagon budget, Medicare for All (including reproductive healthcare), a Green New Deal, a \$15 minimum wage nationally, and canceling student debt. DSA needs to boldly critique capitalism and hammer home how these elections demonstrate how corrupt and broken the Republican and Democratic parties are, and that working people need to organize our own political party to represent ourselves. ■

There Is No Choice – And We Can't Fake It



BY SARAH MILNER AND RUY MARTINEZ

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A Response to the “Safe States Strategy”

DSA faces a difficult situation in the 2024 election. The two major parties are suffering a clear crisis of legitimacy, forced to rely on two unpopular candidates. But the left lacks solid alternatives. We overwhelmingly agree with the comrades – the best response for DSA is to hit the situation head on, with material, messaging, and a dynamic campaigning approach that ties together a national strategy and chapter-level action.

However, there is one major disagreement we wish to highlight. The ‘safe-states strategy’ of calling for a vote for Joe Biden in swing states, and a left alternative in safe states, is not a strong message for DSA to campaign on. While the strategy tries to address real issues – people’s fears about Donald Trump, the weaknesses of various third parties, the complicated frustration around voting – it misses the mark as a leading demand for three reasons.

First, by hamfistedly trying to appeal both to people that plan to vote for Joe Biden and those who would never vote for him at the same time. It will confuse both and connect to neither.

Second, by seemingly endorsing Biden *and* third parties, it simultaneously comes across as opportunist and ultra-leftist.

Third, it overestimates the number of people who will actually be recruited from third party presidential campaigns, which have historically not proven a good base for building DSA.

A more effective campaigning message for DSA would be one which acknowledges the poor situation of the left in presidential politics and confronts it directly. There is no left alternative to Joe Biden that actually seems viable, or even respectable to people, because the organizational structures of third parties are inadequate to the task and have been for decades.

Our presidential campaign should be based on a strong, clear, concise platform from the For Our Rights Committee that lays out an alternative set of positions. We should tell voters that a third party vote or a vote against Trump are both understandable given the basic problem is the lack of a developed alternative. Practically, this means articulating a position of no endorsement for Joe Biden.

But most importantly, we should articulate that, in the long-term, the only solution is to actually build socialist organizations like DSA, so we don’t have to make a choice like this in 2028. The only way to build that alternative is by joining DSA and strengthening its political intervention. In this way, we actually connect to people’s despair and frustration, instead of trying to engineer a solution for 2024. ■

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An Unstable Age of Imperialist Wars



BY RAMY KHALIL

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We Need a Class-Struggle Strategy to Resist Imperialism in Ukraine and the Middle East

The world is a mess under capitalism. Multiple wars and national conflicts are ravaging the Middle East, Ukraine, and parts of Africa and Asia. A new Cold War – between the US and China – is developing, with proxy conflicts all around the globe, including the threat of a nuclear conflict between Russia and NATO.

After Hamas's October 7 attack, Israel unleashed a ferocious assault on Gaza, killing over 25,000 Palestinians, reducing much of Gaza to rubble, and displacing over 85% of the population in Gaza.

The root cause of today's wars is imperialism – a global system of the powerful capitalist nation-states competing for power, markets, and resources. Capitalism is a decaying, chaotic system wracked by multiple inter-related crises: climate destruction, mass migration, intensifying racism, growing inequality, and political polarization. To solve these heart-wrenching problems, Marxists seek to scientifically analyze the world as objectively as possible. We strive to understand how social developments are unfolding so that we can determine how to build mass movements capable of changing the world.

This article analyzes the two most prominent wars today, in Ukraine and Palestine, and why socialists need to use an independent class-struggle strategy in both conflicts.

Two Overlapping Conflicts

The Western media portrays the Ukraine war primarily as Ukrainians defending their homeland from Russia's imperialist invasion. While this is certainly a central aspect of the conflict, there is another critical

feature of this war – a struggle over spheres of influence between the US (leading the Western countries) and Russia (supported by China and Iran).

Since the restoration of capitalism in the USSR, Russia and the West have been fighting over whether Ukraine will be under Western or Russian influence. When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2021, the US posed as a defender of Ukraine's democratic rights and rallied Western countries to oppose Russia. NATO has been gradually expanding eastward, and within NATO, the US's leadership role has been strengthened. The US tried to use the war to undermine Russia and indirectly teach a lesson about US supremacy to its primary global competitor, China.

Ukraine's Zelensky government served Western imperialism well during the first year of the war, initially wearing down Russian forces. Zelensky has combined resistance against the Russian occupation with repressing working-class rights, democratic organizing, a free media, and oppressing the Russian-speaking ethnic group in eastern Ukraine.

However, over the last year, Russia's military has held its ground and withstood the long expected Ukrainian offensive. Putin has recaptured some of the authority he initially lost from the devastating setbacks when his army tried to seize Ukraine's capital. This has strengthened China and Iran, who are supporting Russia.

Now there is a stalemate. The Russian and Ukrainian armies keep grinding each other down, but neither side can get the upper hand. Casualties are mounting, there is mass suffering on both sides, and no end in sight.

How to Defeat Imperialism

To end this destructive war, a completely different approach is needed. DSA has correctly stood for both a withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, and an end to US imperialism's intervention in the conflict.



With the hope to never encounter these horrors again, artists – here Otto Dix in 1924 – reflected on the experience of the trenches of the imperialist First World War. Today, many media outlets compare those atrocities to the war in Ukraine.

Photo: Public domain, tinyurl.com/Dix-Stormtroopers

Socialists need to promote an alternative class-based strategy to defend the Ukrainian people and help build a working-class peace movement in both the US and Russia. In Ukraine, the most powerful weapon in the struggle against the Russian occupation would be if the working class waged the war in its own class interests, politically independent from Western imperialism. This would include opposing any repression of the Russian-speaking ethnic group by the Zelensky government, supporting the democratic right of self-determination for the people of the Donbas and Crimea, and appealing to the Russian working class to rise up against Putin and turn their guns on their officers.

The high-tech weaponry from the US and NATO made Ukraine appear strong at first. However, Zelensky's repulsive, repressive, corrupt, pro-capitalist government has failed to effectively harness the Ukrainian people's determination to defend their country. Plus, the more the Ukrainian struggle is associated with the US/NATO, the more difficult it is for dissent to develop within Russia. The more weapons the US sends to Zelensky, the more Putin can convince the Russian working class that his war is needed to fight Western imperialism.

The history of successful resistance movements against imperialism, such as in Vietnam and South Africa, show that imperialism often cannot be defeated simply *militarily*. *Politics* is decisive.

The most powerful military in the world, the US, was defeated in Vietnam by the determination of the Vietnamese people to fight to the death to achieve the

National Liberation Front's demands for national and social liberation, which were inspiring (despite the NLF's Stalinist politics). In addition, the US government was overpowered by antiwar protests within US society and a mass rebellion by US soldiers.

To defeat Russian imperialism in Ukraine in a lasting way, a domestic opposition needs to develop within Russia to challenge or even overthrow Putin. In 1917, a Russian working-class revolution overthrew the government and capitalism, which ended World War I. Another revolution against Putin and capitalism is needed today.

Although there isn't a strong antiwar movement in Russia today, when Putin first began his invasion, mass antiwar protests exploded onto the streets. Protesters defied authorities who tried to arrest anyone who dared to criticize Putin. In June a year later, the right-wing Wagner mercenary group revolted and threatened to unseat Putin. Supporting left-wing resistance movements within Russia will be essential for ending the war.

For these reasons, Reform & Revolution collaborated with others to convince DSA that our DSA Congress members must vote against US military budgets, NATO expansion, and weapons shipments to Zelensky. Unfortunately, all DSA Congress members voted for these measures. Reform & Revolution fully supports Ukraine's right to self-defense, and we have no objection to their acquisition and use of arms. But socialists, especially DSA members in Congress, must oppose the agenda of US imperialism in this conflict, which serves only to perpetuate this destructive war

and has nothing to do with the democratic right to self-determination.

Supporting the *people* in Ukraine does not mean we should support the corrupt capitalist *government* in Ukraine. Zelensky and his pro-NATO policies are obstacles to defending the Ukrainian people from Putin's war. The Ukrainians' emancipation must come primarily from the Ukrainian working class themselves, with solidarity from the Russian antiwar movement and an international working-class movement.

War in the Middle East

Like in Ukraine, a class-struggle strategy is essential to effectively fight Israel's war on Palestine as well as the growing danger that it will escalate into a full-blown regional war.

The brutality of Israel's war on Palestine sparked unprecedented mass protests in the US and around the world. Global public opinion is overwhelmingly opposed to Israel's atrocities, which led to the UN General Assembly voting overwhelmingly for a Gaza ceasefire. 153 countries voted in favor, and 10 countries voted against – exposing the extreme isolation of the US and Israel. The global outcry finally compelled the Biden Administration in December to urge the Israeli government to scale back its war.

Nonetheless, as this article is being written, Israel is continuing to pound Gaza and exchange rocket fire with militias in the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. In January, the US and UK unleashed hundreds of airstrikes against Yemen's Houthis, dramatically risking escalating the conflict into a full-blown regional war. Activists must step up their opposition to this reckless cycle of escalatory retaliation.

Socialists stand unapologetically on the side of the oppressed Palestinians and the Arab masses against their oppressors – the Israeli state, US imperialism, and the Arab ruling elites. Socialists support the demands of Palestinians for a permanent ceasefire, an end to the siege of Gaza, an end to discrimina-

tion against Palestinians within Israel, the right to return for all refugees, and the right to form an independent Palestinian state.

Navigating Antisemitism

Zionists and the US political establishment try to marginalize the Palestinian liberation movement by labeling us as pro-Hamas, pro-terrorist, and antisemitic. These arguments can often marginalize our movement unless we argue back with an internationalist class-struggle strategy.

Standing in solidarity with an oppressed people against imperialism does not mean that we should necessarily support the official leaders of the movement.

While focusing on the root cause of the conflict – Israeli colonialism – the Left should not hesitate to separate ourselves from Hamas or other right-wing, antisemitic groups like the Houthi Movement. This makes it easier to center the conversation on the context that the Western media tries to ignore – Israel's 75-year history of colonial wars and occupation.

To strengthen the Palestine solidarity movement, we have to take into account the strong consciousness among working-class people around the world, both Jews and non-Jews, who recognize that antisemitism is real and continues to cause ongoing violence. Ever since the Holocaust, many Jews around the world teach their children to view Israel as “a beacon of security for Jews worldwide,” as the *New York Times* put it (January 3, 2024). After centuries of oppression, the rise of antisemitic violence and right-wing populists like Trump are heightening fears among Jews. In this context, we should clarify explicitly that we are not aligned with antisemitic forces like the Houthi Movement.

Palestine solidarity protest in Seattle



The historic rise in unions calling for a ceasefire in Palestine has been both inspiring and instructive on how to build mass support for Palestinian justice. In almost all these unions, the resolutions explicitly opposed Hamas's killing of civilians, called for the release of Israeli hostages, and opposed both Islamophobia and antisemitism – while keeping the focus on stopping Israel's ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

An Independent Class-Struggle Strategy

Like in Ukraine, standing in solidarity with an oppressed people against imperialism does not mean that we must automatically support the official leaders who happen to be leading the struggle at this point in time. The Palestinians have a long rich history of struggle that have used much more effective strategies than Hamas's counter-productive strategy. The first *intifada* (uprising) in the 1980s involved tens of thousands of popular committees of Palestinian resistance. They were not self-selected militants claiming to act on behalf of the oppressed masses; it was a democratic mass uprising by the oppressed masses themselves. A new uprising of the Palestinian people, like the first *intifada*, will be essential to win Palestinian liberation today.

The Reform & Revolution statement on Palestine (December 1, 2023) elaborates the key elements of a democratic socialist strategy:

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 anti-semitism 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 splinter-

Here in the US, our immediate task is to build a movement to stop the US's brutal interventions around the globe:

- » **No US military aid to Israel! US out of the Middle East!**
- » **End US/NATO imperialist intervention in Ukraine!**
- » **Slash the Pentagon budget – close US military bases around the world! Bring US troops home!**
- » **Money for jobs and education, not war and occupation!**

ing working-class support for the far-right Zionist government and undermining the social base of the IDF.

Anti-Imperialism Today

The wars in Palestine and Ukraine highlight the central role of imperialism within the increasingly violent, unstable system of global capitalism. There is no prospect for justice for the Palestinian people within the framework of capitalism. Palestinian liberation is in fundamental contradiction with the huge power of US imperialism and the Israeli state. Nor can Palestinians' basic needs for water, electricity, jobs, and housing be satisfied on the basis of a capitalist Palestinian state and the continuation of Israeli capitalism.

These problems can only be solved by a mass movement of the Palestinian working class against the Israeli occupation and the corrupt Palestinian Authority, aligning itself with uprisings of the Israeli working class and Arab masses throughout the region. Similarly in Ukraine, there will be no lasting solution until the working class of Ukraine takes on Zelensky's corrupt, pro-capitalist regime and the working class of Russia overthrows Putin.

The biggest obstacle we face in movements against imperialism is the historically low level of support for socialist ideas. However, we can win our liberation if socialists patiently build support for an independent working-class strategy within these movements against all the rival imperialist blocs, and boldly advocate for democratic socialism. ■

Ramy Khalil, he/him, was the Campaign Co-Manager for Tacoma For All, which won a tenants rights ballot initiative in 2023. He was the Campaign Manager for Kshama Sawant who was the first independent socialist elected to Seattle City Council in 100 years. He is a member of DSA and its Reform & Revolution caucus.

Seeds of Resistance



AN INTERVIEW WITH YONA R, [@DANIDO999](#), AN ISRAELI ACTIVIST IN THE MESARVOT CONSCRIPTION REFUSERS NETWORK, BY PHILIP LOCKER AND MARIA FRANZBLAU

Overcoming the Fortress Truce in Israel, Supporting Refusniks, and Building an Anti-Occupation Bloc Within the Anti-Judicial Coup Protests

Philip: We are doing this interview in mid-January when over 25,000 Palestinians have been killed by the IDF, 85% of people in Gaza have been displaced, and most of the civilian infrastructure has been destroyed or damaged. As an Israeli socialist activist, what are your views on Israel's role in this ongoing war, and what is your solution?

Yona: Since October 7 and Hamas's attack, Israel has launched a massacre against Palestinians in Gaza and beyond. They've committed atrocities and created a humanitarian disaster with the indiscriminate bombing of civilians and civilian infrastructure.

I, along with my fellow activists, have argued since the beginning of the war that there is no military solution to this conflict. Hamas cannot be deposed militarily, nor would it solve the underlying issue given that October 7 – as unjustified and horrible of a massacre as it was – did not happen in a vacuum. It happened after decades of apartheid and siege and ethnic cleansing. These must be addressed with a political solution in order to provide security and justice and safety for everyone between the river and the sea.

In the short term, Israel should end the war, accept a ceasefire, and get a hostage deal with Hamas to release the captive Israeli hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners and hostages – what we call an “all-for-all” deal.

In the medium term, while I am an advocate for a one-state solution as an end goal, I do believe that a two-state solution is necessary as an intermediate

step. I think it's more attainable, and the priority is ending the war, the conflict, and the suffering that is caused by it and the occupation.

This view is my own, not representative of Mesarvot, but it is one shared by the Israeli Communist Party and Hadash. To be clear, I'm not a member of the Communist Party or of Hadash, but the Communist Party has advocated for a two-state solution. It's the party that has been advocating for it for the longest time, post 1948. Even before Israel got into negotiations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the PLO, the Communist Party had already held that view and it's been very adamant about sticking to it despite some people claiming that the two-state solution has died.

Hadash is the major genuinely left-wing political party within Israel. It is more accurately not a party, but a front mainly composed of the Israeli Communist Party and different figures and organizations. It originally consisted of groups like the Israeli Black Panthers as well. The leader of Hadash in the Knesset is not a Communist Party member, but all other members of the Knesset from Hadash are from the Israeli Communist Party.

Hadash frames itself as the Jewish Arab or Jewish Palestinian political movement within Israel. It's the only one in the Knesset with that self description. It's one of the most sizable organizations with Palestinian citizens in Israeli politics but a more marginal force within Israeli Jewish society.

Maria: How did you start organizing in the anti-war and the anti-occupation movements in Israel?

Yona: I'm a 17-year-old activist mostly in the Mesarvot conscription refusers network and I originally started getting involved in activism around 2020.

That was the era of the anti-Netanyahu black flag and Balfour protests over his corruption, which were calling for his resignation. (Balfour is the name of the prime minister's residence). I used to frequent



Israeli airstrike in the El-Remal area in Gaza City on October 9, 2023.

Photo: Wafa, tinyurl.com/DamageGaza2023, Copyright: CC BY-SA 3.0 Deed, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en

the protests that were on the intersection close to the community in which I live.

In 2021, during the war in Gaza that happened in May, and with the corresponding tensions and violence within the Green Line, I went to some protests against the war and for the shared co-existence of Jews and Palestinians. I had already been left-wing for a while, but that's when I started doing anti-occupation activism and going to protests against the occupation.

Then, in 2023, the protests against Netanyahu and his government's judicial coup developed. This law would have transferred almost all of the judicial authority to the Israeli government, the most right-wing government in Israel's history. This was also the biggest protest movement in Israel's history.

I became a real activist then and joined the movement with a coalition called the Anti-Occupation Bloc. The Anti-Occupation Bloc is a collective of many different organizations that fight against the occupation. We participated in the anti-judicial coup protests with a particular message: that you cannot talk about democracy without talking about the occupation. There is no democracy while keeping millions of people under occupation. The motives for the government to erode democratic liberties within the Green Line comes from the occupation.

I was already somewhat against the occupation back then, though I still identified as a Zionist. It was from there that I became active in a collective of people called the Teen Bloc Against the Occupation.

It's that group through which I became more politically aware of the reality of the conflict and radicalized as a result. That's when I joined Mesarvot.

Mesarvot means "we refuse." It is a network of people who refuse to conscript into the army, often publicly. Mesarvot provides support to people trying to get out of conscription, whether by exemption or publicly refusing and going to jail. We provide refusers with solidarity and media training, and campaign for their release. The network also serves as a platform from which we participate in other types of activism and anti-occupation protests. For example, we visit communities in the West Bank that are under threat of displacement and try to prevent them from being displaced. We try to stop settlers from acting in violence against them.

Philip: There were a number of reports in the US left media about Tal Mitnick being the first Israeli to refuse to serve in the IDF during the siege on Gaza. Is it correct that he is the only one who has refused so far?

Yona: Israel has conscription for both male and female citizens. The army doesn't keep track of how many refusers there are. So I can't give you exact figures.

Tal is not the first person to refuse joining the current war, but he's the first one refusing publicly, for political reasons, and going to jail for it.

Back during the movement against the judicial coup, we in the Mesarvot helped write a letter of refusers, signed by over 280 teens, pre-conscription, who said

that they won't serve dictatorship within the Green Line or outside of it. The signers of this letter, of which I am one, were known as "Youth Against Dictatorship."

This movement is looked at within Israeli society as something extremely, extremely taboo and treasonous, especially during times of war like this.

Maria: *What are the consequences of refusing to serve?*

Yona: Primarily, going to military jail for an unknown amount of time – usually around three to four months – there's no official protocol. In the past it has been as high as two years.

That said, military jail is not the same as criminal jail and certainly not the same as security prison. It's definitely not what Palestinians have to go through, but it's not something to laugh at either.

But the consequences go beyond just going to jail. For some people, refusing would mean getting kicked out of their home, or it would put them in danger of violence.

Philip: *We hear a lot about the horror in Gaza and the brutal situation for Palestinians in the West Bank. What's the situation for Palestinians within Israel?*

Yona: There's a regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea – in the West Bank, in Gaza, and within the Green Line. Obviously its most brutal form takes place in Gaza

and the West Bank, but that does not mean there isn't discrimination and oppression within Israel.

Especially since the war started, Palestinian citizens of Israel have been faced with extremely heavy political persecution, with hundreds of arrests and oppression in universities and workplaces. To a lesser extent, this has also been extended to Israeli Jews who have been active against the war.

Maria: *Since October 7, how hard has it been for leftists to organize in Israel?*

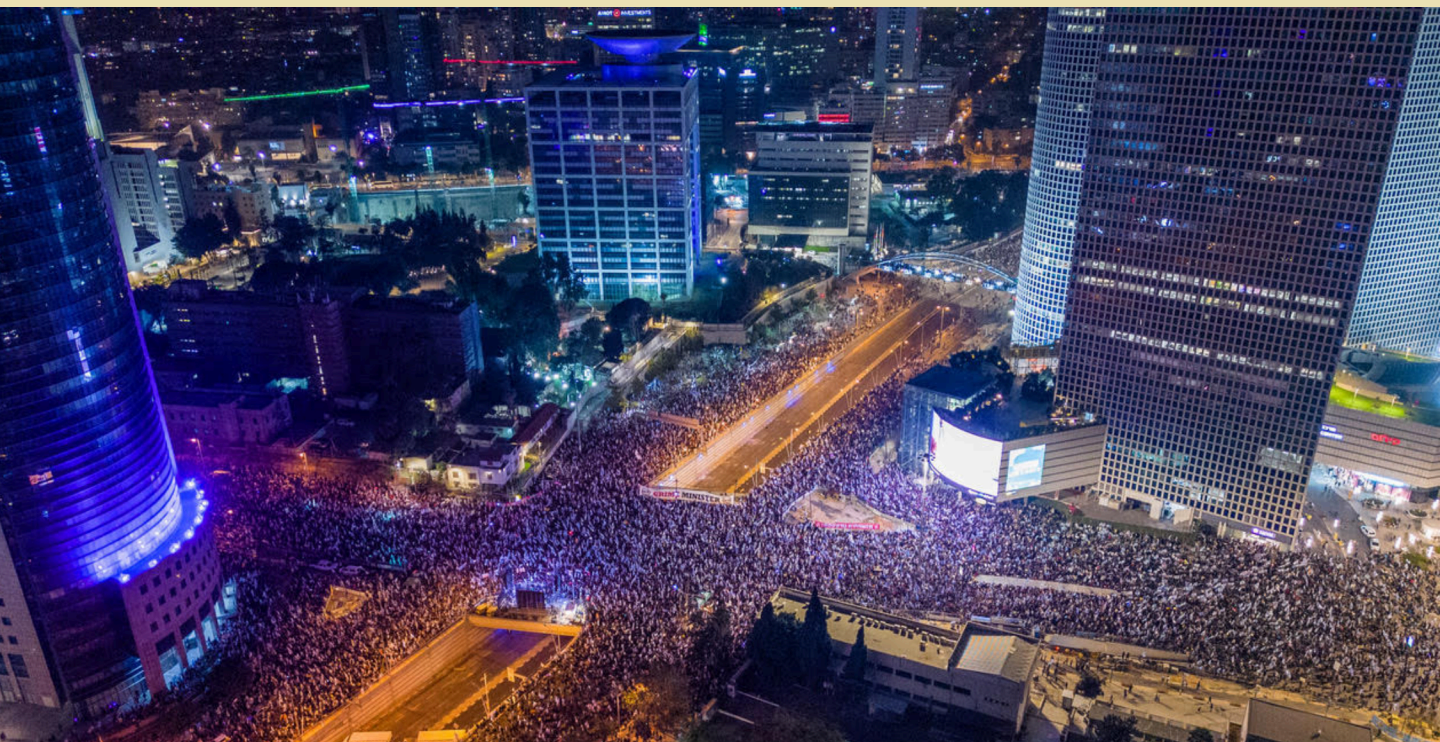
Yona: For the first few weeks of the war, protests, or what the police have described as political protests, have been completely banned. And the small attempts that took place to protest against the war, for a ceasefire, or in solidarity with Palestinians being massacred in Gaza, have been met with heavy police violence.

Two people that were arrested at a protest that took place in Umm al-Fahm more than three months ago, Ahmad Khalifah and Muhammaed Taher Jabarin, are still incarcerated, and they're being held in a security prison which has much harsher conditions.

Even some protests against the Netanyahu government have been banned, but the government realized that it could not go that far and backtracked. There was an appeal to the Supreme Court about the ban on protests in Palestinian towns and cities. And the Supreme Court – with the caveat that it's not a complete ban, but a conditional one – actually did let the police suppress protests in Palestinian cities.

Protest in Israel in 2023 against Prime Minister Netanyahu's justice reform

Photo: Amir Terkel, tinyurl.com/JusticeReformsIsrael, Copyright: CC BY-SA 3.0 Deed, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/



The National Student Union has been lobbying the government and universities to persecute Palestinian students who express their dissent and opposition to the war, which they describe as “support for terrorism.” And many students have been suspended. Some of these suspensions have since been lifted, though not all. In multiple Jewish schools throughout the country, there have been attempted attacks on teachers and principals who merely voiced sympathy for the people of Gaza. There has even been an attempted lynching of an anti-occupation journalist.

Under these circumstances, we – as anti-occupation activists – have slowly tried to regain the rights to dissent against the war. There have been small unauthorized protests, many of which have faced police suppression. There have also been a couple of large protests in Tel Aviv and in Haifa mainly organized by Hadash and by Standing Together that have managed to obtain police approval after appeals to the Supreme Court.

Hadash has consistently been against the war. And for that, when Hadash tried to host its 10th National Convention, the police threatened the venue owner into canceling, trying to ban Hadash in its basic functioning as a party.

Philip: What was your approach to the massive protests against Netanyahu earlier last year, before October 7? These protests were not challenging the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and Jewish supremacy. Was there room to use those protests to raise consciousness and build the forces of a more radical left that stands in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle? Or was it better not to participate in them?

Yona: There was a lot of discussion about this within the Israeli left. But my own entry into radical leftist activism was through the Anti-Occupation Bloc within the protests.

The first rally, the protest that started the weekly protests against the judicial coup, was organized by Standing Together. There were a couple of Palestinian flags there in the crowd and some reactionary media figures pointed out the Palestinian flags and said, “Look, it’s a radical leftist protest.” And as a reaction to that the centrist groups which took over organizing the protests pushed to make the Israeli flag the symbol of these demonstrations. Then it looked like a nationalist protest, and it certainly had those elements.

What we as the Anti-Occupation Bloc pointed out is that just opposing the judicial coup meant fighting for democracy for Jews only. That message did not resonate well with the main organizers of the

protest in Tel Aviv. In other places, such as Haifa and Jerusalem – which were usually the second and third biggest protests every week – the organizers were much more receptive to allowing speakers from the Anti-Occupation Bloc.

They would often bring Palestinians or leftist speakers, but it still wasn’t perfect. For example, they wanted to censor the speech of the secretary of Hadash in Haifa.

I don’t want to give you the wrong idea that this was the main message of the protesters. It was very nationalist and still very Zionist. However, the message of the Anti-Occupation Bloc consistently grew from week to week.

Philip: What role do you think socialists in the US, for example in DSA, could play in helping bring about a permanent ceasefire, to end the siege on Gaza, and end the Israeli occupation?

Yona: I think in order for Israel to change its course and end the occupation and this conflict, international pressure needs to be applied on Israel. That’s where the BDS movement and Palestinian groups, alongside organizations like DSA, come into play – putting pressure on Israel to stop being an apartheid state.

The other thing I’d say is that international solidarity is an extremely powerful tool. I think activists around the world can gain a lot from providing each other with support, learning from and critiquing each other.

When Hadash faced the issue with holding its convention, I tried getting DSA to release a statement of solidarity with Hadash, and with other activists facing repression by the Israeli state. Hadash got a lot of different parties and movements from around the world to send these statements of solidarity. But when I tried to get a similar statement from DSA, I faced a wall from DSA’s International Committee.

Ultimately, I think it was a missed opportunity. I think DSA could stand to gain from showing principled solidarity with activists both Palestinian and Jewish, within Palestine and within Israel. And that’s not to say that it should agree with everything that Hadash says, or not acknowledge the other organizations that exist between the river and the sea.

Once that connection is established, I feel that we could learn a lot from each other. ■

Intifada | ةضافتنا



BY RUY MARTINEZ

@RUYAMARTINI

In Support of a Democratic Mass Movement of the Palestinian People

Intifada literally means “tremor” or “shuddering,” to shake off an “oppressor.” In the Nakba of 1948 – the catastrophe when war was waged on Palestinians – many were killed and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were driven off their land. Perhaps even since the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the Palestinian people have been oppressed, with an oppressor set to take their land, to destroy their prosperity, and make even the concept of a Palestinian people disappear. To shake off the yoke of this oppressor and to defeat the Zionist political project is something which any self-respecting socialist must support.

To understand the history of the intifada in the Palestinian context, one has to understand the horror of the Nakba, both in its banality and barbarity. In 1917, the British government proclaimed that Palestine would be a nation for Jewish people in what would become known as the Balfour Declaration. The end of the First World War in 1919 and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire let the British impose their will over Arabia broadly. Indeed, the first High Commissioner over Mandatory Palestine was Zionist Herbert Samuel, who began to implement the triple strategy of Zionists at the time: to take their land, to take their jobs, and to take their produce. In 1969, Israeli Labor Party leader David Hachohen wrote the following:

I had to fight my friends ... to defend that I would not accept Arabs in my trade union, the Histadrut; to defend preaching to housewives that they not buy at Arab stores; to defend the fact that we stood guard at orchards to prevent Arab workers from getting jobs there. [...] To pour kerosene on Arab tomatoes; to attack Jewish housewives in the markets and smash the Arab eggs they had bought; to praise to the skies the Kereen Kayemet [Jewish Fund] that sent Hanlon to Beirut to buy land from absentee effendi [landlords] and to throw the fellahin [peasants]

off the land – to buy dozens of dunams [of land] from an Arab is permitted, but to sell, God forbid, one Jewish dunam to an Arab is prohibited ...

Zionist paramilitaries like the Haganah and Irgun were also used to oppress the Arab people during the Great Arab Revolt of 1936 to 39, along with fascist paramilitaries like Lehi. These groups would later go on to commit atrocity after atrocity, committing more than 70 massacres of Palestinian people from 1947 to 48, depopulating 530 settlements, killing 15,000 people, and forcing 750,000 to leave on pain of death. After various failed Arab state coalitions failed to defeat Israel, they occupied all of Gaza and the West Bank.

The first intifada was a mass uprising, with protests, rallies and strikes, with thousands of democratic committees on all levels organizing this resistance

In 1987, an Israeli tank crashed into a convoy of cars carrying Palestinian workers outside of the Jabaliya refugee camp on the edge of Gaza, though resistance had begun earlier due to the “iron fist” repressive response of Israel. This policy, begun by Labor Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin, was reportedly meant “to make life so difficult for the Arabs that they leave the territories.” Nowhere else in the world but Gaza under Rabin did the state organize the demolition of the homes of protesters, for example. Indeed, one could argue that Rabin’s policies of ethnic cleansing fueled the intifada.

First Intifada

The first intifada, which had begun after dramatic Israeli escalations to Palestinian protests, was characterized by the organization of Palestinian people from the bottom up. While the leadership of the



Barricades during the first intifada

Photo: Abarrategi, tinyurl.com/FirstIntifadaBarricades, Copyright: CC BY-SA 4.0 Deed, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/

intifada nominally included the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the more realistic assessment is that this leadership was tenuous. A unique mobilization of all of Palestinian society – from clerics to workers, students to farmers – began, armed with little more than stones and Molotov cocktails. Demonstrations and strikes gripped the nation.

What is shocking about the first intifada is that by all accounts the disparity in forces was extreme. The Palestinian people were faced with modern military machinery, mass collective punishment, deportations, and house demolitions, not to mention beatings, arrests, and death. Yet the collective action of the Palestinian people was uniquely able to force Israel, amid growing international ire, to negotiate with the PLO. The Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 and promising a two-state solution, were a response to the powerful upheaval. However, the negotiations between the PLO and Israel, brokered by the US, ended in a disastrous failure, a premature surrender of the movement that demoralized the people of Palestine.

The first intifada was a mass uprising, with protests, rallies and strikes, with thousands of democratic committees on all levels organizing this resistance, directed against the military oppression by Israel.

Second Intifada

In 2000, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon flagrantly visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Seven protesters were shot by Sharon's security forces, followed by the murder of Muhammad al-Durrah, a twelve-year-old boy who was shot in his father's arms on video for the world to see. This would inspire the second intifada – also known as the Al-Aqsa intifada. Israeli forces responding to the protests fired more than 1,300,000 bullets in Gaza alone. As one of the IDF commanders morbidly noted, the operation should have been called "one bullet for every child." Mass bombing of neighborhoods became a feature of the IDF's criminal behavior.

The primary goal of this intifada was not to expose the Israeli occupation to the world or to carry out acts of vengeance; above all, its purpose was collective self-defense and the dislodging of the Israeli military. Unfortunately, the democratic character of the first intifada – with thousands of bottom-up committees formed in the struggle – was no longer present. The methods were much more akin to terrorist attacks that indiscriminately targeted military and civilian targets in Israel.

While the second intifada was able to force Israel to leave Gaza, it also led to the building of the Green Wall and spurred more Israeli settlement in the West Bank.

Still, the Palestinian people have not lost their fighting spirit or hope. Throughout the 2010s, mass uprisings of students and regular people have erupted in Gaza, such as the March of Return of 2018, or the 'firecracker intifada' of 2014. Israel's response has continuously been marked by extreme violence, mass arrests, and terror. Thus, the current siege of Gaza has to be understood in this context.

We are in a unique moment in history where public support for Israel in the US is beginning to crater. Our task as socialists in the US is to press the moment as far as we can, to not only fight to defend Palestinian people today with a ceasefire, but organize such that the US government no longer supports Israel. This will not be accomplished today or tomorrow, but we must diligently and urgently organize so that in the future, the next uprising along the lines of the first intifada – a democratic mass movement of Palestinian people supported by the working class internationally – will be a victory. ■

Ruy Martinez, he/him, helped found Harvard YDSA in 2020 and has been in DSA since 2016. He is on the Steering Committee of Reform & Revolution.



talking about doing something

**I pulled away from the airport and left my
family. In passing, I remember that another
hundred people will die today,**

**I imagine writing something stark enough
that it seems meaningful, or that it looks like
shattered glass, or harsh enough, that it
shows a sickening detachment**

**(or maybe i am not supposed to reflect on
that, maybe the self expression is its own
indulgence)**

**I dream about words that feel like holes in
bodies, I can't write anything, I can't speak**

**I imagine everyone like me,
the long, hesitating roads to the terminal
stutter. I imagine the cars, and every line, and
all the people in them, dropping off their
family and going away,**

**Bleary eyed two days past christmas, I drive
home in suffocating guilt; this feels
untenable, but it is lasting forever**

**I scream, thrashing my hands against the
sides of the car and anything I can make
contact with,**

**and I live, and live, and live, and live
and while I do, some people don't.**

POEM BY SARAH MILNER

ART BY SEAN CASE

“Yes, it Is a Union’s Place to Stand Against Genocidal US Foreign Policy”



INTERVIEW WITH WHITNEY KAHN BY STAN STRASNER

REFORMANDREVOLUTION.ORG

Reflections on How to Bring the Palestine Solidarity Movement to Our Unions

You’ve passed a resolution demanding a ceasefire in Gaza in our union, the Seattle Education Association (SEA). How did this SEA resolution come together?

This wasn’t the first pro-Palestine resolution that SEA members had put forward. In 2021, folks put together a comprehensive BDS resolution that put SEA strongly on the side of Palestinian liberation. It went far beyond our ceasefire resolution, calling for an end to US aid to Israel, and “for Israel to end all current and future bombings of Gaza.” It passed without much debate.

But in the post-October 7 landscape, our new resolution caused a huge stir in the union. All of the Zionists came out of the woodwork to oppose it. What the BDS resolution did for us, however, is that many of us were already organized, practiced at working together around this issue, and we had exposed the union to this conversation before.

Our original ceasefire resolution also called for an end to US funding of the Israeli military and signed onto Palestinian trade union demands, but when we took this to our executive board meeting, many were hesitant. The arguments ranged from fearing that this decision would be too divisive in our union to arguing that it wasn’t our place as an educators’ union to take a stand on US foreign policy. It became clear to us from that meeting that if we went forward with our resolution as-is, a motion would be made to table it until the next meeting. With the urgency of the situation, for us, that would have been as bad as having it be defeated, so we boiled it down to the most urgent point: ceasefire now.

Our leadership took some very panicked steps that ramped up tensions rather than bringing membership together to learn from each other. It would have been so helpful for the strength and unity of our union to have organized discussions and education around the conflict. Many educators feel they don’t know enough to teach about this important issue, and that ends up harming our students. I wish our union leadership had used this as an opportunity to have those conversations, which are vital if we’re going to teach truth in schools.

How did the vote go?

Tensions were high before we even started our monthly shop steward meeting where we vote on resolutions like this, but we were well prepared. There were many of us anti-Zionist Jewish educators who were supporting the resolution, and we wore our “Jews say ceasefire now” shirts from Jewish Voice for Peace actions. We wanted to make it immediately, visually clear that Jews were not united for Zionism, and that it’s not antisemitic to stand with Palestine or criticize Israel.

The resolution was beautifully introduced by one of the authors, and many of the speakers against it threw personal attacks that were called out of order. As much as I have some criticisms about our leadership’s approach leading up to this vote, I have to say they did a great job under difficult circumstances helping to manage that rough debate.

How does the approach to Palestine solidarity taken within SEA compare to other approaches taken in other locals of NEA, the National Education Association? What do you see as the relative strengths and weaknesses of those approaches?

In the couple of years leading up to this siege, support for Palestine has been on the rise. I attended



ECONOMY & WORKERS' RIGHTS

Labor unions are making unprecedented calls for a ceasefire in Gaza

Unions are figuring out what comes next after taking a public stand against the apartheid State of Israel's genocide in Gaza

Second Largest Union in US Calls for "Immediate" Ceasefire in Gaza

The statement goes a step further than some calls for a ceasefire by demanding an end to the occupation of Palestine.

United Auto Workers calls for ceasefire in Gaza - the largest union to do so

UAW, representing 400,000 in the US and over 580,000 retired workers, makes announcement as military operations resume

the NEA convention last summer for the first time and worked with pro-Palestine activists there, and they all reported that for years they faced attacks and slander. But as of last year their resolutions had begun to pass. They had even convinced Becky Pringle, the President of the NEA, to go to Palestine.

So Palestinian activists and allies felt very strong going into this year.

We wanted to make it immediately clear that Jews were not united for Zionism, and that it's not antisemitic to stand with Palestine or criticize Israel.

I think for those who have been in this struggle, the change immediately after October 7 was quite jarring. Even though more broadly this moment has been a real shift away from support for Zionism across the US, the Zionist backlash has also been out in full force. So some union locals went for stronger resolutions, which were beautifully courageous, but which opened them up to backlash, and which they then had to walk back. This happened in a big way in the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, which felt the need to issue an apology and rescind their statement.

It's always hard to judge how far to push demands. It's a constant tension that requires being in touch and as organized as possible. Could we have kept in our resolution the demand to cease funding the Israeli military without it being delayed or shot down? You can never know for certain, which is what makes these tactical decisions so difficult and uncomfortable, but they are often the difference between taking the union a step forward and a step backward.

What are the next steps, within SEA, NEA, and the US labor movement as a whole?

These are horrific times we're living through. This genocide in Gaza is being done in our names. Not just those of us who are Jewish like myself - it is our government that is behind it, using our tax money. The silver lining is the resistance, and the millions of people in the US who are now seeing this conflict and the role of the US government differently. But we still have so far to go. Most unions have not yet called for a ceasefire, but there have been some big steps forward.

We desperately need to grow the anti-war movement in every labor union and in every local. We have no time to lose as our government, led by war-profiteering corporations, march us closer and closer to regional wars and World War III.

The group of educators across the country who has been leading the charge pushing for a ceasefire is now pushing NEA to revoke its early endorsement of Joe Biden until some basic conditions like a ceasefire are met.

More and more unions are stepping up and taking a stand to support a ceasefire. Recently, both our local Martin Luther King County Labor Council and our state-wide Washington Education Association joined the call for a ceasefire, alongside national leader United Auto Workers (UAW). I'm hoping this signals a turning point in the struggle.

Unions have incredible power to sway politics if we're unafraid to use it.

Whitney Kahn, any/all, is a paraeducator in Seattle and a building representative with the Seattle Education Association. They are an active member of Seattle DSA and Jewish Voice for Peace.

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Which Way Forward for Labor's Resurgence?



BY HENRY DE GROOT

 @DEGREAT4

The Contrast Between Teamsters President Sean O'Brien and the UAW's Shawn Fain Raises the Question of Which Forces Will Drive the Labor Revival – and What DSA's Role Should Be

Looking back on the last few years it is clear that the US labor movement has entered a period of revival. New union organizing campaigns at prominent companies including Starbucks, Trader Joe's, and Amazon notched new victories in the past year, and these attempts to organize at these seemingly insurmountable corporations also spread to chains including REI, Michaels, Barnes & Noble, and more.

In the last few years, unions have finally been able to stand their ground after decades of accepting concessionary deals, but in 2023 labor finally took the counter-attack, in many cases flexing their increased bargaining power and energized membership. Contract campaigns were marked by increased strike preparations to threaten, if not actually unleash, a credible economic threat to corporate profits. This was most prominently marked by the Teamsters' UPS contract fight but was also replicated in countless other national and local fights, where unions were able to win at least respectable victories without actually striking.

The UAW's "Big Three" autoworkers and many other workforces including Kaiser nurses, University of California employees, and more took the fight even further, launching tenacious strikes which almost universally ended in victory and

forced additional concessions which could not be won at the bargaining table.

Another major trend in labor organizing was the continued strength of the reform movement. This was especially typified by the election of Shawn Fain to the presidency of the UAW.

Fain's UAW strike framed a contrast between Sean O'Brien's leadership of the Teamsters' UPS contract fight and the class-struggle reformer Sean Fain's leadership of the Big Three strike. While O'Brien's campaign engaged masses of the Teamsters' UPS membership, took on a fighting rhetoric, and won meaningful reforms, it paled in comparison to Fain's even more militant, politically radical, class-conscious, and materially successful confrontation with corporate America.

Whose Revival?

Sean O'Brien typifies the "progressive bureaucrat," who sees in the current period the possibility of returning their union to a footing of limited militancy with a top-down approach, while leaning on the support of members to overcome resistance from more conservative wings of the bureaucracy. Through this approach and through a significant but incomplete altering of the political balance within the union, the progressive bureaucrats are able to advance their career and deliver the reforms necessary to stave off widespread criticism. Whereas for decades the US union leadership has under-invested in new organizing and accepted concessionary contracts, the progressive bureaucrats take the unions back to at least attempting to run fighting campaigns, for example with the Teamsters' continued investment into organizing at Amazon. Also, the ability of the progressive bureaucracy to deliver is especially facilitated by the favorable conditions of the current labor market and political climate.

In contrast to O'Brien, Shawn Fain typifies the class-struggle reformer, seeking to transform the union movement more fundamentally. Progressive bureaucrats know that the fight against corporate America cannot be won without first winning the fight against corporate unionism. Fain himself is a leader of the UAW reform caucus, which fought and won an open struggle to put membership and militancy back in the driver's seat of the nation's sixth largest union. Fain is the leader O'Brien plays on TV.

Even with a friendlier NLRB the campaigns at Starbucks, Amazon, and others have mostly not been able to force management to bargain in a meaningful way.

The reform movement has also been empowered by the active work of the socialists within it, including DSA members, who were instrumental in the Fain leadership and UAW. In fact, all throughout the labor movement, as union staff, member-leaders, and community supporters, socialists have been carrying and driving forward the struggle.

Young workers radicalized through the Bernie campaigns, the BLM movement, and other societal convulsions over the last decade have played an especially prominent role in the recent labor revival. Millennial and Gen Z workers, many of them organized socialists or sympathizers, have played a leading role in the organizing campaigns at Starbucks, Amazon, Trader Joe's, REI, and countless other fights.

Jane McAlevy's organizing seminars have helped to reintroduce best-practice organizing into the labor movement, focused on the structured engagement of the entire membership through 1-on-1s, structure tests, and workplace mapping. The application of these techniques, especially in the teachers' unions, have helped build the power for the militant mobilization of membership in contract fights, including the launching of illegal public-sector teacher strikes.

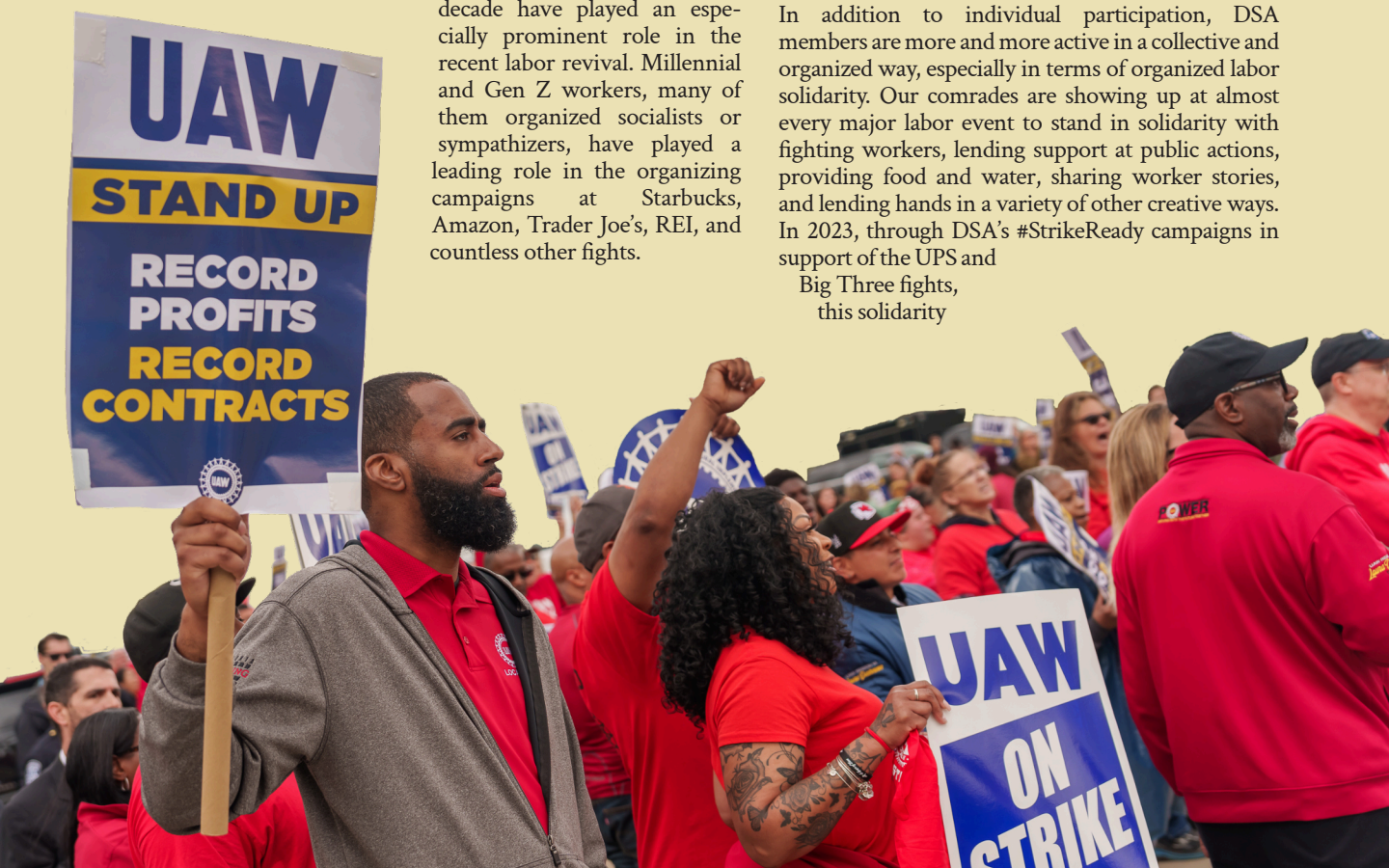
But some, including Joe Burns, have criticized McAlevy's approach as apolitical and therefore insufficient. McAlevy's philosophy of organizing does not call for a fundamental overhaul of the labor leadership, nor is it tied with a larger political project to transform capitalist society.

DSA members active in the labor movement, either independently or through DSA's organized efforts, have increasingly become an important part of the labor movement.

It is not unreasonable to estimate that some 5,000 or more DSA members are union staff, elected leaders, or active union members. These comrades' activities are often relatively independent from their participation in DSA, and may predate their membership. As individuals working diligently behind the scenes, they have played important roles in the UAW reform campaign, the UC strikes, the Starbucks campaign, and many other labor struggles.

In addition to individual participation, DSA members are more and more active in a collective and organized way, especially in terms of organized labor solidarity. Our comrades are showing up at almost every major labor event to stand in solidarity with fighting workers, lending support at public actions, providing food and water, sharing worker stories, and lending hands in a variety of other creative ways. In 2023, through DSA's #StrikeReady campaigns in support of the UPS and

Big Three fights,
this solidarity



work took on a new level of national coordination and scope.

Revival and Revolution: Prospects and Limitations

We should expect the labor movement's revival to continue at least at its current pace this year. A number of major contract fights have the possibility to take center stage, including for more than 300,000 postal workers in the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association and the American Postal Workers Union, 28,000 UFCW grocery workers in Michigan, 60,000 IATSE film and television workers, 30,000 IAM Boeing mechanics in Washington state, and almost 40,000 combined educators in the Chicago and Philadelphia public schools.

There are plenty of forces which will impact the labor movement's development in 2024, including continued economic uncertainty, the continuation of two dangerous wars, and Donald Trump's continued leadership of a powerful alliance between corporate radicals and the far right.

But while developments in the labor movement over the past half-decade should undoubtedly provide optimism to every socialist, there are also several important limitations to this movement which can only be resolved by their being recognized and addressed by the organized socialist movement.

In new organizing, even with a friendly NLRB, the major national campaigns at Starbucks, Amazon, Trader Joe's, and REI have mostly not been able to force management to bargain in a meaningful way. The lack of these key victories exhausts worker-leaders, workers, and staff, causes leadership to second-guess their investment of resources, and introduces uncertainty in the minds of workers who are considering organizing their workplaces. There is no escaping the painful reality that to score serious victories will require strikes that shut down corporate profits in a decisive fashion, which the new workplace organizing has so far not done.

Three Tendencies in DSA Labor

As in the rest of our work, there are political differences within DSA on our orientation to the labor movement.

On DSA's right, the social-democratic wing of DSA pushes for the unquestionable tailing of existing labor leaders, and downplays if not outright resists attempts to express or organize a critical wing in the labor movement. These comrades desire favorable relations to win labor to progressive policies

such as the Green New Deal, essentially forming a popular front with all but the worst tendencies in the labor movement; supporting the reform movement threatens this alliance with Big Labor.

Instead, the National Labor Commission and much of DSA's labor work is currently led by an alliance of Bread & Roses and Communist Caucus, and represents the continuation of the politics of Solidarity and Labor Notes. This tendency embraces the fight against the conservative bureaucracy which continues to dominate the labor movement.

While backing the labor movement as a whole in fights against corporate America, under the banner of "The Rank and File Strategy," these comrades seek to partner with the reformist wing in internal union contests and prioritizes industrialization by comrades in order to grow this movement.

However, this politics sometimes tends towards an uncritical orientation to the union reform movement. This was evident in the tendency of some to take an uncritical attitude to Sean O'Brien's leadership of the Teamsters' UPS strike-that-was-not. Some also downplay the need to raise open socialist critiques in the labor movement or to recruit in the unions directly on a socialist basis. These comrades adopt a stagist approach, in which socialists first act as auxiliaries to rebuild the labor movement, which then makes it possible to openly fight for socialism in the labor movement at some indefinite point in the future. From this political conception, it is primarily through building trust and leading by example that the socialists in the labor movement can win over their non-socialist union siblings.

In essence, this tendency adopts a popular front with the reform movement, failing to distinguish between the partial advances of the reform movement and the greater tasks of the socialist labor movement. The effect is the reduction of the socialist movement to the level of the progressive reform movement.

Despite the almost hegemonic character of this centrist approach to labor work within DSA, there is a third tendency which seeks to reorient DSA's labor work.

This left tendency links the day-to-day struggles on the shop floor with the struggle against the billionaire class in general and puts forward a vision of a socialist society. If we organize in labor from this angle, connecting today's struggles for reforms with the goal of revolution, we can build the labor unions as one part of the struggle for a socialist revolution against the capitalist class. This tendency respects and supports the work of solidarity campaigns and union reform movements, but it also distinguishes the full

and future tasks of socialists in the labor movement from the existing non-socialist forces and from what is possible today. The left-wing tendency looks to historical lessons from the Bolsheviks in the labor movement and the work of early American communists in the labor movement in the 1920s and 1930s as a model. This history shows that it has only been active intervention by socialists, both organizationally and politically, which has historically allowed for the flourishing of healthy labor movements.

The left wing distinguishes the advantages of O'Brien over Hoffa, of Fain over O'Brien, but also of a fully socialist approach over Fain.

The left wing adopts a united front with non-socialist forces in the labor movement, including the progressive elements of the reform movement. It distinguishes the advantages of O'Brien over Hoffa, of Fain over O'Brien, but also of a fully socialist approach over Fain; it offers both praise and criticism in the proportion that they are warranted. Without abandoning the task of building a broader class-struggle reform movement, the left wing raises independent socialist analysis and seeks to lay out a socialist strategy for labor organizing, sets out to organize uniquely socialist fractions in all the major unions, and, in the immediate future if not today, to run open socialist candidates in united fronts with the progressive elements.

Without opposing industrialization or "leading by example," the left wing raises the potential for open socialist engagement with the radical layers of the labor movement, and the prospect of recruiting large numbers of union workers to the socialist movement on a purely political basis. While rejecting sectarian or indelicate approaches, it opposes opportunist attempts to downplay socialism within the labor movement.

The left-wing tendency recognizes that the job of socialists in the labor movement is not just to do "best-practice" union organizing. From the start of this labor resurgence, as early as the educators' "Red State Revolt," there was a visible core of socialist organizers, many of them in DSA, who had a vision that went beyond the framework of capitalism, of budget cuts, and of limiting the struggle to the battle with Republicans. They combined this with an agenda for democracy and self-empowerment in their union, if need be with social media and informal organizing. These are methods of pushing for radical and militant tactics which extend the battle lines of the labor movement deeper into society.

These methods raise awareness within the labor movement of its need to break from the corporate Democrats, and begin to point union workers toward taking militant collective action, not only for the purpose of securing new, better contracts but to confront the billionaire class at the workplace, on the political plane, and ideologically.

The left wing develops these trends more thoroughly, calling explicitly for the reform movement to fight for the establishment of a new political party, and pointing to the need to unite the national reform movement into a unified national organization.

Tasks of DSA Labor's Left Wing

The foundation for reorienting DSA's labor work is fostering political discussion and debate within the DSA labor movement. Such debate and discussion would be greatly facilitated by the reorganization of DSA's National Labor Commission and local labor branches. An annual DSA labor conference would be a powerful tool to encourage debate and the development of strategy and structure. In addition, there is a need for the greater integration of the NLC and local labor branches, as right now there is no representational relationship between these two levels.

Developing DSA's independent political analysis and presence within the labor movement would be greatly facilitated by the development of a national DSA labor publication. Such a publication would immediately be a significant voice on the labor left and could draw on and highlight the existing work of local labor branches. Working within larger reform movements, DSA socialist fractions should be formed in every major national union on a clear political basis, and these fractions could then use the national labor publication to comment on developments within their specific unions and industries. This work would quickly attract the best layers of the US labor movement and lead to a growth in the recruitment of trade union activists to DSA.

Overall, it is necessary that socialists' work in the labor movement be part of, or even the central stage for, a battle to overthrow the existing order of capitalist society and in its place establish a fundamentally new society, a socialist society. By developing revolutionary ambition and enthusiasm, without for a second losing our grounding in the everyday struggles, the socialist movement will win over an ever greater section of the workers' movement. ■

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Keep on Cookin'



BY SEAN CASE

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Lessons from a Snuffed-Out Union Campaign

In April 2023, my coworkers and I formed the first union at an independent Seattle restaurant in 40 years. The beloved 30-plus-year-old hole-in-the wall diner where we worked was about to be reborn in a brand new location. We wanted to ensure the new restaurant didn't replicate the mistakes of the old. In November, our union

was decertified by a margin of one vote. I'd like to offer some reflections on our effort – the challenges, the missteps, and possible paths forward for organizing the restaurant industry.

Industry Challenges

Restaurant work is hard. Long hours on your feet, repetitive motions, extreme temperatures, harmful chemicals, an often grueling pace, and low pay. Restaurant workers have plenty to complain

about, but little energy to do anything about it.

People don't tend to stay in one place for long – they'll spend 6 months to 2 years at one restaurant, then move on. Many restaurant workers are apathetic and have low expectations of their work. This is reflected by a common public narrative about the industry – that these are stop-over jobs, something to do while figuring out a real line of work.

We came up short in our ability to consistently engage most of our new coworkers in discussions about the union.



Restaurants tend to also be atomized workplaces, both internally and externally. Front-of-house and back-of-house employees in many restaurants are pitted against each other due to unfair and often unclear tip pools. While restaurant chains and groups are common, many restaurants are standalone shops with limited and dwindling cash flows. Workers at "mom-and-pop" shops may share similar experiences, but they lack a common target for their woes.

Unique Challenges at Glo's

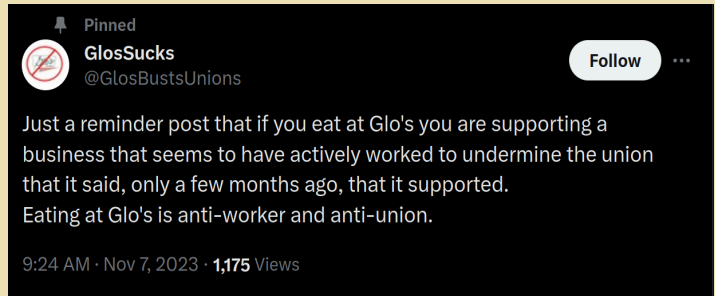
Glo's Café in Seattle, where I worked for 7 years, was somewhat unique in this landscape. It lacked the fast turnover rates that plague the industry at large. I had coworkers who had been there for 10 or more years. We liked it well enough to stick around, which was one of the reasons we were able to organize a union campaign at all.

But that unique opportunity also presented unique challenges. The bosses had a near-constant presence, often working alongside us for long stretches. They paid themselves very little and worked themselves quite hard (and never stopped talking about it). They made themselves into sympathetic characters.

For many of us on the organizing committee, that sympathy dried up quickly. While we were able to win voluntary recognition from ownership, they quickly showed their true nature. Shortly after opening the new restaurant, a coworker of mine (and an active organizing committee member) was fired on dubious grounds. Unfortunately, the organizing committee failed to recover and respond effectively, waiting for the slow, passive process of an NLRB suit to play out rather than fighting back.

Meanwhile, the bosses ingratiated themselves with new hires, who now constituted a little over half of the staff. They were showing one face to their long-time employees (those of us who organized the union), and another to the new ones. This began a process of polarization and emotional manipulation that wound up narrowly in the bosses' favor.

Another unique wrinkle that proved difficult to overcome was the presence of people close to the bosses on staff – specifically one boss's best friend of over 20



years and the other's romantic partner of nearly as long. These coworkers were never going to be won over by the union and were allowed to act with impunity while the rest of us walked on eggshells.

Mistakes Made

We rested too comfortably on the fact that we had already won voluntary recognition. Winning our union was the easy part. Keeping it proved much harder. When a decertification petition popped up in September, we were caught off guard.

The decertification vote was a winnable battle, which makes our loss by one vote all the more painful. The organizing committee's inability to recover from our comrade's firing was a key factor. Rather than mounting a full-throated defense and bringing as much attention to it as possible, we succumbed to fear and timidity. That timidity pervaded the rest of our campaign in various forms. We let the bosses get away with it, and it emboldened them.

We were able to get around 80% of the staff to sign union cards and fill out a bargaining survey within the first couple of months of the restaurant opening and even recruited a couple of new coworkers into the organizing committee. But we came up short in our ability to consistently engage most of our new coworkers in discussions about the

union, both at work and (more importantly) outside of work.

When we first won our union in April, there was a wave of public support. Longtime regulars, other restaurant workers, and the people of Seattle in general were excited by what we had done and wanted to dine at Glo's *because* it was now a union restaurant. In my view, one of our biggest missteps was not tapping into that support when we needed it. We could have publicized our coworker's firing and called it out for what it was – retaliation; we could have organized informational pickets to inform our customers and the broader community about our contract demands; we could have used that support to help pressure ownership to begin bargaining.

There was a prevailing feeling among the organizing committee that we shouldn't rock the boat.

But there was a prevailing feeling among the organizing committee that we shouldn't rock the boat or bring negative attention to the business, that the restaurant needed time to get on its feet and couldn't weather anything too dramatic. There's some truth to that sentiment, but I believe we could have walked a line of putting public pressure on ownership

Key Demands for Restaurant Organizing

▶▶ End the sub-minimum wage

Most states still allow tipped workers to be paid dismally low wages. The federal minimum wage for tipped workers is \$2.13/hour.

▶▶ Tips: transparency, equity, and abolition

Many restaurant workers have no clarity on how their tips are calculated, and misappropriation of tips by management is a common form of wage theft. Workers deserve transparency and equity in their tip-outs, with the eventual goal of abolishing tipped labor altogether in favor of living wages.

▶▶ Secure scheduling

It's common for restaurant workers to have no idea what their schedule is until only a day or so before the workweek starts. Workers should be able to plan their lives; we deserve at least 2 weeks' notice of scheduling.

▶▶ Break enforcement

Restaurant workers are routinely denied breaks. This is both unsafe and illegal, but there's very little accountability.

▶▶ Paid time off and sick time

Restaurant workers are often pressured to work while sick. We deserve at least 2 weeks of paid time off per year and 7 days of paid sick time. That paid time off should include an average tip-out, paid at the boss's expense.

▶▶ Immigration justice

Restaurants in the US are disproportionately staffed by undocumented people. They shouldn't have to live in fear that their boss will rat them out to the authorities if they rock the boat. No ICE in our restaurants!

while not damaging the business financially, drawing positive attention to our demands, and encouraging customers to show their support for us while dining at the restaurant.

Such action may have polarized the workplace. But the workplace became polarized anyway, just not on our terms. Rather than ownership being put on the back foot, we were. We wound up running a defensive campaign while a small group of employees loyal to ownership colluded with the bosses to smear us, lie to new employees about what our union was fighting for, and eventually move to oust our union. It was a demoralizing and traumatizing experience. Union busting is indeed disgusting.

Paths Forward for Organizing the Restaurant Industry

I'm proud of what my coworkers and I were able to accomplish. We still proved the restaurant industry can be organized. The headline here shouldn't be that organizing a restaurant is too hard. The headline is that the bosses had to lie and cheat to win, and they still barely beat us. Restaurant workers make up around 10% of the US workforce, and it's important that socialists and labor organizers find ways to deal with the unique challenges of organizing such a varied industry.

Winning our union was the easy part. Keeping it proved much harder.

There are multiple ways for restaurant organizing campaigns to be successful. We unionized our restaurant because we saw an opening to do so, but such a campaign isn't necessarily viable everywhere. Small unions like Restaurant Workers United can cut their teeth organizing small shops and can work with DSA's Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee to wage union campaigns at restaurant groups and small chains. Larger unions like UNITE HERE may be able to run successful campaigns at big chain restaurants.

One-off shops may prove more difficult to unionize, but that doesn't mean workers there can't get organized. If workers can come together across shops around common demands – secure scheduling, proper safety equipment and training, paid time off, tip transparency – they can begin to organize for change regardless of where they work and whether or not they stay there long-term. An association model of restaurant organizing has real potential to politicize workers and motivate them to demand change beyond their individual workplaces. ■

Sean Case, he/him, is a restaurant worker in Seattle. He's a member of Seattle DSA and the Reform & Revolution caucus and is on Reform & Revolution's editorial board. He's also vice president of Restaurant Workers United.

Toward an Ecology of Organization?



BY JUDITH CHAVARRIA

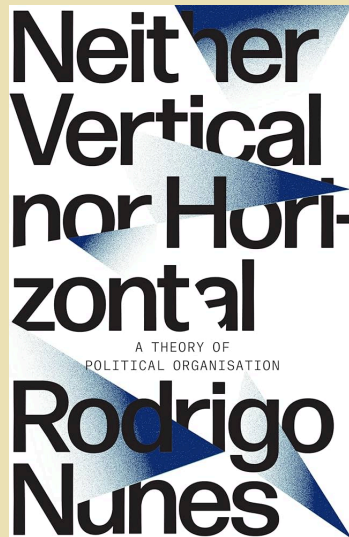
🐦 @WITHOUTJUDITH

Book Review | On Rodrigo Nunes's Attempt to Break Down Binaries With His Book About Political Organization

In his book *Neither Vertical nor Horizontal: A Theory of Political Organisation*, published in 2021 by Verso, Rodrigo Nunes frames our time as “the age of mass movements without mass organisations.” The emergence of post-Fordist capitalism and the collapse of revolutionary optimism since the fall of the Soviet Union have contributed to a series of objective crises without a sense of coordinated organization. Dozens of potentially significant breakthroughs rose and fell across the globe, including Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, and the Greek debt crisis to name a few. As Nunes identifies, one of the primary limitations of these horizontalist movements (“self-organized” movements without formal leadership structures) is their inability to sustain themselves against the national and international scale of capitalist crisis. Since then, horizontalism’s dwindling prospects have led many on the left to consider new approaches: “If there is a return to the question of organisation today, or at the very least growing talk about the need for it, it is of course primarily because recent experiences have left many people feeling that organisation is something they could use more of.”

The question of organization is an important starting point. But as Nunes makes clear, no “proposal, no initiative is good in itself, in abstraction from a situation with objective potentials and subjective dispositions.” As such, socialists today need to

dynamically work through their political and theoretical positions, their organizational forms and structures, and their strategies for achieving a fundamental rupture with and replacement of capitalism. *Neither Vertical nor Horizontal* attempts to rethink the problem of organization, and the binary oppositions that often structure discussions about it, not just because previous strategies have been insufficient, but because the definitions underlying it require some reevaluation. Nunes raises some thought-provoking questions in this regard, but doesn’t go far enough in thinking through what it may mean to answer them. There is a crisis of organization, but a careful study of history and current events shows a way out.



Catastrophe and Melancholy

Nunes is trying to break an impasse: *we can't agree on what the political challenges we're facing are, and so we can't effectively work together to address them.* The political dynamics fostered by DSA (as a broad tent organization) are a notable exception, but binary oppositions rooted in abstract concepts – autonomy/leadership, spontaneity/strategy, local/global, etc. – continue to

impoverish political debate. Sects waiting for the world to come to the right political line are bound to remain small, but movements without a strong program and dynamic organizations remain helpless. Underlying this range of problems is a crisis on the left. How did this occur?

The answer lies in the decades of political defeat which have entrenched the condition of left-wing melancholia. Suffering existential defeat in the 20th century meant that the left, as if seeing its reflection

through a shattered mirror, was made irreconcilable with itself. As Nunes writes about our intransigent debates: “The more each side identifies with one of only two possible answers to a set of equally abstract questions posed in moral terms (‘what is the *right* thing to do’ rather than ‘what is the best thing to do *in this situation?*’), the less visible becomes the fact that concrete problems always raise issues pertinent to both.” This has made the work of mourning (that is, of accepting the reality of past defeats, internalizing their lessons, and moving on) impossible.

Suffering existential defeat meant that the left, as if seeing its reflection through a shattered mirror, was made irreconcilable with itself.

The confusion of failure leads to what Nunes calls the “trauma of organisation.” In rebellion against parties with top-down, anti-democratic practices, the response became an attachment to spontaneity, with its weak hope that things would work out in the end if allowed to follow their own course. *Neither Vertical nor Horizontal’s* contribution is to highlight that these fractures are a consequence of powerlessness, and that a reconstruction of the left can’t begin by turning powerlessness into a virtue. Rather, Nunes speaks in terms of probabilities: political action *always* involves a series of wagers made on the part of its participants, the trick is to gather all of our historical and philosophical material and make the wagers which are most likely to succeed. Resituating the terms of engagement this way makes us political agents rather than abstract observers, and serves as a first step to overcoming the listless feeling which loss has created.

Ecological Thinking in the Time of Climate Crisis

Nunes contends that part of rediscovering a shared terrain of struggle from which to organize is seeing that organizing is *always already* happening around us as part of a diverse “ecology” of people, interests, institutions, social practices, and strategies:

The point, in short, is to shift from thinking organisation in terms of individual organisations to conceiving it ecologically: as a distributed ecology of relations traversing and bringing together different forms of action (aggregate, collective), disparate organisational forms (affinity groups, informal networks, unions, parties), the individuals that compose or collaborate with them, unaffiliated individuals who attend protests, share material online or even just sympathetically follow develop-

ments on the news, webpages and social media profiles, physical spaces, and so on.

Thinking about organization ecologically is about asking how a web of formal and informal relations can become greater than the sum of its parts, of what particular approaches can or cannot contribute to the whole, and to what end this political activity is being directed. These questions *emerge from* particular situations and conditions, and so too must any attempt at answering them. “Of course,” Nunes notes, “some causes – people, slogans, ideas, actions, programmes – will have more influence on the final product than others. Yet that effect is never simply the faithful realisation of the idea that someone had in their head, the imposition of a mental form on the inert matter of the world. It is overdetermined by objective tendencies and the interference of convergent, divergent and contrary forces.”

This observation is one of the book’s most important premises, outlining the fact that we can’t ever decide to make a movement on our own. What this means for a socialist organization is that it can’t seek to dominate a movement, nor prefigure one, if it’s to engage productively – any program or strategy needs to emerge from *what is* and find a way to connect that to what can be. There’s an unavoidable sense of contingency in the process, but beyond the *absolutely correct* is the potential for correction, something which socialists are capable of enacting throughout the process of struggle.

If Nunes recognizes that nothing is *inevitably* bound to succeed, he also leaves open the possibility for *anything* to succeed. In my view, this is an overcorrection, especially as it relates to the displaced role of the working class. Political subjects need to be created over time, but they’re bound to objective conditions which give them a particular place in the ecology. Understanding these conditions doesn’t mean that we’ll be able to predict what will always come of them, but in the tension created by class struggle it’s clear that we have a better way of understanding which wagers are more likely to produce the world we’re trying to build, and that this *not only* includes the working class, but has them playing an essential role.

The onset of capitalist decline and the material force of nature’s ongoing devastation certainly gives us cause to consider what actions might still be available to us to pull the emergency brake. We need to join as productive participants in mass movements for political, economic, and environmental justice, but we also require an approach which is consciously attempting to transform people’s desires and bring them toward revolutionary conclusions; not vertically imposing ourselves,



Occupy Wall Street raised the question: How to organize? And its answers were horizontal, leaderless. Rodrigo Nunes argues to draw a critical balance sheet.

Illustration based on a photo by Glenn Halog, tinyurl.com/OccupyWallStreetOWS, Copyright: CC BY-NC 2.0 Deed, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/

but not horizontally dissolving ourselves either. For Nunes, what matters for successful interventions “is not finding a single strategy that works for the ecology as a whole but coming up with strategies that work within it. What emerges from that is not a single unified strategy run by a central command, but a sort of metastrategy playing out at the ecological scale, the overall direction of which is permanently at stake.” Nunes is reluctant to outline what these strategies may look like, highlighting the limitations of attempting to recognize a problem without a concerted effort to address its solutions concretely. However, his focus on the ecology of movements and organizations is a thoughtful framework to consider a starting point.

Whither the Socialist Party?

What, then, is to be made of the party and the role of leadership, about which so much has been written? The afterimages of countless sects and the tragedy of recent projects such as Syriza have allowed the traumas of organization to reverberate into the present. Yet as Nunes reaffirms, the “question regarding parties is not whether they have a place in a movement ecology – they exist anyway, so they do – but what kind of relation they have or ought to have with it.”

We shouldn’t forget that any healthy mass party will contain a diverse ecology of its own: factions with varying degrees of coordination and conflict, electoral programs which mediate between membership and representation, and social functions which cohere and consolidate it as a politicized fixture of everyday life. While Nunes is careful to privilege the party as an organizational form, what he makes clear is that this

diversity is what can sustain it as an institution. It will succumb to inertia if its inner dimensions – as well as the movement ecology writ large – do not flourish through democratic discussion and debate.

Beyond the absolutely correct is the potential for correction, something which socialists are capable of enacting throughout the process of struggle.

For Nunes, this calls for *distributed leadership* which counterbalances the respective limits of centralized leadership (verticalism) and total leaderlessness (horizontalism) with a focus on bringing out leadership functions from every part of an organization and movement. One challenge for a socialist party is finding ways to build a resilient member-run democracy, because collective agency emerges by making it possible for *all involved* to see themselves as part of a broader movement requiring their participation and initiative in critical moments. As Nunes outlines, there is “only process if there is movement, there is only movement if there is tension, there is only tension if there is difference. The agent, leader or teacher must always be ready to ‘meet people halfway’, that is, to have a reciprocal encounter; but *the very object of the relationship consists in redefining where ‘halfway’ is every time.*”

Nunes’s basic project is twofold. He’s returning to old forms of organizing that horizontalists would call obsolete, while emphasizing the actual inter-

connectedness of forms like the party in movements (i.e. implementing a wide range of tactics, engaging with other organizations in a principled united front, and connecting directly to the ordinary people who show up to a movement). Ultimately, he misses what can make a mass socialist party special: particular organizations can and will contribute in different ways, but only a party can synthesize today's many battles into a common, multifaceted struggle. Even so, his work shows that for such a party to be generative it needs to be intricately linked to a broader movement, not merely trying to stand in for one.

Notes on DSA's Structure and Strategy

If *Neither Vertical nor Horizontal* communicates anything, it's that there's still a need for path breaking approaches to problems new and old. To this end, it's worth briefly grounding the book in the context of DSA.

One of the most important open questions in DSA regards the relationship between local chapters and national leadership bodies. Nunes's concept of *directionality* is constructive here: it is "the ability to break a broad systemic objective down into steps and sequences conducive to generating both the internal and external conditions one needs to achieve it. Directionality connects local targets and global goals, reforms and rupture, by integrating the former into the latter as moments that expand collective *potentia* [the capacity to act] and create opportunities that did not exist before." The challenge for DSA is in turning 78,000 members into a force capable of producing effects at a nationwide and even international scale. Binary oppositions between localism and capital's all-consuming power need to be overcome by recognizing chapters as a component of the whole apparatus that is a mass-membership organization. This is one of the

critical functions of cohesive, well-integrated campaigns, and distributed leadership – both of which DSA is currently without.

Nunes, in thinking of organization in terms of ecologies, emphasizes that local formations such as DSA chapters are "nodes" which help direct a wider political goal through on-the-ground organizing. Two questions arise: 1.) how can chapters be empowered to have the greatest impact and coordination with each other, and 2.) how can their interventions translate upward to a mass organization? In my view, this begins with an elected leadership which can act decisively and implement clear political strategies across DSA, alongside a membership which is empowered through a middle layer to check and recall leadership if it makes mistakes.

If we're actually going to consider our organizing without one-size-fits-all blueprints, DSA members need to have regular, systematic discussions about the direction our organization should take, clarifying together what we hope to accomplish and how. Issues of form and function are intertwined; only through a critical and democratic process will we be able to build a socialist organization which is capable of recognizing the potential flames of revolution where only embers are yet visible. Asking the questions Nunes asks is a good start, but to actually answer them we need to begin laying the groundwork for concrete solutions to the impasse. The book doesn't fully untangle the way forward for today's movements, but it offers an interesting critique which shows that we can't succeed by prefiguring them with a sect, nor with no organizations at all. ■

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DSA Convention 2023





Organizing – but for What Purpose?

BY BRANDON MADSEN AND STEPHAN KIMMERLE

Flowing from the discussions in Reform & Revolution around Rodrigo Nunes's book, Neither Vertical nor Horizontal, we (the authors) had a less positive view on the book than Judith in her great book review in this magazine. We believe that these discussions can be helpful to sharpen the view of Marxists in the US and internationally toward what we understand to be key questions. To be clear, attempting (as Judith has done) to draw out insights even from non-Marxist authors like Nunes and make them useful within a revolutionary socialist approach is something we fully support. We simply felt the need to make the consciously anti-Marxist foundations of the book more clear.

Attempting to draw lessons from the failures of the previous decade's horizontalist movements like Occupy Wall Street to achieve systemic change, Nunes argues for the left to rehabilitate its view of the role of leadership and to allow for a somewhat more vertical approach to organizing. That much is welcome.

Despite being well read in Marxism, however, when Nunes speaks about “organizing” he does not mean organizing the working class to take power. In his own words, Nunes tells us that there is no “revolutionary subject” based on the objective position of “this or that social group.” Even through the author's very academic writing style, the book clearly resounds with the mantra that there is no reason to believe that the working class is the agent of change in any Marxist sense or that a socialist revolution is in any way likely. The question of organizing is therefore posed in a very different way – and with very different context and basic assumptions – than it would be for revolutionary Marxists.

Nunes shows a lot of interest in Lenin as an organizer, but much less in the fundamental political problem around which all of Lenin's organizing was centered: how to arrive at a mass party with a Marxist program, deeply rooted in the organizations and struggles of the working class and its vanguard. (By “vanguard” we mean an advanced layer of experienced working-class fighters and organic rank-and-file trailblazers – far exceeding the bounds of any one party – which also acts to hold leaders accountable to the movement.)

The starting point Nunes takes for organizing is that today there are not many people who actually hope for a revolution – and, even amongst those, a significant part would not consider a revolution to be likely or viable. But his intention is not to change that; instead he tries to find an organizational solution fully adapted to the present consciousness.

Organizing like Lenin?

Nunes gives up on the role of the working class, gives up a Marxist concept of history, and gives up on the idea that a revolution is needed to take power away from the ruling classes. Instead, he concludes that what we will face is a long and messy transition period. With Marxism having been set aside, the reader is left a bit unclear as to what we would be transitioning to; still, Nunes indicates a desire for some type of fundamental change, especially given the threat to human existence posed by climate change. But how is this change to be accomplished?

His answer: organization! Nunes wants to bring some people (it's unclear whom: “potentially anyone, ideally everyone”) together into a stronger network of organizations than anything we've seen over the last decades, one embedded in the broader “ecology” of movements and other organizing. Reading between the lines, these would ostensibly be smart, insightful people who don't root themselves in any particular social class.

In contrast, we believe that Lenin's approach – forming and organizing the advanced layers of the working class into a movement and a party – was and still is correct. This type of organizing is still plenty messy and takes on many shapes, some of them more vertical, others more horizontal. The process of forming and consolidating such an organization will often need to run through broader (politically more diverse) parties and formations in order for the working class to take the next step forward. A mass revolutionary party is forged in the heat of real battles of the working class, sometimes starting from a low level. In fact, today we already face a crisis of low levels of consciousness and organization, and this complicates our organizing tasks.

However, in our view – and in contrast to Nunes's – our organizing should be guided by and directed toward the goal of developing a mass revolutionary party with a Marxist program, deeply rooted in the working class. Within this, of course, questions about how horizontal or vertical our approach should be in any given situation are very interesting, but these questions and our mode of answering them flow from that overall framework.

For us, the absence of (and, indeed, explicit opposition to) that framework limits the insights and value of Nunes's book quite significantly. ■

A Portrait of a Revolutionary



BY CLAIRE SCHACHTELY

Alexandra Kollontai's Life and Work – From Valiant Attempts to Liberate Working-Class Women in Soviet Russia, to Her Radical Writings on Love and Sex – Echo into the Present, with Important Implications for Socialist Feminists Today

Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952) was a Russian revolutionary who's influence had a profound impact on workers – particularly women – in the early stages of the Soviet Union. She had a revolutionary understanding of proletarian feminism that she used to pass important legislation, as well as shift the socio-political culture to protect and empower working women.

Her accomplishments were visionary, and in many cases, are still relevant demands for women and gender minorities today. Following the revolution, she was appointed as the Bolshevik Party's People's Commissar of Social Welfare in the newly-founded Soviet Union, where she helped pass many laws that improved the living conditions of working families. Kollontai also wrote extensively about communist theories of love and sexuality; she believed that women must be emancipated economically in order to be liberated romantically and sexually.

A Class Traitor

Born into nobility in St. Petersburg, Kollontai had a comfortable childhood and a private education, but even as a young child she questioned the social order. She raised objections as to why she was offered schooling when it was denied to other children.

In 1893, she married an engineer of modest means for love rather than financial pursuit, much to her rich

parents' disapproval. They had one child and lived a modest lifestyle. However, her devotion to her first husband wavered as she grew more committed to the revolution, and they later separated because she felt trapped in marriage and family life – a personal experience that would later be reflected in her writings on the family under capitalism.

A major catalyst for Kollontai's radicalization occurred in 1896, when she accompanied her husband to one of the largest textile factories in Russia, where he was working on fixing the ventilation system. There she viewed the horrifying working and living conditions of the female workers.

The emancipation of women requires the end of capitalism, but it can't just stop there; it also requires an active social transformation of society's views on our interpersonal relations.

The factory air was contaminated with toxic textile dust, leading to workers contracting several lifelong respiratory illnesses. She also visited the rickety barracks the workers lived in. Some did not have windows for airflow or sunlight, there was no privacy, beds were crammed together, and children were forced to sleep on the floor. After several conversations with workers about their conditions, she wrote in *Iz moey zhizni (From my Life)*, "I understood deeply to the bottom of my heart that we cannot continue to live as we have lived until now, when such terrible living conditions and inhuman order exist around us."

In the next few years, she helped organize several female factory workers to strike their workplaces for better conditions.

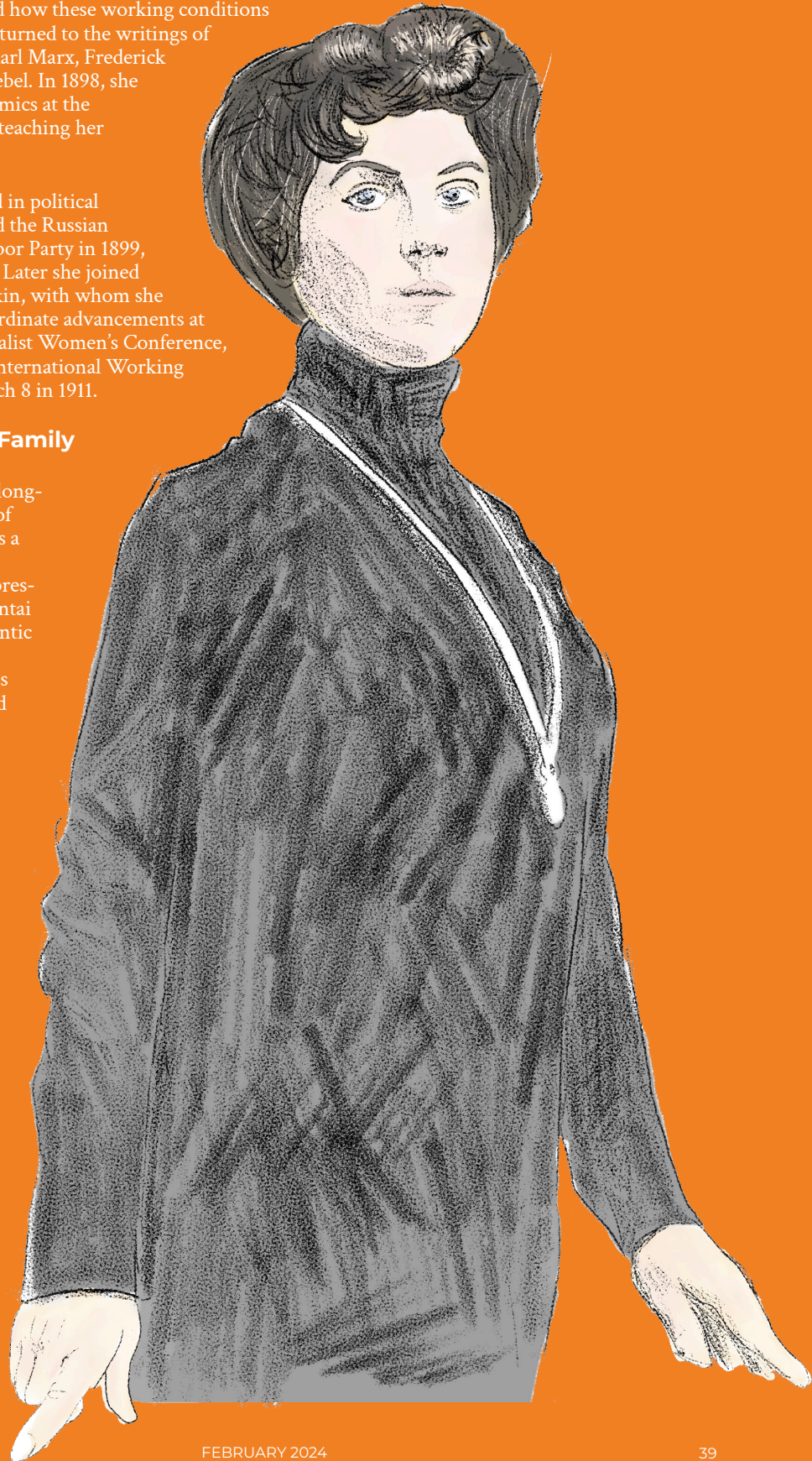
To better comprehend how these working conditions came to be, Kollontai turned to the writings of famous authors like Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, and August Bebel. In 1898, she began studying economics at the University of Zurich, teaching her findings to workers.

She became immersed in political organizing. She joined the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1899, where she met Lenin. Later she joined forces with Clara Zetkin, with whom she worked closely to coordinate advancements at the International Socialist Women's Conference, and helped establish International Working Women's Day as March 8 in 1911.

The Role of the Family

Kollontai viewed the long-standing institutions of marriage and family as a social structure that contributes to the oppression of women. Kollontai understood that romantic relationships are not separate from our class relations and are based in historical materialism. As she wrote in *Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations*, "Family and marriage are historical categories... [that developed] with the economic relations that exist at the given level of production."

Kollontai stated that, "women's liberation could take place only as the result of the victory of a new social order and a different economic system." The emancipation of



Art: @other_boi



International Socialist Congress, Copenhagen 1910. Alexandra Kollontai holds a delegate's hand.

women requires the end of capitalism, but it can't just stop there; it also requires an active social transformation of society's views on our interpersonal relations, which Kollontai embodied in her day to day organizing for women's empowerment.

After the Russian Revolution, Kollontai was able to return to her homeland under the new workers' government. She was elected the Commissar of Social Welfare and was the first – and only – female cabinet member in the world's first socialist state.

Once in power, she dramatically shifted familial relationships to be more equal and just towards women and children. Very quickly, she was able to pass laws that made women the juridical equal to men. The laws allowed soviet women to have total access to their wages devoid of financial control from their fathers or husbands, maternity leave was protected, divorce and abortion legalized, and the idea of "illegitimate" children was abolished. This was not a form of charity for a lucky few, or a gutted governmental service only available to those who could navigate a bureaucratic system, but real transformations of material conditions for an entire demographic.

Kristen Ghodsee points out in *Why Women Had Better Sex Under Socialism*, "Although gender wage disparities and labor segregation persisted, and although the communists never fully reformed domestic patriarchy, communist women enjoyed a degree of self-sufficiency that few Western women could have imagined."

Kollontai later became head of the Zhenotdel, the women's department of the central committee, where she pushed for the socialization of women's domestic work through public dining halls, communal kitchens, laundry services, and high-quality free childcare. Because the capitalist economy thrives on unpaid domestic labor, she believed moving these services into public ownership would both stimulate the national economy and alleviate burdens of women in the home, all while curbing some of the power dynamics of the family.

Although the question of responsibilities of domestic life is a gender issue, it is also equally a class issue. Upper class families could (still can today) afford to not perform domestic tasks, and instead exploit the working class to raise their children, and clean the house.

Kollontai pushed for the socialization of women's domestic work through public services, and high-quality free childcare.

These bold changes did not have time to become universal before being quashed by the bureaucratic counter-revolution. Even though the brand-new and very impoverished position of the Soviet Union did not allow for the full implementation of these public services, the level of progress was still admirable, especially considering the deeply religious and patriarchal nature of society during the prudish Victorian era.

Kollontai was critical of the bureaucratization of the Soviet Union and some of its early economic policies, leading her to join the workers' opposition and demand more democracy within the Bolshevik Party. This contributed to Stalin discrediting her work and reversing most of her policies when he came into power in 1924. Under Stalin, abortion was outlawed, there were restrictions on divorce, and a traditional nuclear family imposed. Soviet women once again found themselves taking on the double burden of domestic work and employment. Kollontai left Russia for Norway in 1924 where she became the world's first female ambassador. She died naturally in 1952.

Modern-Day Bourgeois vs. Socialist Feminism

Kollontai was a fierce fighter. She was up against not just her male colleagues and proletarian men (many of whom were influenced by the dominant sexist ideas of the time), but also bourgeois women

who did not want to see the economic hierarchies that they benefited from change. Kollontai, and many like her, staunchly opposed a women's movement that focused solely on voting or property rights for upper-class women while ignoring the unique needs of working women.

Exclusionary pitfalls, experienced by Kollontai, bring down the movement. Unfortunately, problems with the first and second waves of feminism – which primarily contended with topics like suffrage, the right to work, and anti-discrimination (which are important) – leave out the distinctive needs of working-class women and minorities, and these issues can still be found today.

A common theme of the modern-day women's movement focuses on the advancement of women in positions of corporate and political power. This form of bourgeois identity politics mainly serves individualized "girl bosses," but leaves out and exploits working women, creating a myth of equality as some women are in positions of power, while the majority struggle to make ends meet. There seems to be an impulse to fix the patriarchy by putting female faces in high places, and although sexism does affect all women, it is incorrect to assume that the equality of those on top will trickle down to liberate those on the bottom.

A socialist feminist movement today would do well to learn from the feminist developments of the Soviet Union and study the women who fought for and enjoyed rapid gains brought about by the collectivization of society. Although not universal, women of the time experienced economic independence through radical expansion of social safety nets and a shift in social consciousness of the role of working women.

There seems to be an impulse to fix the patriarchy by putting female faces in high places. But equality of those on top will not trickle down to liberate those on the bottom.

As we begin an election year, lessons from Kollontai are all the more vital. We need socialist candidates who will fight for legislative reforms that protect working women and gender minorities, while understanding that the gains women have made in the past 100 years are very vulnerable to being rolled backwards. Additionally, Kollontai's

legacy of reforms shows how, while we fight for changes that help the entire working class, it is essential to consider the needs of particularly oppressed groups within it. There is no winning a socialist program that doesn't consider the unique needs of women, trans people, or people of color.

While we fight for changes that help the entire working class, it is essential to consider the needs of particularly oppressed groups within it.

Revolutionary Love

Kollontai had a revolutionary commitment to radically re-configuring bourgeois notions of sexuality and love. Bourgeois morality influences the cultural norms of heteronormative, nuclear family relationships, and it often does so to direct the concentration of capital. Therefore, sexual relations under capitalism are also economic and property relations.

Under a new economic and social system the interests and needs of the proletariat will be met and we will be able to date and marry without any financial, familial, or property considerations. But romantic relations aside, a new society based on principles of comradeship, empathy, understanding, and solidarity will allow all types of love to flourish. As Kollontai puts it in *Make Way for Winged Eros*:

The proletarian ideology [...] attempts to educate and encourage every member of the working class to be capable of responding to the distress and needs of other members of the class, of a sensitive understanding of others and a penetrating consciousness of the individual's relationship to the collective. All these "warm emotions" – sensitivity, compassion, sympathy and responsiveness – derive from one source: they are aspects of love, not in the narrow, sexual sense but in the broad meaning of the word. Love is an emotion that unites and is consequently [...] an organizing character.

Kollontai's concept of comradely love is not only something to be embraced as we struggle for a new world together, but also points towards the human potential for empathy and connection outside of the restricting forces of exploitation and accumulation inherent in capitalism. ■

Claire Schachtely, she/her, is a rank-and-file Teamster and a member of DSA and the Reform & Revolution caucus in Portland, OR.



Between Imperialism and Socialism



BY MARIA FRANZBLAU

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A Report from My Participation in DSA's Delegation to Cuba

"There are no boundaries in this struggle to the death. We cannot be indifferent to what happens anywhere in the world, for a victory by any country over imperialism is our victory; just as any country's defeat is a defeat for all of us."

Che Guevara, 1965

An expanded version of this article can be found online, detailing more of the experiences that I don't have the space to go over here.

In late October, I traveled to Havana with over forty comrades as part of the Democratic Socialists of America's first official, national delegation to Cuba. For five days our delegation, which was hosted by the ruling Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), met with government ministries and mass organizations, visited Havana neighborhoods, and donated medical and school supplies to a local hospital and a primary school.

The political content of this delegation was focused on arguably the single biggest crisis faced by Cuban society today: the criminal economic embargo imposed by the United States government. The US embargo, commonly known in Cuba as *el bloqueo* (blockade), was put in place shortly after the victory of the Revolution and blocked nearly all US trade with the island. In Havana, you can see

The delegation hears a presentation from Homero Acosta Álvarez in the National Assembly. Photo: Maria Franzblau.



some of the effects of this devastation, such as crumbling public infrastructure, long lines for food and gas, shortages of basic goods and medicine, and regular blackouts.

In response, Cuba's government has chosen to allow a greater presence of private businesses on the island, and officially recognized both private property and foreign direct investment in their 2019 constitution. During our delegation, due to US sanctions barring American citizens from spending at Cuban state-owned enterprises, we saw several of the private shops, restaurants, and hotels in Havana. These businesses are primarily targeted at tourists and have introduced greater social inequality to the island, though to a much lesser degree than in capitalist nations. Another impact has been austerity, including a December 2023 proposal to either cut rations or raise fuel and electricity prices, with top officials citing Cuba's recent 1-2% GDP decrease and 30% inflation rate as justification.

But there is a second aspect of the crisis which we did not focus on during this delegation: a crisis of political legitimacy. Cuba's government is a regime where decision-making power rests in the hands of the Central Committee of the PCC (the only legal political party) alongside its bureaucracy while the elected legislature is a disempowered rubber-stamp committee. Legally recognized mass organizations we met with on this delegation, like the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, Federation of Cuban Women, and the Workers' Central Union of Cuba, are loyal to the bureaucracy, while independent political organizing is repressed.

To learn from the revolution, we must learn from the whole of this socialist project's successes and failures.

In prior decades the party could rely on the gains of the revolution and the formidable leadership of Fidel Castro as a source of legitimacy. But as the economic crisis threatens the country's social programs and leadership has passed to the less-popular Miguel Díaz-Canel, Cubans increasingly show

dissatisfaction with life on the island. We see this in the mass protests of 2021, smaller localized demonstrations against shortages, and nearly 5% of the population emigrating away in the past two years.

Of course these crises, particularly that of the bureaucracy, must be put into context – the context of what it means to defend a socialist revolution in a poor Caribbean nation 90 miles away from the most powerful capitalist empire in the world. Cuba has faced economic sabotage, an attempted invasion at the Bay of Pigs, assassination attempts on its leaders, terrorist attacks from far-right Cuban exiles, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Stalinism in Eastern Europe and with that a period of dramatic economic change in a very short time, and groundlessly being placed on the State Sponsors of Terrorism List in 1982 and again in 2021.

But just because these crises can be attributed to external forces doesn't mean that *every* decision of the state has been correct or that *every* mistake has been inevitable. Nor does it mean that we, as US socialists, should be apathetic to the internal issues and debates of Cuban socialism while we narrowly focus on our own ruling class. To truly learn from the revolution, and to arm ourselves with the best analysis and messaging to fight the embargo at home, we must learn from the whole of this socialist project's successes and failures.

I must also reaffirm that the revolution remains an inspiration as a testament to the gains working people can make when they seize power and resources from the capitalist class. In Cuba, we saw a healthcare system with free, universal treatment and doctors ingrained in every small town and *barrio*, while back home in the richest nation on Earth millions of people can't afford basic care. We saw an education system which provides a free, quality education from primary school to university with a national curriculum, without the fragmentation, incoherence, and racial segregation present in the American system. We saw a religious, *machista* society which had in 2022 legalized same-sex marriage and adoption, and had already secured free abortion and gender-affirming care on demand, while states across the US roll back our most basic rights to bodily autonomy.

Cuba's socialist project, even with a repressive state bureaucracy and crippling economic crisis, has made important achievements for the workers of Cuba and the world. It is our duty to support them against vicious attacks from imperialist powers, which begins by ending the US embargo. In giving this support, though, our aim should be to empower Cuban workers to gain democratic



DSA delegation in Cuba, October 2023

control of their economy and government, rather than pretending that this is already the case.

During my time on this Delegation, I think we succeeded in educating ourselves on the impacts the embargo has had on Cuban society, convincing many of us to consider organizing against the embargo in our own chapters. I believe we were far less successful, though, in understanding Cuban socialism in its full complexity or considering how to apply our findings to our organizing in the US. Because we were hosted by the Communist Party, the vast majority of our itinerary involved us meeting state or party officials and representatives from the party's mass organizations. These meetings mostly consisted of us receiving lectures followed by a Q&A period, instead of any even exchange of ideas, tactics, and advice. On several occasions comrades asked our Cuban counterparts for advice on our own organizing, and consistently we were met with non-answers.

At no point in our itinerary did we meet with independent, critical, or alternative leftist voices, and criticisms of the country's bureaucratic political structures were almost entirely absent. For this reason, I sought out and organized three meetings

with critical leftists entirely separate from the official itinerary. While I give credit to the delegation organizers for never impeding my efforts and encouraging all of us to ask challenging questions, there was no intentional effort to introduce the critical perspective.

This report will not be a play-by-play account of everything we did on this delegation. Instead, I will highlight a few key moments from my trip and how they inform my analysis of Cuban socialism and of DSA's international approach.

CENESEX, Mariela Castro, and the Family Code

One of the most significant political developments in Cuba's recent history was the passage of the 2022 Family Code, which legalized same-sex marriage and adoption and granted several other rights and recognitions to LGBTQ people. Initially, the provision on same-sex marriage was intended to be part of Cuba's 2019 Constitution but, after counter-pressure led by the churches, the government removed that provision and pushed it to a separate vote. The Party and its mass organizations campaigned extensively for the adoption of the Family Code and held public meetings across the country to allow citizens to give their feedback. Meanwhile, a notably large "No" campaign against the Family Code was led by the churches and right-wing dissident groups through social media. While the referendum passed, "No" received 33% of the vote, which is remarkably high for a government initiative in a one-party state.

A large part of the credit for this advancement belongs to the Cuban National Center for Sex Education, commonly known as CENESEX. This is a state-funded body known for advocating for LGBTQ rights, led by Mariela Castro (niece of Fidel). This group has played an important role in advancing LGBTQ rights and struggling internally within the Communist Party against more socially conservative trends. It is also, though, the only state-sanctioned advocacy group on this topic while independent formations are repressed.

The PCC has had a remarkable transformation on LGBTQ rights over its 60-year history in power. For the first two decades of the Revolution, the Party took an actively

DSA members hear a presentation from Mariela Castro at CENESEX. Photo: Maria Franzblau



homophobic stance, as the state forced gay men to work in labor camps in the late 1960s and Fidel Castro openly used homophobic slurs and declared that a homosexual could never embody the characteristics of a true revolutionary. In a 2010 interview, Castro took responsibility for the labor camps and expressed regret for abuses in them but did not apologize or acknowledge the camps as an explicitly homophobic policy. Through decades of research, organizing, and internal struggle within the Communist Party, CENESEX and Mariela Castro have helped transform Cuba into one of the most progressive nations in the world, let alone in Latin America, on LGBTQ rights.

My participation in DSA's delegation to Cuba has been one of the most meaningful experiences I've ever had as a socialist.

In many ways, the Family Code represents the bureaucracy working at its best. They corrected an error in the party's stances under the pressure of LGBTQ Cubans and the international movements for those rights, used mass meetings to influence public opinion and respond to it, and mobilized the party and its mass organizations to advance a "Yes" vote to expand women's and LGBTQ rights. But a lack of independent organizing or popularly-controlled institutions means that this was necessarily a slow going and top-down process. Put bluntly, Cuba's transformation on LGBTQ rights was facilitated in no small part by Mariela Castro's position as a prominent figure in the party bureaucracy with a famous family name.

We visited the center in Havana and heard a lecture from Mariela Castro about the history of CENESEX and of women's and LGBTQ rights in Cuba. During the Q&A, one comrade asked for any advice Castro could give to US socialists fighting for queer rights. She mostly dodged the question regarding advice for US socialists, and she opted instead to describe her internal struggles within the Communist Party on this topic. She told the story of how she found old writings from her mother, the revolutionary Vilma Espin, in support of same-sex marriage and used it to argue for the Party to support same-sex marriage. She went on to describe the process of winning LGBTQ rights as a slow, gradual, consensus-building project rather than a rapid, activist struggle.

Castro's struggles within the party have been admirable and won considerable gains for queer people. But it is worth examining that, in response to a question about what LGBTQ organizing should look like, her answer was a course of action really only available to her: using old family documents to make an argument to top party brass. I was left wondering what avenues for change might exist for ordinary working people without the same access.



Rally in Philadelphia in 2021, Photo:

Joe Piette, tinyurl.com/EndBlockade2021, Copyright: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 Deed, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/

A Queer Perspective on Cuba's Future

During my time in Havana, I made contact with several members of what is often called Cuba's "critical left," a term used to refer to left-wing activists, journalists, intellectuals, and everyday people who are critical of either certain policies of the PCC or broader systemic issues in the party bureaucracy. One of these meetings was with Maykel Vivero, an independent journalist and LGBTQ activist.

Vivero, who writes for a queer-focused publication called *Tremenda Nota*, is a socialist who is critical of both the US blockade and the Cuban government. In his analysis, the government has grown increasingly unpopular with most Cubans as the economic situation has worsened and people see less hope for a future on the island. Many young people have given up on political ideals and have instead come to view emigration to capitalist countries as the surest path to a better life. Politically, this has most benefited the right-wing of the opposition, as they can receive funding and political support from the United States and propagate their messages through social media. By contrast, the critical left as it is currently constituted is weak and marginal; repressed heavily by the government and lacking the external support given to the right-wingers.

Still, he acknowledges that the single biggest factor impacting Cuban society is the crushing US embargo. The tightening of sanctions under the Trump administration has led to shortages of food and medicine, undermining the country's social programs and forcing it to allow more private businesses to take hold. While Vivero argues that there are still changes the government could make immediately – such as the release of political prisoners and allowing greater freedom of association – the most systemic change must happen through a change of policy in the United States. Absent that, the most likely possibilities for Cuba's future would be 1) a Chinese-style mixed economy, which would significantly increase inequality and leave workers without a democratic voice, or 2) a full capitalist restoration, which would be a world-historic disaster for the working class.

Regarding CENESEX, Vivero said he had mixed views. As an LGBTQ person himself, he chafes at the tendency of Mariela Castro, a cisgender heterosexual woman, to purport to speak on behalf of Cuba's LGBTQ community while independent organizers are suppressed. In 2019, he was one of several organizers of an independent pride rally in Havana, after the government abruptly canceled the state-sanctioned march, and the protest was denounced by CENESEX as a "provocation."

Still, he argued that while CENESEX has moved slowly, its role has largely been a positive one. *Tremenda Nota* supported the 2022 Family Code, which he argued is a significant step forward for LGBTQ Cubans. The right-wing opposition, by contrast, campaigned strongly against the Family Code and condemned critical leftists for supporting the PCC's position on the initiative.

This conversation indicated to me that there are significant differences between the right-wing dissident movement – which aligns itself with the US and calls for a capitalist regime change – and the critical left, which supports socialism and is willing to engage in critical support for government initiatives like the Family Code. Vivero, who was actually arrested briefly for participating in the 2021 protests, said this:

The July 11th protests were an expression of Cuba's workers and poor. They may not understand the full scope and context of our country's problems, but they are demanding resources they have a right to. They also demand political freedoms and the ability to control their own government. The protests were also against the capitalist policies of the Cuban government! People are angry that our government is building hotels when we don't have food!

The Political Limits of Our Delegation

Internationalism means more than just solidarity. Within the global capitalist system, international events have repercussions for all countries. We see in Cuba's history, for instance, how thoroughly their socialist project has been impacted by the fall of the

Soviet Union, the rise and fall of Pink Tide governments in Latin America, and US foreign policy. For this reason, US socialists must be invested and engaged in these debates, seeking to learn from the successes and failures of international class struggles and seeking to teach others from our own.

This delegation represents a positive step for DSA's international work, and I'm confident that the resulting discussions, debates, and follow-up actions which arise from it will lead to a growth in activity and consciousness around ending the embargo. But the uncritical, diplomacy-first approach of DSA's International Committee places important limitations on the effectiveness of our work in three major ways.

The first weakness is in our analysis and understanding of Cuban socialism. There is no shortage of inspiration we can draw from positively appraising the Revolution's gains in literacy, healthcare, education, and more. We should not deemphasize the role of the brutal US embargo in the country's crises. But one simply cannot understand the full picture of Cuba this decade without also understanding the political repression of independent organizing, the threats that private business and austerity pose to the socialist economy, or the crisis of legitimacy the government faces. If one were to attend this delegation and fully accept the party line put forward in our itinerary, the political side of this crisis would go completely unmentioned.

Second, it limits the effectiveness of our external messaging and organizing, especially in regions of the country with large Hispanic and Cuban-American populations. While it is true that there are large sections of these diaspora communities, particularly Cuban exiles, who are hardcore reactionaries and have petty-bourgeois class interests, it would be a mistake to treat these communities as monolithic or immovable. In my own experience organizing in Miami, there is a large presence of Cubans in every local struggle, whether it be university students and faculty walking out against our far-right state legislature's censorship of education, or local Starbucks workers struggling to unionize their stores.

In these struggles, there is often pressure for organizers to lower the banner of socialism and avoid talk of

Cuba, if not to outright condemn the socialist government. As principled internationalists, we can afford to do neither. Instead, we should make our case for socialism and against the embargo in a grounded, defensible way to working people. One way of doing this is acknowledging basic facts recognized by the vast majority of Cubans, like the fact that independent political organizing is severely restricted and that institutions like the National Assembly act more as rubber stamp committees than as democratic representatives of the people. Another is being willing to voice criticism of the government when we think it makes mistakes, like in the suppression of an independent pride parade in 2019 or excessive sentences for political prisoners from the 2021 protests.

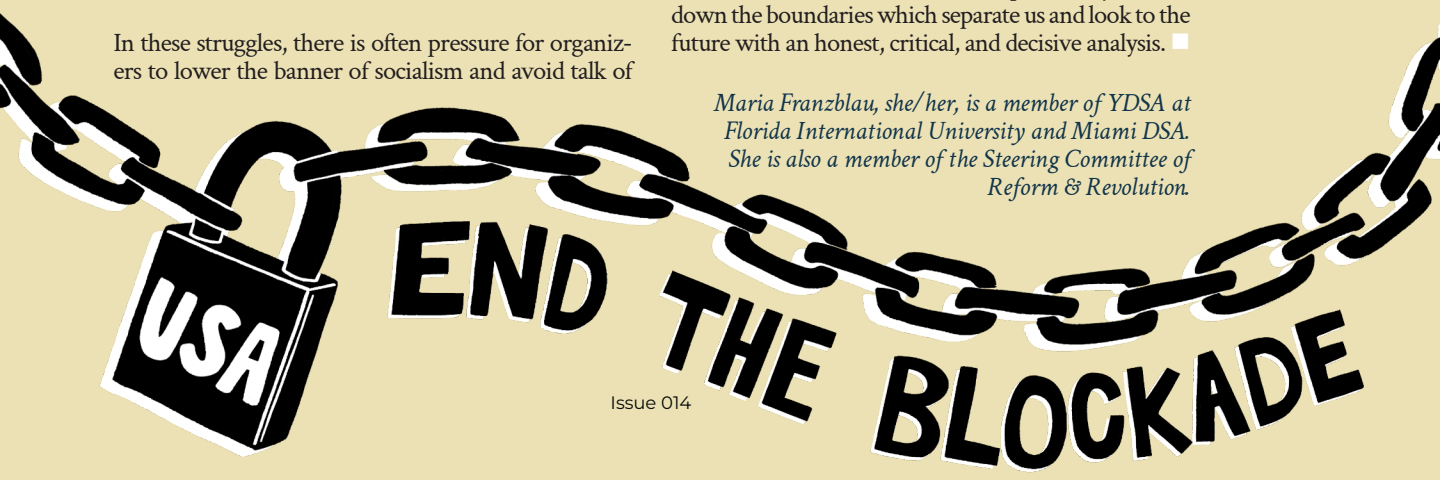
Third, and perhaps most jarringly, is that it doesn't appear to me that we learned very many lessons which can be applied to organizing against the embargo in the US. We certainly raised the delegation's consciousness and degree of knowledge about the embargo and Cuban politics generally, and many of us are already bringing those lessons back to our chapters and our communities. But we didn't learn very much that would inform our practical organizing strategy and we didn't trade ideas or tactics between ourselves and our Cuban counterparts.

Reflections

Even with these limitations, my participation in DSA's delegation to Cuba has been one of the most meaningful experiences I've ever had as a socialist, and I genuinely hold nothing but respect and appreciation for the comrades who spent months and years working to make it happen.

It's no exaggeration to say that the resilience of Cuba's revolutionary working class is a beacon to us all, and a project which must be defended. As we donated over 500 pounds of desperately needed medical and school supplies, witnessed the gains that have been made even with the embargo in place, and navigated one of the last remaining examples of a socialist society, how could we not marvel at all we still have left to fight for? I came back to the US with the sense that our work was far from over – now, it's our responsibility to tear down the boundaries which separate us and look to the future with an honest, critical, and decisive analysis. ■

Maria Franzblau, she/her, is a member of YDSA at Florida International University and Miami DSA. She is also a member of the Steering Committee of Reform & Revolution.



Navigating Challenges and Defending Revolutionary Gains



BY BRANDON MADSEN AND STEPHAN KIMMERLE

Flowing from the vibrant reports and insightful connections made by Maria Franzblau during the DSA delegation's visit to Cuba, Reform & Revolution has restarted a more in-depth discussion about the struggle for a democratic, socialist society on the island. Here is the perspective of this page's authors.

Since 1959, Cuba has successfully ousted US imperialism, nationalized the country's resources, implemented free healthcare and education, and ensured a certain standard of living for all. However, the impact of the blockade imposed by US imperialism and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which left Cuba in economic isolation, has led to ongoing challenges. The situation of an isolated, bureaucratic regime based on the revolutionary hopes of the masses and confronted with imperialism has endured longer than anticipated. Nevertheless, its current state is fragile, and economic hardship continually destabilizes and jeopardizes its existence. Even with Cuba's highly educated doctors and nurses, the healthcare sector still lacks basic supplies. Discontent is mounting as people in Cuba increasingly seek ways to overcome current economic and societal challenges.

In our view, the way to defend the achievements of the revolution is to reintroduce the key democratic demands of the first working-class revolutions, such as the right to recall any official at any time and an average worker's wage for workers' representatives. This is the sort of democracy that both the 1871 Paris Commune and the 1917 Russian Revolution fought for. In Cuba, workers need to have the right to form independent unions and different working-class parties. There needs to be an end to the repression and oppression of working-class opposition.

However, the Cuban bureaucracy has been leaning in a completely different direction, toying with capitalist reforms, developing the private sector, and suppressing opposition.

Comparison with the Uprisings 1989-91

The uprisings of 1989-91 against Stalinist regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe emerged in the context of economic and social challenges similar to those faced by Cuba today. These revolutions started in favor of democratic socialism. Before long, however, it began to seem to most people that the only realistic hope for an alternative to the

decades-long Stalinist crisis lay in a restoration of capitalism. Posing the question this way greatly benefited counter-revolutionary forces.

This comparison is not meant to suggest identical situations. The Cuban masses still recognize the achievements of the revolution, especially when compared to the profound economic and social inequalities that plague the rest of Latin America. However, the idea of democratic socialism as a fundamentally different and bureaucracy-free society is less widespread today than it was in the 1980s, both in Cuba and internationally. Market reforms introduced by the Cuban bureaucracy already point implicitly towards capitalism as the only alternative.

That's why Marxists internationally and in Cuba should argue, in preparation for future movements, that a *fundamental rupture* with the rule of the bureaucracy and a political transformation toward democratic socialism is needed, and that this can only be enforced by the active participation of the masses. In short, the Cuban people must take charge of society themselves. This position can resonate very well on the left in Cuba, including within the ranks of today's Cuban Communist Party.

Such a turn toward working-class people taking over – a transformation to workers' democracy – would open the gates for a much larger movement of solidarity involving working-class people globally, including in the US, finally bringing down the blockade.

For Workers' Democracy

Our starting point is to defend the achievements won and defended by the Cuban people against imperialism. Socialists should prepare to do just that in the coming upheavals to avoid being derailed like the 1989-91 revolutionary movements in Eastern Europe, not allowing them to turn into "color revolutions" (which have, in truth, been counter-revolutions). The coming revolution needs to be prepared and defended to open the door for democracy and socialism.

Any reform towards democracy and working-class power in Cuba is very welcome, no matter how incremental. But given the character of the Cuban regime, a fundamental rupture with the current way of organizing society can't be avoided. Democratic socialism or imperialist barbarism – that's how the question is posed by history. The space for the current regime, somewhere in between, is closing. ■

reform & revolution

A MARXIST CAUCUS IN DSA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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