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A MARXIST CAUCUS IN DSA

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A MARXIST CAUCUS IN DSA

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 of the working class and the oppressed. Join us.

Summer 2024

Issue 15

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# reform & revolution

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

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## TRAPPED IN CONTEXT

The 2024 presidential election will not present easy answers for socialists.

After a period of intense pressure for Joe Biden to drop out of the race, the Democratic Party has now chosen Vice President Kamala Harris as its nominee. This decision has begun to stabilize what looked to be a historically dangerous election. While Trump earned new sympathy among a wider layer of people after the attempt on his life, it's clear that the Democratic Party is quickly integrating demoralized progressive layers back into its own political agenda.

The nomination of Minnesota Governor Tim Walz as Harris' running mate has further reinforced illusions in the Democratic Party's ability to represent working people. In the face of this challenge, the immediate sense of powerlessness which much of the left sought to build an alternative to is less vivid.

A divided left is currently without a sense of direction. What it means for DSA to build in moments of capitalist stabilization has gone unanswered since Joe Biden was elected to the presidency in 2020, but this question must be urgently taken up again.

Many progressive union leaders and elected officials are uncritically supporting Kamala Harris, while Bernie Sanders and The Squad were part of a public campaign to defend Joe Biden as part of an insider strategy which sacrificed an independent voice for the left. Meanwhile, Trump remains a far-right threat.

Now more than ever, a left independent politics is needed. But in this election it also feels more absent than ever, despite the tremendous growth of left-wing politics over the past decade. The third party presidential runs by Jill Stein, Cornel West, and Claudia De La Cruz have all failed to prepare the grounds for a viable alternative or partyist strategy.

This is the context we are organizing within. There is no way out but through. DSA must become a socialist party, and together we must be the ones to build it in difficult times.

In this issue, Reform & Revolution members look back to the past – to the Cold War – to gain insights for how we can build the type of power which crescendoed at the end of the 1960s, and how we can go even further than they did.

– Editorial Board

Judith Chavarria, Henry De Groot, Rosemary Dodd, Philip Locker, Brandon Madsen, Meg Morrigan





## From the Cold War to Neoliberalism, and Back Again



BY HENRY DE GROOT

DEGREAT4

**The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.**

— Karl Marx

Today we associate neoliberalism with the corporate wing of the Democratic party. But it was not Democrats, but right-wing Cold War hawks who ushered the neoliberal ideas of Hayek and Friedman down from the Alps and out from academia, transforming them into the extreme policies mainstreamed by Reagan.

In the post-war, the capitalists embraced corporate-liberalism, not neoliberalism. Instead of unrelenting free trade, they invested in US industrial might to counter the Soviet Union. Instead of breaking unions, they sought to co-opt them as junior partners of US empire.

The need for the pivot to Neoliberalism arose from a crisis which developed in the middle of the Cold War. The post-war order was breaking down at home and abroad, as the rebuilt European and Asian economies threatened American super-profits while anti-imperialist struggles rolled back the empire abroad and popular movements waged challenges at home. The capitalist class needed a new direction to stabilize their profits and their rule.

Having organized amongst themselves and backed by a set of increasingly rich and radical billionaires (see Powell Memo), these most committed capitalists armed themselves with the ideology of Neoliberalism.

But to execute this pivot, they would need to win over both the broader capitalist class as well as the wider layers of society.

To do so, they launched a wide network of campaigns and front organizations, to connect the immediate and concrete fights of various sections of society with their longer vision for a radical restructuring of our political and economic system.

Largely, they were successful, building a movement which has reigned hegemonic for the last generation. Whether we are fighting the impact of the Federalist Society on our Supreme Court, the looming authoritarian threat of Project 2025, the politicization of abortion, or the rise of the Zionist lobby, we will find ourselves wrestling with the deep roots of the neoliberal movement.

This pivot to neoliberalism was launched in defense of American capitalism. But today the threat to US capitalism comes not from the command economies of the Eastern Bloc, but from the capitalist states of Russia and China. The global markets, re-opened since the end of the Cold War, are being divided anew between these two great camps. Now the capitalist class pivots away from neoliberalism for the same reason it initially embraced it: self preservation. But if the policies have changed, it is largely the same billionaire-funded network which worked so hard to bring us neoliberalism which is now pushing for this pivot to a new economic model.

In this issue we trace the foot-prints of this far-right network from the Cold War, to Neoliberalism, and back again.

## What Is To Be Done

Frank Barnett. 1957

Barnett's 'What Is To Be Done' is arguably the core document in inspiring the right-wing billionaire movement which we continue to fight today. Its title is a direct reference to Lenin's work by the same name.

Barnett was a US Army translator in WW2 who had studied Russian at Oxford. He drew on Lenin's work to devise strategies for political warfare, collaborating after the war with CIA founding father William 'Wild Bill' Donovan and Wild Bill's right hand man, William Casey. Barnett was a core organizer of the post-war military-industrial complex, where he focused on training anti-communist educators, including advising Allen Dulles on the CIA's curricula for educating American students on the dangers of communism. and helping to advise NATO.

Barnett's WITBD calls for the launching of a political war in defense of capitalism. The document calls for the forming of a capitalist vanguard along the lines laid out by Lenin. This capitalist-Leninism was first taken up by the US military when Barnett partnered with the Joint Chiefs of Staff to host National Strategy Seminars - a sort of Cold War university - from 1957 to 1961.

Eventually Democrats protested to the far-right hijacking of official US military spaces. Barnett took his mission underground, immediately forming the insular League To Save Carthage, with founding members including Admiral Arleigh Burke, Joseph Coors, Richard Mellon Scaife, Joseph F. Powell Jr, William Casey, and Prescott Bush Jr. The group of Republican operatives, business leaders, billionaires, and government officials acted as a private political party to coordinate Barnett's political war in defense of capitalism.

## Attack on the Free Enterprise System

Lewis F. Powell Jr. 1970

Known as "The Powell Memo," this document was written by Powell for the US Chamber of Commerce in 1970, and leaked after he was nominated to the Supreme Court by Nixon.

The document identifies the attacks on the US capitalist system which had grown through the 1960s, expanding beyond the far-left to the broader liberal sections of society including academia. Powell calls for an aggressive counter-offensive by corporate America, to be waged in all the realms of civil society including the courts, the universities, and the press.

The memo - or at least the strategy contained within it - is widely viewed as the blueprint for the Reagan Revolution, and is credited with inspiring the foundation of the Heritage Foundation, the American Legislative Exchange Counsel, the Federalist Society, and the Manhattan Institute.

The Powell Memo was hardly new, but simply an update of Barnett's WITBD, updated to address the unrest which had grown throughout the 1960s and necessitated a more aggressive - and surreptitious - fight for public opinion. Several of the key donors to this new wave of organizing had been participants in Barnett's network for more than a decade, including mega-donors Coors and Scaife.

Barnett and Powell's network continued to gain influence during the Nixon administration. But it was during the Reagan administration when they truly were able to set US foreign policy, with Casey serving as Reagan's campaign manager and later his Director of Intelligence.



# Between 1968 and 2024



BY JUDITH CHAVARRIA

WITHOUTJUDITH

*The lessons of 1968 are reflected in the political battles of 2024, and socialists must be ready to make the most of them.*

1968 was a year of movement.

From Czechoslovakia to China, France to Pakistan, Mexico to Chicago – radical students, sections of the middle class, and masses of workers clashed with the postwar order. Interconnected struggles by these forces in opposition to war, for reforms on campuses, and for increased freedom of expression challenged ruling elites in both Western democracies and Eastern Stalinist regimes. The lessons drawn from these struggles developed into an awareness that it was possible and necessary to smash up the continuum of history – that society, even in a moment of relative economic stability, was stagnating. These events, alongside confrontations such as the general strike on May 24 in France, made it feel like revolution might once again be on the horizon.

But revolution was not to be. The mass struggle was rolled back and a lasting alternative failed to materialize. Students for a Democratic Society, which had served as the main home for the New Left and the student movement, fell apart. The left failed to build a fighting, multi-tendency socialist party which could sustain the energy of mass movements through defeat until the next struggle.

The power of the late 1960s did not vanish in a weekend. In the 1970s, the movement actually continued to engage wider layers in mass struggle. In May of 1970 some 4 million US university and high school students joined student strikes against Nixon's invasion of Cambodia and the shooting at Kent State. But over time many of the leading political elements spiraled into sectarian irrelevance.

Middle class activists scattered to the wind as the working class backbone of the movement was broken by Reagan's neoliberal onslaught. The broader layers which had been energized were co-opted once again into the disorientating folds of the Democratic Party.

The mobilizations of 1968 magnified a deeper underlying crisis of Western capitalism, as 'Golden Age' super-profits were eroded by new competition in Europe and East Asia. The ruling class responded to this double crisis by a dramatic pivot, discarding the corporate-liberal synthesis of the post-war years for neoliberalism. Capitalists today face another inflection point with a new double crisis of economic and political challenges to the Western imperialist system, leading a pivot away from long-held pillars of neoliberalism. The question facing us all is what comes next.

Yet revolutionary tasks which were posed then are still the tasks of today. Socialists have been recovering from this failure for a long time. It took a half-century before the economic crisis of 2008 sparked movements which are once again approaching the fervor and potential of 1968. Another antiwar movement is mobilizing new layers the world over against the genocide in Palestine, and growing inter-imperialist conflict threatens to only further escalate global tensions.

Just as the lessons of the Civil Rights movement informed the antiwar movement, mass uprisings for racial justice over the last few years have contributed to the antiwar movement of today. But approaching 1968 levels of mass mobilization is one thing; winning this time is another. These historical reflections are a reason to pose a decades old question: *What does it mean to go beyond the legacy of the New Left?*



## Reflections and Refractions

On January 30, 1968, a combined force of 80,000 North Vietnamese conventional units and Viet Cong insurgents attacked over 100 towns and cities across South Vietnam in the Tet Offensive. The attack shocked Americans and showed a military vulnerability that had seemed previously unthinkable.

It is hard not to draw comparisons between Tet and October 7. As with the US in Vietnam, the IDF has responded with an intense bombing campaign and devastating military occupation. The move by Saudi Arabia and Israel to normalize relations, which would have helped consolidate the pro-Western imperialist bloc in the Middle East, pushed Iranian-backed Hamas to strike. Imperialism increases bipolarity, and bi-polarity increases pressure, as pressure leads to resistance, and resistance to reaction. The forces unleashed by imperialism finally return home, as defeats then have an impact on domestic politics.

The Vietnam War was unpopular by 1968, with a majority of Americans saying it was a mistake to send troops to Vietnam. Deaths rose dramatically that year. The costs of the war also weighed heavily on the American economy, with inflation rising to from 1 percent in 1964 to more than 4 percent by 1968. However, despite the fact that the war was losing support, the student movement against the Vietnam War was also very unpopular at the time, with a majority of Americans saying that they approved of the way Chicago police handled antiwar protests at the Democratic National Convention.

The US was neither winning nor losing the Vietnam War in militaristic terms, but the war imposed a high cost in blood and dollars. As public disapproval of the war increased, student protests brought the political cost home. This forced politicians to speak of peace even as they prolonged the war. The student protests were critical, because withdrawal was not militarily necessary, but it would have meant little without armed resistance making escalation impossible.

There must be a similar dual pressure on Israel and the US for a free Palestine. Ending US military aid for Israel would immediately

compromise the fighting power of the IDF, creating necessary openings for the Palestinian resistance.

Students are often the first section of society to move into struggle, but their institutional power is largely symbolic. They need to get broader layers of society involved, especially the labor movement.

Today unions across the country are passing ceasefire resolutions at a local level, University of California academic workers went on a political strike in solidarity with protesters, and seven major unions recently called on Joe Biden to halt military aid to Israel. These are all vital steps in expanding the movement and developing its ability to strike critical blows against US imperialism, but they are having to work against crises of organization, consciousness and leadership.

These crises are also reflected in the development of a robust socialist movement. Thousands of Black people in the US considered themselves revolutionaries by the end of the 1960s, and forces like the Black Panther Party were able to channel their desires for a world beyond capitalism and police brutality. Revolutionary circles at universities, such as the Independent Socialist Club at Berkeley, were important for establishing small but active Marxist cores. Revolutionary ideas were stronger in the movements of the 1960s than in the current period.

However, this does not mean the left cannot grow. While students in 1968 were responding critically to both anticommunism from the US and 'official' communism from the USSR, the left today is having to reconstruct itself as if from the beginning. There are opportunities to internalize lessons through today's struggles and within different organizations such as DSA and YDSA. The fates of the socialist movement and Palestinian liberation are intertwined – we are tasked with fighting for each through the other. But to do this, the left must find a way to build the political cohesion and independence of the working class.

The polarization of society and advancements of the left throughout the 60s also gave the far right new opportunities to grow. Former Democratic Governor of Alabama George Wallace led a Dixiecrat revolt against the Democratic Party with his third party



campaign, winning five southern states and almost 10 million votes to Nixon and Humphrey's 31 million each. Likewise, the far right has grown its base of support internationally this year, especially in European elections. The emergence of the Nouveau Front Populaire in France has shone one light in the dark, but the international left is currently fighting a series of defensive battles it cannot afford to lose.

## Fear and Loathing at the DNC

Through much of 1968, antiwar organizers sought a political alternative to challenge Lyndon Baynes Johnson for the Democratic Party nomination and oppose the war. While most Democratic politicians declined to challenge the party establishment, sitting Minnesota senator Eugene McCarthy (not to be confused with Joseph McCarthy, the former senator from Wisconsin who led the Second Red Scare) decided to run. Thousands of volunteers flooded into New Hampshire to support his campaign in the March primary. He ultimately got 42% of the vote. Though he did not win, it was enough to spook the incumbent LBJ into not running again.

This is when Robert F. Kennedy, the brother of John F. Kennedy and Attorney General under his presidential term, stepped in as an 'establishment' alternative. Suddenly there were two anti-war candidates running for the nomination. While both Kennedy and McCarthy won individual states in the primaries, the sitting vice president, Hubert Humphrey, was racking up delegates through the Democratic Party machine, which controlled a majority of the delegates.

The assassination of RFK by Palestinian activist Sirhan Sirhan at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles helped break the antiwar movement's organized pressure on the election. The political bosses and conservative union leaders then helped Humphrey get the nomination. This only intensified the political unrest which had previously broken out after the murder of Martin Luther King Jr., pushing the whole country to an intense breaking point.

As Black Panthers, Yippies, and future Weathermen took to the streets of Chicago in protest of the DNC, the Democratic Party tried to repress them by any means necessary.

Chicago police brutalized the protestors in full view of news cameras for days on end, and as this violence continued they began to cry out, "The whole world is watching." The antiwar movement posed itself in stark, irreconcilable conflict with the political establishment which sought to maintain the war effort. In parallel, the severe police repression of student encampments for Palestine across the country has radicalized thousands of people. The world was again watching.

Not unlike LBJ, the incumbent Joe Biden became unpopular enough, due in part to anti-war protests, that he could not remain in the election. Yet the hope for a genuine alternative is less concrete than it was in 1968. Vice President Kamala Harris appears likely to take Biden's place on the ballot without any intention of changing his political course. The Palestine solidarity movement has not been able to produce a serious antiwar challenger. And in another parallel, RFK's son is running, although his campaign has proven to be little more than a farce.

Affirming the power of mass struggle to impact events also requires recognizing the potential of unintended consequences. Richard Nixon, helped by the chaos of Chicago, won the presidency in 1968. Although, in the long term, the drama of 1968 helped to build an even larger anti-war movement, in the short term Nixon's election meant a massive expansion of the conflict in Southeast Asia. This points to the danger of a powerful protest movement without a viable positive outlet for change – it hurts the center but can help the right wing.

The long view of history was missing in the DNC protests of 1968, and this is what eventually allowed the New Left to be co-opted and dismantled. But we can't afford to have our efforts in the present be dismantled over the course of decades; we need our political horizons to expand over time.

We lack institutions of the left. It is a party-building program which prepares us to build the political independence of the working class, while patiently bringing together struggles against oppression under a common banner. The situation will not produce ready-made solutions, and so the left must attempt to look beyond the next months. We also cannot settle historical accounts cheaply – it requires direct confrontation with past failures.

## Unfinished Revolutions

Protests in the US were one small part of a global revolutionary upsurge in 1968. It was a year when regular people seemed capable of toppling governments.

Hunter S. Thompson famously wrote about the period,

*We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave...with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the high-water mark – that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.*

We are trying to stop the waves from breaking and rolling back again.

Without a healthy and vibrant Marxist core, the New Left was unable to build on solid foundations. Even with the strength of the Civil Rights movement behind them, and struggles such as the 1970 student strike and the Stonewall riots yet to come, it is a bitter truth that the energy of 1968 developed into a powerful anti-war movement and a wider cultural rebellion, but not a lasting and effective political alternative. It extended only as far as it could be accommodated by capitalism. The participants of mass organizations like SDS, with a deeply optimistic conception of popular democracy, failed to navigate the limitations of that inheritance as a bright future died down.

We are between histories, traditions, struggles and conflicts. The New Left's formation was often set against the political and organizational practices of the Old Left, but each has something to give us. The Old Left, with decades of written theoretical material being reflected in the practice of the October Revolution, established a Marxist current which must be carried forward. The New Left, which looked to find a way out of the choke point of Stalinism's eventual collapse, radically expanded its fields of inquiry and critique. Our task is to productively merge them, to heal old wounds and account for new ones.

For socialists there are hard lessons to learn. Even when we mean well, our movements can fall into self-defeating marginalization. Opportunities for a radical upsurge were squandered. But we shouldn't write off 1968 so quickly. Against the pressure of a corrupt political establishment, the imperialist system, the concentrated intervention of intelligence agencies and violent police repression, a mass movement against the war in Vietnam was built. A generation of young students ran headlong into the violent reality of our country, their illusions in American democracy were beaten out of them by the batons of the Chicago police and by the bullets of National Guardsmen at Kent State.

*We can learn the lessons of their decade.* Mass protests alone cannot achieve a lasting political alternative, and every instrument of political repression will be used to prevent them from posing a challenge to the capitalist state. To counter this repression, the working-class requires a democratic organ in the form of a socialist party. This party can help direct the political dissent of increasingly radical sections of people, while finding ways to grow those sections. An important mechanism for achieving this is fighting for protest democracy, giving participants the chance to decide on slogans, concrete demands, and goals together. Democracy is a process capable of changing desires, and this should be reflected in every battle we partake in to counteract marginalization. Alongside this, the diversity of the working-class must be matched by the breadth of our analysis and political engagement. Every attack facing the working and oppressed people is of immediate concern to socialists. The explanatory power of a Marxist program is crucial for turning this concern into a practical struggle against capitalism, and its absence can be fatal to even the largest of movements.

With every country that experienced some form of radical upsurge, a heterogeneous tapestry was created. Those moments of collective solidarity which are woven into them reveal the possibilities which remain open to us even now. We don't just need to repeat 1968; our task, this time, is to finish the revolution they started.





## Project 2025: A Blueprint For MAGA Authoritarianism?



BY HENRY DE GROOT

DEGREAT4

*The Heritage Foundations' Project 2025 gives us insight into the policies Trump may carry out if elected to a second term.*

### The Danger of A Trump Re-Election

Will a second Trump term spiral into authoritarian dictatorship? This question is increasingly raised by Democratic politicians and left wing activists alike.

The failed assassination attempt on Trump increases the chances of a Trump victory. The recent Supreme Court ruling *Trump vs United States* provides almost complete immunity to the president, these fears have dramatically increased.

Although Trump's first term was terrible for working people, immigrants, women, and people of color, it would not be accurate to label his first administration as a fascist or authoritarian regime. In many ways Trump's administration took far less authoritarian measures than than George W. Bush took in response to the 9/11 attacks.

But Trump has increasingly taken on the politics of the 'strong man.' We all heard him tell the Proud Boys, "stand back and stand by." Then the January 6th riots showed his willingness to attack the foundations of constitutional order, with his MAGA supporters and a sizable chunk of the larger Republican Party happy to follow along. Since January 6th, Trump has only consolidated his influence over the Republican Party, silencing critics and bullying a large number of establishment Republicans to parrot obvious lies about stolen elections. Now in his 2024 platform, he calls for the biggest deportation ever, and to "deport Pro-Hamas radicals.

As revolutionary socialists, we are no defenders of the constitutional order or the administrative state. But that does not mean the working class benefits when right-wing populists take control of the government or undermine the constitution for their interests. We should take the threat of Trump seriously.

The Trump-appointed Supreme Court has now legalized the far-right doctrine of Unitary Executive Theory, meaning that if re-elected, Trump would have wide 'constitutional' powers to carry out sweeping changes, persecute rivals and dissidents, and enact draconian policies. But would using such powers be in his interest?

The capitalist class would benefit from an extension of the aggressive pro-corporate, anti-worker agenda which Trump took on in his first term. But they are mostly reluctant to depart from the stability of bourgeois democracy for a dictatorial Trump regime.

Trump himself is a wild-card. His desire for power, ego, personal beliefs, and legal situation — all multiplied by the ever-present factor of his irrational behavior — means we cannot rule out him making decisions which are not in direct accord with the material interests of his fellow billionaires.

But even more so, it is possible that increased pressures — from escalating war, protests, or an economic downturn — could increase the need for both Trump and the class he represents to take the path of increased repression.

### Project 2025

The Heritage Foundations' Project 2025 is a right-wing blueprint for a second Trump term, drafted by his conservative allies.

Founded in 1973, the Heritage foundation sought to implement the conservative strategy laid out in the Powell Memo. Heritage first produced a Mandate For Leadership proposal in 1979 in preparation for Ronald Reagan's 1980 election victory. Within the first year of the Reagan administration more than 60 percent of the Mandate's policies had been enacted.

Project 2025 is close to Trump and his entourage but shouldn't be seen as identical to Donald Trump himself. There is a clear contradiction and differentiation between the more traditionally neoliberal preferences of the right-wing billionaires represented by the Heritage Foundation and the more working and middle class elements of the MAGA movement which Trump mobilized as his own personal army. Project 2025 presents both but generally defers to MAGA orthodoxy.

While the Democrats have drummed up Project 2025 to energize their base, Trump claims that he knows "nothing about Project 2025," which is an obvious lie, as 6 of his former cabinet advisors as well as more than 140 Trump Administration staffers have contributed to Project 2025. The ideas very closely mirror the 2024 Republican Party platform which was more directly drafted by Donald Trump's team.

The projects' rhetoric draws on four ideological themes, which are laid out in its introduction:

1. Restore the family as the centerpiece of American life and protect our children.
2. Dismantle the administrative state and return self-governance to the American people.
3. Defend our nation's sovereignty, borders, and bounty against global threats.
4. Secure our God-given individual rights to live freely—what our Constitution calls "the Blessings of Liberty"

These four principles unite the ideologies of Christian nationalism, deregulation, personal fealty to Trump, economic nationalism, and neoliberal economics. Project 2025 then develops these principles into cuts to the welfare state, removal of any government support for diversity, equity, and inclusion, rollbacks on women's and trans rights, deregulation of corporations, strengthening of the president's control of the executive, mass deportations, withdrawal from some international treaties, and moderate economic protectionism.

The above four principles provide a bridge between the political ideas of the MAGA movement, the interests of the corporate elite, and the technical decisions which Trump officials will need to make for his administration to enact this program.

This unity at first appears as a contradiction, especially since the economic theories of economic nationalism and neoliberalism are formally antagonistic. One calls for closed borders, the other welcomes cheap immigrant labor; one calls for investment in national industry, the other calls for laissez-faire economics and free trade. However, Project 2025 proposes a sort of "nationalist neoliberalism" with a division of labor between the two approaches.



The balancing between MAGA base and the business establishment will largely be at the personal discretion of Trump. Trump's pick of J.D. Vance as his running mate and his welcoming of Teamsters president Sean O'Brien shows how he is increasingly leaning on economic nationalism. Many in the business establishment do not want to win over the Teamsters union, but rather eliminate their rights entirely. Similarly, fear mongering of a mass deportation might help employers drive down wages, but actually carrying through the deportation of tens of millions of undocumented migrants would dramatically drive up labor costs.

## The Politicization of the Executive

Project 2025's call to "dismantle the administrative state," is actually a call to stack it with Trump appointees and remove any semblance of an independent civil service.

Trump has called for the 'dissolution' of the FBI and the department of Homeland Security. But this is not actually a call to abolish the most important apparatuses of the repressive state, but rather to dissolve any elements of the state with an independent law enforcement mandate, in order to recast them directly under Trump's rule.

The plan requires expanding the current 4,000 political appointees in the executive branch ten fold. This would extend the MAGA movement deep into the layers of the civil service. And Project 2025's *Presidential Administration Academy* is preparing the forces which would be necessary, with online training courses training tens of thousands of MAGA activists to fill the various civil service roles.

## Attacks on Workers

Trump's former Secretary of Labor, Patrick Pizzella, was one of the senior Trump officials involved in drafting Project 2025.

The document calls for stripping many of the protections offered to marginalized groups under the law, including allowing for discrimination against trans people in hiring and firing, and attacks on overtime. Project 2025 undermines the federal employment law as the national floor for workplace standards, allowing for states to set lower standards, and expanding independent contractor status.

Under Project 2025 employers would have broader powers to fire employees for expressing concerns about and within the workplace. The plan would also eliminate the recent Board changes which expanded the role of "card check" elections.

Project 2025 also calls for the elimination of the NLRA's Section 8(a)(2) prohibition on company unions, calling for the establishment of "Employee Involvement Organizations." This would revive company union tactics which have long been illegal.

But beyond the usual corporate attacks, MAGA also represents a counter-mobilization of the reactionary elements of the working class against the labor movement as a whole.

By denying workers employee status, weakening employment law, decertifying unions, mass layoffs, weakening the unions which survive, and drawing the right-wing elements of organized labor towards MAGA, a second Trump term sets out to divide and conquer the labor movement. Unions will be on the defensive and the pressure to break ranks in order to get some favorable status from Trump will be high.

## Action, Resistance, Reaction

If Trump does take authoritarian action, like launching an aggressive mass-deportation campaign, he will be met with mass mobilizations, as Democrats and liberals seek to demonstrate in opposition to his policies, and left wing groups take direct action to block their roll out.

If Trump does take authoritarian action, like launching an aggressive mass-deportation campaign, he will be met with mass mobilizations, as Democrats and liberals seek to demonstrate in opposition to his policies, and left wing groups take direct action to block their roll out.

It is likely that such mass-movements will be larger, more consistent, and more militant than under his first term. A larger layer of the Democratic party, concerned by Trump's continued radicalization since losing the 2020 election, is likely to participate in mass demonstrations. Furthermore, the mass

radicalization of youth which has continued to grow but remained relatively dormant under the Biden administration will find eager expression in protests against Trump.

It is also more likely that there will be dramatic confrontations between the forces of the resistance to Trump and his MAGA supporters. The mobilized section of the MAGA base continued to grow through COVID protests, against BLM, and in relation to parental involvement in schools, and would also draw on broader layers of the MAGA base in a politically charged environment. An even more dangerous layer, including the Proud Boys and Patriot Front, have also grown and gained experience over the last period. MAGA forces would likely seek to help Trump's administration carry out policy, counter-mobilizing against anti-Trump protestors who try to block the rollout of the MAGA program.

If there are violent confrontations, this could be an opening for Trump to increase the repression of his dissidents. The right-wing reaction to the BLM uprising which followed the police murder of George Floyd shows that Trump would likely have a sizable base of support in a crackdown on rioters.

Previously the government has usually not pursued the majority of protestors who engage in illegal actions like blocking highways, especially after protests have dispersed. But an aggressive approach to enforcement could mean that those participating in street actions find themselves arrested days later, based on charges built through surveillance. Additionally, it would not be inconceivable for Trump to pursue RICO charges against entire organizations if their members plan illegal civil disobedience actions, even if these actions are entirely non-violent. And there is also the possibility that a Trump administration could persecute dissidents with no legal basis at all.

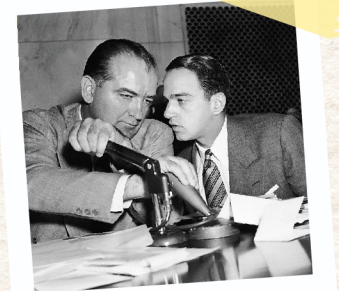
In the face of all of these serious threats, a correct socialist orientation will be crucial. Our movement must seek to expand any street protests to the larger working class, gaining support from labor institutions. We must also be careful to avoid provocations, and take more seriously the threat of suppression by the state. Above all, it is necessary that the resistance to a second Trump term develops into support for a socialist alternative.

## THE MCCARTHY TRIALS

When Senator Joseph McCarthy was made chair of the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee of Investigations, he turned to a young lawyer, Roy Cohn, to serve as his chief counsel. Cohn had impressed McCarthy as prosecutor for the 1951 trial of communists Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. Cohn was chosen for the job over Robert F. Kennedy. McCarthy unleashed a series of investigations into government employees for suspected communist links which had a larger chilling effect on political dissent, with Cohn actually conducting most of the hearings.

The McCarthy trials became the moniker for the larger 2nd Red Scare of the 1950s, in which leftists were denied access to the labor board, were purged from Hollywood, and were politically repressed through programs including COINTELPRO.

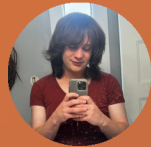
Roy Cohn would go on to serve as Donald Trump's mentor.







## What BLM Teaches Us About Palestine



BY SARAH MILNER

📍 SARAH\_PDX

### Six Lessons For Today

As the student movement for Palestinian liberation spreads rapidly across the nation, the left faces the opportunity and danger of an escalating protest movement. Amidst the BLM movement in 2020 we faced many of those same dangers. In Portland, my comrades and I spent one hundred nights straight in the streets protesting. The movement had mass support, the protests swelled to include 10,000 people even with our militant tactics. BLM was the most impressive protest movement I have ever been a part of. Yet the opportunity was squandered and our city government lurched rightwards as we elected a conservative mayor and majority in our city council. In Portland, we had the numbers to win huge concessions, and we missed our chance.

Those setbacks were not inevitable. If we can learn the lessons of BLM, we can build a far more durable, powerful movement which can seriously challenge Joe Biden and the genocide in Gaza.

### Lesson One: Protests Need Democracy

In Portland, many of our protests were led by the first person to pull out a megaphone. There was no process for deliberating on demands, tactics or leadership. There was no method to litigate disputes. The entire movement was organized informally. Protests were organized in small group chats by autonomous, horizontalist cells, with most of the participating crowd relegated to passivity when it came to decision making. We would show up to a rally, advertised anonymously on Twitter, and wait for someone to show up and take control of the march—usually the march leaders were not even known to the crowd.

The result was a tactical inflexibility, a lack of clarity, and a movement which punched well below its weight. The most devastating example of this was the weeks after Donald Trump sent in federal troops, with thousands of newly radicalizing liberals joining the protests and we reached unprecedented numbers. Instead of employing new strategies, like sit-ins of politician's offices, strikes, targeting multiple police buildings at once, or adopting more confrontational approaches to the police designed to force them back into the building and off the streets, we continued the same strategy every night: gathering outside the Justice Center and waiting to be tear gassed.

DSA should be at the forefront of fighting for real deliberative structures at these protests—regular mass meetings with votes, elected steering committees accountable to recall, and public forums to discuss our tactics and approach.

This century, dozens of semi-spontaneous movements have risen and fallen. Composed of cells of leaders and a mass of people who show up to protests but never join an organization, without proper coordination of democratic structures, these movements like Occupy, BLM and the anti-war movement against the invasion of Iraq have failed to build enduring political structures. This will only continue unless groups like DSA begin actively fighting for the principle of democratic organization of protests. Nationally, DSA can best equip members by putting out a guide on protest democracy and how to implement and argue for it.

### Lesson Two: Protests Need Accountable Leaders and Representatives

The Portland protests were sustained by an extraordinary momentum. But so much of our energy was spent in vicious cycles of internal battles and informal debates over movement micro-celebrities that played out over social media.

The protest movement tried to avoid media narratives by avoiding journalists entirely, but the result was a vacuum that allowed anyone who wanted to speak on our behalf. The press will always misrepresent us, but their job becomes much easier when we don't have a formal, democratically accountable leadership. The small minority of protesters who hold genuinely antisemitic views or make crass ultra-leftist formulations will be amplified by the media regardless, but their impact can be limited by an open, democratic debate, and empowering elected representatives.

As it stands, arguing for accountable leaders and representatives is one of the hardest things one can undertake in a protest movement. There is a strong instinct to see efforts at coordination as power grabs. DSA members will need to explain very delicately, but consistently, the necessity of organized democratic structures.

The strongest arguments will be ones which point to positive examples from past protest movements and ones around the country. Ultimately, we will need to come out clearly on the side of coordination and clear representation.



## Lesson Three: Protests Need Demands

In Portland, the movement never arrived at a clear demand outside of immediate abolition. This meant it was extremely easy for the city to wait us out while offering piecemeal reforms to look as though they had made concessions.

We need a series of transitional demands which can connect to the consciousness of working people while also pointing towards the abolition of capitalism. Demands are not just about giving clarity to our movement or extracting immediate concessions. Demands are one of the strongest means by which we win people over to the movement and our ideas about society. They draw clear distinctions between the left, the ruling class, and moderates trying to co-opt the movement. Our goal with demands is to connect to existing consciousness and build a bridge forward towards revolutionary conclusions. We in R&R call this a transitional program.

Just like elected leaders, the demands of a movement should be democratically decided. That's why support for democratic deliberation and accountable representatives is so vital – they build towards a unified message and series of demands. We need a revolutionary program on Palestine that outlines how the working class will radically transform society. In R&R, we are working for these demands:

- **End Complicity in Genocide**
- **Divest our universities, pension funds, and cities from Israeli genocide**
- **US out of the Middle East!**
- **End all US military aid with Israel and reactionary regimes like those in Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.**
- **Bring US Troops Home Now! Shut down all military bases abroad!**
- **Money for healthcare and education, not war and occupation!**
- **End the US sanctions on Iran.**
- **Build an independent, working-class political party in opposition to far-right Republicans and pro-imperialist Democrats.**
- **For a free Palestine!**
- **A total and immediate withdrawal of all Israeli military forces from Gaza and the West Bank.**
- **An end of the siege, an end of the occupation, an end of discrimination and apartheid in Israel, and for the right for all refugees to return.**
- **An independent, democratic, secular, socialist Palestine.**

## Lesson Four: Protests Need To Take the Offensive

In Portland, we allowed the initiative to slowly slip away. Every night we protested, but they were offensive actions for a defensive purpose. We were repeating the same tactics endlessly, trying to sustain our movement and outlast the government. We can't simply outlast the capitalist class, we need to overwhelm them.

All of our organizing has to be with the clear aim of expanding and growing the movement on the terms of our demands. We have to constantly be thinking about how we grow, how we win the smaller victories that sustain a movement, and how we build enduring organizations. If protests are only on and around college campuses, they will eventually dwindle. But if we can use this momentum to expand our movement, we can keep the initiative.

DSA has a critical role to play in helping protesters seize the initiative. In addition to strong demands and messaging, we can organize solidarity rallies, mobilize our members to protests, raise funds, provide jail support, and coordinate off campus events to draw in public support.

We can message about the need to back students and support them. At the same time, we can also work within the movement to push for broad, forward facing demands that link ceasefire to other popular issues, like the billions of dollars we waste on war when we could be providing healthcare to people. DSA needs to show up and push the movement forward.

## Lesson Five: Protests Need To Fight A Class War

Another major problem in Portland's summer of protests was the lack of labor support. Labor unions are important for a number of reasons—they are mass, democratic organizations filled with people who have shared interests with us but might not be automatically sympathetic to our ideas. How much more powerful could the 2020 Portland protests have been – and how much more enduring their impact could have been – if they had brought along even a radical minority in local unions to support clear demands?

Simply put, to win, we need to win over the working class. At the start of our movement, we had a powerful labor solidarity campaign which passed ceasefire resolutions across the country. Now more than ever is the moment to rejuvenate that push. Labor needs to push beyond resolutions, especially on campuses where strike action is needed to resist violent repression. There are already exciting signs from the UAW, who have openly supported protesters and condemned the war. UAW 4811 has moved to hold a strike vote after UCLA protesters were brutalized by right wing mobs.

On campuses, we can have the strongest possible movement by building coalitions with teachers, graduate students, and other campus unions. Comrades at FIU did this, and were able to turn out hundreds of people to a rally and build a lasting coalition.

This engagement isn't just a one way street. Protests have something major to offer socialists in the labor movement—they open up the space for us to connect our reform struggles to mass movements. The mass energy of a protest movement can lend legitimacy and inspiration to a union reform movement. In this way, social struggles and labor reform build power together, with each advancing the other.

DSA sits at a in an essential intersection of protest and labor solidarity, where we can introduce cross-union labor organizing to social movements. In working class democratic organizations, we can crystallize our gains, building enduring political engagement outside the workplace. [In Seattle](#), comrades mobilized the workers, drawing on past successes expelling the police union, and won an endorsement from major unions and their leaders for a Labor for Ceasefire rally. DSA chapters can replicate this approach across the country, bringing together labor organizing and Palestine Solidarity.

## Lesson Six: Protests Need DSA

Unfortunately, DSA missed our responsibility to lead in 2020, and in doing so, we didn't help the movement as much as we could.

We are already playing a much stronger role this time around. Still, we should keep a clear focus on the tasks at hand: we need well organized, democratically run protests, with a mass focus and strong ties to labor. We need clear, socialist demands that connect to the class struggle and respond directly to attacks on us. We need an aggressive messaging strategy that puts forward forcefully what we support and what we oppose.

By fighting clearly for these things, highlighting the need for international solidarity and pushing beyond a ceasefire, we can make the strongest possible contribution to the movement.

In order to succeed, these protests need DSA to be active and engaged in the movement. To build power against the ruling class, DSA needs to be loud and proud. Our country's leaders have laid out their vision for the future: bombs, barbed wire, genocide, and brutal repression from the campus to the border. Now it's time to put our alternative forward: End the war! Free Palestine! Fight for a socialist world!



# Nothing Left to Take: The Impact of War on Earth



BY JOSELYN PEÑA

PLANTCOMRADE

An olive tree in Gaza is burned alive in a forest of its species. It has fed Palestinians and its ecosystem for generations, just to be engulfed in flames by an IDF soldier. The scorched bark bears the same wounds as an American bison skinned by a settler, its corpse left to rot on the same land upon which it was once valued for the warmth and food its species brought to multiple Indigenous groups of the Great Plains. An olive tree forest burnt to a crisp, bison skulls piled high, 150 years apart but connected by the violence of war, colonialism. Whether in the form of Zionism or Manifest Destiny, colonialism has destroyed our environment.

As a Marxist studying environmental science and working as an educator at a large wilderness preserve on Florida's Gulf Coast, I cannot separate my field from my anti-war politics. Yet, the popular environmentalist movement has become far less radical and less connected to the anti-war movement since its peak in the 1970s. Many socialist organizers, including in DSA, also fail to center the environmental concerns that should be a part of our campaigns and demands. The ecological crisis caused by capitalism needs to

be confronted. This means bridging the gap between environmental movements, anti-colonialism and the class struggle. Exploring what is happening to life in Gaza can help guide us as we build an intersectional and international socialist movement.

## Genocide Is Ecocide

Military intervention and war have increasingly brought about environmental destruction. The major battles in wars throughout history are usually fought in open and remote locations, harming biodiverse prairies, meadows, and savannahs. The US military has been hard at work building a mass surveillance system of bases around the world, becoming a larger emitter of carbon dioxide alone than over 70% of all countries. The pollution of bombs and missile strikes is widely known, and the immediate destruction of the environment and air is increasingly visible. However, other environmental impacts of war aren't as easily seen with the naked eye, or without an understanding of ecological systems and their metabolic processes.



Art by Earth Liberation Studio  
(IG: @earthliberationstudio)



We can expect the long-term impacts of such environmental devastation amidst genocide in Palestine to be similar to the post-war conditions in countries like Iraq. The ecosystems have been burdened with the toxic chemicals of war and polluted its soil and waterways. This greatly impacts the people of Iraq. Even years after the most visibly destructive attacks, many living in the region have reported an increase in miscarriages, birth defects, and cancers. The soil in bombed areas is now too contaminated to produce viable crops. Removing the toxins will take many years of restorative agriculture, and even that is not a guarantee. This solution is an experimental investment not accessible to many farmers, especially those in a post-war society.

The oppression of human beings across generations degrades not only life itself but the conditions for life. For as long as imperialist wars and settler colonialism continue, humanity and the thousands of species will face annihilation.

## Using Nature Against Her People

The balance of ecosystems has fallen together through millions of years of evolution. One change to the system and it is at risk of becoming unbalanced, which could result in a cascade of environmental consequences. As seen with the impacts of climate change on agriculture, migration and health, human communities can be deeply affected by such imbalances. This is often taken advantage of in times of war.

An example of the violence latent in Israeli settler colonialism is the strategic placement of settlements on hills, allowing waste and polluted runoff to flow down to Palestinian villages. Most immediately, the destruction of Gaza's civilian infrastructure cuts off all access to food and even local resources, ensuring that the land will be a blank slate if and when Israeli settlers begin moving in. Damage done to the environment is also injustice done through it.

The Jewish National Fund (JNF), a non-profit founded in 1901 to buy land in Ottoman Syria that now focuses on planting trees in Israel, has systematically removed native plants and

established crops, replacing them with European pine trees. Replacing native plants with non-native ones reduces native biodiversity, impacting the ecosystem and populations of organisms across a food web. European pine trees are highly flammable, and some pine species rely on fire to reproduce. The trees in Palestine, however, are not fire dependent, so frequent burns will further damage the native biodiversity, further depriving Palestinians of the fruits of their native land.

The cultivation of European pine forests on top of destroyed Palestinian villages, which the JNF calls their 'Green Lungs', are publicized with classic greenwashing techniques. An example of greenwashing is when the US military proposed a plan to be carbon neutral by 2050 – a destructive war machine powered by renewable energy. It is also greenwashing when Israel establishes "green areas", blocking the land off from Palestinians in the name of land conservation, just for them to knock it down for Israeli settlement five years later. Nature is being used against her people by colonialism, imperialism, and the capitalist system which grounds them to further oppress Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized populations.

## An Anti-Imperialist Environmentalism

Youth environmental activists like Greta Thunberg have become increasingly radical and have begun to connect their work to other struggles, including the fight for a free Palestine. Still, this is a small minority of the movement and it lacks a Marxist theory of change. The depoliticization of environmentalism is prominent in the United States, where historic organizations such as the Audubon Society and the Sierra Club lost their more radical tendencies after the Earth Day demonstrations in 1970. Most of their current political work is lobbying and petitioning, which encompasses much of what environmental activism entails today. Other sections of the environmental movement, including Extinction Rebellion and Earth Liberation Front, draw on the direct action of the 1960s, but in a decentralized and anarchistic way by failing to connect demonstrations to a broader vision. Both reformers and radicals often share the same

flaw of lacking a class-struggle approach that recognizes the capitalist system as the cause of Earth's degradation.

Even at its peak, the environmental movement of the 1960s struggled to have a steady relationship with the New Left and other left currents. Some radical social activists thought environmentalism distracted from revolution and liberation. On matters such as labor rights for workers in unsustainable industries and immigration that warrants more development under capitalism, environmentalists and social justice activists who lack a Marxist vision can find themselves at odds with each other.

There must be an internationalist, Marxist core within the environmental movement. Without this, the tension between and separation from anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles will go unresolved, even as the Earth becomes uninhabitable. While fighting for immediate reforms like the Green New Deal, which helps give environmentalists a program to fight for, we also need to push beyond the framework of capitalism and infinite growth, recognizing that they make responsible industry impossible. Top-down interventions from the United Nations, like the 2015 Paris Agreement and the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, have failed to manage - let alone stop - rising temperatures. Only a socialist program for democratic central planning and reduced global waste can provide an alternative.

The ecological crisis is always looming, present in big and small ways. This needs to be urgently confronted, but it also makes it hard to organize around any specific moment of rupture, especially when so many other critical issues must be responded to quickly.

The long-term threat of climate change and the fight for ecosocialism may be more difficult to target and organize around alone, but it is a major opportunity for raising popular transitional demands and a positive vision to adapt to the changes ahead. Climate change is an issue that disproportionately impacts the working class, particularly in the global south but also in the US. These impacts include health issues, viruses, lack of thriving ecosystems and green space, food shortages, and property damage. There are many steps

we can take and demands we can raise to build a transformative, anti-imperialist environmentalism, including:

- 1. We need a democratic socialist party which can bring environmental and anti-imperialist struggles together.**
- 2. Begin articulating popular demands, such as a four-day work week and the mass retrofitting of homes, which would cut energy use and reduce waste while improving the lives of working class people.**
- 3. Union members should advocate for their locals to cut ties with the US military and weapons manufacturers, while demanding a just transition for workers in those industries.**
- 4. Take up the need to reallocate government funding from the military to fund sustainable measures and green infrastructure.**
- 5. Link every battle for environmental justice to the fight for a socialist world and a class-struggle approach.**

With these steps, we can build a true ecosocialism that is anti-imperialist and ready to fight the global struggles ahead.

There is a future where the environmental destruction described here no longer happens, where our society is once again living harmoniously with nature, and are no longer massacred by bombs filled with poisons of capitalists' creation. We can have a democratic, centrally planned economy that can improve the condition of humanity as a whole. Not only do I believe the international working class can achieve such an ecosocialism, but our future depends on it.



# The New Cold War?

## Inter-Imperialist Conflict and The Changing Crises of Neoliberalism



BY HENRY DE GROOT  
DEGREAT4



BY BRENDAN YOUNG  
BRENDANYOUNGKN

### The Growing Face-Off Between East and West

As the Russian assault on Ukraine stretches on, China organizes its largest-ever “war game” encirclement of Taiwan, and US and Iran-backed proxies fight in the increasingly unstable Middle East, it is no surprise that both leftists and the mainstream press, alongside other commentators across virtually the whole political spectrum, have declared that we are entering a ‘New Cold War.’

With Finland and Sweden joining NATO and the continuation of Russia-backed coups in central Africa, it is now possible to trace an almost uninterrupted frontline - partly cold, partly hot - from the forests of the Finnish border north of St. Petersburg down to the Middle East, and then all the way through the African Serengeti out to the Atlantic Coast.

Moving south from Finland, Poland has just announced plans for the creation of a \$2.5 billion defensive line, potentially including minefields, on its eastern border, on top of the \$15-20 billion air and short-range missile defense systems already under development. A bit further south, the hot war between Ukraine and Russia rages from Kharkiv, through the Donbass, and down to Crimea. And in the Caucasus Mountains, NATO-backed Azerbaijan just last September regained control of the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave from Russia-backed Armenia.

On the other side of the Caucuses, Syrian and Russian hold positions just kilometers away from Turkey-backed proxies and Turkish forces in Northwest Syria, and across from

US-backed proxies and US troops in the northeast and along the eastern border with Iraq. And in south-west Syria, as well as over the border in southern Lebanon, Iran-backed Hezbollah forces trade daily fire with Israeli forces occupying the Golan heights. Not far away, at the entrance to Africa and near the pivotal Suez Canal, Israel continues its brutal assault on Gaza, facing continued resistance from Iran-backed Hamas fighters.

And on the other side of the Sahara, Russia has had an active hand in the ‘Coups Belt.’

A contiguous line of countries - stretching from Sudan on the Red Sea, through the Sahel countries of Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali, to Guinea on the Atlantic Coast - have experienced coups since 2020. These new governments, which have generally bucked French influence in the region, have drawn on support from Wagner mercenaries, and offer Russia expanding geopolitical influence including plans for a naval base in Port Sudan, as well as new customers for military hardware, and access to rare mineral resources. These projects have the added benefit of creating new opportunities for graft and corruption.

Yet even this 6,000-mile nearly-continuous front line does not exhaustively cover all of the significant military buildups between the two main camps. It does not include the conflict between Saudi Arabia and the Iran-backed Houthis, China’s new military base in Djibouti or economic development projects throughout much of Africa, China’s “nine-dash line” claims on the South China Sea, the US placing missiles in the Philippines, and more.

What this illustrates is the growing political division of the planet into two antagonistic blocs of East and West, with NATO and its sympathizers on one side, and China, Russia, Iran, and their orbiters on the other.

### Beyond The Front Line

While the growing polarization between NATO and the East is drawn most starkly by the battle lines described above, the dynamic is not limited to military conflict alone. Rather, this great power competition is developing into a central, overarching international contradiction which weighs profoundly on the other areas of global politics, society, and economy.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has been reproduced in miniature in election after election across western democracies, as liberal pro-Ukraine hawks pledge increased military support for the embattled country while neo-populists from Trump to France’s Le Pen to Hungary’s Victor Orban extend olive branches to Putin and challenge pro-NATO budgets. Meanwhile, mass protests in support of the Palestinian people lay siege to the pro-Zionist, pro-imperialist status quo in the West, bringing this international conflict into union halls, college quads, and family dinner tables.

State partisans organize aggressively to cultivate support for their camp on the foreign soil of friend and foe alike. In the United States, AIPAC spends aggressively to oust critics of Israel like DSA’s Jamal Bowman, and a neo-McCarthyism is developing as congressional hearings are once again used to launch political witch hunts of radicals on campuses. Meanwhile, Russia funds social media trolls and pays outright bribes to its Western sympathizers, China grows its network of Confucius Institutes in Africa, and NATO intelligence services lend assistance to pro-Western dissidents in the former Eastern Bloc as well as in Venezuela and the Chinese diaspora.

And if a kinetic conflict is only half-underway, the economic war between these two blocs has already been launched in full. The United States has led the West in imposing aggressive sanctions on the Russian economy and is attempting to dragoon the EU — especially Germany — into its deepening trade war against China; meanwhile, China attempts to flood the West with subsidized electric cars and solar panels in order to gain dominance in

these new and strategic sectors. To slow Chinese development of advanced weapons systems — including weaponized artificial intelligence — the United States has imposed export controls on advanced processors and invested billions to subsidize domestic production of semiconductors. And even before the war, Russian intelligence was implicated at the center of the Wirecard scandal, the biggest fraud in German history.

The economic conflict is so serious that it has forced the more laissez-faire economies of Russia and the United States to move closer to Chinese-levels of state intervention, as they shift their economic policies dramatically in order to bolster their own military capabilities or deny such capabilities to their rivals.

In the West, there has been a surprising - albeit incomplete — reversal of economic orthodoxy. This entails the rejection of many of the basic neoliberal principles which have dominated public and trade policy for the last four decades. Unbridled free trade is replaced with tariffs and trade wars, while hands-off industrial policy and offshoring are replaced with mercantilist neo-Keynesianism, military Keynesianism, and investments in domestic production.

At the same time there is continued commercialization and financialization of public services in these states; and an insistence that full neoliberalism is implemented in peripheral and dependent economies — as the US-Ukraine Strategic Partnership Agreement of 2021 and the EU Accession Agreements make clear.

This economic shift in the West is also felt in the labor movement. The Democratic party pivots investments in US military capabilities into useful handouts to loyal labor leaders, enrolling them as junior partners of imperialism, and thereby reviving the ‘corporate-liberal synthesis’ strategy of the early Cold War which was largely abandoned with the neoliberal pivot of the 70’s and 80’s. But the escalating global conflict has also triggered the opposite reaction, as union workers are radicalized by the horrors of Israel’s genocide and organize to break their unions from complicity in the crimes of Western imperialism.



The conflict even makes itself felt within the socialist movement and within DSA. A section of ultra-left 'campists' uncritically cheer on the military successes of Iran-backed militias from Gaza to Yemen, while some right-wing social democrats have resigned in protest of DSA's support for Palestinian liberation, clinging to their Labor Zionist approach. Fights over our public electeds' stances on the Israel-Palestine conflict take center stage, and become the fights on which larger questions about DSA's strategy and structure are worked out.

Unfortunately there is little such debate in relation to the globally more dangerous US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, where deaths are about three times those in Gaza and casualties likewise are currently at approximately 500,000.

## Cold War 2.0?

While the growing international tensions of the present period are geographically similar to the rivalries of the Cold War, that is largely where the parallel ends.

The reason the original 1947-1991 Cold War was called 'cold' was because the nuclear-armed forces arrayed in NATO and the Warsaw Pact avoided engaging each other directly in a 'hot' military conflict. Instead they opted to battle each other indirectly via other means - waging proxy wars in Vietnamese jungles, African grassland, and Latin American foothills - as well as intervention in each other's domestic politics by means of espionage, misinformation, sabotage, and the sponsoring of domestic political opposition movements.

But for Marxists the primary 'nature' of the Cold War is not whether the armed conflict was direct or indirect, but that it had had two basic and related features: it was a conflict between two fundamentally different and antagonistic economic systems - capitalism in the West and command economies in the East; and it was the mechanism for maintaining US hegemony in the context of the US-sponsored rebuilding of the destroyed economies of Europe and Japan- to ensure they did not become a competitive threat to American capitalism.



Russian forces stage in Syria.



Rapid Defense Forces contest for power in Sudan.



Iran-backed Popular Mobilization Forces drill in Iraq.

Today the situation is profoundly different. While 'mutually assured destruction' still imposes itself as a potentially existential obstacle to direct hot conflict, and so the conflict is largely fought indirectly in a similar way, the underlying economic basis of the antagonistic states is quite unlike the situation during the original Cold War in two fundamental ways.

China and the states of the former Soviet Bloc have become bourgeois states: they now defend capitalist property relations — the 'Communist' systemic difference has gone. And the US economy is no longer as completely dominant as it was until the 1970's: the economies of other countries in Europe and Asia have caught up — and are now significant competitors in the world economy.

The Russian state, which was once the senior power of the Warsaw Pact, is now an instrument of its domestic, kleptocratic capitalist class and even under intense Western sanctions is still a site of investment of Western capitalism. It was the United States itself which helped to privatize the Russian economy and enable a new crop of domestic oligarchs to simultaneously liquidate the state-owned enterprises while capturing and corrupting what remained of the state to further their self-interests.

China has also largely shed its command economy, albeit without the same chaotic political and economic upheaval as in Russia. Its Communist Party remains firmly in place, but nonetheless, since Deng Xiaoping kicked off his Reform and Opening Up campaign in 1978 the Chinese economy has pursued almost a half-century of trade liberalization and the liquidation of social benefits and many state-owned enterprises, resulting in the growing dominance of capitalist enterprises in the industrial, commercial, and financial sectors, and the growth of an industrial proletariat forced by necessity to work under harsh and draconian conditions.

The party too, has experienced this slow but sure penetration of capitalism, as party officials use their power to enrich themselves and their relatives. Some estimate that Xi Jinping's family is worth around \$1 billion, making the 'communist' First Family far richer



than the Biden family, who have an estimated wealth of not much more than \$10 million. Although the Chinese state remains Communist in name and retains a sizable hand in industrial policy, the Chinese economy has overwhelmingly transitioned to an economy based on commodity production for profit, in other words, a capitalist economy.

The net result of these changes means that the current conflict is not between two camps with different economic systems, but rather between two groups of states that promote the same basic economic system, albeit with different political regimes managing them: liberal, rules-based democracy mixed with a smattering of illiberal democracies and outright dictatorships in the West, counterposed to oligarchic illiberal democracies, single party states, dictatorships, and theocratic democracies in the East.

The now-similar economic basis of the two camps is not merely a scholastic question, but rather is fundamental to understanding the internal forces which are driving both camps into an escalating conflict.

## Imperialism With Chinese Characteristics

In *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin rejected the argument by Kautsky that imperialism was merely a policy (ie, a choice) made by capitalist governments, as opposed to a stage (ie, a structural tendency) imposed on capitalist governments by the underlying economic situation, which these governments could ultimately not avoid.

Lenin's argument was based on the build up of capital within a small handful of industrial-core countries, writing that

“the need to export capital arises from the fact that in a few countries capitalism has become 'overripe' and... ..capital cannot find a field for 'profitable' investment.”

In other words, these core markets become oversaturated with capital and face a declining rate of profit, and so these capitalists seek

foreign investments in less developed, undercapitalized markets where profits are higher. These capitalists use their investments to secure favored agreements, with 'their' state using mercantilist trade restrictions and military presence to bring foreign markets under their sphere of influence and keep out capital from other countries which would undermine their profits. The British Empire was the classic example.

The declining rate of profits in the core industrial countries also results in economic crises which lead to serious social unrest and political instability. Lenin pointed out that the very personification of British Imperialism, Cecil Rhodes, argued that the bounty of imperialism was an ideal tool to mitigate unrest among the domestic working classes and avoid a civil war.

When Lenin was writing, the various groups of capitalist nations had already carved up the rest of the world. Therefore, the colonial phase of capitalism was transcended by the imperialist phase, as the established capitalist blocs now sought to re-divide the world to their advantage, which required replacing their rivals' spheres of influence with their own.

Thus,

“an essential feature of imperialism is the rivalry between several great powers in the striving for hegemony, i.e., for the conquest of territory, not so much directly for themselves as to weaken the adversary and undermine his hegemony.”

These various tendencies towards war pitted the capitalist blocs against each other, growing inexorably until they broke out in a tragic and horrific explosion of violence.

While the First World War was the initial global military expression of inter-imperialist rivalry, and WWII resolved it for the middle of the 20th century by establishing the USA as the global hegemonic military and economic power, the Cold War and the post-war boom offered some relief from this inter-capitalist rivalry. Instead, the capitalists were largely united against the Eastern Bloc which threatened not only their spheres of influence but their very existence.

But secondly, wars between previously-belligerent imperialist states were avoided because neither the crippled economy of the British and French Empires could support a war - revealed decisively at Suez in 1956 - nor could the destroyed economies of the other belligerent European states; and because the USA maintained a controlling military presence - both in Europe through NATO and by military bases in Japan and on Pacific islands. The objective of NATO, in a phrase oft repeated, “to keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down” was made clear by its first general secretary, Baron Ismay in 1949.

So wars between the previously-belligerent imperialist states were largely avoided. Instead, wars were fought more to contain or roll back left-wing governments coming out of decolonizing movements than to secure outlets for surplus profits.

However, since the fall of the Soviet Union and the re-emergence of capitalism in Russia and the related possibility of a pan-European economic bloc, and the massive growth of capitalist China, the imperialist inter-capitalist rivalries of the early 20th century have gradually re-emerged in a new form. The competition between the blocs has reached a fully inter-imperialist level as Chinese exports of commodities are joined by Chinese exports of capital.

The conflict between these blocs has its sharpest current expression in the proxy war between the US-NATO and Russia in Ukraine. The context for this war, and the social content of the war, is the US intervention into Europe since 1991 to ensure that the re-unification of Germany and collapse of the Stalinist states and Comecon did not lead to the emergence of a pan-European economic bloc that could include the states of the EU, Eastern Europe and Russia. Such a bloc could also include a new security framework and lead to the demise of the US as the dominant power in Europe because of the decline of the need for NATO.

The US-NATO intervention in Yugoslavia and Libya were carried out to establish an out-of-area military role for NATO and re-assert US leadership. Later, the continued expansion of

NATO to the western Russian border - and the encirclement provocation to include Ukraine in NATO while excluding capitalist Russia from pan-European security and economic frameworks that Putin sought to join and while Russia had assisted the US invasion of Afghanistan - is the expression of US grand strategy against the emergence of a pan-European economic bloc which, in alliance with China, could be a global competitor to the USA.

The granular expression of this aspect of US strategy is the explicit opposition in the 2021 US-Ukraine Strategic Partnership Agreement to the Nord Stream gas pipeline; and the likelihood that the US was involved in blowing up the pipeline - to sever Euro-Russian energy and other trade links.

While at first the liberalization of former command economies, including the liquidation of state-owned enterprises in Eastern Europe, the opening of China, and 'structural adjustment' policies in the developing world, served as investment opportunities for foreign capital with parallels to the earlier colonial conquests, these economies have now all been largely consolidated into one or the other rival sphere of influence.

This rivalry is exacerbated by the declining rate of profit in the industrial-core countries with its related social and political impacts. The stabilization of capitalism in the West after the Great Recession was largely done on the basis of massive quantitative easing (central banks printing money), expansion of government debt, and cuts to social services, as well as investments in the Chinese economy which had the unintended result of strengthening the West's rival.

Now the Chinese economy is also slowing, as it faces the collapse of its real-estate bubble, industrial overcapacity, a weak stock market, and a slowing rate of growth. The Financial Times recently noted that “across China, multiple indicators of social stress are flashing red.” Home foreclosures have increased 35 percent since last year, 10 million migrant workers have left the construction industry since 2022, and youth unemployment recently reached such a high level that the government revised its survey methodology to hide the



numbers. All this has fueled a feeling of malaise, which is confirmed by social media, as well as 1,800 incidents of labor unrest over the last year, up from pre-pandemic levels.

The CCP has attempted to manage this looming economic crisis through foreign investment including the Belt and Road Initiative, extending credit to the governments of developing countries which is then used to invest in infrastructure projects, providing an outlet for both Chinese capital and Chinese industrial capacity.

But neither the West nor the East can avoid an economic crisis forever. When the next crisis does develop, resulting in increased unemployment and further deterioration of standards of living, it will only increase both the pressure to secure opportunities for profitable foreign investment, as well as the need to redirect working-class discontent away from the domestic ruling elite.

## Unstable Alliances

Not only is the current conflict a fight for dominance between blocs of national capitalists classes as opposed to a fight over the existence of capitalism itself, but these blocs are far less stable than those which formed during the Cold War.

To be sure, there were some smaller and medium-sized powers that never fully committed to one or the other bloc - at one point this was even formalized into a "non-aligned movement" with official member countries - but among the major world powers there was never any question of who would be on what side. This was predetermined and cemented by virtue of the classes and systems they represented.

Today, however, there is a much thinner ideological or class basis for the Eastern and Western poles to form around. There is some alignment between capitalists which rely on a liberal and 'rules-based' order versus those which rely on illiberal and relational (read: corruption) order, but these are less than fundamental differences; more so the blocs are formed on political expediency.

The lack of a more fundamental basis of alliance means that these blocs are far less stable. Indeed, important caveats must be added to many of the conflicts noted in the first section. Armenia, defeated by Turkish-backed Azerbaijan, now desires closer relations with the West, while Azerbaijan is developing closer relations with Russia; in Syria, Nato-backed forces fight each other, as Turkish-backed proxies and US-backed proxies contest for control of the Northern Syrian border; and Turkey has also played an opportunist role in the developments in the Coup Belt alongside Russia.

## Organize Against The 'New Cold War'

We once again assert that the contradictions of the above described inter-imperialist conflict will not confine themselves to the realm of 'foreign politics.'

The current conflict has not been brought about by the personal ideation of this or that dictator, but is endemic to the capitalist economic model which, since the end of the Cold War, has more or less been adopted by every major economy. The general conflict will not go away, it will only grow.

Therefore, it is crucial that Marxists prepare now to deal with the inevitable escalation of this conflict, and recognize that we are entering a new period of history in which it will dominate. So how should Marxists relate to the growing number of inter-imperialist conflicts, and to the likely future proxy wars between the US and China?

The first necessity is that Marxists recognise the social content of conflict and war. We should remind ourselves of Clausewitz's framework for characterizing a war - often quoted by Lenin: 'War is the continuation of politics by any other means.'

And thus, Lenin's approach to WWI: "The philistine does not realize that war is 'the continuation of policy,' and consequently limits himself to the formula that 'the enemy has attacked us,' 'the enemy has invaded my country,' without stopping to think what issues are at stake in the war, which classes are waging it, and with what political objects."

Lenin recognised that although several European countries were invaded and occupied in WWI, the social content of that war was not one of national liberation but was an inter-imperialist conflict between the states of the various rival capitalist classes.

This should inform our approach to the wars in Ukraine, Palestine, and to future proxy wars - taking into account not only European matters but also the world situation. Without US weapons and finance the Ukraine war and Israel's assault on Gaza would end very quickly.

## | War is politics by other means.

Likewise, we take the standpoint of the international working class, refusing to pick a side between one or the other imperialist bloc. We are neither for the capitalism of Nato-dominated Europe nor the capitalism of Russia and China, but for socialism. We support the right of both Palestinians and Ukrainians to sovereign self-government and to resist invasion and occupation; but we do not support either the interests of NATO or Russia in Ukraine, nor Israel or Iran in Palestine.

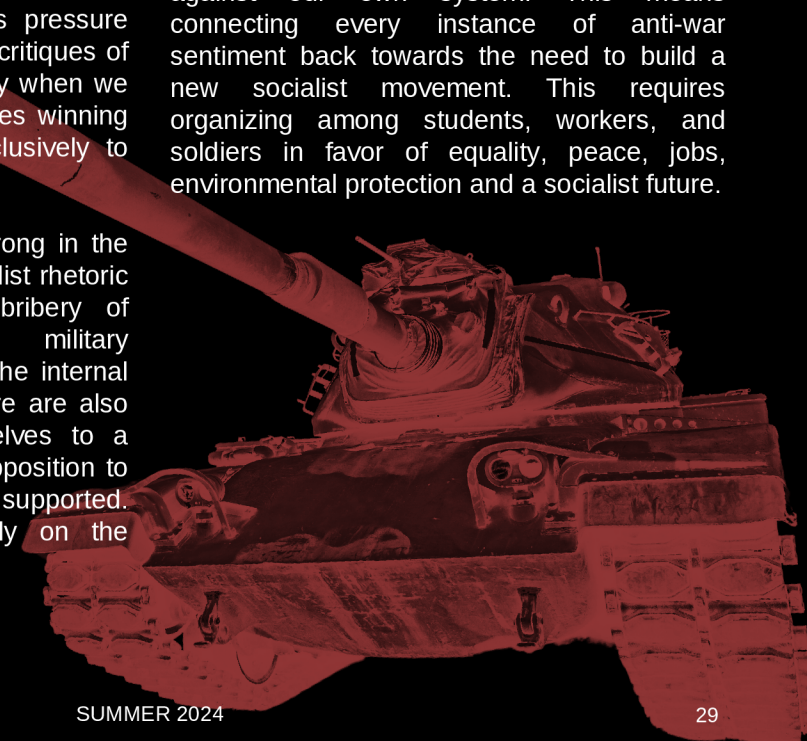
Taking such an independent position requires combating the intense pressures from both sides which has already made its way into our movement, and will only increase. As Marxists in the West, we face tremendous pressure from our own society to soften our critiques of our domestic imperialists, especially when we engage in mass work which requires winning over those who are exposed exclusively to Western narratives.

These forces can be especially strong in the labor movement, where the imperialist rhetoric is materially bolstered by the bribery of imperialist industry effectively military Keynesianism. Conversely, within the internal life of our socialist movement, there are also pressures to accommodate ourselves to a 'campist' approach in which any opposition to our own imperialists should be supported. These pressures weigh especially on the activist layers.

While acknowledging our opposition to both camps in favor of an internationalist outlook, we must then take into account our own positionality within the west. Therefore, our primary strategic focus becomes opposition to our own camp - our own government and state. Without hiding our criticisms of the leaders of Russia, China, or Iran, we focus our critique on our own ruling class by opposing the supply of weapons for Western proxy efforts in Ukraine and Israel.

The actions of elected representatives who claim to speak in the name of the working class - such AOC and the other three left Members of Congress and the Labour Left around John McDonnell in Britain, who have refused to oppose the war budgets of Biden and of the British Tories - is an alignment by them with 'our own' ruling class and a betrayal of socialist internationalism. ***We cannot build movements against our capitalist oppressors at home while we support them in competition and armed conflict with their rival capitalist oppressors overseas.***

To build a powerful movement against Nato imperialism and any US-led escalations of the impending inter-imperialist conflict will first require clear opposition to such war-mongering; and simultaneously helping movements develop from 'defensive' protests against war into 'offensive' mobilizations against our own system. This means connecting every instance of anti-war sentiment back towards the need to build a new socialist movement. This requires organizing among students, workers, and soldiers in favor of equality, peace, jobs, environmental protection and a socialist future.





'Full, fresh, and friendly—we guarantee!'  
But shelves are empty, food rotting  
In the giant waste bin, workers exhausted  
Past the point of smiling.

Hollow as I work the aisle, cutting boxes,  
Tearing plastic. Rundown when my manager  
Asks for another "favor" that's really  
Just my job.

Angry when I get misgendered for the nth time.

"Zero hunger, zero waste." My stomach grumbles.  
Putrid cabbage, bacon, milk collecting flies.  
How can they get away with telling lies?  
Mistruths as marketing, neon falsity.

If those who knew ran the store—  
Stocked shelves, crisp lettuce, happy eyes.  
Only the stockholders' pocketbooks hurting.

Poem and art by Marley Daniel





# DEBATE: THE POLITICAL CHARACTER OF DSA

*Reform & Revolution values and prioritizes debate within our caucus. Here we feature a recent internal debate on the character of DSA and the prospects for Marxists working within it.*



## DSA's Character Is Up To Us



BY RUY MARTINEZ

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**A debate contribution on the political character of DSA.**

The debates within our caucus since our 2024 Convention have often returned to a question about the character of DSA. Some comrades in the caucus argue that DSA is "fundamentally reformist", that the institutions, membership, and leadership are at their base level through-and-through reformist, and that changing its direction would require a sea-change for DSA. Certainly, the politics of DSA are permeated with a reformist character - beyond the politics of individual chapters, members, and even leaders, the broad strokes of DSA's political activity have often de facto taken on an approach of tailing the Democratic Party's left wing to pass legislation. Even efforts by our comrades on the NPC to move towards a party-like strategy have been met with stalling and run-arounds, along with a general trepidation to incite the moderate members of the organization.

**Our task is to change our organization, DSA, by winning over fellow members to our perspectives as revolutionary Marxists.**

But this doesn't prove DSA's reformist politics are fundamental or basal to the organization and its members. Rather, they reflect onto the historical debates and struggles that many previous socialist parties have faced in the past. Many historical socialist parties have had massive shifts in the 'character' of their membership and leadership which played out over years, such as the SPA, the RSDLP, and the SPD. Our task is to change our organization, DSA, by winning over fellow members to our perspectives as revolutionary Marxists. In order to effectively do this, we have to commit ourselves to fully engaging not just with DSA, but as DSA members: fellow

comrades engaged in this project. We have to take responsibility for the decisions and debates playing out in our organization today, with all of the muddy waters and difficult paths which that entails. I believe our caucus' majority is striving to utilize this approach.

### **DSA is Reformist, but Not Fundamentally**

DSA is a reformist organization - that is to say, it broadly follows in practice a policy of trying to win piecemeal reforms and gaining representatives towards a goal of changing society. Crucially, while the spoken politics may be more left-wing internally and in statements, the general decisions play out practically in this reformist method.

For example, when we engage in elections, it's not on a revolutionary basis with a program that advocates for a workers' state with our own clear party identification. Rather, we in practice are campaigning for a working class candidate who will support movements and win reforms - regardless of the way we describe our politics internally. We can see this most clearly with how we've engaged with AOC, Jamaal Bowman, and yes, even Cori Bush and Rashida Tlaib. These politicians are not bad, but their political approach is centered around raising awareness of issues and trying to be effective legislators for (much needed) reforms.

This is very different to the approach of Bolsheviks in the Duma, who routinely got arrested for utilizing the office to spread the message and ideas of their party. It is also different from the SPD's deputies, which were beholden to a program of the party. These systems are not perfect and shouldn't be



replicated entirely today, but they point to a clear distinction between the current approach we take in our national and many local races in comparison to our historical forebears.

This and other potential examples, like our approach to reform-caucus labor leaders, doesn't mean everyone is a reformist in DSA. Nor does it mean that passing reforms through legislation is bad. What it does mean is that we have not built either the will in action or the coherence on these points to break from a de facto strategy of pursuing elected officials and progressive reforms with no organization-wide clarity on the state and how we'd change it. That is what is reformist and wide-reaching within the organization, despite the active membership working to move away from this direction.

But that reformism isn't fundamental. For something to be fundamental means that it is the base or central pillar from which the organization operates. It implies that changing it will essentially require a new organization. But this isn't true. Already, between 2021 and 2023 a new governing majority was elected with different politics from the previous majority of SMC and Groundwork (known then as the Green New Deal slate).

**For something to be fundamental means that it is the base or central pillar from which the organization operates. It implies that changing it will essentially require a new organization.**

Even as this new slate of leaders faces major difficulties, their victory shows that further change and evolution can happen - especially when the membership is mobilized and educated on the debates within our organization. It's for this reason that we in R&R worked hard to host debates with our comrades in MUG. Recently, we helped write a resolution to open up DSA's communications to be more accountable and driven by members. Most notably, in response to the moderate wing's betrayals on Bowman's vote for the Iron Dome and falling numbers, members have changed their opinions and supported new ideas and caucuses. Would we discount this as vacuous or insignificant?

## Our Responsibilities as Members

We are members of DSA - and we have a responsibility to put forward politics which we believe will help it and the working class achieve their emancipation. Thus, for us the question is not of the DSA but our DSA. The view of labeling DSA as fundamentally reformist misses the point: that we have a duty to put forward our Marxist politics and win people to them. If we believe in Marxist politics, that is to say, an understanding of the state and the need to put the working class in the seat of political supremacy as the primary agent of change, then naturally it follows that winning our organization to it is vital.

DSA has enormous potential. We can see this reflected in YDSA's interventions in the student strikes for Palestine, in our work in the Uncommitted campaign, in the strengthening ties and influence in the labor movement that we've built through rank and file work, and in the national Trans Rights and Bodily Autonomy campaign which R&R helped put forward.

DSA's potential comes not only from our size, but from our position at the intersection of labor organizing, student organizing and social movements. In all of these respects, DSA has shown a capacity to move forward as conditions develop. Members have built student unions, won tenant rights in Tacoma, and even won agreements to divest from Israeli apartheid.

This not only demonstrates the power of socialists together in DSA, but also the potential for revolutionaries to intervene within it. DSA's ambitions substantially outstrip our capacity, and a determined and well organized group of Marxists can step in and provide leadership - if they are willing and able. Almost every chapter in the country has working groups without leaders, vacant leadership committees, dormant coalitions, and essential work in need of members to take on.

As we intervene in these struggles, we not only gain the chance to represent our politics, but also to win people to our ideas, build up a core of like-minded people around us, and change the political landscape of the chapter for the better. The conditions of organizing in DSA are not fixed conditions we can only agitate against, they are malleable structures we can take an essential role in building.

It's only if we are willing to take the plunge and recommit ourselves to this socialist movement that we can speak to not only the tens of thousands of DSA members, but the broader working class as a whole.

## The Tasks of Marxists in DSA

Winning the workers' movement, let alone broader society, to Marxist politics will not be easy. There are large pressures within DSA and in the broader society to have strong rhetoric internally while muting our politics externally. This is essentially the problem with DSA's current politics - it is led by a left-wing majority that has not been able to break fully from the reformist politics of parliamentarianism and popular front-ism in the face of internal pressures from the moderates in DSA and the external pressure of wanting to maintain our connection to notable figures on the left. So too could R&R face pressures to water down our politics in the broader space of DSA and to put forward politics externally that are no different than the median voter on issues like Palestinian liberation and the election.

In our view, one key task Marxists must fight for within DSA is to engage with the wider working class on key issues of the day. We have put forward this idea with our mass campaigning approach on abortion and trans rights. However, interventions on rapidly emerging current events are not enough on their own. They need to be carried out on a clear programmatic basis, and aimed at building our capacity to be able to engage in mass politics with an independent and clear socialist message. We need a distinctive message, different from mainstream progressives but that can appeal to working people galvanized into struggle.

**For our politics to succeed in convincing people, we must clearly demonstrate that they can actually work.**

Such unity requires internal organization—our communications, our NPC's priorities, the way we use our staff, the materials we produce for members: all of these serve to shape how DSA will function. Marxists in DSA need to fight simultaneously to democratize these structures and open them up to members alongside convincing people of our ideas within them.

R&R has a few key political goals. We seek to build an independent socialist party with a program it constantly agitates on. We aim to win over the majority of the working class through mass work and an escalating series of confrontational campaigns on the basis of a transitional program. This can only be successfully accomplished by working with our fellow socialists in DSA, and we can only convince our comrades of this if we are fully committed within the wider organization.

To achieve change on this level points back to the question of our engagement with DSA. For our politics to succeed in convincing people, we must clearly demonstrate that they can actually work. It is a question of "put up or shut up." If the left claims we can run mass campaigns, we have to actually prove it. If we claim we can elect independent tribunes to office, we need to do it. We need a body of evidence which can prove that we are the best leaders not just in word but in practice.

## R&R's Goals

In Reform and Revolution, we aim to build a caucus which is dedicated to systematically transforming DSA into a revolutionary organization. We do this by taking on responsibility for local and national leadership with a clear intent to reflect and implement our politics. In the process, we aim to win people to our caucus by strengthening DSA.

This process is a two way street. Not only do we shape and inform DSA, our agreement with DSA shapes and forms us. From the basis of our analysis, engaging with the practicalities of implementing our politics forces evolution and re-evaluation. But we do with a clear goal: developing coordinated teams of revolutionary Marxists in chapters and national structures across DSA who win the trust of members through showing our politics in action. We hope every other left caucus will pursue the same, and work with us to build teams of cadre leaders in each chapter working to develop and implement a shared vision.

Taking on responsibility in DSA means taking on the obligation to fix its problems, it means taking on the responsibility to chart a course forward from our criticisms to our solutions. The majority position of Reform and Revolution, and the core principle of our caucus' engagement with DSA is that the character of DSA can be changed by our interventions.



## DSA and the Road to a Mass Working-Class Party



BY ROSEMARY LORD



BY STEPHAN KIMMERLE

### *DSA Represents a Welcome, but Initial Step of Organizing Toward Winning Socialism in Our Lifetime*

On June 27, the night of the first presidential debate, tens of millions of working-class and oppressed people were forced to gaze into the abyss as Joe Biden, the Democratic establishment's ordained candidate, crashed and burned. Suddenly, the scenario of four more years of an even more unrestrained Trump administration became more likely. This is the latest expression of the deeply unpopular two-party system which was established to protect the interests of capitalism.

Bernie Sanders' political revolution against the billionaire class revealed the enormous gulf between millions of left-wing voters who form a key part of the Democratic electoral base and the Democratic Party itself. The other side of this coin of polarization and instability is Trump's far-right populism that has largely taken over the GOP.

Climate chaos, economic instability, declining living standards caused by inflation and capitalist stagnation, US-backed imperialist wars in Gaza and the Ukraine are all results of the capitalist system in decline. These crises produce an urgent need – as well as an opening – for mass movements and a democratic, socialist alternative to the two capitalist parties.

The growth of DSA is the most important expression in recent years of the opportunities for independent working-class organizing. However, within DSA, as with other left formations internationally, the low level of working-class consciousness, setbacks of the labor movement over decades, and the lack of Marxist leadership have had a big impact on delaying and complicating the process of the self-organization of our class.

DSA retains significant promise. But since Biden and the Democrats took office in 2021 DSA has been mired in crisis and steady decline. If we want to avoid the fate of the demoralization we saw around the betrayal of Syriza in Greece, the end of Podemos in Spain, or the slow motion disappearance of the Left Party in Germany, a revolutionary Marxist left in DSA needs to organize and clearly speak out.

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The last DSA National Convention took a step forward by electing a left majority to the NPC. Unfortunately, so far this new NPC has failed to carry out any fundamental change in policy or direction. DSA has continued to slowly decline, avoiding taking a clear stance on the 2024 presidential election, failing to launch an all-out nationwide campaign for Palestinian liberation around a clear socialist program, and failing to chart a new course of active and democratic engagement of the membership in confronting the main political challenges facing the organization.

Revolutionary Marxists should continue to collaborate in good faith with the left-wing NPC majority, but we must not trail behind their inadequate policies and strategy. Instead, clear revolutionary Marxist policies and strategies are needed to help to build toward the party the working class needs to change society.

The changes needed – to move today's DSA toward a party able to organize the working class to take power in the citadel of global capitalism and imperialism – are qualitative leaps. It will require transformative changes to DSA in size, roots in the working class, and, in particular, a fundamental political shift to overcome the dominant reformist politics in DSA among both the leadership and membership. We don't get closer to accomplishing these tasks by minimizing them, nor do we convince and win over comrades to our perspectives by not being upfront about what we believe is necessary to liberate humanity from capitalism.

Our organization has both strengths and weaknesses, and this article will highlight two main qualities that show why working-class activists – including revolutionary Marxists – should fully engage in DSA and build it; two major challenges that we should not shy away from taking on; and one ambition we should pursue.

### Two Strengths

**1) The most promising political development in the last 35 years is the new layer of activists in labor, political organizing, and social movements that is developing – and DSA is the most important organizational expression of that process.**

DSA is a semi-mass force of around 60,000 members carried by this layer of new activists. It's beginning to develop roots in working-class organizing, particularly in labor.

All major social movements over the last few years have been expressed in DSA, including Black Lives Matter, labor organizing, the struggle for abortion rights, and the recent Palestine solidarity movement. Key discussions on the left are reflected in DSA, making it a consistent place to organize and discuss these political developments.

Despite declining membership, DSA continues to be the key organization that gives a home to new radicalizing activists, and as such, is the most important organizing outlet for revolutionary Marxists to work within at this stage.

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To be clear: the understanding of socialism among most comrades in DSA is largely an abstract hope rather than a guide to action toward a rupture with capitalism. The reference to the working class as the agent for change is often only lip-service. However, this contradiction – between the alleged aim of a working-class-based socialist change and the dead end reformist practice of improving capitalism for working people – opens up important opportunities for revolutionary Marxists to boldly make their case.

**2) Compared to most organizations on the left, DSA is relatively democratic and offers a vital opportunity for activists to test out ideas together in practice, and to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different ideas.**

Over the last several years, a more staff-driven and NGO-style approach was developing in DSA, limiting the role of our elected leadership in guiding the organization. However, the departure of Maria Svart, the politically moderate DSA National Director, offers an opportunity for DSA to move in a new direction.

Even under the previous circumstances, compared to other organizations in the workers' movement – most unions in the US, almost all NGOs, social movements, and most left parties internationally – the ability to organize and fight for political positions democratically within DSA is outstanding. This is still an area of concern that needs to be watched, but internal democracy in DSA is a strength of the organization.





## Two Challenges

Unfortunately, DSA is not politically and organizationally prepared to do what's needed in this time of systemic and multiple overlapping crises of capitalism.

### 1) We need political independence from the Democratic Party and to build toward a Democratic Socialist Party.

In DSA, an unholy dual approach co-exists: in theory, everyone is for an independent working-class party. In practice, there is endless hand wringing and delays. For example, elected officials are not held accountable; nor is there even the self-confidence to openly demand that they use their platform to build toward independence from the Democratic Party or clearly promote socialism (with some rare exceptions). The fears of electoral setbacks paralyze the organization.

DSA abstains from key questions out of a misguided attempt to not get our hands dirty, and this is paired with panicky support for Democrats when pushed.

Take the presidential election for example. The dominant position on the left of DSA is to not weigh in on the election because it's just too messy. This argument for abstention stems from the widespread idea that far-right Trump

might be worse, but war-mongering Biden is not significantly better, so it's better not to advocate a concrete position of who workers should vote for despite the election being the most important political question on the minds of millions of working-class people. Then, coming closer to a real showdown, panic develops and DSA ends up trailing the Democrats to allegedly fight "against fascism." The challenge is to combine a strategic struggle for an independent party with flexible tactics that address the current concrete terrain.

Strategically working toward a new mass working class party while being tactically flexible about which ballot line to use and what electoral recommendation to give will require maturity on the part of the leadership of DSA.

### 2) We need a focus of DSA – including our elected officials and the future party we want to establish – to be building working-class movements and working-class organizing, not electoralism.

The first thing every socialist (including elected socialists) should call for when people feel the threat of Trump should be independent action of the working class – not a call to "unify around a candidate that can beat the rise of the right" in a process that is controlled by the Democratic Party elites (as the appeal promoted nationally by DSA, "[Withdraw Biden, Reject Fascism](#)" unfortunately implies). We need to build the resistance against all the coming attacks from a looming far-right administration even if the Democrats somehow manage to keep the keys to the White House in 2024.

Most DSA members would agree that DSA needs to be deeply rooted in labor and social movements and link this to bold, transformational demands.

However, our national organization is hardly visible in battles such as the fight for Palestinian liberation. While local DSA chapters and YDSA have long been engaged in Palestinian solidarity efforts, the national organization struggled to capitalize fully on the opportunity. Despite grassroots initiatives like the "No Money for Massacres" phone-banks, DSA failed to establish a distinct socialist political message and organizational presence

within the broader Palestine solidarity movement.

**In practice, DSA increasingly focuses on electoral work, and once candidates are elected, using horse-trading to try to impact the state from within as opposed to using those elected seats to build movements.** This is not what the left NPC majority was elected to do, nor do we believe it's what they want. However, this is the result of the political inability to put forward meaningful positions, independent of the Democrats, and campaigns that mobilize our organization and wider layers of progressive workers around us.

## A Clear Ambition

DSA needs a revolutionary Marxist leadership – and we can't shy away from explaining what we mean by that.

To develop a mass working-class party to organize a democratic uprising of the vast majority, we believe a revolutionary Marxist program is needed. Such a program is not set in stone and none of the current Marxist caucuses can lay sole claim to what this program would be. However, without a conscious Marxist impact in our predominantly reformist organization, we will not be able to win people to such a program. This will initially require being in a minority advocating for revolutionary Marxist views in a constructive but clear way. However, it's not helpful to hide our views because they are temporarily unpopular.

The dominant ideas on the left today are left populism. The strength of the working class is obscured and all kinds of other forces are asked to play a transformative role.

In the struggle for Palestinian liberation, campism tries to align us with right-wing, fundamentalist nationalist forces in a desperate search for a "realistic" social force that can wage the struggle. In the struggle against the Russian imperialist aggression in Ukraine, some want us to side with US imperialism and their corrupt, pro-capitalist, pro-NATO allies around Zelensky. In the struggle against Trump, the dominant policy in the US Left is to trail the Democrats as supporting troops for their liberal capitalist agenda.

**As Marxists we fundamentally disagree.**

A more ambitious left-wing leadership could begin to transform DSA into a rebellious, active, debating and clearly anti-capitalist force that can put forward a distinct political profile, one that could prepare the working class for future mass movements, upheavals and a global socialist rupture with capitalism. Too often, however, DSA remains pragmatic, within the acceptable dimensions in the current mainstream left consciousness rather than boldly pushing those boundaries.

We believe that revolutionary Marxism rooted in organizing the working class to fight for transformative reforms and a revolution against the billionaire class is the only way forward. If this is not popular today, we need to popularize it, not to tone down our proposals.

## Join DSA and Help Build a Revolutionary Marxist Current

A future mass party needs to be embedded in a much broader advanced section of the working class in order to hold such a party accountable, keep it on course, and check even the best leaders as they come under unavoidable pressures arising from the class struggle.

DSA is a complicated expression of a step in a wider process of the beginning of the formation of an advanced layer of the US working class. But this layer is not very experienced, not very clear about a socialist program, allured by left populism, pragmatism, electoralism, and much more. DSA is not simply what revolutionary Marxists want it to be, but an expression of the current stage of the class struggle in the US and internationally, the corresponding dominant consciousness on the Left – and the struggle to change it.

People in the US who want to fight to end the current capitalist relations should join DSA and get actively involved. Revolutionary Marxists should be part of these struggles without shying away from boldly making the case for revolutionary socialist politics in what is currently a reformist organization to offer an alternative to the moderate and left mainstream in DSA.



## To Labor Notes, and Beyond



BY HENRY DE GROOT

DEGREAT4

### The Labor Revival

In April, thousands of union activists and at least several hundred socialists gathered in Chicago for the 2024 Labor Notes conference. The conference, which was founded by socialists more than three decades ago as part of their socialist orientation to the labor movement, was a picture into the ongoing revival of the labor movement in the United States.

The conference was headlined by powerful stories from baristas organizing at Starbucks, warehouse workers organizing at Amazon, and auto workers in the middle of union drivers at Mercedes, Rivian, and Hyundai. Also featured were educators, graduate workers, and writers — fresh off of the strike lines which have been raised from Boston to Los Angeles — who relayed the transformational power of striking for their livelihoods and on their class consciousness.

Just as prominent at the conference was discussion of the fight for union reform. Newly-elected UAW president Shawn Fain shared the floor on the last day with members of Teamsters for a Democratic Union, the UFCW reform movement unveiled a new lawsuit in a press conference, and several side events provided space for reformers to connect in their given sector or national union.

All together, these panels provided a tremendous insight into the state of the labor movement, and showed the growing power which working people are finding as they come together against both their bosses and the ineffective existing leadership of their unions.

### Socialist Vibes - Reformist Program

At every turn the vibrancy of the socialist forces within the labor movement was on display.

One could reasonably estimate that something like one quarter of the attendees were members of the DSA or other socialist organizations, and it is also likely that well over 50 percent of the attendees would generally consider themselves socialists. The DSA Labor event alone had more than 200 attendees. Booksellers in the lobby displayed books on Eugene Debs and Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin, while Socialist Alternative, the Revolutionary Communists of America (formerly IMT), and the Spartacist League hawked newspapers on the sidewalk outside the hotel or to passersby inside the main entrance. I myself met with socialists from Ireland, Germany, Puerto Rico, and Brazil in a side-event organized by the 4th International.

In the evening, the anarchists of the Black Rose Federation threw a party with an open bar, which many reported as "very vibey." Reformists and revolutionaries, Tankies and Trotskyists, anarchists and accelerations alike joined an after-party thrown by Railroad Workers United. There socialists and unionists from all over spent the early hours of the morning chatting and arguing, drinking and dancing, and generally filling the Hyatt Regency with the aura of patches sewn on to denim jackets, tattoos of red flags and flaming Molotov cocktails, and the spontaneous singing of Solidarity Forever and the International.

But in spite of the abundance of socialists there was a notable absence of socialism in the content of the formal conference program. There were no major events focused on organizing the socialist wing of the labor movement, or uniting the labor movement as a whole with the socialist electoral movement on the path to forming a new political party. Instead, the panels were almost all focused on non-socialist aspects of the labor movement, many of which could have been well at home at an AFL-CIO conference, and the main politician to address the audience was not a socialist, but not rather progressive Mayor of Chicago, Brandon Johnson.

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The one explicitly socialist event on the entire formal agenda, "Socialist At Work," was the exception which proved the rule. In the basement of the Hyatt Regency, some 80 socialist trade unionists packed into a conference room to hear from the panelists with many years of experience in the trenches of the labor movement. The speakers discussed how socialists should work to be strong builders of their unions on bread and butter issues, thereby engaging broad layers of their coworkers in collective struggle against the boss. But when the speakers discussed transitioning this energy into larger political fights, these campaigns ultimately remained liberal, and did not rise to the level of organizing union support for a socialist political project.

### The Limitations of Labor Notes

Building a progressive, fighting labor movement is a tremendous step forward.

But the politics of the Labor Notes conference and the 'rank-and-file' reform movement which gathers around it ultimately remain progressive and reformist, not socialist and revolutionary.

Within the unions, Labor Notes calls for an expansion of militancy and democracy, but does not point out the eventual need for revolutionary tactics or a struggle for power.

In terms of union internal elections, their strategy calls for socialists to form an undifferentiated bloc (a popular front) with progressive, non-socialist elements of the labor movement, and even sometimes with 'progressive bureaucratic' elements. On the political field, these forces align themselves uncritically with the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, and avoid the need for a new political party. This can only lay the foundation for an inevitable betrayal of the working class elements within this alliance by unreliable class forces.

This limitation was marked by the notable absence of two stars from the previous conference, Teamsters president Sean O'Brien, and Amazon Workers United organizer Chris Smalls.

At the previous conference, O'Brien had been held up as a great reformer and the hope of the rank and file movement, while Smalls was seen as the face of the upsurge in new, largely self-directed, organizing. But despite their celebrity status just two years ago, the two largely went unmentioned. Since then, O'Brien has provided working class cover to Trump and Vance at the 2024 Republican National Convention, while Smalls has been beset by a reform caucus which formed and sued his leadership team to run elections at Amazon Labor United.

A movement which lauded these figures only two years ago, before all but abandoning them today, shows an inability or unwillingness to correctly identify the contradictory tendencies within the labor movement.

Instead of O'Brien and Smalls, the celebrities of this year's conference were UAW president Shawn Fain and the organizers of Starbucks Workers United. Fain is a genuine improvement over O'Brien. Fain comes directly from the reform movement, and has already shifted the UAW in a significantly new direction, using strikes to spread class consciousness, investing in new organizing, and boldly calling on unions to coordinate a 2028 general strike. SBWU also seems to be an improvement over AWU, with far more member participation and less egotistical leadership. We hope these leaders will live up to the mantles placed upon them better than



O'Brien and Smalls. But they too will eventually show their limits. Fain has already "proudly" endorsed Joe Biden, and SBWU remains a campaign which is ultimately controlled by SEIU, widely seen as one of the most bureaucratic unions.

**We hope these leaders will live up to the mantles placed upon them better than O'Brien and Smalls. But they too will eventually show their limits.**

The movement for progressive, militant reform within the union movement will not evolve in a linear manner into a socialist labor movement. It will develop through internal contradiction. Some elements of the progressive wing, which at first mark great advance for the movement, eventually become a break on its advance. This does not mean it is not appropriate to work with them in a united front, but let us not be surprised when they betray us.

Ultimately, the ideas which are officially expressed at Labor Notes are reformist. They call for the reform of unions, the revival of trade union militancy, and the embrace of progressive stances on issues like racism, sexism, immigration, and climate change. But Labor Notes does not call for the formation of a new socialist party or for the overthrow of capitalism, nor point out the limitations of reformism.

### Socialism Is Needed

Either the reformist politics of Labor Notes are sufficient to deliver working people from the exploitation and oppression of capitalism, or they are insufficient and it is necessary for socialists to fight for a more revolutionary politics in the labor movement, inside of and outside of the Labor Notes orbit.

Marxists believe that reformism will not be enough to deliver lasting change for the working class of the United States. Rather, only a socialist transformation of society can deliver the change we need, and this transformation must be carried out by the working class.

### JACKIE PRESSER

Teamsters President Jackie Presser had initially been a protege of Jimmy Hoffa. Also tied to organized crime, Presser rose up the ranks of his local with the blessing of the Cleveland Mob. While local president, he inspired the formation of a rank and file opposition group which would evolve into Teamsters for a Democratic Union.

Presser later betrayed Hoffa, informing on him to the FBI.

As a vice-president of the union, Presser served on Reagan's campaign and helped secure the Teamsters' 1980 endorsement. He would go on to join Reagan's transition team as Labor Advisor, despite both his continued involvement in the organized crime and as an informant for the Department of Justice.

In the lead up to the 1983, Presser helped Hoffa's heir Williams fight off opposition from TDU, but also provided information to the DOJ which led to Williams' indictment just before the election, clearing the way for his own election to the Teamsters top job. As president, Presser led the endorsement of Reagan in the 1984 election, and was again appointed to his transition team.



The labor movement cannot be confined to only fight for wages and working conditions, and to back progressive policies and politicians. The unions must be drawn into the socialist camp if socialism is to have any chance at victory.

It is not possible to accidentally build a socialist wing of the labor movement powerful enough to assume leadership of the movement as a whole. Instead, it is necessary to build the socialist wing consciously, and where possible, openly. To build a conscious movement collectively, it is necessary for socialists in the labor movement to discuss how they can develop their participation in union work into the larger project of building socialism. And they must openly share their aspirations with the progressive layer of the labor movement if they are to convince ever more union members to join its socialist wing. Labor Notes does not offer space on its official agenda or in its publications to discuss these larger topics, such as the need to organize for a new labor party.

In addition to reformist politics, the Labor Notes conference offers little space in which to argue for a change in direction. Despite the values of Labor Notes — organizing, democratic participation, and collective action — there is actually very little space in Labor Notes for democratic decision making. The meeting is a conference, not a congress, so the leadership of the organization which is supposed to be helping facilitate the left wing of the labor movement is not actually elected by the members of this movement; Labor Notes is not a membership organization at all. So ironically, this conference focused on building up the rank and file is run in a surprising top-down way.

### Beyond Labor Notes

Socialist politics and an organized socialist wing, increasingly united with the advanced sections of the unions, is necessary to deliver lasting reforms for working people.

Despite its limitations, the forces which gather under the Labor Notes banner are precisely the key forces necessary for socialists to organize the labor movement in support of a workers' revolution.

These forces include both the left-wing socialist worker-intellectuals who will serve as the leaders of this movement, as well as the 'salt of the earth' rank and file workers who will help to connect these socialists to the broader layers within the unions and in the wider working class.

If armed with a clear political program for organizing for support of the socialist movement within the trade unions, these forces can make incredible progress over the next several years.

However, the right ideas are not enough; we need organizations which help us spread these ideas in a comprehensive, consistent, and collective fashion.

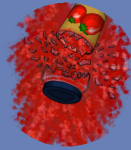
It would be ideal if Labor Notes could be reformed into an actual membership organization with an elected leadership, and also if the various rank and file caucuses would directly affiliate to Labor Notes, rather than maintaining a close but undefined relationship with the organization. If both of these changes were accomplished, the labor left would have the space it needed to collectively and democratically debate and decide the tasks facing it today. This would be far closer to the democratic structure of the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), which I have previously argued is a strong model for DSA's labor work.

Since the politics and organizational model of Labor Notes are not accidental but rather intentional, it is unlikely its leadership would allow for the democratization of Labor Notes in this way. The semi-socialist nature of labor notes actually complicates our tasks and confuses our forces. If Labor Notes was not socialist at all, we would participate in it productively, while openly advocating for socialism. But in this case, it is actually other socialists who advocate for the lowering of our wing of the movement from socialism to reformism.

To fight against this confusion, DSA Labor must hold a conference of its own where socialist politics are taken up explicitly, and the various socialists working within the labor movement are able to debate and decide on the tasks before our movement.



## The System is Rigged: Reform in the UFCW



BY MARLEY DANIEL

“UFCW International’s system is rigged to keep rank-and-file members’ voices quiet, just as CEOs and corporations rig the workplace to keep workers’ voices quiet,” said Iris Scott to a packed hotel suite during a press conference at this year’s Labor Notes.

Scott is a rank-and-file member of the United Food and Commercial Workers who is a plaintiff in a lawsuit against the union for illegal convention delegate apportionment. The lawsuit brought by Scott alongside fellow UFCW member Kyong Barry is the biggest step so far taken by the nascent UFCW reform movement.

UFCW is the fifth largest labor union in the US, with approximately 1.1 million members with a jurisdiction covering industries including grocery, food production, meatpacking, retail, cannabis, warehousing and chemical industries, and which also organizes some healthcare, pharmacy, and food service workers. These industries are not only some of the most essential to society, representing a huge amount of the commercial sector, but also unjustly considered to be “unskilled” or “low-skill” work. To unionize this jurisdiction would be to unionize some of the lowest paid workers in the US.

But UFCW’s membership is only a fraction of the more than 50 million workers who work in the industries covered by its jurisdiction. UFCW’s membership could be much bigger, but decades of bureaucratic, top-down, business friendly, and blatantly anti-worker behavior on the part of UFCW officers and staff has reduced the union’s reputation and influence with its own members and been a brake on making serious investments in new organizing.

Within its own ranks many members have low union consciousness or outright negative opinions of the union, after years of poor contracts with real wages and benefits cut while the union brass receives six-figure checks and bonuses on the members’ dime, and the treasury banks around \$50 million annually which could be spent on hiring thousands of additional new organizers.

The last twenty years have brought a string of corruption and embezzlement scandals as well as a steady flow of Unfair Labor Practice allegations. The biggest problem is transparency. In 2002 UFCW brought forward a lawsuit with the intent of establishing their right to keep the union constitution away from members and the public. Though that suit failed and UFCW reluctantly complied to post the constitution online, it pointed to a reticence for accountability that persists in the union today. Still, any member who requests a copy of a local’s bylaws is looked upon with suspicion.

Now many of the new workplaces UFCW takes an interest in organizing have chosen to create independent unions rather than hitch their wagons to UFCW’s horse. But a strong, fighting, democratic UFCW could be a major force in the labor and worker power movement, if it undergoes a revitalisation from the bottom up.

If UFCW were utilizing its full potential as one of the largest labor unions in the US by being a strong power for their members and other workers in their jurisdiction, the US labor movement would be significantly strengthened. Just the grocery sector alone would be a vital reinforcement. Imagine the millions of grocery workers nationwide going



UFCW Members Launch Suit from Labor Notes Conference

on strike simultaneously. How much quicker could the entire capitalist system be shut down than for such a key economic lynchpin to be pulled? Even just a strike among Kroger workers would have a widespread impact, creating massive leverage for the union to win significant improvements for UFCW/Kroger workers. A strong and fighting UFCW could do more than just weakly call against the proposed Kroger/Albertsons merger, they could organize against it. If the merger were to go through, despite the undemocratic megamonopoly that would be created therein, an energetic UFCW could use the situation to fight for a national contract and bargaining table, not only raising the standards of grocery jobs across the country but coalesce the power of millions of workers into a force that could actually stand against corporations and their CEOs and officers.

### A New Approach

Though there have been attempts at reform movements in UFCW in the past, none have gotten very far. Some locals, like 3000 in Seattle, are more progressive and democratic than others, but by and large there is low member engagement within the union. The

latest reform push is spearheaded by a non-profit called Essential Workers for Democracy (EW4D). Formed through funds of the sale of former worker housing owned by Retail Clerks local 1001 in Bellevue, WA, EW4D’s mission is to increase rank-and-file democracy throughout all unions. They have a special focus on UFCW now as they play the role of facilitator between reform-minded rank-and-filers in disparate locals, connecting members who want to change their union and workplaces, as well as providing resources and support to those groups. Though some have derided EW4D as an outside force, not a grassroots reform movement, they play an essential role.

The Twitter account “Reform UFCW” is the closest thing to a true member-led movement at the moment. People who look to revitalize their UFCW locals are hampered by the bureaucratic nature of leadership, and are isolated from other workplaces in their local and even more so from other locals, making a robust, nationwide, grassroots reform campaign a non-starter. By creating a network between local reform groups and assisting them with advice, skills training, resources, and peer connection, EW4D is helping lay the foundation of a true reform push in UFCW.



The recent lawsuit against UFCW bears this out. The lawsuit is brought by two UFCW members in different locals, with the funding of EW4D. Iris Scott of UFCW 1459 in Massachusetts and Kyong Barry of UFCW 3000 in Washington State are bringing the suit to challenge UFCW's current system of appointing convention delegates. The Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA), the Federal law which oversees the governance of labor unions, makes it a clear point that every member of a union has an equal right to vote.

UFCW's current convention delegate appointment system illegally undercuts this by having a range of delegates per thousand whereby locals of one thousand members or less, like Scott's local 1459, receive 2.0 votes per thousand while locals of 55,000 or more, like Barry's 3000, only receive 0.5 votes per thousand. Furthermore another provision of the UFCW Constitution automatically awards local top officers delegate and voting status, without any opportunity for the rank-and-file to challenge them with an election, further disenfranchising them.

As a delegate to the 2023 UFCW convention, Scott spoke of her disappointment as she witnessed a slate of reform proposals get not just voted down, but booed, insulted, and even made fun of by delegates who were UFCW officers and staff. This illustrative moment showed Scott that reform was not going to come to UFCW internally, as long as the current UFCW officers and their undemocratic system persist. Scott, Barry, and EW4D are bringing this suit to challenge and hopefully change the current delegation apportionment system, and though it does not outright ask for one member one vote, that is the ultimate hope of EW4D's UFCW project.

## One Step At A Time

One member one vote (1M1V) is a powerful tool for member-led union reforms. Both the Teamsters and the United Auto Workers (UAW) won 1M1V and took back their unions from the old, corrupt, business-friendly leadership and instead voted in reform-minded leaders often from rank-and-file backgrounds.

UAW is a particularly recent and salient example—Shawn Fain has become something of a labor celebrity in the last year since his election following the passage of 1M1V, authorizing powerful strikes, winning historic contracts, and making waves with his “Eat The Rich” shirt. Such a policy in UFCW would shift the labor movement into a new gear.

For now the lawsuit is only asking for a fair and equal delegate distribution system, but with hope that it would be a crucial step on the way to 1M1V. But EW4D's program is not limited to this suit. In addition to the quiet, background work of connecting rank-and-file members across the country looking to reform their locals, they have also begun a pressure campaign agitating for “\$30+COLA,” meaning a \$30/hr starting wage plus cost of living adjustments for essential workers. Long term goals include getting a national contract for large employers like Kroger and, eventually, one single bargaining table for all grocery and retail workers. EW4D understands the potential significance of a fighting, democratic UFCW—millions of workers in solidarity, enough to create the largest strike in US history, should they be properly organized.

## Workers Don't Trust UFCW

The implicit and explicit practices of UFCW's leadership that prioritize union officials while disempowering rank-and-file members have led the union to develop to a poor reputation among the working class. Its own members often see it, at best, as a “service union” who exist essentially as an outside entity to “help” the workers. At worst, members despise the union, seeing its officers and attorneys as in bed with the officers and attorneys of the companies they bargain with, feeling the pain of years of bad contracts and being let down at the bargaining table. Outside the union their reputation is no better. UFCW is not-so-quietly referred to as “the worst union,” even (or especially) by labor activists.

In many of the nascently unionizing industries such as cannabis, coffee shops, and smaller grocery chains where UFCW has attempted to intervene, workers have rejected unionizing under UFCW and opted instead to create independent unions. Radical workers trying to unionize explain that they are organizing for actual power in their workplaces, and UFCW

doesn't seem to be the kind of union that would fight for them as hard as they are willing to fight for themselves. UFCW fails to grow, and the UFCW reform movement misses out on new, radical rank-and-filers who have a vested interest in seeing a more democratic and fighting union. Less reform wins, less interest in reform. How can UFCW break out of this cycle?

## Help Wanted

The last several years' upswing in labor militancy has heartened many in the working class, but despite some local grocery worker strikes and efforts to unionize smaller grocers like Trader Joe's, the movement has not yet extended to the largest section of grocery and retail workers, and others in UFCW's jurisdiction. UFCW is an extremely significant player in the labor movement, and the further success of the movement depends on UFCW. We can't expect the tiger to spontaneously change his stripes. Nor can we expect an unbidden grassroots movement. We need dedicated people specifically orienting to UFCW reform as a strategic lynchpin in the labor movement.

The UFCW reform movement needs socialists. DSA members and others on the left have been leaders in many other union reform movements, it is now vital to orient to UFCW. Food and retail workers are an essential and huge part of the working class. No labor movement will be able to significantly expand without the organization of the tens of millions of workers in food, grocery and retail industries, and these workers are desperately in need of solidarity.

The UFCW reform movement needs primarily two things: more leaders and a robust network. An influx of even a few dozen highly motivated, highly energetic activists would greatly increase the capacity of both local and national campaigns. Any additional networking infrastructure to connect locals not only with each other but with other unions and a coalition of community supporters would endow UFCW members with a new confidence

that they are not alone in their struggle, creating a more viable reform movement. DSA is uniquely positioned to offer both these things. DSA members should strongly consider getting jobs in UFCW shops and joining the reform movement, and DSA Labor should adopt a national plan for UFCW Reform solidarity. An organized push from DSA can rapidly speed up the development of the reform movement.

Furthermore, the UFCW reform movement needs a Marxist core. It is the purview of Marxists to study the material conditions of past struggles to identify the strongest possible tactics. There is a generational memory of movements to reform other unions such as the Teamsters and UAW. With Marxist leadership, reformers in UFCW could bypass many of the mistakes made by previous campaigns to direct energy into effective strategies. If we avoid the hurdles of other reform movements we can transform UFCW into a key vehicle of class struggle.