

the magazine of the  
**Democratic Socialists  
of America**



**DEMOCRATIC**

**LEFT**

Vol. XXVII, No. 4

Spring 2011

[www.dsusa.org](http://www.dsusa.org)



**Metro Atlanta  
Democratic Socialists  
of America**  
Liberty · Equality · Solidarity  
[www.dsa-atlanta.org](http://www.dsa-atlanta.org)

**Unions - Yes.  
Slavery - No.**

- Our Debt to Organized Labor**
- 8 Hour Day
  - Woman's Vote
  - No Child Labor
  - Workplace Safety
  - Social Security
  - Sulfur Dioxide
  - Workers' Compensation
  - Medicare
  - Unemployment Compensation
  - Minimum W. Fair Wage

**STICKING WITH  
THE UNION**

**INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL  
UNION SOLIDARITY**

**DSA Comrades Rally Around Wisconsin Workers**

# WISCONSIN AND BEYOND

As we go to press, the struggle to defend workers' rights has spread from Wisconsin to every state, with especially intense battles in states with right-wing governors and legislatures such as Indiana and Ohio, but also in states with neoliberal Democrats such as Gov. Andrew Cuomo in New York. DSA locals and YDS chapters have energetically participated in solidarity actions and local coalitions to fight legislation attacking public workers and all organized workers as well as budgets and bills that would make life even harder for immigrants, women, people of color and anyone not in the highest income brackets. Locals such as New York and Boston supported progressive legislative proposals in their states with targeted leafleting, and Sacramento continued

strong media outreach on California's budget crisis. Cecily McMillan, a member of the YDS coordinating committee, helped the AFL-CIO organize a rally in her college town in Lawrence, Wisconsin. You can see her rousing speech at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJZWXBEs\\_OY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJZWXBEs_OY). Many DSA and YDS leaders have posted their reports on (<http://talkingunion.wordpress.com>) and sent videos to YouTube – too many to summarize here. We have hopes that this renewal of grassroots solidarity with labor is just the beginning of an effective fight back against the neoliberals in both major parties and to win real jobs programs, strengthen public services, and defend public education. □

– Editors

---

## The Writing is on the Wall: State and Local Fiscal Crises and the Future of U.S. Politics

by Chris Maisano

In the Spring 2010 issue of *Democratic Left*, our comrade Mike Hirsch offered an assessment of the political implications of the fiscal crisis facing states and localities around the U.S.:

“What these shortfalls mean for the working classes of these states is a collapse in public services, attempts at the mass firing of state and municipal workers, the slaughter of pension and benefit standards and a battle even for the survival of public sector unions, which today constitute the majority of the nation's unionized workforce. The fiscal crises of the states and who pays for the crises is the terrain on which class struggle will be fought in the coming five years.”

This analysis was right on the money one year ago, and if anything it rings even more true today. Nearly every state in the nation has cut spending over the last three years, and since 2008 over 400,000 state and local employees lost their jobs. Fiscal year 2012, which begins for most states on July 1, promises to be the worst year yet. As the indispensable Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) reports, the 50 states and the District of Columbia face a combined \$125 billion budget shortfall in FY12. Because every state but Vermont is constitutionally required to balance its budget, these shortfalls must be closed by the start of the new fiscal year. To date, most U.S. states have released budget proposals for the upcoming fiscal year. The panorama of austerity that they compose is staggering in its scope.<sup>1</sup>

Almost all states propose to spend less this year than in 2008, despite increased demand for public services. A majority propose deep cuts to education and health care spending, programs that cover the bulk of state expenditures.

Meanwhile, a number of governors propose significant tax cuts for corporations for the ostensible purpose of “job creation” – even though such measures are of dubious value and push state and local budgets even further into the red. Fiscal reserves have been depleted in most states, and only a handful of governors propose to raise taxes or raise new revenues in any significant way. The economic implications of this drive to austerity should be clear to any minimally informed observer. As the CBPP puts it, “When states cut spending, they lay off employees, cancel contracts with vendors, reduce payments to businesses and non-profits that provide services, and cut benefit payments to individuals. All of these steps remove demand from the economy,” and when there's not enough demand in the system, there is little chance for recovery to take hold. Instead of alleviating economic hardship, austerity merely reinforces and prolongs it.

DSA has recognized the importance of the state and local fiscal crisis by strongly encouraging all locals to focus their organizing and activism on the fight against budget cuts. But to win this fight, activists need to be familiar with the sources of the fiscal crisis, the factors that have helped to mitigate its impact until now, and the new political landscape that will shape our responses to it.

### It's the Recession, Stupid

The state and local fiscal crisis has an obvious cause – the worst recession since the Great Depression, one from which the country has not even come close to recovering. Overall state tax receipts are still 12 percent below pre-recession levels after adjusting for inflation. Combine this with increased demand for unemployment benefits, health

---

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed list of proposed state and local budget cuts, see <http://www.cbpp.org/index.cfm?fa=view&id=1214>

care, and other public services caused by the recession and it's not surprising that the states find themselves in dire budgetary straits. Unemployed workers consume less, which in turn lowers sales tax receipts. They also collect unemployment benefits and enroll in Medicaid in greater numbers, further drawing down state coffers. Finally, the housing market has yet to recover, and probably won't regain its health any time soon. Depressed home values lower property tax receipts, applying even more pressure to state budgets.

Curiously, the Tea Party and neoliberal governors across the country seem to have forgotten about the fact that global capitalism nearly collapsed in 2008-2009. To hear them tell it, the fiscal crisis of the states can't be attributed to the biggest recession in almost 80 years – it's all the fault of the teachers, librarians, cops, firefighters, and other public sector workers who have the temerity to form unions and ask for decent pay, benefits, and pensions. In Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, Idaho, New Jersey, New York, and elsewhere, Republican and centrist Democratic governors have used the crisis as a cudgel for beating their unionized state workforces (more on this below). Unsurprisingly, these claims are more fiction than fact.

As the CBPP demonstrates in an important recent report,<sup>2</sup> hysteria over impending fiscal calamity confuses short-term, cyclical budgetary problems associated with the recession (such as increased unemployment or Medicaid spending) with longer-term structural problems that are significant but don't warrant immediate and drastic

<sup>2</sup> CBPP, "Misunderstandings Regarding State Debt, Pensions, Retiree Health Benefits Create Unnecessary Alarm," <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=3372>

policy changes. State and local bonds, public employee pensions, and retiree health insurance fall into the latter category. Fears about widespread state and local bond defaults are misplaced because such defaults are extremely rare. Most states and localities issue bonds to fund capital projects, not operating costs, and their interest payments are generally quite low – 4 or 5 percent. Finally, almost all states prioritize debt service above spending on public services – come hell or high water, the bondholders will be paid. Retiree health insurance is similarly non-threatening. These benefits are not protected by law, and if states and localities genuinely cannot afford to pay for them they are free to change the terms of the plans however they like or to scrap them completely.

Pension obligations are something of a different story – the numbers are eye-catching and can be used to vilify public sector unions, so conservatives like to talk about them a lot. But here too, the hysterical rhetoric doesn't match up with the much less frightening reality. Advocates of public pension cuts argue that the states and localities have a \$3 trillion unfunded pension liability, and that a day of fiscal reckoning is at hand. As the CBPP points out, a few key points need to be kept in mind. First, the assets held by pension funds have eroded in value because of the two most recent recessions. In the aggregate, public pensions are only about 70% funded now but were fully funded in 2000 – and future market gains should help make up for this shortfall. Second, the \$3 trillion estimate often cited by conservatives is disputed. It's based on an interest rate benchmark that is not used in standard state and local accounting rules that put the unfunded liability as low as \$700 billion. Further, even if states and localities really

## Democratic Left

(ISSN 1643207) is published quarterly at 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 505, New York, NY 10038. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY (Publication No. 701-960). Subscriptions: \$10 regular; \$15 institutional. Postmaster: Send address changes to 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 505, New York, NY 10038. Democratic Left is published by the Democratic Socialists of America, 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 505, New York, NY 10038. (212) 727-8610. Signed articles express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of the organization.

### Editorial Committee:

Chris Maisano, Michael Baker, Duane Campbell, Jeffrey Gold, Michael Hirsch, Barbara Joye, Frank Llewellyn, Mark Schaeffer, Jason Schulman, Joe Schwartz, John Strauss, Corey Walker, Simone Morgen

Production: Barbara Segal

### Founding Editor

Michael Harrington (1928-1989)

*Democratic Socialists of America share a vision of a humane international social order based on equitable distribution of resources, meaningful work, a healthy environment, sustainable growth, gender and racial equality, and non-oppressive relationships. Equality, solidarity, and democracy can only be achieved through international political and social cooperation aimed at ensuring that economic institutions benefit all people. We are dedicated to building truly international social movements – of unionists, environmentalists, feminists, and people of color – which together can elevate global justice over brutalizing global competition.*

### DSA NATIONAL OFFICE

75 Maiden Lane, Suite 505, New York, NY 10038 • 212-727-8610

[www.dsausa.org](http://www.dsausa.org)

## Contents

<b>Wisconsin Solidarity .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Writing On the Wall .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>DSA in DC .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Tyranny of Common Sense.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Organizing the Egyptian Revolution .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Pressing for New Priorities... ..</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Moti Zelmanowicz Remembered .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Book Review: Rebel Rank and File .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>DSA Locals Report.....</b>	<b>13</b>

have a \$3 trillion unfunded liability, that doesn't mean that they are therefore required to put \$3 trillion into the pension funds. Historically, the funds have enjoyed higher earnings over time than the Treasury bond rate, which means that states would likely not be required to contribute the full unfunded amount into their pension systems. Besides, the states and localities have decades to confront any problems with their public pensions – they don't have to do it tomorrow. The CBPP quotes a Boston College pensions expert who argues that “even after the worst market crash in decades, state and local plans do not face an immediate liquidity crisis; most plans will be able to cover benefit payments for the next 15-20 years.” Like the claims made by conservatives about Social Security's imminent insolvency, hysteria over public pensions is misguided at best. It is a smokescreen used by conservatives intended to frighten the people into supporting an unnecessary attack on the public sector.

Finally, a recent study by the Center for Economic and Policy Research<sup>3</sup> found that public sector workers are underpaid when compared to their counterparts in the private sector. Because public sector workers tend to be older and much better educated than private sector workers, global comparisons between the two groups tend to compare apples to oranges. As the study finds, when one compares public and private sector workers of similar age and educational level, public sector workers are on average paid 4 percent less. To counter widespread and politically damaging misinformation about public employee compensation, these important facts need to be shouted from the rooftops at every opportunity.

To put it simply, supposedly greedy public sector workers are not the cause of state and local fiscal crises. It's the recession, stupid.

### **The Federal Government's Key Role**

The biggest reason why FY12 is shaping up to be the most painful budget year yet is because federal aid provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and other spending measures is scheduled to dry up at the end of the current fiscal year. The states faced larger aggregate budget shortfalls in previous years, but federal relief helped them mitigate the potential impact on services and jobs. According to the CBPP, the states received \$31 billion of relief in FY09, \$68 billion in FY10, \$59 billion in FY11, but will only receive \$6 billion in FY12. Considering the aggregate \$125 billion budget shortfall, the states will be forced to find \$119 billion in revenue through some balance of tax increases and spending cuts. With few exceptions, governors and state legislatures are likely to place their emphasis on the latter.

It's worth dwelling on the implications of federal policy for a moment here. “Stimulus” has become something of



a dirty word in U.S. politics, but without it we'd surely be in the throes of Great Depression 2.0 right now. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that the ARRA has been instrumental in keeping unemployment down and promoting economic growth. As Doug Henwood points out in the most recent edition of *Left Business Observer*, the ARRA raised GDP between 1.1%-3.5%, lowered the unemployment rate by 0.7-1.9 points, and increased the number of people with jobs by up to 3.5 million. Official unemployment currently stands at 9% – without even the exceedingly modest stimulus package, it would be at 10.7%. Much of this performance is due in no small part to federal aid to the states, which prevented mass firings of teachers and other public employees, kept people on Medicaid and extended eligibility for unemployment insurance.

Federal policy is also instrumental in helping states control spending on health care and education, whose costs have outstripped inflation in recent years. As the CBPP notes, these two areas account for over half of state budgets and over one third of local budgets, and these costs are likely to grow. But health care and education are national issues that states and localities have no hope of solving on their own. It remains to be seen whether or not the Obama administration's health care law will have any significant effect in controlling health care costs, but the main provisions of the bill do not go into effect until 2014. Any possible fiscal relief offered by federal health care reform will not help states and localities confront the massive budget shortfalls they must confront this year and the next.

<sup>3</sup> John Schmitt, “The Wage Penalty for State and Local Government Employees” <http://www.cepr.net/index.php/publications/reports/wage-penalty-state-local-gov-employees>

## The New Political Landscape

Appropriate action by the federal government would go a long way toward solving state and local fiscal crises, at least in the short term. After all, the aggregate state budget shortfall – \$125 billion – is not a very large sum in the context of a federal budget that's well over \$3 trillion dollars. Congress could solve the states' budget problems with the stroke of a pen. But here's the rub – the political landscape in Congress is not hospitable to such action, to put it mildly. Emboldened by their victories in the 2010 midterm elections, Republicans in the House are pursuing an aggressive austerity agenda that disdains state and local fiscal relief as little more than another wasteful “bailout” program. Spurred by freshman congresspeople with roots in the Tea Party movement, House Republicans passed a bill to cut federal “discretionary” spending programs by \$61 billion. In response to GOP demands for more even more cuts, the White House and Senate Democrats have offered an additional \$6.5 billion in spending reductions. As the CBPP reports, these cuts will have a severe impact on K-12 education, Head Start, vocational and adult education, job training programs, and a number of other services. To the extent that they lead to layoffs of state and local government workers, they will further reduce demand and hamper the very limited economic recovery now underway.

At the state level, Republicans have been emboldened by their widespread success in winning control of governorships and state legislatures around the country. The GOP now controls 29 of 50 governorships and enjoys outright majorities in 21 state legislatures (the Democrats control 11, and the rest are mixed in one fashion or another). Predictably, Republican governors around the country have used state and local fiscal crises as cover to rearrange the balance of electoral forces, primarily by attacking the power of public employees' unions that form the backbone of Democratic electoral operations. While the dramatic battle over public employee collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin has drawn the most attention, similar efforts to undermine the power of public sector unions are underway in Ohio, Indiana, Idaho, New Jersey, New York, and elsewhere.

Before this issue went to press, Ohio was on the verge of passing legislation that would end the agency shop, strip public employees of the right to bargain over anything but wages, and the right to strike. Indiana already ended collective bargaining for public employees six years ago, and Republicans in the state legislature are trying to pass right-to-work legislation over Democratic opposition. And in right-to-work Idaho, Republicans are poised to pass legislation that would strip the teachers' union of collective bargaining rights and institute a “merit pay” system. In New Jersey, Republican Gov. Chris Christie has not attempted to destroy collective bargaining but has waged a long-running offensive against public sector unions, particularly the teachers. And in New York, newly elected Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo played an instrumental role organizing the Committee to Save New York, a business group devoted to supporting his austerity agenda and counteracting the clout of the state's public sector labor movement.

The writing is on the wall. Since Ronald Reagan fired the striking air traffic controllers in 1981, private sector union density has plummeted below 7%, but the public sector remains heavily unionized at over 36%. If conservatives around the country are successful in undermining the public sector unions, they will likely end the labor movement as we know it and win a decisive shift in the balance of electoral forces that will shape U.S. politics for a generation. If the left is to have any kind of future in the U.S., they must be stopped. In the short term, we need mass mobilization to beat back the right-wing offensive state by state. In the longer term, we need a national program that can permanently solve health care, education, and other policy issues that the states cannot possibly solve on their own, thus defusing the main sources of state and local budget crises.

The stakes could not be higher – get out there and organize. ■

*Chris Maisano is a public librarian in NYC, Democratic Left's managing editor, and an activist in the NYC DSA local.*

## DSA in DC: 2011 National Convention

**D**SA has set its 2011 National Convention for the Veterans Day weekend in the Washington, DC suburbs. The convention will be held at the Sheraton Premiere at Tysons Corner in Vienna, VA. The convention will open Friday morning November 11, 2011 at 9:00 AM and close Sunday afternoon November 14, 2011.

DSA's bi-annual convention sets the direction of the organization and elects the National Political Committee. The convention is delegated. Most delegates are elected by DSA locals, but members without locals may also serve as delegates. The exact number of delegates will be set based

on the membership size four months prior to the convention.

Detailed information about the convention will be posted on DSA's web site this spring, printed in future issues of *Democratic Left* and distributed electronically through *DSA News*.

A special convention rate has been established with the Sheraton Premiere of \$109 plus tax per night. A reservation system will be available online at DSA's web site. Every member of DSA is urged to consider attending the convention. Anyone interested in attending the convention should contact the national director, Frank Llewellyn, at [fllewellyn@dsausa.org](mailto:fllewellyn@dsausa.org).

# The Tyranny of Common Sense

By Joseph M. Schwartz

“The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.”  
– John Maynard Keynes

Keynes said this decades ago, but he could have been speaking of the dominance the “classical liberal” ideas of long-dead economists Friedrich von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises have enjoyed over the last three decades. The Great Recession should have discredited neo-liberal policies like deregulation, as they facilitated the global financial crisis and the ensuing mass unemployment. Yet failed ideas can only be displaced if the public comprehends a viable, alternative worldview. Unfortunately, after 30 years of neo-liberal academic work and punditry aimed at undermining Keynesian and social democratic economic thinking, the U.S. public and political elites have forgotten the principles and promise of a regulated social market economy of the kind enjoyed by the nations of northern Europe.

While the relationship between ideas and social movements is highly interactive, the absence of a “common sense” understanding of the basics of the Keynesian social contract that underpinned the prosperity of 1947-1973 means that public opinion can be readily manipulated by corporate ideologists and neo-liberal politicians. That arrangement showed that progressive taxation and high-quality public goods, combined with government regulation of corporate excesses (particularly in the financial sector) played an essential role in creating a well-educated and healthy society. But today most Americans believe the neo-liberal common sense (as in the Gramscian conception of “hegemony”) that global capitalist competition demands the endless pursuit of lower wages, shrunken social services, and the abandonment of progressive taxation.

This unthinking attachment to neo-liberal nostrums lies at the heart of the current crisis. As working families confronted a decline in their real living standards, they borrowed against the rising value of their homes (themselves driven up by financial speculation) to maintain their consumption and pay for the ever-rising cost of college for their children. Who financed this borrowing? The sovereign wealth funds of China, South Korea, and oil-producing nations who bought U.S. Treasury bonds. They did so with funds generated by the massive trade surpluses created by an oil-dependent America which imports too much of its real goods from abroad due to its lack of manufacturing capacity. So when the housing bubble collapsed, so did the economic well-being of the vast majority.

For a brief moment after the fall 2008 financial crisis, the mainstream press admitted that economic deregulation and the steady decline in average real income had helped to cause the financial crisis. Yet by the fall of 2010 the Republicans had regained the House of Representatives as well as many state legislatures and governorships on a platform of fiscal austerity. Why did this happen? Because the tools needed to confront the crisis head-on and get people back to work – a serious, large-scale public jobs program – has been ruled out as too radical or wasteful even by most liberal Democratic politicians.

## The Fierce Amnesia of Now

Few in the establishment press remind voters that nearly three quarters of today’s total federal debt were incurred under the Reagan and G.W. Bush administrations, both of which were defined by a perverse “military Keynesianism” that simultaneously cut taxes and dramatically increased military spending – not the Obama administration’s exceedingly modest stimulus programs. Further, most Americans have been convinced that these programs, which according to the Congressional Budget Office have saved two to three million jobs, did not work because aggregate unemployment remains above historical averages. In spite of the fact that the private sector does not appear willing or able to spend the money necessary to spur recovery, there is no mainstream support even among liberal Democrats for renewed federal assistance to states and localities to avert deep cuts in social services and mass layoffs of teachers and other public workers. Neo-liberal “common sense” is bringing us to the brink of a double-dip recession and a second straight decade of zero growth in real family income.

Such federal spending would add to short-term federal debt, but it would also help to get the economy growing again. Federal debt will not pose a long-term threat if the annual rate of growth outstrips the growth of the deficit – and federal spending on infrastructure and investments has been the key driver of economic growth in U.S. history. It is often forgotten that there would have been no postwar economic boom without the GI Bill, federal highway projects, and federal mortgage guarantees for the white working and middle classes that fueled suburban growth. Today, our high-tech and biotechnology industries would be unimaginable without federal funding to support research and development. The Internet would have been little more than a pipe dream. We could readily afford a new round of productive investments by adopting a series of policies: restoring progressive income and corporate taxation at the federal and state levels; removing the payroll tax limit on Social Security funding; providing a path to citizenship for undocumented workers; and creating a single-payer, Medicare for All health insurance system that

would eliminate tens of millions of dollars in private insurance company waste.

Yet, the Obama administration's reluctance to push for a real economic recovery program may well doom its chances for re-election. As any undergraduate political science student can tell you, an incumbent president who runs on a record of declining real family income and high unemployment will probably be sent into an early retirement. But because the Obama administration has lost the battle of economic ideas – indeed it barely attempted to put up much of a fight in the first place – there is little pressure on the government to push for an aggressive pro-growth, full employment agenda.

### **Drowned Out and Cut Off**

While it is true that a few Keynesian voices appear in the mainstream press (most notably Paul Krugman, Robert Kuttner and Robert Reich) they are treated by most pundits as the left wing of the impossible. For example, the Obama administration, even at the height of the crisis, never referenced FDR's public jobs programs as a model for putting Americans back to productive work – programs that created three million jobs (in a nation of only 100 million citizens) in FDR's first year in office. While the Dodd-Frank financial reform bill contains some decent features, such as the creation of a Consumer Finance Protection Bureau, legions of Wall Street lobbyists are working to insure that the specific federal agency rules will preserve the financial sector's ability to avoid strict regulation.

Not only did the administration avoid “unwinding” the major mega-banks by temporarily nationalizing them, they don't even talk about the one successful quasi-nationalization scheme they did adopt – the auto industry bailout. The UAW health funds and the federal government remain the majority shareholders in both Chrysler and General Motors and their return to profitability has saved close to 600,000 jobs in auto production and auto parts (of course, we must note that profitability has been restored largely because of the union's acceptance of a two-tiered wage structure at the behest of the federal government).

Until movement activists can inculcate in the general public a “common sense” alternative progressive economic vision to displace today's neo-liberal common sense, the center-right will continue to dominate U.S. politics and policymaking. Progressives must be able to articulate a clear, simple vision of the social market logic of economic growth through progressive taxation, high-quality universal public goods, and public investments in infrastructure, education, and ecological sustainability.

On the right, Christian mega-churches and Tea Party groups popularize a “gospel of wealth” that is nothing more than warmed-over Horatio Algerism and classical liberal ideological nonsense. These popular teachings are the hegemonic common sense, in part because there are no comparable groups on the broad left that have a similar reach. While many labor and foundation-funded think

tanks produce social market policy analyses (Economic Policy Institute, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, Center for Economic Policy Research, etc.) they do not have local, active chapters that train political activists and organizers to advance this ideological perspective in a language accessible to the general public. United for a Fair Economy, *Dollars and Sense* magazine, and the Center for Popular Economics produce excellent materials, but they too do not have local affiliates that educate local activists and help them adapt their social market model to regional and local circumstances. Part of DSA's work must be to train activists to refute the neo-liberal nostrums of deunionization, deregulation, and privatization. As George Lakoff has long argued, because progressive forces lack a unifying moral and political narrative, the national presence of the left is weaker than its constituent grassroots parts.

### **Another Common Sense is Possible**

Even after the Great Recession, neo-liberal economic “common sense” is so naturalized that there is little public knowledge that there is an alternative to neo-liberal capitalism. Even some readers of this article may not know that if the U.S. returned to the corporate and personal income tax rates of the Eisenhower era (in place until the Reagan administration), we could transfer over \$400 billion (in today's dollars) to peaceful purposes. And a modest 0.05% financial transactions tax on all stock and bond transactions would yield another \$300 billion in federal revenue. We should follow the advice of the infamous bank robber Willie Sutton and “go where the money is.”

The American public is not stupid. The think tanks, media outlets, and popular social institutions of the right have out-funded and perhaps out-organized the left over the past 35 years and have defined the economic common sense of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Political contestation involves both movement building and popular education in the creation of an alternative common sense. Until progressive funders and activists take seriously this task of popular economic education, we will continue to live in a nation dominated by a consensus in favor of “race to the bottom” neo-liberal economic policies. DSA Vice-Chair Frances Fox Piven is absolutely correct to stress the role of social movements and political disruption in forcing dominant elites to make policy changes that benefit ordinary people. But these progressive social movements must also be armed with an alternative program that offers a feasible alternative to dominant ideology. In short, we have to educate, agitate, and organize. DSA locals and YDS chapters can play a modest, but important role in offering that alternative ideological and programmatic vision by participating in the building of mass democratic social movements. ◻

*Joseph M. Schwartz teaches political science at Temple University and is a Vice-Chair of DSA. His most recent book is The Future of Democratic Equality (Routledge, 2009).*

# Organizing the Egyptian Rebellion

By Mark Engler

All of us who watched the Egyptian protests that led to the resignation of Hosni Mubarak were told many times that the demonstrations were “spontaneous” and “leaderless,” sparked by the Tunisian rebellion and spread via the Internet.

Those intent on repeating this storyline can count me as skeptical. Such depictions of social movements are not unusual, yet they are usually more a product of previous media neglect and ignorance than an accurate description of protest activity. If you’re not paying any attention to a country’s politics and only swoop in when things have reached a crisis point, events will invariably look out-of-the-blue. Yet that’s hardly the whole story. Yes, there are extraordinary moments when public demonstrations take on a mass character and people who would otherwise not have dreamed of taking part in an uprising rush onto the streets. But these protests are typically built upon years of organizing and preparation on the part of social movements.

There are elements of the “spontaneity” narrative that I think have some truth to them. The Egyptian protests were decentralized, not controlled by any single figurehead or political party. And in terms of social movement theory, moments of dramatic upheaval present a legitimate challenge to some of the ways we might normally look at groups that are pushing for social change.

Without going too deep into the theoretical debate: approaches aligned with Resource Mobilization Theory, which focuses on organized networks and their ability to deploy community resources in prompting social change, are good at understanding the slow, year-in-and-year-out work of building up oppositional organizations. But they tend to be weaker in accounting for moments of mass upheaval, when huge protests take on a life of their own and the legitimacy of a previously dominant order seems to crumble overnight.

Among those who have challenged the Resource Mobilization school, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward have emphasized the disruptive qualities of mass movements, suggesting that such movements can wield significant power even without particularly well-established organizational structures. Theories of strategic nonviolent conflict, working in the lineage of Gene Sharp, offer an independent set of conceptual tools – and a rich set at that – for understanding the art of unarmed uprising.

With regard to Egypt, the tension between these different schools of thought raises a lot of interesting

questions – too many to sort out here. But there are some relevant points I think we should keep in mind as we reflect on Mubarak’s ouster and consider Egypt’s future.

First, the skills that it takes to create and sustain a period of mass protest are not the same as those needed to institutionalize the gains of mass demonstrations – to carry forward after the moment of upheaval has passed. In challenging the dictatorship, those who were savvy at engaging the media and creating protest scenarios that convey a sense of excitement and forward momentum were very important. To the extent that street demonstrations continue, they will remain influential. However, when it comes to determining how mass action will translate into long-term social change, more traditional organizers, who can develop local leaders and create stable networks of commitment and accountability, will be essential.

With reference to the U.S. civil rights movement, historian Charles Payne distinguishes between two different activist traditions. In the South there was, he argues, a “community-mobilizing tradition, focused on large-scale, relatively short-term public events” – a “tradition best symbolized by the work of Martin Luther King.” At the same time, there was also a “community organizing tradition,” with a “greater emphasis on the long-term development of leadership in ordinary men and women” – epitomized by the likes of SNCC and Ella Baker. Both mass mobilization and long-term leadership development are organizing, and both can be extremely valuable. And, at times, they can overlap. But it’s useful to understand that they are distinct processes.

A second point: Even during a moment of dramatic upheaval, there are dangers in ignoring the organizational networks that make up more established social movements. If you view a mass movement as “spontaneous” and “leaderless” – leaving its constituent groups unexamined – it makes it much easier to employ the language of “chaos” and “riots” in describing popular mobilizations. These descriptions lend themselves to a fear of the mob that robs movement participants of their legitimate democratic agency. They’ve been useful for right-wing commentators who argue that we should be wary of the pro-democracy movement (and supportive of the United States’ historic backing of Mubarak), since “chaos” in Egypt will “inevitably,” in their view, produce a radical Islamic regime hostile to U.S. interests.

In this type of conservative account, Mohamed ElBaradei becomes a “self-appointed spokesman for the Egyptian ‘revolution’” (the words of a particularly nutty

on-line conservative) – despite the fact that, as protests developed, ElBaradei had significant support from anti-government groups across the political spectrum.

As a counter to this nonsense, I have been pleased to see some thoughtful and detailed analysis of the protest movement appear, giving attention to some of the different constituencies that contributed to the uprising.

Juan Cole, at his appropriately named Informed Comment blog, called the protesters a “broad-based, multi-class movement, with working-class Egyptians clearly making up a significant proportion of the crowd in Tahrir Square.” In arguing why “Egypt in 2011 is not Iran in 1979,” Cole further breaks down why the “social forces making the revolution in Egypt,” including the Muslim Brotherhood, “have a significantly different profile and different dynamics than in Iran.”

Robert Dreyfuss at *The Nation* also did a good job discussing “Who’s Behind Egypt’s Revolt,” noting:

“Contrary to some media reports, which have portrayed the upsurge in Egypt as a leaderless rebellion, a fairly well organized movement is emerging to take charge, comprising students, labor activists, lawyers, a network of intellectuals, Egypt’s Islamists, a handful of political parties and miscellaneous advocates for ‘change.’”

He pays particular attention to youth constituencies:

“First, by all accounts, is the April 6 Youth Movement. Leftists, socialists and pro-labor people know that the movement takes its name from April 6, 2008, when a series of strikes and labor actions by textile workers in Mahalla led to a growing general strike by workers and residents and then, on April 6, faced a brutal crackdown by security forces. A second, allied movement of young Egyptians developed in response to the killing by police of Khaled Said, a university graduate, in Alexandria. Both the April 6 group and another group, called We Are All Khaled Said, built networks through Facebook, and according to one account the April 6 group has more than 80,000 members on Facebook. The two groups, which work together, are nearly entirely secular, pro-labor and support the overthrow of Mubarak and the creation of a democratic republic.”

Overlapping with the youth movement is labor. David Macaray made the case that “Egypt’s current political unrest was inspired and energized by the actions of the country’s labor movement”:

“According to a report presented at a symposium hosted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in February, 2010, there have been more than 3,000 labor protests by Egyptian workers since 2004. That’s an astounding number. The report declared that this figure [dwarfs] Egyptian political protests in both scale and consequence.’ ...Joel Beinin, a Stanford

University professor, referred to Egypt’s labor activism as ‘...the largest social movement in the Arab world since World War II.’”

U.C. Santa Barbara Professor Paul Amar elaborated on this in an excellent assessment of Egyptian civil society:

“Paralleling the return of organized national(ist) capital associated with the military and ranged against the police (a process that also occurred during the struggle with British colonialism in the 1930s-50s) there has been a return of very powerful and vastly organized labor movements, principally among youth. 2009 and 2010 were marked by mass national strikes, nation-wide sit-ins, and visible labor protests often in the same locations that spawned this 2011 uprising. And the rural areas have been rising up against the government’s efforts to evict small farmers from their lands, opposing the regime’s attempts to re-create the vast landowner fiefdoms that defined the countryside during the Ottoman and British Colonial periods.

“In 2008 we saw the 100,000 strong April 6 Youth Movement emerge, leading a national general strike. And in 2008 and just in December 2010 we saw the first independent public sector unions emerge. Then just on 30 January 2011 clusters of unions from most major industrial towns gathered to form an Independent Trade Union Federation. These movements are organized by new leftist political parties that have no relation to the Muslim Brotherhood, nor are they connected to the past generation of Nasserism. They do not identify against Islam, of course, and do not make an issue of policing the secular-religious divide. Their interest in protecting national manufacturing and agricultural smallholdings, and in demanding public investment in national economic development dovetails with some of the interests of the new nationalist capital alliance.”

At this point, I hope a vibrant, resourceful, and decentralized mass protest movement will remain active in Cairo and other cities throughout Egypt until a genuine democracy is established. But I also hope that Egypt’s labor movement, its youth organizations, and all those who will be organizing long after the international press departs gain plenty of enduring fans and international supporters to make their work ahead a little easier. ■

*Mark Engler is a senior analyst with Foreign Policy In Focus and author of How to Rule the World: The Coming Battle Over the Global Economy (Nation Books, 2008). He can be reached via the website <http://www.DemocracyUprising.com>. A version of this article first appeared on-line at Dissent magazine.*

# Pressing for New Priorities

Lawrence S. Wittner

In 1953, at the beginning of Dwight Eisenhower's presidency, he delivered an address that highlighted a sharp clash of national priorities. He declared: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed."

That clash of priorities is certainly evident today.

According to the highly-respected National Priorities Project, President Barack Obama's budget proposal for FY 2012 includes \$719 billion in military spending: \$553 billion for the Pentagon (a 3% increase in real spending that will provide the Pentagon with its biggest budget, in real dollar terms, since World War II), \$117.6 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (though this amount can be increased through supplemental appropriations), and additional

billions for nuclear weapons. Thanks to simultaneous cuts that the administration has called for in domestic spending (including education, income security, food safety, and environmental protection) – some \$400 billion over the next ten years – the military portion of the budget will grow to about 58% of discretionary federal spending.

Furthermore, other military-related items should be considered part of the "security" portion of the budget, including \$129 billion for veterans' benefits, and billions more for war-related interest on the national debt and for homeland security. This pushes total annual "security" spending by the United States to well over \$1 trillion – roughly 66% of federal discretionary spending. As Obama has reported, his proposal reduces the civilian share of the budget to the lowest level since the Eisenhower administration.

## Motl Zelmanowicz 1915-2010

By Bogdan Denitch

We were all saddened to hear that Motl Zelmanowicz has died. He was the head of our sister organization the Jewish Socialist Bund as well as a Vice-Chair of DSA and an active supporter of *Dissent*. For two decades, he joined our delegation to the Socialist International where the Bund had many historic ties and where their support increased the weight of DSA in that body. For over a decade I had



the honor of being the main invited speaker at the May Day meetings of the Bund, and for far longer we kept in close contact. The Bundists were mostly activists in the unions, mainly the garment and textile workers unions where they historically provided much of the cadre.

Politically they tended to be close

to DSA and its predecessor, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. They were a working-class oriented non-Zionist mass organization of the Jewish pale of settlement – Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, Belorussia, Russia and Austro-Hungary. They were as a consequence all but wiped out by the Holocaust. However, they fought as they died, leading the heroic Warsaw Ghetto uprising and the smaller uprisings in Lodz and Vilna. Motl, a member of the Bund youth section, was an active unionist in the Lodz Ghetto and then transported to Auschwitz where he survived as a skilled worker until liberation. In the U.S. he plunged into Bund activities where he spent his whole life. In his later years he was able to give large contributions which basically funded DSA work in the Socialist International and some of our work in Mexico in the seventies and eighties.

He was one of our main links with the Jewish labor movement. The Bund had essentially the same position on Israel we did, for the rights of Jews in Israel to self-determination – not to be confused with the right of Jews from the Bronx and Brooklyn to "return" – as well as the right of Palestinians to a viable state.

He will be deeply missed.

Supporters of these priorities insist that this vast military outlay is necessary in today's dangerous world. But is it? After all, U.S. military spending is nearly equivalent to the military spending of all other nations combined. The runner-up to the United States in military spending is China, which spends about one-sixth the amount the U.S. government lavishes on its military. Indeed, there is an almost total mismatch between the legitimate security needs of the United States and the enormously expensive Cold War-style weapons systems that the Pentagon, working hand in glove with defense contractors, insists upon purchasing. Nor is it at all clear why the United States, unlike other nations, needs an estimated 700 to 1,000 overseas military bases.

Against the backdrop of vast U.S. overkill on the world scene, the severe imbalance between military and social spending has drawn a good deal of attention. The Sustainable Defense Task Force, pulled together by Representatives Barney Frank (D-MA) and Ron Paul (R-TX) and staffed by military experts from both parties, recommended cuts of up to \$960 billion in the military budget over the next decade. Even the relatively conservative National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, appointed by Obama, recommended equal percentage cuts in military and social program appropriations, which would work out to about an \$800 billion decrease in U.S. military spending over ten years – a decrease, of course, that is not in the president's budget.

Fed up with this situation, peace and social justice organizations have begun to work together on a campaign to “move the money” from the military to the civilian side of the ledger. On October 3, 2010, a day after the historic One Nation Working Together rally in Washington, DC, activists from these two constituencies met and began organizing the New Priorities Network. Their goal was to “secure ongoing funding for jobs and services in our communities by building a movement to radically change federal spending priorities.” To accomplish this, they planned to “build local organizations and long-term coalitions between economic and racial justice, peace, labor, faith-based, and other organizations.” In turn, these coalitions would operate primarily by bringing new priorities resolutions before local organizations and government entities.

Since that time, numerous groups have joined the New Priorities Network. Among the dozens of national organizations are the Alliance for Global Justice, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Just Foreign Policy, the National Priorities Project, Pax Christi, Peace Action, U.S. Labor Against the War, and Veterans for Peace. An even larger number of local groups have signed on, from the Boston Coalition to Fund Our Communities to Brooklyn for Peace, from Cleveland Peace Action to the Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club. There is also growing support from unions, including the National Union of Health Care Workers, SEIU 1199 New England, the United Auto Workers, and the United Electrical Workers.

This campaign has some prospects for success, particularly given the public's willingness to slash the bloated U.S. military establishment. According to Gallup polls, Americans believing that the nation spends “too much” on the military have consistently outnumbered those who believe it spends “too little” since 2003. In February 2011, Pew research polls found that, when given choices as to where spending cuts should occur, Americans generally preferred cutting the military. Thus, 11 percent favored cuts in spending for education, 23% for energy, 24% for health care, and 30% for “military defense” – a term, furthermore, that puts a positive spin on the reality of much U.S. military spending.

In addition, the struggle for new priorities also provides an excellent opportunity for peace and social justice organizations to cement their emerging alliance. Recognizing this, as well as the struggle's potential for success, the largest peace group in the United States, Peace Action (which developed out of the merger of the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy and the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign), has made the “move the money” campaign one of its top priorities. In some regions, the campaign is well underway. In Maryland, the Montgomery County Peace Action group played a key role in establishing Fund Our Communities: Bring the War Dollars Home, a coalition of 34 organizations that has gotten dozens of state legislators to back a call to the state's Congressional delegation to cut the military budget.

Democratic socialists and other activists in the broad democratic left should regard this new priorities campaign as a natural for them. Certainly, it is hard to imagine the creation of a decent society in a nation committed to militarism. Indeed, it is clear that militarist priorities are strangling efforts for democratic social transformation.

Our forebears understood this. Eugene Debs and the Socialist Party stood up valiantly against militarism and its offspring, World War I. Norman Thomas was a trenchant critic of the weaponeers and a strong proponent of disarmament during the Cold War. Labor leaders like Walter Reuther and William Winpisinger helped rally union support for disarmament treaties and economic conversion. Michael Harrington, like Norman Thomas and A. Philip Randolph, spoke out against the Vietnam War and championed a reordering of national priorities. Dozens of American unions opposed the Reagan administration's military buildup, as did DSA and nearly all social democratic parties around the globe.

So there's good reason for the democratic left to support this struggle for new national priorities. If successful, it can lead to a better America – and to a better world. ■

*Lawrence S. Wittner is Professor of History emeritus at SUNY/Albany. His latest book is Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement (Stanford University Press).*

# Rebels in industry: A story told well, and one worth telling

By Michael Hirsch

***Rebel Rank and File:  
Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below  
During the Long 1970s***  
Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and  
Cal Winslow (editors)  
Verso, 2010  
\$29.95

Wordsworth's paean to the French revolution, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven!" doesn't appear in *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s*. It should. The notion of rising with a people risen was as true for the radical generation of the 1960s, as it was for any period when rulers seemed incapable of ruling in the old way and the ruled – certainly a significant portion of young working people – refused to play along. Historian David Montgomery called the period of working class ferment "a rebellion from below." It was.

And it was an important decade, the long period roughly from the New York transit strike of 1966 to Reagan's crushing of the air traffic controller's job action in 1981. In the early- to mid-1970s alone, miners, longshore, auto and railroad workers, teachers and construction workers went on both official and wildcat strikes not only for better wages and benefits but also for an end to hideous working conditions. Jimmy Carter's calling out the federal troops couldn't get the mines working and even the air traffic controllers, whose union (PATCO) had endorsed Ronald Reagan walked off their jobs. It took the virtual collapse of the manufacturing sector with its millions of permanent layoffs, a shift in investment away from manufacturing and the Reagan recession to drive that movement underground.

It would be a mistake to read this valuable and exceptionally informed book as glorification of one more contender for the "Greatest Generation" prize, nor is it pure validation for "industrializing," one approach to labor organizing favored by some radicals of that period. With the exception of a passing reference in two of the 13 essays, no socialist groups are mentioned. The emphasis is on, as co-editor Cal Winslow writes in his introduction, in words reminiscent of the late Edward Thompson, "a chapter in the history of an important decade," as well as "a rescue mission, a history of the workers movement in those years – from the bottom up."

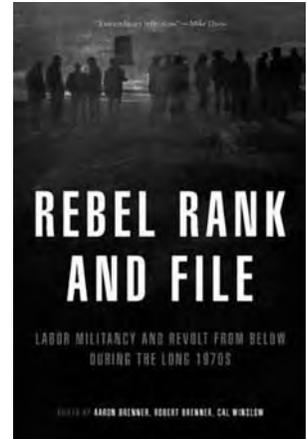
It charts, in 13 separate and well-informed essays covering industrial and social struggles and the larger national and international contexts, how an insurgent movement of workers was growing. It was a movement

whose demands outstripped not just the politics of liberalism but the vision even of those labor leaders who – with the notable exceptions of the Machinists' William Winpisinger and the Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers' maverick Tony Mazzocchi – called themselves progressives.

There are lessons to be learned here for a new generation of militants, including what worked, what didn't and why. Certainly one weakness, which the authors don't adequately address because of their emphasis on self-activity, rank-and-file initiatives and an evident reluctance to wage old wars by making convenient historical points about political strategy, was precisely the politics of the radicals who industrialized. Quite consciously guided by Rosa Luxemburg's wise maxim that "Those who do not move, do not notice their chains" and that "chains must be broken where they are forged," many defined this condition narrowly, as forged only (or primarily) at the workplace. They also prided themselves on an anti-electoral stance even as corporate America was consolidating itself around neoliberal policies that outsourced jobs and reasserted the primacy of finance capital. In effect too much of the industrialized left gave too little thought to putting forward and organizing for alternative policy programs or engaging in local political campaigns, even as many of their own prized rank and file militants did. Nor did they have a vehicle for selling those programs in the cases, especially in steel, where such plans were put forward.

But a more charitable view is that these young radicals (and I was one of them) were like Aesop's hedgehog – they knew one big thing. That big thing is common coin among community organizers today – that without a base of support the best plans of the most foresighted policy makers would die on the drafting table or in the seminar room or in a legislator's front office. They knew that government and corporations could only be forced to concede and initiate reforms with massive pressure, and at the workplace and not (or not just) at the ballot box. That's necessary if insufficient wisdom, but wisdom nonetheless. ■

*Michael Hirsch works for the NYC local of the American Federation of Teachers and is a veteran left activist and writer.*



# Our Locals are Going Strong

## **ALASKA: Fighting for People's Oil and Radio**

Alaska DSA has been active in two areas: sending letters to legislators promoting a state-owned natural gas pipeline from Prudhoe and assisting "Fairbanks Open Radio" in establishing a progressive radio station in Fairbanks. Their intent is to host a weekly DSA call-in radio show once the station is up and running. An FCC license has been approved; now they are working to raise \$100,000 needed to set up the station and tower to start broadcasting. Also, the local is lobbying for the State of Alaska to purchase the privately owned (by the Koch brothers of Oklahoma) oil refinery located outside of Fairbanks. The Kochs purchase the royalty oil that is owned by the State of Alaska, refine it and sell it back to Alaskans at inflated costs to enrich their own pockets. DSA Alaska's approach is to use such state-owned facilities as a way of benefiting the people of Alaska, not multinational corporations.

## **ATLANTA: Speaking Out for Jobs Now**

The Atlanta local has joined forces with over 20 Atlanta labor and community groups to help launch two exciting – and connected – new organizations: A reborn Jobs with Justice group (the previous Atlanta JwJ morphed into something else and dropped the name) and an ambitious project to start an organization of unemployed people. The JwJ group, facilitated by Atlanta DSA's Milt Tambor, agreed that its kickoff event would be a "Speak-Out for Jobs Now" on April 2, at which unemployed and under-employed people would be invited to speak about their situation and ideas for solutions, and also receive free services ranging from legal and benefits counseling to haircuts and massages, all feeding into the plan for organizing the unemployed.

Tony Romano, former co-founder and director of the Miami Workers' Center and a new member of Atlanta DSA, had moved back to Atlanta, his hometown, a year ago and with Bill Fletcher, Jr. developed a proposal for organizing unemployed councils in cities across the country, with Atlanta as the pilot project. Atlanta DSA agreed to support the plan and encourage members to supply some of the volunteer labor that will be needed. Activities will include direct services, support groups and a barter system for goods and services; campaigns and direct action demanding jobs and relief; and independent civic action including electoral and voter turnout work. Stay tuned.

Atlanta DSA also held two very successful community events during the past few months. Its fourth annual Douglass-Debs Awards Dinner in November drew a capacity crowd and featured a keynote speech by Kim Bobo, executive director of Interfaith Worker Justice and author of *Wage Theft in America*, as well as awards to Anita Beaty, executive director of the Metro Atlanta

Taskforce for the Homeless (also a DSA member), and Walt Andrews, president of Local 3204 of the Communications Workers of America, who is a strong supporter of the Atlanta Fighting Foreclosure Coalition among other good causes. A special award went to students supporting a union drive by cafeteria workers employed through the multinational corporation Sodexo at five diverse metro Atlanta colleges and universities. Student representatives from all five schools led the dinner attendees in spirited picket line chants.

The second event took a busload of college students, DSA members and others on a tour of Atlanta's black and low-income neighborhoods that have been systematically bulldozed or gentrified to make way for development projects. DSA member and Georgia Tech planning professor emeritus Larry Keating, joined by the president of the Peoplestown Revitalization Commission, from one of the affected neighborhoods, led the tour, which ended up in discussion over lunch. The tour received a very positive response and stimulated interest in DSA/YDS.

Atlanta DSA continues to participate in the steering committee of the Atlanta Fighting Foreclosure Coalition. Local chair Milt Tambor and four others arrested during a protest at Wells Fargo a year and a half ago received reduced sentences of 20 hours of community service, which Milt will contribute to Jobs with Justice. Finally, the local's Socialist Education Circle has been enthusiastically discussing David Schweickart's *After Capitalism*.

## **CENTRAL INDIANA: Celebrating Socialism**

The two socialist groups in Indianapolis, the Central Indiana Democratic Socialists of America and the Greater Indianapolis Socialist Party USA (SP-USA), met together monthly at North Meadow Circle of Friends. They reviewed past activities, planned future events, heard about coalitions, partners, and other progressive groups in the community, and discussed current issues and occasionally more theoretical topics. Thought-provoking movies were shown at some meetings.

A group of DSA and SP-USA members went to Terre Haute, Eugene V. Debs' home town, in October for the 2010 Eugene V. Debs Award Banquet, where Bobby Duval, Haitian human rights worker and political activist, was honored. The local also continues to publish its monthly *Central Indiana Socialist* newsletter (edited by Marvin Williams).

On February 21, members of the Central Indiana DSA local joined thousands of union workers and supporters crowding into the state capitol in protest of a right-to-work bill proposed by the Republicans. Almost all Democrats in the House failed to appear for the day's legislative session.

## **BOSTON: Educating, Lobbying, Demonstrating**

Despite being omitted from the Fall 2010 DL, Boston DSA did enlist two dozen people to travel down to Washington on October 2, but half of them were stranded by a bus snafu that left literally thousands of Massachusetts activists without transportation, and several others, after traveling all night, never managed to connect to the main DSA contingent at the rally.

Since October 2 the local has co-sponsored public forums on the elections, on the ongoing fight for truly universal health care, and on the Middle East. They participated in grassroots lobbying efforts around single-payer health care and an anti-foreclosure bill, and held their own discussion meeting on Social Security. They turned out, with signs and leaflets, for two huge Wisconsin solidarity meetings in one week.

Currently, they are working on building support for a state bill that would address the budget crisis by raising revenue progressively, rather than by slashing government programs, and they are preparing for their annual Debs-Thomas-Bernstein award event.

## **CHICAGO: Podcasting**

Chicago DSA has been active with new social media. The local has recently instituted monthly podcasts (akin to radio shows that can be downloaded on the Internet) called "Talkin' Socialism." In December, the first podcast featured economists Ron Baiman and Bill Barclay discussing the financial state of our country. This was followed in January by Chicago DSA secretary Tom Boderick discussing steps to push anti-death penalty work to finally get the governor's signature to repeal the archaic and cruel punishment. February will feature a discussion on religious socialism. Several podcasts are available on [chicagodsa.org](http://chicagodsa.org). The March podcast will feature DSA activist Peg Strobel and Judy Gardiner, professor of Gender and Women's Studies at UIC, discussing the roots of feminist socialism.

The local plans to help host US representative John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) in Chicago for a town hall-style meeting on his jobs bill. It's being organized as a New Deal Coalition program with co-sponsorship from Chicago Jobs with Justice, Oak Park Coalition for Truth and Justice and others.

## **COLORADO: Meeting and Studying**

A revived Colorado DSA has been meeting monthly since August at Left Hand Books in Boulder (an all-volunteer store founded by Boulder NAM in 1979). So far they have been comparing notes about their activities (labor, single payer, Israel/Palestine) as well as discussing local, state, national and international politics. They recently decided to add book discussions to their meetings.

## **ITHACA: Filming the Revolution**

Ithaca DSA is determined that the revolution will be televised. They started the year on their weekly community

access cable television show with Joe Schwartz discussing "What Should the Left Do Now?" Since then, they have documented excessive inequality in the US, talked about the need for preserving essential services in the upcoming state budget, and suggested how the money to pay for them could come from those who have it. These videos and many more can be seen on the local's website: <http://ithacadsa.blogspot.com>.

## **LOS ANGELES: Showing Films and Growing**

Our newest local has received its charter – finally – and hopes to be able to fulfill the promise of this historic re-development. "The local's birth was hard work," says Chair Carol Newton, "but an ambitious effort was made to give it real meaning by writing a thoughtful statement of purpose for the bylaws, one that will inspire our efforts in the future."

While working on local development, the Los Angelenos presented a film series, moderated by Jack Rothman, Professor Emeritus, UCLA School of Public Affairs. After they screened "Harlan County, USA," directed by Barbara Kopple, about organizing a coal miners' union in the 1930s, Kyle Arnone of the UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment led a discussion for 18 attendees. Next was "The Corporation," with a discussion led by Professor Howard Sherman, a progressive economist and former head of the economics department at UC Riverside. Last up was "Howard Zinn: You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train." John Marciano, a professor emeritus at Cortland State University who led the discussion, had worked directly with Howard Zinn and is noted for his teaching of historian and activist Zinn's book *The People's History of the United States*.

The local has received 55 responses so far from a membership mailing and expects more. They plan a strategy meeting in March to discuss further membership development, programs for community engagement, spreading the good news about socialism, and educating the public.

## **NEW YORK CITY: Rallying for Jobs**

DSA held several meetings after the October 2nd One Nation march, including a report-back event and a letter-to-the-editor writing event after the election in November. Then they focused on their annual holiday brunch in December and preparing for a busy winter. In the new year, they began attending "first Friday" vigils organized by the National Jobs for All Coalition (among others) each month. The vigils are in front of Senator Schumer's office in midtown Manhattan and intended to highlight the need for a massive jobs bill and income support for the jobless. They have also found that holding work parties to make posters and calling DSA members to attend the vigils has been quite helpful. "We look forward to promoting the Conyers full-employment bill, once it is introduced, which

will likely be partly funded by a financial transactions tax,” says Maria Svart. “Senator Schumer has been a reliable friend of Wall Street, so the vigil site is quite appropriate.”

In addition to the vigils, the local holds a biweekly winter discussion series, “Democracy Under Capitalism,” and is participating in the fight to prevent Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s proposed budget cuts – the local is turning out members to a mass labor/community/student protest against cuts on March 24. Local members have turned out to rallies supporting struggles in Wisconsin and in the Middle East, and have attended meetings bringing together various members of New York’s famously fractious left to discuss potential areas of cooperation and joint campaigning. Finally, they have launched a Meetup.com group, which has led to several new members joining the local.

### **OHIO: Supporting Labor**

Labor solidarity is hot in the Buckeye State. Democratic Socialists of Central Ohio are involved in the pushback to SB5, the proposed revision or destruction of collective bargaining for public workers. This includes attendance at hearings, canvassing and phone calling this week and next, in concert mainly with Jobs with Justice (JwJ).

In addition to participating in a 5,200-person Wisconsin solidarity rally, the local also joined in a newly formed statewide “street heat” group of labor unions, spearheaded by the Communication Workers of America, with a demonstration scheduled for March 15th.

Another project that they’ll be working on with JwJ is a community benefits agreement to be created around a medical center expansion by Ohio State University, which has gotten \$200 million in state, city and federal money, to extract benefits and good jobs for local constituents and those who may be displaced by this expansion. An excellent introductory workshop included representatives from Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh, and a large public meeting is planned for March, to bring in the larger community.

They also continue to work with Defend Ohio on various projects, such as an immigrant support group that’s developing a helpful pamphlet telling immigrants how to react if ICE or other law enforcement turns up. The local also plans on organizing movie nights and publishing their activities on DSA’s *Talking Union* blog.

### **PHILADELPHIA: Growing YDS, Educating and Campaigning**

The Philadelphia DSA local proudly announces that the Young Democratic Socialists chapter at Temple University has been joined by two new YDS chapters at the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University. Philly YDSers will continue to focus on fighting for better, cheaper and more universal education.

Philly DSA has booked SEIU chief economist Mark Levinson for a talk in March on the structural causes of

the economic crisis and the Keynesian road forward. The local will use this public event to generate support for its work on the campaign of local progressive City Council candidate Sherrie Cohen, as well as further installments in a series of public economic education panels.

### **SACRAMENTO: Blogging Against Cuts, Developing Messages**

Sacramento DSA has been participating in the resistance to budget cuts in California, through demonstrations as well as energetic and creative use of blogs and other media. In January they attended a town hall meeting on the budget chaired by Senator Darrel Steinberg, chair of the California Senate, and reported on this event on their blogs. Based upon his description of the budget proposals, they wrote an advance response to the Governor’s State of the State Address so they could issue it on the day of the address. The initial draft was approved at a meeting of their coalition partner, the Sacramento Progressive Alliance, which gave them access to many more blogs and media sites than usual. The statement got up on six blogs in addition to *Talking Union* and went to 5,000 people on Facebook. Then, they posted responses daily to local newspapers and blogs whenever a budget story was published, averaging six to ten per week.

“The current dominant themes in the media are that budget cuts are necessary, public employee unions should give up more, and taxes should not be raised. Such news stories, editorials, and opinion pieces appear almost daily around the country and in our local press and media,” says local chair Duane Campbell. “As a left we need to create a message that is repeated and repeated – Fund jobs for all, not budget cuts! Put teachers, firefighters, nurses, police back to work and stop cutting these jobs. Then, they will buy groceries and gasoline, pay rent, buy houses, and create private sector jobs. It is called demand. Cutting jobs makes the recession worse. Just look at the current situation of Ireland and Great Britain. You can see what a budget cut approach produces – stagnation.”

### **SAN DIEGO: Writing, Tabling, Lobbying City Hall**

San Diego DSA has met twice since the October march, to discuss DSA’s Activist Agenda and defending Social Security, and in February to assess their response to the crisis in Wisconsin. At the February meeting they initiated a letter writing project and took the first steps toward developing a house party to raise money for Rep. John Conyers’ re-election campaign.

The local was invited to have a DSA table at a Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast in January attended by hundreds of people, and were able to make contact there with other progressive activists in San Diego. On March 1st they urged the San Diego City Council to declare San Diego a Sanctuary City for Wisconsin Democratic legislators.

Their speakers appeared on the City Council Public Access Channel, identified as DSA. They also remain active in two coalitions: the San Diego Maquiladora Workers' Solidarity Network and the Affordable Housing Coalition, San Diego.

**WASHINGTON DC – Petitioning, Educating, Bonding Over Beer**

After formally affiliating with DC Jobs with Justice (JwJ), Metro DC DSA increased its involvement in the local coalition's work. A major JwJ campaign has focused on Wal-Mart's plans to build its first four stores in Washington. Local members have worked with the Living Wages, Healthy Communities Coalition to collect signatures on petitions outside of grocery stores and go door-to-door in affected communities. The goal is to convince Wal-Mart to sign an enforceable Community Benefits Agreement guaranteeing that it would pay workers a living wage and hire local residents, among other demands. They also hosted a talk by Bill Barclay of Chicago DSA and the Chicago Political Economy Group, who spoke on the Conyers jobs bill in the House.

In the coming months, they plan to continue public outreach and education by hosting sociologist Norman Birnbaum, who will talk on recent developments in European socialism in the wake of the financial crisis.

Younger members of the chapter have gotten to know each other better through several "Young Socialist Film Nights," reports co-chair Ben Kreider. "Bonding over left-wing films and beer has proven a great way to increase camaraderie, and we hope to continue the tradition."

**WICHITA: Working in Coalitions, Reading and Writing**

Wichita DSA continued to be active in coalitions throughout the fall. They supported the National Day of Action to Defend Education on October 7th, and joined Sunflower Community Action on a field hearing with federal and state Department of Labor officials on wage theft in October. They followed labor issues in the local community, joined a coalition fighting a state bill to repress voter registration, and are part of a state-wide coalition to oppose anti-immigrant laws. Local members have spoken at legislators' open forums on the state budget and wage theft, and tabled at the annual meeting of the Peace and Social Justice Center of South Central Kansas.

Their reading group has read Kim Bobo's book on wage theft in conjunction with the October hearing organized by Sunflower, Hal Draper's *Two Souls of Socialism*, and DSA's material on SEBOR. Friends University Political Science Professor Russel Arben Fox led a discussion of Erik Olin Wright's *Envisioning Real Utopias*. The local also organized a very well-attended workshop for writing letters to the editor, using material provided by DSA. "This turned into a very good discussion about social security and other issues in our community," says Stuart Elliot. □

Look for more news about our locals in the next issue, featuring the actions and activities of our YDS chapters.

**Change the USA! Join the DSA!**

Yes, I want to join the Democratic Socialists of America. Enclosed are my dues (includes a subscription to Democratic Left) of:

\$65 Supporter     \$35 Introductory     \$20 Low-Income/Student

Yes, I want to renew my membership in DSA. Enclosed are my renewal dues of:

\$65 Supporter     \$45 Regular     \$20 Low-Income/Student

Enclosed is an extra contribution of:  \$50  \$100  \$25 to help DSA in its work.

Please send me more information about DSA and democratic socialism.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Year of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City / State / Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Union Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

Bill my credit card: Circle one: MC Visa No. \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

My special interests are:

Labor

Religion

Youth

Anti-Racism

Feminism

Gay and Lesbian Rights

International

Return to:

Democratic Socialists of America

75 Maiden Lane, Suite 505

New York, NY 10038

212-727-8610

dsa@dsausa.org

www.dsausa.org

month year