



DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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GENDER • RACE • LABOR • HEALTH JUSTICE
FEMINISM



From the National Director

Stay Furious!

By Maria Svart

What a fall it has been. DSA members joined picket lines for hotel worker strikes; mobilized with direct actions, walkouts, and rallies against the appointment of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court; continued work with the nurses' union for Medicare for All; and campaigned for members who ran for office and won.

As a socialist feminist, I admit I went into a bit of an emotional fetal position after Kavanaugh was appointed. I knew intellectually that this is how power works, but it was still a blow.

However, the struggle continues. People like you and me got right back into the fight, working with allies to elect members across the country, pass progressive ballot initiatives, and build the base we're going to need in the months and years ahead. Blatant voter suppression demonstrated yet again that a capitalist economy normalizes undemocratic ideas, justifying not just the rule of the many by the few, but also the outright rigging of the system. Exit polls showed that too many working-class white women vote their race rather than their gender or class interests. The results on California Proposition 10 in support of rent control as well as various environmental ballot initiatives around the country illustrated the continued power of corporate money to sway the public, even in the face of a nationwide housing crisis and the threat of climate change.

As this issue of *Democratic Left* went to press, we heard that Stacey Abrams and Andrew Gillum recognized that they could not overcome the mass Republican disenfranchisement of black voters in Georgia and Florida. Education secretary Betsy De-



Vos proposed policies on campus rape that shields institutions and the accused. Police shot more black men. And the Wall Street Democrats signaled they would cave to Trump and the Republicans, rather than fight for bold, left-wing policies.

The lesson, as always, is that only collective action, only we ourselves, will save us.

Fortunately, we have the power to do it.

With the arrival of DSA members Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib in Washington, we've seen what a difference it makes to have warriors raising our vision and key issues on the public stage. But our true power comes from the grassroots. Our slogan during the Kavanaugh fight was "Unleash your fury." The work now is to keep up the momentum and energy from the massive election turnout and catapult it into long-term, sustained organizing. One day spent on voting is not enough, no more than is any one rally or event. That is mobilizing. Now is the time for organizing.

Organizing is learning what will inspire people to move past their fear to action, how to build solidarity among them so that we grow our power. It is talking with and listening to those who don't already agree with us and helping them see the choice we now face between socialism or barbarism.

Organizing is the only way we will harness our power. Teachers and other workers have learned this, as they lead the way in a massive strike wave unlike any in recent years. The ability to interrupt the flow of profits is our greatest source of power in the capitalist system.

Training the DSA Grassroots to Organize

At the 2017 DSA national convention, delegates made a commitment to training. One of the problems we face under neoliberal capitalism is the weakness of mass grassroots organizations, and in their relative absence it is critical to systematically train chapter and organizing committee leaders in all regions of the country in basic organizing skills. Our Regional Leadership Trainings are intimate spaces for local leaders to build relationships with staff and other elected leaders in their region and learn key organizing skills to help them strengthen their home chapters.

Workshops cover strategic campaign design; power mapping; coalition building; leadership develop-

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Cover: Kelly Lauren

ment; building a healthy anti-racist, feminist organization; and having one-on-one organizing conversations. The national committees leading our three national priorities of labor, electoral, and Medicare for All each send a trainer to lead workshops, and we have breakout sessions by size of chapter and by state. After each training weekend, we update the curriculum based on feedback and participants take the workshops back to their home chapters.

By the end of 2018, we will have held 14 regional leadership trainings with more than 550 chapter and organizing committee leaders from every corner of the country, Alaska to Florida, Minnesota to Texas, Hawaii to Maine.

Preparing for the 2019 Convention

A key source of DSA's power is that we are truly member run and independent. We are funded by membership dues rather than foundation or other institutional money, and members elect delegates who vote on organizational priorities and the National Political Committee at our national convention every two years.

The 2019 national convention will be this coming summer in the South! Feedback from the 2017 convention showed that members loved the cross-chapter discussions prior to the convention but thought that they came too late in the year and were too rushed. Many delegates arrived at the convention not understanding the NPC election process or the resolutions process.

This time, we are starting the organization-wide democratic process with a series of pre-convention regional conferences in February, March, and April. This will provide earlier and equal access to political conversations and information.

We will encourage the broadest member attendance possible and have small-group political discussions to create an even playing field and opportunity for deep participation for all members. Borrowing from our Regional Leadership Trainings, there will also be training on organizing and on using Robert's Rules of Order in preparation for the convention. Working with our National Harassment and Grievance Officer, there will also be training for

chapter Harassment and Grievance Officers. Watch my emails and the national website for details!

Focus on Socialist Feminism

In this issue of *Democratic Left*, Christine Riddiough reminds us of our forgotten history and points toward a twenty-first century socialist feminism. In DSA we have an opportunity to revive the socialist feminist movement, if we ensure a feminist analysis influences our class analysis, and a class analysis influences the feminist movement. The articles that follow elaborate on some key questions we face.

Marian Jones names reproductive justice as the more comprehensive alternative to the individualistic "choice" framing of neoliberal feminists. I'm reminded of a national march on Washington of my youth when women of color national organizations had to threaten a boycott to all of the mainstream national feminist organizations at the time to get the title changed from March for Choice to March for Our Lives.

The mainstream feminist movement still has that basic lesson to learn.

Angel M. Castillo brings a class analysis to the debate over sex-work decrimi-

nalization brought to the fore by SESTA-FOSTA bills earlier this year, while Waleeta Canon shows that class struggle, not individual empowerment, is how we collectively will get free. Shelly Ronen and David I. Backer offer a socialist feminist analysis of the "rank-and-file" strategy for labor, and Laura Colaneri shows what socialist feminists across the country are doing. Abigail Gutmann-Gonzalez highlights Medicare for All as part of the solution for the unpaid labor of caring for our elderly. Richie J. Floyd rounds out the issue by exploring the way we are socialized from birth into a harmful gender dichotomy glorifying violent masculinity, which not only inspires the far right but also weakens our own abilities to build a strong and resilient movement for democratic socialism. More articles appear at DL Online.

As we head toward the close of 2018, let's work together to draw strength from understanding our differences and build the class struggle for 2019. ❖



Annie Zhao

Re-envisioning Socialist Feminism for a New Century

By Christine R. Riddiough

If I were to ask you, ‘What were the largest gatherings of U.S. socialists in the last 100 years?’, you might suggest the conferences of the Socialist Party at the beginning of the twentieth century or the 2017 DSA convention. But who would mention the socialist feminist conference held in Yellow Springs, Ohio, in 1975?

On the July 4 weekend of 1975, about 1,600 women gathered in Yellow Springs to discuss socialist feminism theory and practice. The conference was organized by about ten socialist feminist women’s organizations from around the United States, joined by two chapters of the New American Movement (one of DSA’s predecessor organizations). The principles of unity for the conference were the following:

- We recognize the need for and support the existence of the autonomous women’s movement throughout the revolutionary process;
- We agree that all oppression, whether based on race, class, sex or lesbianism, is interrelated and the fights for liberation from oppression must be simultaneous and cooperative; and
- We agree that socialist feminism is a strategy for revolution.

Socialism (and Marxism) have had a long, entwined, and sometimes combative relationship with feminism. In 1848, the year of the revolutions in Europe, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published “The Communist Manifesto.” That same year, in the United States, at the Seneca Falls Convention, a “Declaration of Sentiments” for women’s rights was passed. That document included support for women’s suffrage, at the time deemed an

almost ridiculous position.

In the years following, there was often debate in socialist circles about “the Woman Question.” Engels’s *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* was a pioneering effort to address the role of women in society but was limited in its vision of women’s rights and liberation. Like later nineteenth-century contributions to the Woman Question, however, it assumed both that the standard by which to discuss women was men and that the status of women need only be considered in relationship to the workplace.

In the early twentieth century, one of the advocates for women’s rights and suffrage in Europe was socialist Rosa Luxemburg. In some respects, she might be considered a precursor of mid-twentieth-century socialist feminists. In “Women’s Suffrage and Class Struggle,” Luxemburg closes by

saying, “Fighting for women’s suffrage, we will also hasten the coming of the hour when the present society falls in ruins under the hammer strokes of the revolutionary proletariat.”

Some 50 years after Luxemburg’s assassination, the concept of socialist feminism moved forward. British Marxists Juliet Mitchell and Sheila Rowbotham were among the first to suggest that the relationship between the exploitation of working people in a capitalist society and the oppression of women was more complex than earlier analyses indicated. Their ideas were put into practice in the United States by about a dozen women’s liberation organizations and by the New American Movement, perhaps the only left organization of the period that took socialist feminism seriously.



The 1975 conference referred to above was the culmination of the work of these organizations. And it was also its downfall. In the two years after the conference, almost all of the sponsoring organizations disbanded. This was, in part, due to the changing political climate that resulted in the rise of the Right and the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. In addition, the attacks on women's liberation groups by sectarian groups intensified after the conference. These groups were not interested in advancing socialist feminism but rather in siphoning off members from the women's movement and in suggesting the "correct line" the groups should take. They were extremely divisive within these organizations and undermined the ability of the women's groups to fight for women's liberation.

Although these women's unions disappeared, the debate over socialism and feminism did not. In the 1970s and 1980s, several important works such as Zillah Eisenstein's *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* and Lydia Sargent's *Women and Revolution: The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* were published.

An important part of the discussion of socialist feminism in this period related to race as well as class and gender. Many of the early founders of socialist feminist organizations had ties to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

**For socialist feminism
online exclusives, go to
democraticleft.dsausa.org
and read about**

- Patriarchy vs. the Co-op: Socialist Feminism and the Housing Co-operative Movement
- The Case for Universal Childcare and Preschool
- Sexual Violence and Graduate Student Labor
- Why Socialist Feminist Spaces are Important: Making a Socialist Feminist Podcast
- Who Is "Good Enough" to Have a Home? Sex Workers and Housing Discrimination

One of the most important documents of this period was the Combahee River Collective Statement.

The Combahee River Collective was a black feminist lesbian organization started in the mid-1970s. It focused on addressing the issues facing black women and, in particular, black lesbians. Members of the collective coined the term "identity politics." The collective's analysis was multidimensional and avoided ranking oppressions based on race, class, and gender.

Almost ten years later, legal scholar and activist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw discussed these issues in her article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex." The article focuses on several court cases that demonstrate how black women are marginalized by

the political and legal institutions of our society. Crenshaw describes how black women are not allowed to represent women as a class (while white women can) nor can they represent African Americans as a class (though black men can). This understanding of the intersection of race and gender became a focus of much feminist discussion in the intervening years.

Today, we are again at a turning point in our understanding of socialist feminism; a turning point that must be informed by the lessons of the past. In our work going forward we must ensure that our socialist program is feminist in nature, both in the particulars of the program—recognizing that a socialist healthcare program must acknowledge that women are both the primary users and primary givers of healthcare—and in our further exploration of the ideas of socialist feminism. Capitalism in the United States is built on racism and sexism, and only by understanding that interaction can we build a truly socialist movement. ❖

Christine R. Riddiough has been a member of DSA since 1982 and active in the Socialist Feminist Working Group at various times. She became involved in socialist feminist politics in 1970 when she joined the Chicago Women's Liberation Union. She is currently on the DSA National Political Committee, and is chair of the Steering Committee, co-chair of the National Electoral Committee, and on the Steering Committee of Medicare for All.



From “Choice” to Justice

By Marian Jones

For years, pro-choice feminists equated the right to abortion with reproductive justice. But for scores of women, access to abortion is just one element of a multi-pronged battle. As socialists, we need to join with women of color in the fight for reproductive justice and move away from pro-choice single-issue organizing. The reproductive justice movement will help ground our work in the material conditions of women of color, women with disabilities, and working-class women whose needs are not reflected in the mainstream feminist agenda.

The United States has a long and unacknowledged history of harsh and authoritarian population-control policies in the form of forced sterilizations, unsafe contraceptives, welfare family caps, and racial disparities in healthcare. Black women at all economic levels have an infant mortality rate of three to four times that of white women and are more likely to face life-threatening complications during childbirth. They are also more likely to be uninsured and to receive late prenatal and no postnatal care when Medicaid does kick in. With these racial inequalities in mind, activists have worked to change the focus of the conversation from choice to justice.

Contemporary pro-choice rhetoric stems from *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision that made abortion legal through a privacy-based claim to bodily autonomy. This rationale, which has been widely criticized by legal scholars, makes abortion a matter of individual choice in which the government cannot interfere, not even to provide federal funding. As a result, restrictions take the form of such legislation as the Hyde Amendment, which prevents the government from helping to make abortion accessible. Choice rhetoric also feeds into marketplace individualism, as only those with access (able-bodied, white, middle- to upper-class women) can choose among reproductive alternatives unavailable to poor and working-class women.

SisterSong, a collective of women of color organizing for reproductive justice, defines reproductive

justice as three related values: the right to have or not have children, the right to choose the conditions under which one has children, and the right to raise children free from violence. This framing considers the impact of oppressions rooted in class, race, ability, sexuality, and citizenship status, all of which influence one’s reproductive freedom.

The reproductive justice movement represents a more expanded socialist vision for reproductive rights in line with our goal of removing all political and economic barriers to full participation in society. It makes common cause with movements to end police brutality, raise wages, expand public housing, and win Medicare for All. Leaders in this movement such as SisterSong and Forward Together have been defeating oppressive ballot measures, building a base in their communities, and publishing books and key research. Meanwhile, the pro-choice camp has engaged in narrow legal and electoral fights to keep *Roe*

intact. Despite their efforts, there are fewer and fewer clinics, laws regulating abortion grow more burdensome, and anti-abortion protesters have become increasingly violent in their tactics.

During the last quarter of a century, grassroots groups have worked to include the goals of the reproductive justice movement in the traditional pro-choice movement. Large gaps remain. In a 2014 open letter to Planned Parenthood, SisterSong executive director Monica Simpson describes an electoral campaign to stop two conservative ballot initiatives in Mississippi. One initiative was to implement voter ID laws and the other would have established fetal personhood at the moment of conception. SisterSong fought to defeat both measures, recognizing that each of these bills violated the tenets of reproductive justice. Planned Parenthood focused its efforts on stopping the personhood bill only, because it violated *Roe*. Personhood was defeated, but the voter ID law passed. As Simpson says, this bill leaves “Mississippi more vulnerable to new ‘personhood,’ anti-abortion, and other discrimi-



Erin Bauslaugh

natory and counterproductive laws in the future.” The singular focus on abortion prevented Planned Parenthood from recognizing the voter ID law as an attack on black women.

In a post-Roe world, the notion of choice will become even less important. Reproductive justice activists understand the challenges we may soon face, as they have been working in states with highly re-

“In a post-Roe world, the notion of choice will become even less important.”

strictive abortion laws for years.

Activists have already established travel networks between states with restrictive abortion laws and those with more liberal statutes; coordinated efforts to lobby state legislators to provide funding for and access to all reproductive care; and disseminated information on sexual education, including facts on contraception and maternity care. These efforts have been part of a broad-based social justice platform that gives priority to healthcare access and alleviating poverty.

Embracing the reproductive justice framework will allow us to attract women estranged by the feminist movement but still interested in fighting for themselves and their families. To stand in solidarity with these women, we need to stop being merely pro-choice and instead make a commitment to full reproductive justice in our rhetoric, our strategies, and our tactics. ❖

Ed. Note: As this article went to press, voters in Alabama and West Virginia approved “trigger” laws that would either make abortion more restrictive or make it illegal if Roe is overturned.

Marian Jones is the Political Education Coordinator of the NYC-DSA Socialist Feminist Working Group. In the spring of 2018, she, Natalie Adler, and Amanda Arnold facilitated an eight-week reading group on reproductive justice. The reading list can be found here <http://bit.ly/ReproSyllabus>.



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**DSA National Convention
Summer 2019 in Atlanta**

SAVE THE DATE FOR YDSA!

The Young Democratic Socialists of America annual outreach conference for high school and college students will be February 16-17, 2019 in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Watch the YDSA website for details and updates: www.y.dsausa.org.

Decriminalizing Sex Work

By Angel M. Castillo

On April 11 of this year, Donald Trump signed into law two bills that significantly increased the dangers faced by sex workers. The Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and the Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) may have sounded as if they were meant to target those who coerce others into the sex trade, but the vague language of the bills has allowed the government to shut down websites used by voluntary sex workers, thus depriving them of ways to vet clients and exposing them to violence.

The backlash from sex workers and their allies has been loud, large, and too late. Although individual DSAers worked against the legislation, the national organization did not devote resources to it. I would argue that we must establish ourselves as radical allies of *all* workers by coming out in full support of decriminalization of sex work. Full decriminalization is a feminist issue, a prison abolitionist issue, and a labor issue, and thus is a natural cause for socialists to support. It means that sex work would be treated as is any other work, subject to fair labor practices.

One of the major obstacles to sex workers' rights and decriminalization becoming a mainstream

cause for leftist and feminist organizations, both in the United States and abroad, has been the divided opinion among leftists over whether it can truly be "feminist" to support sex work in any way. On one side are those who say that it is useless to distinguish between "voluntary" sex work and "coercive" sex work, as all instances of selling and buying sex are coercive because of the imbalance of power caused by patriarchy. The other side responds that it is inherently anti-feminist to erase the agency of people who engage in sex work of their own free will. As socialists, we know that it is necessary to apply a class analysis to this situation. Patriarchy and capitalism do not exist separately. They are symbiotic. If we recognize that *all* wage labor under capitalism is inherently coercive, and thus all workers have their agency negated to some extent regardless of gender, then we should ask ourselves how our negative views on sex work versus other forms of wage labor might come from the patriarchal views that have surrounded most of us since birth.

Halfway Measures

A middle way of sorts is what's known as the Nordic model, in which clients are prosecuted rather than workers. It has been in effect in Sweden and

Norway since 1999. In 2016, France enacted law number 2016-444 that similarly intended to criminalize demand instead of supply. A survey of French sex workers the following year showed that 42% experienced an increased exposure to violence and social stigma and 38% found it harder to get clients to use condoms. As we're see-



SWOP-LA

ing now in the United States post-SESTA/FOSTA, because the client pool is smaller, workers are less able to pick and choose, and that leads to workers being forced into riskier and more dangerous situations. Even in countries that have adopted the “end demand” model, workers are still harassed and targeted by police. A 2016 Amnesty International report found that Norwegian sex workers were still being fined for street walking and prosecuted for “brothel keeping” if they chose to share living spaces, a decision motivated by safety in numbers. As Ine Vanwesenbeeck reported in the online *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, even in the Netherlands, an often cited example of a place with “legalized” sex work, those who try to work outside of the highly regulated and formalized system are still criminalized. Sex workers there are thus still vulnerable to systemic harassment and oppression.

To bring it back to the United States, suspicions of engaging in prostitution are a common pretext for police to harass and intimidate marginalized communities. Transgender people are well aware of the phenomenon of being detained by the police for “walking while trans.” In July 2015, nearly all 200 attendees of a transgender forum in the Bronx reported being profiled by police on the suspicion of prostitution. A court case in 2016 found that Long Beach, California, police intentionally targeted gay men more than any other group in cases of “lewd conduct.”

Policies that Work

There are models that demonstrate the benefits of decriminalization. In 1995, the Australian state of New South Wales decriminalized sex work, then the whole country of New Zealand followed suit in 2003. As today, opponents feared this would cause an explosion in sex trafficking, but the results have been quite the opposite. A follow-up study in New Zealand in 2008 concluded that the sex trade had not only not increased, but more sex workers were able to leave the industry if they so chose, and even felt more encouraged to demand safer conditions. In fact, in 2014, a worker in the city of Wellington successfully sued a brothel owner for NZ\$25,000 for sexual harassment. It should be noted, however, that the policies in both New South Wales and Australia still don’t afford protections to non-citizens and migrant sex workers, which is why advocates

today specifically demand “FULL decriminalization” in current and future campaigns to close such gaps.

The American Civil Liberties Union, the World Health Organization, Amnesty International, and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) have adopted official stances in favor of decriminalization. In fact, the Industrial Workers of the World already organizes sex workers under its public service department as union 690. Although many in the United States may view DSA as the “extreme left,” we have to push ourselves to be bigger players in the worldwide progressive movement and not let our views be constrained by the narrow American political imagination.

Of course, it is not enough to simply make a resolution supporting decriminalization. We must seek actively to welcome sex workers within DSA spaces and give their voices equal weight and priority. Local chapters should work to build coalitions with sex worker advocacy organizations

such as the Sex Worker Outreach Project (SWOP), the Desiree Alliance, or the ESPLER Project. The ESPLER project in particular focuses on challenging anti-sex work laws through litigation, such as the *ESPLERP vs. Gascon* case in California which challenged 647b of the state penal code criminalizing sex work on the grounds that it violated privacy. The case was dismissed at the beginning of this year, but more such cases will arise and may succeed if brought to more people’s attention.

When sex workers are fighting, we need to show up and stand in solidarity as we have done with others. Treating sex workers as comrades does not mean simply inviting them into our spaces, but actively and enthusiastically listening to them and letting them lead the way in the fights that affect them. It means looking at our own internalized attitudes toward sex work. We will only grow as an organization and as a movement if we actively embrace *all* of those who have been rejected and cast out by capitalism, and this is just the next step. ❖

Angel M. Castillo is a member of the Los Angeles Chapters of both DSA and SWOP. He would like to thank his fellow advocates and activists in SWOP for their help in researching this article.



“Patriarchy and capitalism do not exist separately. They are symbiotic.”

Kitchen Table Socialism

Socialist Feminism for the Rest of Us

By *Waleeta Canon*

In 2012, Marissa Mayer became the first woman CEO of the major tech firm Yahoo! In the same year, she also became a new mom. A few months later, as she revoked the right of her employees to work remotely—a right that many depended upon to care for their children—she paid to have a private nursery built in her new office. Gina Haspel, the first woman director of the CIA, built her political career overseeing a secret CIA site where people were tortured. Former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton waved away Black Lives Matter activists during her presidential campaign and, as First Lady, supported her husband's successful efforts to “end welfare as we know it” and dump single mothers into a shredded safety net.

With all of the progress some women have gained from second-wave feminism—the focus on equal pay, advancement opportunities in their careers, parental leave, equal share of housework, bodily autonomy, and so on—they have yet to diminish the power of the patriarchy. Liberal feminism focuses on inequities in outcome without confronting the structure that upholds the patriarchy—capitalism.

Socialist feminism offers an alternative. Marissa Mayer's gender didn't alter the needs of capitalism. Had she wanted to raise every female employee's pay to match that of men or to offer more flexible work schedules, better health coverage, more paid family leave time, and so on, she might have made her company less competitive or less profitable. Capital requires profit, and having a woman at the helm doesn't change this fundamental fact.

Liberal feminism offers an incomplete framework, an inability to explain the patriarchy and why it persists. It's a framework that excludes class struggle, that stresses empowerment over solidarity. Socialist feminism views *capitalism*—and not just the patriarchy—as a source of gender oppres-

sion. One cannot be free from patriarchy without being free from capitalism.

When we look at female-dominated industries such as teaching or nursing, we see that they are undervalued and underpaid, despite the fact that these are central economic activities that the patriarchy (and capitalism) needs. Work that is defined as “valuable” is work from which profit can be extracted. There's no profit in raising families, hence the labor involved is unpaid. Socialist feminism would point out that the oppression of women is rooted in capitalism's reliance on our unpaid labor to reproduce the workforce. The wage gap is itself evidence that women are considered less valuable as workers.

Strong unions are central to socialist feminist organizing. They have done the most to equalize wages and power between men and women at work. Although the call for bodily autonomy and universal healthcare are goals that liberal and socialist feminists share, socialist feminists understand that working-class women, women of color, and non-binary people need more than just access. These goals are fundamental rights that should not have barriers such as cost, employment, or geography.

Capitalism is inherently patriarchal. It cannot be sustained without the unpaid and underpaid labor of women. Women may share a common gender identity and oppression, but without an understanding of class, they can never destroy patriarchy. It is capitalism itself that must be broken. ❖

*Waleeta Canon is an Assyrian American living in Chicago. She currently serves on the Chicago DSA Northside Steering Committee, is a co-host on the leftist feminist podcast *Season of the Bitch*, and is a mama to twins and a software engineer.*



Hallie Jay Pope

The Key to the Key

A Socialist Feminist Rank-and-File Strategy

By Shelly Ronen and David I. Backer

Kim Moody's "Rank and File Strategy" has influenced much of DSA's approach to labor organizing. To draw out what he calls socialist "class consciousness," Moody recommends fomenting member-led struggles in unions that advance self-empowerment. By joining "transitional organizations," or rank-and-file reform caucuses such as Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), he believes, workers gain experience directly confronting management over working conditions. These organizations prepare workers for larger fights to come.

As socialist feminists, we read Moody's text with a particular attention to social reproduction. Like Lise Vogel, Johanna Brenner, and Sue Ferguson, we begin by asking, Who produces the worker? We know that the worker produces surplus value and profit for the capitalist, but how does the worker get ready for production? She must be fed and clothed. She must be raised to become an adult who is on time and ready to work.

If productive work is the key to capital accumulation, then reproductive work, or "care work," is the key to the key. How might this insight change how we evaluate the rank-and-file strategy? We believe it changes how DSA should understand and approach (1) strike tactics, (2) contract demands, (3) workplace issues, and (4) the *prerequisites* of socialist organizing.

Strike Tactics: Taking reproduction as the key to the key of shutting down capital changes our tactics during union actions. Consider the West Virginia wildcat teachers' strike. As Tithi Bhattacharya and Kate Doyle Griffiths point out, two things that made this strike successful were teachers working with food pantries and soup kitchens to make hot meals for students, and coordinating with the West Virginia School Service Personnel Association so that school bus drivers joined the strike. After all, an efficient way of shutting down a school is by interrupting a reproductive function like transportation. But because many children depend on breakfast and lunch in schools, those reproductive functions have to be replaced to win the strike.

Contract Demands: Since the 1970s, when employers jettisoned the "family wage," few families can get by on one wage earner's salary. And although we do not advocate for a return to the exploitation of women within the home, we do advocate that union strategists recognize that workers must be consid-

ered in their full contexts. What unionists fight for in their contracts must include more than so-called "bread and butter" issues. Workers need paid family leave, childcare, dependent healthcare coverage, and reproductive health benefits.

Workplace Issues: Using a socialist feminist lens, the rank-and-file strategy makes it obvious that unions must take the lead in the fight against sexual harassment and assault. More women workers means gendered violence is a habitual part of working conditions. The #MeToo movement is a workers' movement, and we should fight in and with it as such.

Socialist Organizing: This understanding of the rank-and-file strategy also highlights the importance of reproductive support such as childcare to build transitional organizations. Including caregivers in socialist meetings is essential to mobilizing the working class. Pittsburgh's "Socialist Sprouts" program and the Philly Childcare Collective offer inspiring models. And because women and people of color do an outsized share of reproductive labor—often uncompensated—it follows that we must be class "expansivists," not class reductionists. Moody takes this point seriously, citing Aimé Césaire: "I have a different idea of a universal. It is a universal rich with all that is particular." Sometimes this insight gets lost in the DSA's understanding of the strategy, but as the Afrosocialists and Socialists of Color Caucus reminds us, we must approach exploitation, white supremacy, and patriarchy as inseparable.

Workers make capitalism go, but it takes work to make workers. Social reproduction is the key to the key to fighting capitalism, and social reproduction feminism expands our understanding of labor to include everything that makes labor possible and therefore expands our understanding of Moody's rank-and-file strategy. ❖

Shelly Ronen is a member of the Socialist Feminist Working Group of Philly DSA. While at NYU, she was in a rank-and-file dissident caucus within GSOC-UAW Local 2110.



David I. Backer coordinates Philly DSA's Childcare Brigade and is chair of the External Organizing Committee in West Chester University's chapter of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculty (APSCUF).

DSA Chapters Build Socfem Power

By Laura Colaneri

Democratic Left spoke with the leaders of DSA's socialist feminist working groups, committees, and branches across the country about their work. Here's a sample.



The feminist action committee of **Austin DSA** began its organizing by raising money for the National Network of Abortion Funds Bowl-a-thon, and since then has helped make Austin the first city in the South to pass paid sick leave. Members built relationships with sex workers and SWOP (Sex Workers Organizing for Power) to participate in organizing around sex work. Although they do not yet have the means to provide child care at every event, they have created a children's box with crayons, radical coloring books, and toys available to children who attend events.



Boston DSA undertook an extensive sex-work education project and discussion across working groups. After SESTA/FOSTA passed (see p. 8), the chapter unanimously passed a resolution supporting the decriminalization of sex work. Members Jessica Lambert, and Peter Morency followed up by visiting

every working group to discuss organizing around sex work. Boston DSA's electoral group incorporated questions about sex-work legislation into its questionnaire for candidates and endorsements.



Central Iowa DSA's socialist feminist working group began with monthly meetings open only to women and non-binary folks to get to know one another and discuss projects in a safe feminist space. Alongside them, a men's anti-patriarchy working group also gives men a place to talk about feminism while relieving women of the burden of having to introduce or accommodate men to feminism. Both groups have helped to establish a feminist tone and culture in their chapter, which has brought in new members. The socialist feminist group hosted a Socialist Feminist Convergence, where nearly 75 people from across Iowa met to learn, discuss, and connect. They also planned a Bread and Roses spaghetti dinner fundraiser where they raised \$1,500 for the Eastern Iowa Community Bond Fund.



Chicago DSA's socialist feminist working group raised more than \$10,000 for the National Network of Abortion Funds Bowl-a-thon in April and hosted Socialist Feminism 101 in July, a two-hour crash course on the basic theory and praxis around socialist feminism. A copy of the course materials can be obtained by emailing socfem@chicagodsa.org. The chapter also voted to adopt feminist process, a list of feminist principles for holding decision-making meetings and discussions, as part of its new bylaws at the June convention. These principles help to encourage comradely behavior and a welcoming environment for people from marginalized groups.



The socialist feminist caucus of **East Bay DSA** worked within the Bay Area for Re-



Twin Cities Socfem Mothers Day fundraiser. From the left: Bree Richardson, MacKenzie Brown, Emma Youndsmith, Mandy Medley, Tracy Waterman, Amy Tran, Katie Black, Diana Walter.

productive Justice coalition to organize the largest counter-rally against the March for Life in their area in several years, where they focused not only on abortion but on other aspects of reproductive justice such as infertility and hormone therapy and how reproductive justice ties in to Medicare for All. The group also helped to organize a counter-rally against fascists in the Bay Area and has started working on advocating for unhoused people and registering them to vote by partnering with other advocacy organizations and domestic violence centers.



New York City DSA's socialist feminist working group has developed a socialist feminist syllabus (see p. 6), and its current main campaign is fighting to pass the New York Health Act, which would provide single-payer healthcare throughout New York State.



In **Philadelphia DSA**, the chapter's socialist feminist working group is dedicated to achieving gender parity within the chapter and ensuring that it is a safe and accessible space for all. It has set a goal of having childcare available at meetings and events. Because general meetings can sometimes be difficult to follow for newcomers, members strive to make their working group meetings full of natural language, human connection, breakouts, and consensus. Philly socialist feminists have spoken and rallied at the International Women's Strike, raised money for the West Virginia teachers' strike, and rallied in solidarity with prison abolitionists for May Day. They hope to host a Socialist Feminist Convergence in April 2019 to help connect and organize socialist feminists.



Further west, in **Pittsburgh DSA**, the socialist feminist committee has focused on two major projects, one internal and the other external. Within the chapter it has developed the Socialist Sprouts, a child watch group staffed by volunteers that allows those caring for children to more easily participate in chapter events and meetings. Externally, the Pittsburgh socialist feminists have implemented a widespread anti-crisis pregnancy center campaign called Expose Fake Clinics. They plugged into a nationwide campaign and added a socialist perspective to reproductive justice organizing, putting together locally focused pamphlets, flyers, and a website. Members have canvassed in front of CPCs to provide correct information and discuss the kind of healthcare people deserve: free, honest, and comprehensive.

Portland DSA's socialist feminist caucus organizes both DSA members and the nonaffiliated in order to provide an access point to DSA that is less saturated with white cis men. The caucus pushed for the chapter to provide child watch at general meetings, but insisted that the responsibility not fall solely on female comrades, and men have stepped up to provide this service for their chapter. The group's main projects have revolved around reproductive justice, including lobbying and educating around the statewide Reproductive Health Equity Act that was passed in 2017 and now incorporating that work into the Medicare for All campaign and running an "expose fake clinics" project.



In **Seattle DSA**, the queer and feminist caucus developed out of a socialist feminist reading group where readings focused on queer and women authors and theorists. Providing a small-group setting that encourages queer and women comrades to get more involved has helped to develop them for leadership and organizing. Additionally, they have co-hosted reading groups with Seattle Clinic Defense; raised money for the National Abortion Fund Bowl-a-thon; presented on Socialist Feminism 101 for a general membership meeting; and co-hosted a documentary screening of *Live Nude Girls Unite!* with the local chapter of Sex Workers Organizing for Power to draw attention to sex workers' rights and organizing.



In **Silicon Valley DSA**, socialist feminists have organized several meet-ups for non-male-identifying comrades to connect and begin developing projects. One of their goals includes putting together feminine hygiene packs to distribute to unhoused women.



Twin Cities DSA's socialist feminist branch held a Mothers Day fundraiser for the Minnesota Freedom Fund where proceeds went to bail out incarcerated mothers. They also have an active reading group and led an educational session on identity politics and the Combahee River Collective at a general chapter meeting.



Thank you to the socialist feminist DSAers who provided information for this article. ❖

Laura Colaneri is a Ph.D. student studying Latin American literature. She is on the steering committee of Chicago DSA's socialist feminist working group and the editorial board of Democratic Left.



Crisis in Elder Care

By Abigail Gutmann-Gonzalez

Women who work outside the home are facing a generational crisis as they find themselves searching for home care for elderly relatives. The U.S. elderly population, defined as those age 65 or older, accounted for 13% of the population in 2010, a figure expected to grow to 20% by 2030.

The elderly population has greater need for in-home care and few means to attain it. For this reason, caregiving often falls to the family—particularly wives, daughters, and daughters-in-law. Daughters are 28% more likely to care for an elderly parent than are sons, and women provide almost two-thirds of unpaid elder care overall. *Time* magazine highlighted the case of Ruby Lawrence, who had to shoulder the burden of caring for her elderly mother with dementia because her family could not pay for extended long-term care but was not poor enough to qualify for Medicaid. Caregivers like Lawrence may also experience negative psychological consequences, such as anxiety, depression, and stress, as a result of providing care.

Because women on average make 80 cents for every dollar that men make, women are often pressured to take on a caregiver role in order to ensure that the one wage shared in a family is the higher one. The sacrifices women make to provide elder care include decreased work hours, passing up job promotions, or quitting their jobs. The value of the informal care that women provide is estimated to be around \$148 billion to \$188 billion annually. At the same time, cuts to Medicare and Medicaid as well as rising costs of healthcare have led many insurers to push toward homecare and away from nursing homes. And, of course, most of the people employed in the homecare industry are women, who receive very little for demanding and demeaned work. In addition, because women outlive men on average,

after caring for a spouse or elderly relative, they are often left alone, with nobody to care for them, and fewer economic resources to obtain care.

The for-profit health insurance industry makes high-quality elder care accessible to the wealthy and inaccessible to the working class. As Marxist feminists, we understand that removing the material cause of this inequality is our primary task. To relieve the burden of elder care that falls disproportionately on women,

we need a publicly funded, universal, single-payer health-care program that includes long-term elder and hospice care in its comprehensive coverage.

DSA's National Medicare for All program advocates for just such a system. Prioritizing the health of working-class Americans, including the elderly, over the profits of insurance company executives is a crucial demand for

Marxist feminists. Daughters and wives freed from the responsibility of elder care can enjoy greater equality within society. A reduced burden on their time, energy, and material resources will give women more independence to pursue their own ambitions—and more freedom to enjoy the company of their aging family members, without performing tasks that should fall to fairly compensated professionals.

Single-payer can only be won when workers stand up to health insurance companies—in the streets, in their workplaces, and at the ballot box—and demand that their interests be prioritized over corporate profits or tax cuts for the wealthy. ❖

Abigail Gutmann-Gonzalez is a public health researcher and program evaluator. She is co-chair of East Bay Democratic Socialists of America and co-chair of the local Medicare for All Committee.



DSAers in Minneapolis, June 2018, at the National Single Payer Conference. Photo: Tim Higgingsbotham

Combating Toxic Masculinity

By Richie J. Floyd

Masculinity is defined as a set of attributes, behaviors, and roles associated with men and boys. Far too often these attributes include traits such as aggression, domination, sexual prowess, and a penchant for violence. In our patriarchal world, we are inundated with this version of masculinity even before birth. Many of these ideals are intertwined in our upbringing. Competition and domination are idolized in such areas as academics, economics, and (sometimes violent) sports, and boys are constantly pressured to conform to general gender roles no matter how they feel about them. Feminism and socialist feminism rightly identify this “toxic” masculinity as unacceptable and have pushed this criticism to the forefront of our cultural debate on social equality.

Unfortunately, some reactionary forces have misrepresented the critique as a war on men and masculinity as a whole. Provocateurs such as Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson gain followers (and fame and money) by rationalizing and defending toxic gender norms with pseudoscientific hypotheses. Their message appeals to many men because it justifies the picture of masculinity that society has painted for them their whole lives, a picture that places them at the top of the cultural hierarchy.

The decline of working- and middle-class men’s fortunes under neoliberalism has given many men a very real reason to be upset. However, instead of directing the anger toward corporate power, where it belongs, the reactionary message misdirects it toward women, immigrants, religious minorities, and the marginalized. Sexual assault, domestic violence, and mass shootings have deep roots in our culture’s model of masculinity and cannot be fully addressed without a socialist feminist perspective.

Our task in the face of these circumstances, as bell hooks points out in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, is to articulate clearly an alternative definition of masculinity based on positive and inclusive attributes. Because masculinity is a

collection of traits based on cultural assumptions about men and boys, we can then work toward a socialist feminist masculinity by reimagining these assumptions with equality and partnership in mind.

A starting point might be the “chief constituents” of feminist masculinity described by Olga Silverstein in *The Courage to Raise Good Men*. Traits such as integrity, assertiveness, emotional awareness, relational skill, self-love, and responsibility to self and community should be gender neutral and held up as core ideals. As socialists, we should envision solidarity and egalitarianism as a part of healthy masculinity. On a practical level, we can start by joining anti-patriarchy groups or organizing child watch efforts in our DSA chapters. We can model anti-sexist behavior in our DSA chapters and speak out against harassment of women and sexist comments whenever and wherever we see them.

These traits and actions represent some of the building blocks from which we can start to construct a new framework for a masculinity based on socialist feminist ideals. Articulation of a new, inclusive definition of masculinity will guide us toward a world liberated from patriarchal oppression and offer men a constructive alternative to the status quo. As socialist feminists, we should push for and openly discuss this new definition of masculinity. And as socialist feminist men we should represent these ideals in our everyday lives, for the benefit of society, as well as ourselves. ❖

DSA member Richie J. Floyd is an organizer, engineer, and freelance writer from St. Petersburg, Florida.



Lee Bruce

Books by DSAers

Once a year we list all books written by DSA members within the last three years (and not previously listed). If you've published a book, please send the information to dlmagazine@dsausa.org by January 15, 2019.

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