



Call to Convention 2005

Building the Future—Challenging the Right

The National Political Committee of Democratic Socialists of America calls on all members to participate in DSA's 2005 Convention this November 11-13, 2005, in Los Angeles, California.



We meet in Los Angeles, a city that has just elected Antonio Villaraigosa, a former union staff member, its first Latino mayor in a tremendous victory for that city's vibrant progressive movement (in which the labor movement plays a leading role). Los Angeles is representative of the emerging workforce, the cultural divide and the globalized economy that the corporations wish to impose on us; as such it is a particularly appropriate location for the DSA convention.

Bush's 2004 victory came at a cost to working families. An administration that enacts tax cuts for the rich and a bankruptcy bill that penalizes persons of modest income while orchestrating a pro-corporate CAFTA and an energy bill that fails to curtail fossil fuel consumption is an administration that needs a political beating. Yet the left's ability to administer that beating, let alone effectively counter the continuing occupation of Iraq, will be further challenged in the next two years of Republican rule by the split in the labor movement.

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Direct Mail Yields Membership Increase

DSA's membership has increased by nearly thirteen percent since July of 2003. This is largely the result of a direct mail campaign launched in June that featured an invitation to join by longtime DSA member, former SAG President and noted actor Edward Asner.

This is the first substantial increase in membership in DSA in a number of years. "Without the direct mail campaign, we would have continued to tread water," said DSA's National Director Frank Llewellyn. "This was the first such campaign in almost ten years; we expect to be able to continue to undertake modest campaigns each year."

The membership increase is the difference between the membership level used to apportion delegates for the 2003 DSA convention and that used for the upcoming convention in Los Angeles. Both measurements were taken in mid-July.

Growth in membership is important because it can lead to increased resources for the organization to carry out its program and to increased activism. It also helps us to measure the political temperature. DSA has always grown when the larger progressive movement was growing and suffered when that movement was on the defensive. If our membership appeals continue to yield good results, it should be good news for us—and for the broader progressive movement.

We received a lot of hate mail from right-wingers or libertarians who found their way onto leftwing lists and received our direct mail package. You can imagine what some of them said. But we wanted to share some of the positive letters with *DL* readers:

I have been looking for a movement such as yours to sink my teeth into. Thank you for contacting me. I want to be involved.

—S. P., CA.

I had the honor of being arrested with Ed Asner and many others in front of the White House.... Please find enclosed \$60 for a supporting membership.

—G.T., MD

Here is a check. I will try to [do] better in the future. As a senior on a very low income it's difficult to donate in any amount, but I want to do something!

—I.K., IL

I agree with everything you say.

—D.G., MN

What a letter that found itself to our mailbox. It's so heady to hear someone say the things out loud (in print) we've been feeling and saying in our small circles, but aren't being said in the larger arena of our society, certainly not by the media either.

—S.P., MA

Delighted the "dream" continues.

—S.B., CA

Wish I could contribute 10-fold. Medicines cost me 1/3rd of my Social Security monthly income. I know many others in the same situation. It's time for a real change.

—O.E., FL

Interested in Going to Los Angeles for the Convention?

DSA's National Convention is scheduled to open Friday morning, November 11th, and close Sunday afternoon, November 13th. The convention will be preceded by a conference on Wal-Mart that will open the evening of November 9th and conclude during the day on the 10th.

The convention will be held at the Radisson Wilshire Plaza Hotel, located at 3515 Wilshire Blvd. Rooms are available for as early as November 8th at the special convention rate of \$99 for a single or a double (plus tax). Triples or Quads will be available for \$109 or \$119 plus tax.

Rooms may be reserved by calling the hotel directly at (213) 381-7411; ask for reservations and mention that you are with the DSA or Democratic Socialists of America Convention in November.

Delegates are elected by their local; at-large members may self-select. Delegates are apportioned based on the principle of one person one vote, except that every local is entitled to at least one delegate. The convention apportionment is set based upon the membership as of July 11th.

The convention will focus on important questions—beginning to update DSA's general perspectives statement, setting the direction of the organization for the next two years, and reviewing our mission statement.

The convention is travel shared. The travel share system equalizes the cost of basic transportation. Delegates who have lower transportation costs will pay into a fund to help those who have to spend more. Some resources will be available to subsidize delegate travel.

Convention fees that include the cost of materials and some meals have not been set yet. The fee for the 2003 convention was \$150.

Join us in Los Angeles

Please advise us as soon as possible if you would like to be a delegate to the convention or attend as an observer. You can email the National Director at flwellyn@dsausa.org, contact your local DSA or send this coupon to the National Office.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

Mail to: DSA, 198 Broadway, #700, NYC, NY 10038

From the National Director

As you read this issue of *DL*, you will discover immediately some things we think are important—peace, health care, building an international movement and renewing our own movement by building our youth group, Young Democratic Socialists. So why, you might ask, have we devoted so much of the issue to building up our convention?

The answer is simple: because the convention is where we collectively renew our commitment to the socialist project and define our place in it. The convention sets the immediate tasks for the next two years, and this convention will begin the process of updating our perspective statement—the statement that, more than any other, defines our relationship with the political forces we have to grapple with.

Many wonder why we keep at it, and some even wonder if time has passed us by. Unfortunately, time has not made injustice and exploitation *passé*. There is no doubt that repressive rightwing governments broken up by brief periods of centrist Democratic government have made our work harder. The forces of corporate globalization are slowly, and in some cases not so slowly, rolling back the gains of generations. These pressures have even shattered the unity of the labor movement, although we hope that its solidarity remains intact.

If history has taught us anything about our country it is how quickly things can change. 1954 saw the height of McCarthyism; 1963, The March on Washington. That did not just happen. It happened because people in small groups similar to DSA worked to make it happen. Work, planning and organization around a set of demands—that's what makes change. And that is what our convention is all about, and why every DSAer should think about coming.

Of course the main reason why we keep plugging away is the systematic injustice that permeates our world. It can be found in the story (see the low-wage economy page of the DSA web site) of the exploited day laborer in Georgia placed in indentured servitude or in the all-too-familiar words of a woman from Mountlake, Wash-

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DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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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.

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Why we say Yes to “Troops Out Now” but No to supporting “the resistance”

by Stephen R. Shalom

Some of those who argue that the U.S. must stay in Iraq do so out of concern for the Iraqi people. They are wrong in believing the occupation can help Iraqis, and the anti-war movement needs to explain why this is so. The truth is that U.S. forces are not keeping violence in check. The brutality of the U.S. occupation is a major incitement to violence.

The tortures at Abu Ghraib—with their emphasis on humiliation—alone created thousands of hostile, even violently hostile, Iraqis. Consider Fallujah. In the first assault, in April 2004, U.S. troops slaughtered hundreds in the city, the majority women and children, with U.S. forces firing at ambulances and blocking access to hospitals. Then in November 2004, the U.S. essentially leveled the city. Or consider the report by the Guardian’s Rory McCarthy, who attended “a vast family funeral in Ramadi where witness after witness described in detail how U.S. jet fighters attacked a village near the Syrian border after a wedding party and killed 42 people, among them women, children and even the musicians who had played for the bride and groom.”

What sort of reaction do U.S. air strikes elicit from Iraqis? Even interim President Ghazi Yawar, a U.S. appointee, called them “unacceptable” and “collective punishment.” Rather than protecting Iraqi civilians, U.S. armed forces have shown themselves to be the main danger to Iraqi civilians. According to the Iraqi Health Ministry last September, operations by U.S. and allied forces were killing twice as many Iraqis—most of them civilians—as attacks by insurgents.

Nor has the U.S. military changed its approach. In May 2005 it launched Operation Matador. As Knight Ridder reported, “influential tribal leaders and many residents said the U.S. troops didn’t distinguish between those Iraqis who supported the United States and the fighters battling it. ‘The Americans were bombing whole villages and saying they were only after the foreigners,’ said Fasal al Goud, a former governor of Anbar province who said he asked U.S. forces for help on behalf of the tribes. ‘An AK-47 can’t distinguish between a terrorist and a tribesman, so how could a missile or tank?’”

Even without this brutality, the U.S. presence would provoke Iraqi hostility because no people like foreign occupation. It is precisely the U.S. determination to control Iraq—militarily, economically, and politically—that incites many Iraqis to resort to an armed response.

What sort of credibility can the United States have as a protector of the Iraqi people when it presides over the corporate looting of Iraq and tries, in the words of the Wall Street Journal, “to remake Iraq’s economy in the U.S. image?” How

can the same nation that is building long-term military bases in Iraq for the indefinite future be taken for a disinterested defender of Iraqi interests?

Ending the occupation is consistent with the views of the Iraqi people. How do we know this? One indicator is a poll conducted by Zogby International in late January that showed that 82 percent of Sunni Arabs and 69 percent of Shiites favored U.S. withdrawal “either immediately or after an elected government is in place.”

What about the elections? President Bush says that the 58 percent of registered Iraqi voters who went to the polls in January were voting for the U.S. presence. In fact, the vote was a repudiation of the occupation. Washington had previously opposed elections—and only mass demonstrations called by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani forced U.S. officials to agree to hold elections. Those who did vote supported parties calling for an end to the occupation. The U.S. favorite came in a distant third—but even his supporters felt the need to campaign with banners that said in Arabic: “Vote for Allawi’s slate if you want a strong Iraq free of foreign troops.”

Certainly Iraqis do not think things will be swell after a withdrawal. Acknowledging that there might be attacks on trade unionists, Hassan Jama’a Awad, head of the Southern Oil Company union, has said that his members want an immediate end to the occupation: “We have to solve our problems ourselves,” arguing that things wouldn’t be worse than under the occupation.

Consider also that the Association of Muslim Scholars, the leading Sunni religious group, with ties to the resistance, has declared that if a date were set for withdrawal it would issue a fatwa against anyone continuing an insurgency. Thus, if the occupation were ended, the insurgency would be significantly undercut.

Ending the occupation not only will substantially reduce any insurgency, but it will also strengthen democratic, feminist, and tolerant forces. The contrary is also true. As long as the occupation continues, those holding progressive values will tend to be discredited, while reactionary forces fighting the occupation gain in credibility.

Now what is meant by immediate withdrawal? No one believes that a withdrawal could take place overnight. Most calling for immediate withdrawal mean an orderly process, with a clear and internationally sanctioned short timetable. So why support “immediate withdrawal” when the term isn’t literally accurate? First, because it is consistent with the language the Left used in the cases of other illegitimate occupa-

tions. We said “Out Now” for Soviet troops in Afghanistan, and we say “Out Now” for Israeli troops in the occupied Palestinian territories. These couldn’t and can’t happen overnight, especially if one is talking not just about a troop withdrawal, but a full withdrawal of all the apparatus of occupation.

It is essential that the anti-war movement call for *complete* U.S. withdrawal. U.S. troops are, of course, the main impediment to Iraqi sovereignty, but they aren’t the only impediment. Washington has used the occupation to establish all sorts of instruments of control that could last even if the troops were pulled out. There are the military bases. There are all the economic decrees imposed by former U.S. pro-consul Paul Bremer. There are sweetheart contracts that have been signed with U.S. and other favored firms. There is Bremer’s small army of bureaucrats, from deputy ministers to inspectors general, many with multiyear terms. So the bases must be dismantled. The decrees must be abrogated. The contracts and appointees must be revocable and removable at Iraqi discretion.

Finally, the United States must contribute funds for the reconstruction of Iraq—but without U.S. control. This demand reflects simple justice and distinguishes the anti-war movement from those who oppose the occupation simply because it costs too much to Americans. Its cost to Americans is not the only or even main reason to oppose it. There is a moral debt that must be repaid.

If occupation is so bad, why not be for “the Resistance?” Some argue that we should support the armed opposition because as a general principle we should always support those who are fighting against U.S. imperialism and “striking the strongest blows” against “the main enemy.” Always? Does that mean we should have supported Japan during World War II or Nazi Germany, the toughest opponents U.S. imperialism ever faced? Or the Taliban in 2001 or Saddam Hussein in 2003? No! We can oppose the U.S. wars in Afghanistan or Iraq without having to support governments the U.S. was attacking. And those who have struck the “strongest blows” against the “main enemy” on its home soil are the non-governmental actors al-Qaeda and Timothy McVeigh. Must we support them?

What about people having the right to resist foreign occupation? They do, just as people have many abstract rights that don’t require us to support all those entitled to these rights. We support the right of the Peruvian people to overthrow a tyrannical regime, but we do not automatically support one revolutionary organization in Peru fighting the regime—Sander Luminoso—that targets and kills progressives. A distinction has to be made between supporting a people’s right to resist and supporting a particular resistance movement.

Those who demand “support the resistance” aren’t just calling for us to get the U.S. out; they want to tender an automatic affirmative statement of support for some Iraqis because they oppose the U.S. Others say not supporting a resistance movement is by definition supporting U.S. imperialism. But this doesn’t follow. One could oppose Saddam

Hussein or the Taliban without having to support U.S. imperialism, and one could oppose Saddam and the Taliban while opposing U.S. military intervention in Iraq or Afghanistan.

I am not arguing that we only support movements that are perfect, that hold precisely all the right views on every question. No such movement exists. Oppressed people are constrained in their choices and are not in circumstances yielding the most humane outcomes. If a union went on strike against the employment of African Americans, we wouldn’t support them. If strikers in a just cause used more violence than we thought appropriate, we might well continue to support them, while criticizing their particular acts. But if they gang-raped the children of scabs, we wouldn’t support them. So of course we shouldn’t insist that a movement needs to be perfect in terms of tactics or politics for us to support it, but nor should we say that our support is automatic, no matter how horrible the movement’s tactics or politics may be.

Some who urge support for “the Iraqi resistance” agree that many national liberation movements are or have been severely flawed, but say that “to use this as an argument for opposing self-determination misses the point.” But it’s not a question of opposing self-determination. We should avoid blanket endorsement of every resistance movement precisely because we care about self-determination. Movements that want to impose ruthless dictatorships over a population are not movements for self-determination—by definition.

An approach that is defensible morally and politically is to support the right of the Iraqi people to engage in resistance, whether armed or unarmed, by all legitimate means, and condemn acts of terror targeting innocent civilians, especially sectarian attacks. Moreover, we support any forces, armed or unarmed, that are fighting for the liberation of Iraq and to achieve a democratic and progressive outcome, but we withhold our support from those whose tactics are systematically unacceptable and from those who would impose a rigid dictatorship, secular or Islamic, over the Iraqi people.

Iraqi social and political forces pushing a progressive political agenda reject the U.S. occupation and oppose Islamic fundamentalism. When they are threatened by some armed groups claiming to belong to “the resistance,” we should defend them and condemn those that would crush them. When unionists linked to the Iraqi Communist Party, with whose politics we disagree, are subjected to atrocities, we should defend their democratic rights and condemn their torturers and murderers, even when the latter claim to act in the name of “the resistance.”

“Troops Out Now” is rightly the antiwar movement’s watchword. But those who call for supporting “the resistance” are not just advancing a perspective that is morally and politically wrong; they are making the task of bringing the troops home more difficult.

DSAer Stephen R. Shalom writes regularly on foreign policy issues. This is a condensed version of a piece that appeared on ZNET, May 24, 2005. The full text, with footnotes, is available at the DSA Web site (<http://www.dsasusa.org/dsa.html>).

Protecting Medicare: The Best Defense is a Good Offense

By Joseph White

Medicare is under attack from two sides. The first is an ideological attack by the Republican party machine led by President Bush. The second is a misguided attack by centrist and even liberal academic, media and business elites who do not quite believe in “red meat” capitalism but have been convinced that the program is “unaffordable” because of its projected cost increases.

There is little point in arguing with the Bush administration and its supporters. They seek an America in which success is based on virtue and virtue is shown by success: a version of the Protestant Work Ethic. In their America, you must be a sinner if you’re not a winner. So they don’t have to care about the losers—except perhaps out of “compassion” or as a way to spread their “faith.” They don’t like sharing risk and they don’t like sharing wealth, and so they don’t like Medicare, plain and simple. They have their own think tanks to make up their own facts and their own news media through which to communicate and mobilize.

They can do a lot with pure partisan power, including passing a fairly sneaky Medicare law in 2003. But they haven’t been able to enact the voucher system that they really want. Instead, they hope to get their way in the future by exploiting establishment fears that Medicare will become unaffordable due to an “aging population.” This fear has been promoted for years by the editorial boards of the major newspapers; by economists at the Brookings Institution and other centrist or liberal organizations; and by the routines of government budgeting and reports about the condition of the Social Security and Medicare trust funds, which call for projecting solvency 75 years into the future. Even supporters of traditional Medicare are put on the defensive by this argument, which seems to require that they offer a “solution” to the “problem.”

We should reject the idea that there is a crisis. The conventional wisdom is wrong.

The first wrong conventional argument says that people living longer is a major factor in increased health care costs. Older people tend to have higher health expenses. If 80-year-olds are substantially more expensive than 50-year-olds, and we’ll have more 80s relative to 50s, in the future, then costs should go up a lot. Right?

Nope. Studies from all over the world tell us that most of the increase in medical costs associated with being older is not due to age *per se*, but to likelihood of dying. 80-year-olds on average cost more than 50-year-olds because 80-year-olds on average are much more likely to die, and final illnesses are expensive. If the trend is for people to live longer, then—other things being equal—taking care of 70-year-olds in 2025 will be cheaper than taking care of 70-year-olds today, and

80-year-olds cheaper than the same group today, because people in each group will have lower death rates. Conventional wisdom confuses the cost of living with the cost of dying.

So why do projections show dramatic increases in Medicare costs over the next 75 years? The answer is: *because we don’t have national health insurance*. In all other rich democracies, when a person attains age 65, the extra cost to the main national health insurance arrangements is simply the difference between their costs at age 64 and age 65. Maybe a hundred bucks, on average. In the U.S., at age 65 a person will normally leave some sort of private insurance and go on Medicare. So, if you’re only paying attention to the federal budget, suddenly they are an extra five or six thousand dollars of costs. The establishment confuses the federal budget with the nation. What the projections show is not the effect of aging on health care costs, but how aging will cause a *cost shift to Medicare*.

Conventional wisdom foresees a crisis in public insurance but is blind to a crisis in private insurance. The major influence on costs of health care is the growth in costs per person. Medicare actuaries assume that cost per person will climb at the same rate in both Medicare and the rest of the health care system. That’s probably wrong: over the past three decades Medicare costs have grown about 1 percentage point per year more slowly than costs of private insurance. But even if you accept the actuaries’ assumptions, they mean that *total national health care costs would rise to 38 percent of the economy by 2075*. The burden on employers and employees of the employees’ insurance will double. If people are losing their private insurance now because of its costs, what will happen if the cost to employers, *as a share of their revenues*, doubles? Employers will stop offering insurance, or raise employee contributions so high that many employees won’t be able to pay. The private sector insurance system will collapse.

The real problem could only be addressed by limiting health care costs for everyone. Conventional wisdom says we have to act now to control costs in 2030 or 2050 or 2075. But we can’t. *Health care cost control is not a long-term problem. It can only be a series of short-term ones*. It is a war between the people for whom costs are costs and the people for whom costs are incomes. The people for whom costs are incomes are as smart and aggressive as anyone in the world: the American medical establishment. They promise great benefits that we all want more than anything else: longer and more active and less painful lives. Other countries (with national health insurance!) do a better job of controlling costs than we do, but cost control measures have to be changed

occasionally because eventually, the providers will either find a way to evade it, or generate enough popular discontent to force governments to weaken the methods. Nobody would imagine that security policy could be designed to meet all threats for the next fifty years. Health care cost control, a gentler kind of war, is no different.

All policy-makers can really do is try to control costs in the short run, and do it again and again and again. Savings in the short run lower the base from which costs grow, so lower the eventual costs as well. The whole idea that anyone, conservative or liberal, could have a policy to control health care costs in the far future is ludicrous. So nobody should imagine that Medicare changes could be justified on those grounds.

All elements of the “crisis” that requires that Medicare be “fixed” now are wrong. The aging society only creates a cost shift; it is not a major factor in health care costs overall. Perhaps Medicare will be harder to pay for in the future, but private insurance is already collapsing and will only get more fragile. If people want to worry about long-term costs, they should start by repealing Bush’s short-term giveaways to insurance companies.

Defenders of Medicare need to make those arguments to the centrists (who are captivated by budget illusions but not quite as hopeless as the conservative ideologues). Luckily, the establishment tends to be a bit skeptical when Bush uses rhetoric of budget responsibility. But the Republicans hope they have already set in motion a process that will privatize Medicare by stealth. Traditional Medicare will be competing with private insurers under the terms of the 2003 legislation, and they’ve tried to rig the game.

First, they’ve made no effort to control costs within traditional Medicare itself, at any point within the past five years. Traditional Medicare did an embarrassingly good job of controlling costs—much better than the private sector—in the late 1990s. So that couldn’t be allowed to continue. Second, under the new law if you want to keep your traditional Medicare, and therefore select separate Part D drug insurance, *you are forbidden to buy any supplemental drug insurance*. So, if you keep traditional Medicare, *you can only get the very limited drug benefit available through Part D* (unless you’re covered by a previous employer). Third, the law pays private plans more than the cost for fee-for-service Medicare. If the private plans could actually match traditional Medicare’s cost control, they would be able to use the extra money to provide a better drug benefit and get people to switch. Finally, all administrative decisions will be made by an administration that has shown every intent to regulate the game in ways that help private insurers. It already suppressed its actuaries’ cost estimates to get the bill passed.

Yet the administration’s scheme may fail, and in failing could teach people why everyone’s insurance should look more like traditional Medicare. Even in an unfair game, traditional Medicare is the stronger team. Medicare is more attractive than private insurance because people can’t be “dropped” from the program and its enrollees don’t have to worry about which

doctor or hospital is in their network. They are more satisfied, on average, than people in other insurance plans. Medicare also has significant advantages for controlling costs. It has much lower overhead costs than private, competing plans can have, because Medicare has no expenses for marketing, underwriting, profits or taxes.

This is why traditional HMOs failed in the competition with traditional Medicare that was set up by legislation in 1997. The new law tries to encourage Preferred Provider Organizations (PPOs) to join the fray. But, as the analysts at the centrist Center for Studying Health System Change point out, when it comes to getting favorable prices, Medicare is the “Mother of all PPOs,” and not even private insurance executives will claim PPOs can have lower administrative costs than traditional Medicare. So, unless the administration gets away with overpaying the PPOs really egregiously, or lets the PPOs “cherry pick” only the healthiest beneficiaries, PPOs shouldn’t do much better than HMOs.

So analysts who believe in Medicare need to be ready to scream when the administration cheats (as it will). But we should take the competition to another level. If private insurers can compete with Medicare for seniors, Medicare should be allowed to compete with private insurers for workers.

We should start by proposing that big businesses be allowed to use Medicare as their PPO. By limiting the proposal to large businesses, we avoid having to figure out what to charge each employer. Big businesses basically self-insure already, hiring insurance companies to manage their plans and networks. They pay what the system ends up costing. Medicare could offer the same service—but with greater administrative efficiency and the ability to pay health care providers lower prices. Some employers might look at their experience over the past few years and figure the government could not do worse. And, once they were in, they would be a constituency for Medicare cost control, helping stop the Republicans from rigging the competition! (I know this government would never adopt such a law, but I’d like to see them explain why they’re against it, especially if, say, Ford and GM are for it.)

Will they say the government would be unfairly competing with private insurers? That’s an admission that private insurance is more costly. Will they say the government budget shouldn’t grow through Medicare, even to help private employers compete in the international marketplace? Will they say this option violates “free choice?” We would just be offering employers a new choice, not eliminating old ones.

The conservatives want to set up an unfair competition between traditional Medicare and private insurance for Medicare beneficiaries. Why not turn it around and offer Medicare to American employers? Let the competition begin.

Joseph White is Chair of Political Science at Case Western Reserve University. His most recent book is False Alarm: Why the Greatest Threat to Social Security and Medicare is the Campaign to Save Them (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001; Paperback, 2003).

Toward an Appropriate Health Care System

By Jerome Liebman

The health care system in the United States is anachronistic, fragmented, frequently dehumanizing, ineffective and in desperate need of re-design. In 1972 Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) predicted today's chaos and presented a solution: a single payer type of national health service, which extended across state lines. Since then many other excellent groups have developed single payer types of plans, including Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP) and Universal Health Care Action Network (UHCAN). On one occasion a serious complete plan was presented as a bill in Congress, by Rep. Jim McDermott and the late Senator Paul Wellstone. Wellstone and McDermott were greatly aided in their efforts by members of PNHP.

Although superb care has been delivered to some people in some places, market forces have never delivered optimal health care to everyone at a reasonable cost, and reform is usually approached incrementally, where correcting one serious problem often leads to another. In the concluding statement of the first paper published in a major American medical journal strongly recommending a single-payer type of national health care, the rhetorical question was asked as to whether "we were prepared in the name of the market system to work for corporate masters, to face ever-increasing costs and medical indigence and to be deluged with regulations and complex reimbursement systems." The disgraceful Medicare drug plan mainly uses taxpayer money to provide even more profits to the private insurance and pharmaceutical industries.

In 1970, the year Canada inaugurated its national health program, Canada and the U.S., with similar health systems, each spent 7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) on health care. In 2005, Canada, which provides comprehensive care for all and is a remarkable success story, spent 10 percent of GDP, while the U.S. spent 15 percent, soon to approach 16 percent. In the U.S. we have 45 million uninsured, plus 30 to 40 million who are underinsured, including large numbers of expectant mothers who have little or no prenatal care. Even those with so-called full insurance are finding increasing amounts of "co-pays" limiting their disposable income. As the economy weakens, each state keeps decreasing the amount of Medicaid monies, while at the federal level the Bush administration is about to "reevaluate Medicaid." What havoc will result will soon be seen. Medicare, which has kept a generation of elderly out of poverty, is also being torn apart. We all know that the gap between affluent and poor is widening and that the gap in health care is widening even further. The insurance companies take 25-30 cents to pay a dollar's worth of claim. The recent Medicare drug bill, of course, does very little for most of the elderly.

This problem, for which we described a reasonable solution in 1972, is no closer to being ended in 2005. It should be made clear, however, that due to rising costs, the managed care system, and the pharmaceutical industry, health care is becoming a concern for even more affluent Americans. The Bush administration's plans for Social Security and Medicare would only further aggravate this trend. What it would do to the working poor, of course, is disgraceful. Currently a four-person family earning twice the poverty level has no disposable income. According to a Commonwealth Fund study in 1997, health care costs approximately 20 percent of such a family's already painstakingly allocated income.

One of the most important forces in the health care debate is Dr. Kenneth Frisof, founder of UHCAN. Some of Dr. Frisof's excellent ideas were presented in the Fall 2004 issue of *Democratic Left*. Dr. Frisof has always believed that since Canada's universal health care system began in one province (Saskatchewan), it could also be established one state at a time in the United States. Medicaid, of course, is a state program. It is a matching program with the federal government matching the state's contribution. In 1965, the plan was for each state to be matched one to one so that the federal government would match each state equally. This means that a wealthy state like California or New York would put in more money per child than a poor state like Mississippi. Thus, each child from a wealthy state could receive more federal money than would each child from a poor state. This has been partially remedied; in Mississippi, for example, the federal government matches on a 70 percent to 30 percent basis. Each poor child, however, may still get less if the state puts in less. What the Department of Health and Human Services commission looking at Medicaid will recommend remains to be seen, but there is no reason for optimism.

It must be a "given" in an appropriate national health plan that: everyone is covered; everyone is covered equally, with equal access to care; care is comprehensive; there are no out-of-pocket expenses; the financing is from a progressive income tax; no private insurers are involved. While accomplishing the above, there must be mechanisms for cost containment. In order to allow appropriate cost containment and attack the maldistribution problem as well, an innovative solution must be sought. It is suggested that a national health service be organized.

We will assume a national population of 300 million people. There might be 150 academic health centers or medical center complexes, each to serve approximately 2 million people. Some of these would cross state lines. Most, but not all, of these centers would include a medical school and various other health worker schools, as needed. Tertiary, com-

plex care would be centralized in each health center, while research and teaching would be population based rather than based on geography or the states, there might be six centers for New York City and environs, one for the Cleveland area, and one for Montana plus Idaho plus Wyoming together. Each medical center complex would be the center of a ring of perhaps ten secondary care units (community hospitals), which would serve a population of about 200,000 people, and where most hospital care would actually take place. But each secondary care unit would be truly part of the center even though it might be hundreds of miles away. Attached to each secondary center would be multiple primary care centers, where almost all care is given (e.g., the doctors' offices or primary care clinics as indicated and necessitated by the area served). The patient would choose his/her own doctor where he or she lives—but that doctor, no matter how rural the area in which he or she works, would be as much a part of the medical center complex as is the professor in the center. The locale and method of practice of the primary care physician would likely be different in rural areas from urban areas and would likely be different in affluent suburban areas from that of poor inner-city areas. The doctors in these primary care areas would be making the major decisions as to the type of offices they would have.

There should be no situation where optimal care cannot be given because the patient lives in a rural area. Any test available in the tertiary care center would also be available in the primary care area, either by computer access or other electronic means or, if necessary, by transporting the patient. If the patient needs to go to the secondary or tertiary care center for tests, examination or care, that patient would get there by virtue of a transportation wing of the national health service. Therefore, a lumberman from Idaho or a poor farmer from Mississippi could be taken where he needs to be (perhaps by helicopter or fixed wing airplane) as readily as would a wealthy businessman from New York City. It might also be more appropriate at times for health workers from the secondary or tertiary care centers to go to the primary care area.

In addition, in order to help keep all health workers up to date and stimulated, there would be frequent seminars for the health workers, which would usually be held in the central medical center complex. The health workers would be transported to the center for these seminars.

It might be judged that expensive operations such as liver transplants or complex congenital heart surgery would be more appropriately performed at a limited number of identified centers of excellence. Thus, both the quality of care and cost containment would be addressed. There would be no such thing, as we have now, where the wealthy are more likely to obtain a needed organ transplant than are the poor. Very specialized care units might be limited only to specific academic health units so that costly duplication, costly competition, and costly marketing efforts would be largely eliminated. *If there*

is rationing, it would be based on appropriateness of care, not on the basis of the patient's income or because the patient lives in an underserved area. There must be no "underserved areas." Everyone would have the same access to health care, whether wealthy or poor.

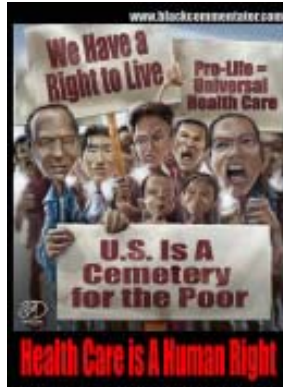
All of this requires control, but this control cannot be only in the hands of physicians. In fact, it would be wise to have *each* health unit, from the primary care center to the largest national administrative unit in Washington, in the hands of a board of control, with each board to include health workers, health administrators, and patients. Since there is only one payment system, the paperwork would be much less, and *it is likely that the physician would have more control of his patient's care in this system than he or she has today.* It has also been shown that having a single-payer system would save enormous amounts of money.

All health care students must get their education without cost or with minimal cost. Determination of acceptance to medical school, for example, would be based upon the quality of the person. The very large debts incurred by medical students would not necessitate them going into high paying fields in order to pay these debts back. Physicians would be salaried, with an incentive plan.

Clearly, in addition to developing the transportation wing (a "health unit" of the transportation system), something must be done to control the pharmaceutical and hospital supply industries, which should not be making large profits from our patients' misfortunes. In view of the international nature of these industries, nationalization may not be possible, but control of the pricing structure is necessary, while allowing innovative research to continue.

In the type of national health service described here, the goal of one tier of care, of optimal care for all, is achieved. The maldistribution problem is taken care of, the enormous cost of the system is under control, and the frequently marvelous technological advances in health care can continue.

Jerome Liebman, M.D., is a member of Physicians for a National Health Program.



Thank You

We gratefully acknowledge a bequest from the estate of longtime member Harry Fleischman, who died last November. Harry Fleischman spent much of his life working to build the socialist movement. He understood the obligation we all share to make sure the movement carries on after we are gone. Bequests of any size help ensure that our movement, which began to emerge centuries ago, can carry the good fight through the 21st century. When preparing or revising your will or revocable trust, be sure to include DSA.

Progressive Politics in Europe: A Frog's-eye Perspective

by Stephan Peter

In early summer 2005 I had the opportunity to spend three and one-half weeks in the so-called Saar-Lor-Lux region of Europe where Germany, France, and Luxemburg meet.

1. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) in the Saarland state of Germany hosts a public forum "One World Saar." The Saarland is the tenth German state to hold such a forum. The main speakers are Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, minister of Third World Development in the national government; Jo Leinen, member of the European Parliament from the Saarland; and state SPD chair Heiko Maas. Jo, who had been in Minneapolis for the fall 2004 DSA forum on building a multi-lateral foreign policy, notices me in the audience. In his introductory remarks he spends two minutes commending DSA for its work in the U.S. in general (and Minnesota in particular) and for its hard work in the recent presidential election. Not everyone in the U.S., Leinen tells the audience, subscribes to the "Washington Consensus." Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul observes how the amount the U.S. military spends in Iraq in two months is equivalent to what the entire world community has pledged for development in Afghanistan for years to come. Heidi argues for a common European development policy that would connect environmental and energy issues with anti-poverty efforts. She stresses U.N. reform as a major SPD and Party of European Socialists concern. The "one world forums" are an SPD attempt to challenge its own social-democratic paternalism and to engage the NGO community on a state level. It's an approach that views the main agent of change as a multi-faceted global progressive alliance of both party and NGO forces rather than just party organizations and the Socialist International.

2. Oskar Lafontaine, former SPD party chair and vocal critic of Chancellor Schroeder's policies, is on a book tour. I catch up with him in his and my home town, Dillingen, where he reads from his latest book *Politik für alle* (Politics for All). He bemoans stagnating wages for employees, welfare state modernization at the expense of the socially weak, rising unemployment numbers, outsourcing, and the growing wage and income gap between rich and poor in Germany. He focuses on the corruption of language and thinking, how many Social Democrats, perhaps unthinkingly, use the Right's language.

3. Two days after Lafontaine's talk, state elections in North Rhine Westphalia (NRW) are being held. The SPD records its worst result in NRW in over 50 years. It is also the eleventh defeat in a row for Social Democrats in state elections. And NRW really matters. It is the SPD heartland—the party has governed there for over 30 consecutive years. It is also the industrial center of Germany where close to one third

of West Germans live. In the past, election results in this state foreshadowed election results on the national level. During election night, following the announcement of the results, Chancellor Schroeder stuns the political establishment by calling for early national elections in fall 2005. He cites the defeat of his party in NRW and the need to present clear policy choices to the voters. This, he argues, cannot be accomplished under the conditions of political gridlock caused by most states being governed by the right while the federal government consists of a left-of-center coalition between the SPD and Greens. Constitutionally, Schroeder's move is problematic, as only the President can dissolve parliament.

Politically, Schroeder's decision appears unilateral and a far cry from grassroots democracy. Barely a handful of party leaders were informed initially, certainly not the entire executive committee. Strategically, the move aimed to preempt a coup within the party against Schroeder—or at least to preempt massive criticism from the party's left and center. The sudden call for early elections instead aims to enforce discipline and unity to ward off pending electoral defeat.

In the following days, the attention of the German media switches from Schroeder to Lafontaine. Lafontaine announces he is leaving the SPD after 39 years of membership to protest Schroeder's neo-liberal policies. Lafontaine urges the formation of a new progressive party to the left of the Social Democrats, modeled after the Italian "olive tree" coalition. It would appeal to three constituencies, the three groups that backed the grassroots voter initiatives that sprang up in a number of West German states to protest the government's neo-liberal economic policies. These initiatives were backed by left-wing Social Democrats and progressive labor union people, the left wing within the Green Party, and the post-communist Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), with its stronghold in former East Germany. These are the groups that Lafontaine hopes to unify into a new party of the Left. Polls in June indicate this new Democratic Left/PDS alliance could receive between 6 and 10 percent of the vote in national elections and establish itself as the third largest party in the next national parliament.

The SPD, suffering one of its deepest identity crises in history, topped only by persecution during the Nazi era and the disputes over war credits in 1916/17, appears poised for a historical defeat in the fall. Much will depend on three issues: will this new left force become a competitive political party or a potential ally for the SPD in the months to come? will the new party be able to mobilize the increasing number of disgusted non-voters in recent years, many of them alienated Social Democrats? and how will loyal Social Democrats in-

terpret recent developments—will those remaining in the party’s left wing emotionally regard this new left alliance not as competition but as friends?

4. Throughout the French border towns in Lorraine province, billboards with *Partie Socialiste* posters urge “oui”—“yes” to the new European Constitution that must be approved by all 25 EU member states. In Metz, capital of Lorraine, a leading Socialist Party government official argues “non,” accusing Jo Leinen, chair of the European Parliament’s Constitutional Committee, of neo-liberal tendencies. The French official declares his sympathies with Lafontaine’s anti-capitalist positions. Lafontaine campaigns in Paris for “non”; Leinen for “oui”; Francois Hollande, leader of the French PS, for “oui”; and longtime Mitterrand confidant and former Socialist prime minister Laurent Fabius argues for “non.” In their last session before the French vote, most members of the EU parliament in Brussels hold up signs saying “oui.”



Election night: The left wing of the Socialist party, the communists and the extreme nationalists win: 55% of the French vote “non.” The European Constitution is defeated. Television in Germany shows French Communist Party members celebrating with clenched fists and singing “The Internationale.” Constitutional critics feel its enactment would pave the way for Europe to become little more than a gigantic free trade zone and would also facilitate the militarization of EU foreign policy. Supporters point to constitutional provisions that endorse a social rather than a “free” market economy as well as a social charter that embraces goals of full employment, social justice, equality between men and women, solidarity between the generations, and dialogue between employers and employees. The fact that this “constitution” is several hundred pages long (compared to the few pages of the U.S. constitution) makes it all the more difficult to figure out what exactly it promises and regulates. During my travels, I did not encounter one single person—politician or ordinary citizen—who claimed to have read the whole document.

5. The train from Luxemburg City to Brussels takes three hours. My destination: 98 Rue du Trone in downtown Brussels—the offices of the Party of European Socialists (PES). I do not expect to find a festive mood: the British Labor Party’s loss of parliamentary seats in Blair’s recent re-election; the disarray of the Polish Left; the split in the French Socialist Party; the almost certain defeat of German Social Democracy in the Fall 2005 election... Alexandra Pardal, political advisor, Office of the President, explains PES initiatives to improve U.S.-European relations, leading to a discussion of how socialists and progressives on both sides of the Atlantic might collaborate. Later on, Cathrine Bossenmeyer joins our conversation. She has helped build the “Global Progressive Forum” (GPF) that was launched in November 2003 in Brussels by the PES, its parliamentary group in the European Par-

liament, and the Socialist International. Its motto reads, “Reforming globalization by creating progressive communities for change.” The GPF intends to go beyond parties and reach out to groups in civil society. The focus is on world civil society, not merely Europe. Its website lists numerous progressive NGOs that have participated in GPF activities. The GPF’s most developed initiative aims to bring together the fight against global poverty and the defense of the global environment. The GPF utilizes electronic communication to debate and reshape its position papers. An important GPF event will be the September 2005 conference in Milan, Italy, which aims to give new direction to future GPF activities.

6. Berlin. The view out the hotel room window: across the street a park, the former Gestapo headquarters. In one corner of the park the outdoor exhibition “Topography of Terror.” Beyond, a large building—designed as Goering’s air force ministry. In the distance, the “Reichstag,” with its new glass dome, hosts the national parliament. No way to escape the past. Tall cranes surround the new central railway station. Berlin is readying itself for the 2006 world soccer cup. Surprisingly, I find little news in the media on Bush, Iraq, and terrorism. I visit offices of the SPD faction in the national parliament and also the Willy Brandt Haus, the SPD headquarters. Those critical of Schroeder’s course argue that his approach to globalization has allowed neo-liberalism to trump progressive social-democratic concepts such as economic democracy or redistribution. There is talk among party officials that the party intends to communicate its social and labor reforms more clearly and to cushion some of the harshest effects of these reforms on the poor. Will this be sufficient to save the “red-green” coalition? At a Berlin train station I bump into my old friend Enrico Troebst, executive director of the Berlin August Bebel Society. He describes the challenges to generate funding for this kind of educational work, and informs me that party offices with paid staffers are struggling to survive in the face of stagnating party membership. As I leave Berlin in a 150 mph bullet train, one legacy of the red-green project becomes apparent: windmills everywhere. Germany accounts for over one third of the world’s windmill generated electricity today. Windmills—the supplement to saying no to war with Iraq. And 120,000 jobs created by them.

7. On my very last day in “old Europe,” a meeting with Koba Krause, chair of the SPD local in Luxemburg City—one of the very few SPD locals that exist outside of Germany’s national borders. Their SPD branch hopes to continue the trans-Atlantic dialogue, which began last summer when I was invited to give a talk on DSA and U.S. politics. I was impressed by this local’s European outlook and close ties to the Luxemburg Socialist Labor Party (LSAP), a coalition member in the current Luxemburg government. Six of them are planning a visit to Minnesota and other areas.

Stephen Peter of Twin Cities DSA is Co-Chair of DSA’s International Commission.

James Weinstein 1926-2005

By now most of you have heard that James Weinstein died this June of brain cancer. I won't duplicate other obituaries here. Rather, I'll simply note that what impressed us when we chose him for the 1997 Debs-Thomas-Harrington Award was his record as a founder of institutions: the periodicals *In These Times*, *Socialist Revolution* (which later became *Socialist Review* then was last heard of as *Radical Society*), and the Modern Times bookstore. He was a founding member of the New American Movement (one story I've heard



has him present in the Hyde Park living room where the idea for NAM is said to have been born). When it merged with the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, he became a founding member of the Democratic Socialists of America.

Over the past decade or so, Weinstein's relation with DSA was both supportive and cranky. He very helpful with the 1997 Dinner, and *In These Times* has cosponsored several events with Chicago DSA over the past few years. But it was no secret that he felt DSA had not fulfilled what he (and many others) had regarded as its potential. He felt this way about most of the left.

James Weinstein was also a scholar and author. My own particular favorite was his history, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925*. Others feel that *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-1918* is his most significant work of scholarship. It is reported that he was most pleased with his most recent work, *The Long Detour*. In May of 2004, *In These Times*, the Open University of the Left, and Chicago DSA organized a forum to discuss this book.

Losing someone like Weinstein is always bad news. If only there were more lefties like him: a builder of institutions.

Robert Roman

Robert Roman is the Treasurer of Chicago DSA. This obituary first appeared in New Ground, published by Chicago DSA.

Radfest takes on Wal-Mart

By Marc Silberman

Almost 500 community activists and left academics chose among 48 panels, 2 plenary sessions, and a parallel festival of political films and documentaries at the Midwest Social Forum, better known as Radfest, June 3-5th. At "Winning the Battle against Wal-Mart," sponsored by the Madison Area DSA local, around 30 people listened to short presentations by the five panelists, followed by discussion and comments. Economist Ron Baiman, a DSA NPC member from Chicago, summarized a study he co-authored that counters Wal-Mart's claims about job creation and then detailed the ongoing attempts to pass a city big-box ordinance that would force Wal-Mart (and others) to provide a living wage in Chicago stores.

Buzz Davis, Madison Area DSA member from Stoughton, reported on the town's two-year struggle to prevent Wal-Mart from annexing a large parcel of land outside the municipality in order to transform an existing store into a Supercenter. He emphasized mistakes of his local citizens group that should teach us some useful lessons: lack of a steering committee, lack of defined objectives, lack of outreach to the affected business community, and lack of a positive vision (instead of a purely negative approach aimed against Wal-Mart), and he advised that an effective community group must operate like a political campaign.

Beth Gehred and Kitty Welch from Ft. Atkinson, Wisconsin, reported on how their community group used weaknesses in the governing system to undermine a Wal-Mart initiative that would have the town annex adjacent farmland for a new Supercenter. Beth, who was appointed to a town *ad hoc* committee in an attempt to co-opt her group's opposition, was able to implement a strategy of transparency and community accountability. The town had recently passed its own state-mandated master plan forbidding big-box sprawl within its borders, so this ultimately became the trump card that led to Wal-Mart's defeat. The struggle continues now in a nearby community (5 miles down the highway), which is using lessons learned in Ft. Atkinson to good effect.

Carl Davidson, a seasoned community activist from Chicago, gave a well-received slide presentation on the global implications of Wal-Mart's economic imperatives. He analyzed exactly how the stockholder profit mentality undermines a responsible, stakeholder approach to community growth and discussed some alternatives, such as consumer cooperatives in France and Spain (the co-mart model).

The discussion made clear how Wal-Mart depends on a sophisticated playbook to guide its penetration of rural and urban communities and deftly play groups, neighborhoods and cities off each other to get its way. At least two conclusions emerged from the panel discussion: those who want to fight Wal-Mart need 1) to join forces at least regionally if not state-wide and 2) to develop their own playbook with effective strategies.

REVIEWS

Flattened Worlds, Modest Reforms and Utopian Impulses.

Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, NY; Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005; and Russell Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age*, NY; Columbia University Press, 2005.

by Michael Hirsch

Like Oscar Hammerstein's Kansas City, everything's like a dream in Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*. The brave new world of instant communication, uniform standards and easy capital mobility is better than a magic lantern show. Except this slight of hand comes without human intervention or conscious planning, and certainly without the capacity to dream languorously or think deeply or value much beyond the technical innovations that raise the bottom line.

Less an overview and more a thin veneer making capital flight seem attractive, Friedman's book has all the zip of a hall monitor's oral report. Yet this silly Panglossian screed has stayed on the *New York Times* bestseller list for much of the year. That's a lot of top-shelf success for a cut-and-paste job of transcripts, interviews, and e-mails, stitched together with gee-whiz enthusiasm for the serendipitous confluence of excess fiber-optic capacity, Netscape, the 1996 telecom deregulation and an unemployed meritocracy in India.

But that's what we've come to expect from Friedman, and not just in his *New York Times* columns in praise of self-sacrifice. If his 1999 *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* was a tone poem to corporate domination, this one is an infomercial. It's not so much even a book as a series of advertising slogans. Perhaps the punchiest is "1989: The Wall Went Down, Windows went up," at least assuming you agree that the collapse of the East German commandist regime and the triumph of the Microsoft standard over the Mac OS represented progress, instead of the implosion of a police barracks and the victory of a derivative and easily hijacked operating system.

So Friedman can bask in the glow of unfettered capital mobility without even a nod to how workers benefit—outside of some praise for open-sourcing and for the libertarian geeks who promote it. He isn't even sure that in a fight between the 400-pound bully Microsoft and its plucky open-source opponents he knows which side he's on.

Working people surely don't figure in his account, either, where globalization and standardization are prized but the donkey work gets outsourced anyway. GE's "Neutron

Jack" Welch foresaw a goldmine in outsourcing software development to India, a nation that featured, as one source tells Friedman "a talent pool that could be leveraged." What Friedman leaves out is the chief attraction of South Asia's *lumpen* intellectuals to Welch: they worked cheap. For that insight and for other innovations in job cutting at home, Welch was named Manager of the Century by *Fortune* magazine.

Does globalization set the stage for worldwide solidarity and international labor cooperation? Is any resistance valid? Friedman is silent if not clueless.

Why be surprised? The book runs along the same lines as his "Manifesto for a Fast World" (*NY Times Magazine*, 3/28/99), where he urged the U.S. public to brace its weak knees and accept that "the hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist." There, the security of, for example, Silicon Valley was vouchsafed by U.S. military might. That essay at least preached tough love. In this one he just hucksters for the four horsemen of neo-liberalism: globalization, deregulation, outsourcing and a race to the bottom among those desperate for the remaining on-shore jobs. Reading this book in the wake of the G8 meeting in Edinburgh is surreal. There the agenda focused on opening markets and privatizing, but only a pittance of the massive Third World debt was canceled and the group couldn't agree that global warming is a fact, let alone a danger. A flat world? More like an iron heel. What he does, as the saying goes about journalists and other critics, is come down from the hills after the battle is over and shoot the wounded.

But if Friedman glories in the "good society" that is here today, or could be if competition were untrammelled, Russell Jacoby says what protesters at G8 meetings around the world say: that another, better world is possible. In *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age*, Jacoby, a onetime bookstore clerk at Cambridge's fabled Red Book in the 1970s (the only one with a sense of humor, as I remember) and now professor of history at UCLA, asks the big, subversive questions. He asks them in an age when big questions and comprehensive answers are old hat, even on the left. Like his earlier 1999 book *The End of Utopia*, where he buries postmodernism, here he slashes away at the Left's retreat to fixing and fine-tuning existing social institutions instead of naming and opposing the system. He bemoans how social policy formulation trumps politics and scandal mongering substitutes for commentary.

Jacoby calls his ideas "utopian"—despite a history of its being seen as a term of abuse on the left where posing alternatives isn't always distinct from thumb-sucking. He makes a useful distinction between what he calls the "blueprint tradition" over planned castles in the sky and commodes on the ground with what he identifies as the "iconoclastic tradition." These latter were, "not idolaters" but "protesters and breakers of images...who could 'hear' the future but not see it" and "who are essential to any effort to escape the spell of the quotidian."

He disparages the anti-Marxists Karl Popper and Hannah

Arendt, whose critiques of “totalitarianism” helped develop a 1950s cult of pluralism by assuming that any all-embracing ideology for good devolved into a radical evil. While much utopianism does come from a non-democratic impulse—something Jacoby doesn’t acknowledge—he does wisely say there are multiple roads to genocide, too. Where was the utopianism in the Spanish Inquisition, he asks? Or in Britain’s manipulating of the Irish famine? Or in the U.S. slaughter of Native Americans? Or in the anticommunist rampage in Indonesia after the fall of Sukarno? The list of evil acts non-ideological forces commit goes on, unaided by any utopian impulse, something Arendt would admit only after her essay on the Nazi everyman Eichmann.

Jacoby’s utopian vision isn’t without its problems, either. Who would want a nation of iconoclasts, or even a DSA filled to overflowing with George Orwells and Russell Jacobys (Groucho Marx’s observation that he would never join a club that would have him as a member comes to mind)? And he spends far too much time rooting the sensible Marxian refusal to imagine a worked-out, fully mapped egalitarian society of the future in the Hebrew invocation that “you should make no image of God.” You don’t have to be Jewish to hear the chimes of freedom. You don’t have to have monotheism as your patrimony to reject idolatry.

But he’s right that the problem with the modern age isn’t an excess of imagination or social engineering; it’s an excess of routinization and acquiescence. Today, the Left is mired in formulating even the most moderate social policies as the Right dreams the impossible (and, for us, terrifying) dream. It’s that dream that millions follow, as Thomas Frank has brilliantly argued, in the absence of any alternatives. Because if the center-Left won’t speak to people’s economic needs, the hard Right will pretend to speak to their values. Even on the democratic Left, it’s Sweden’s problematic Meidner plan (a proposal to tax corporate profits in order to create socially-owned investment funds)—not the abolition of wage labor—that makes comrades salivate. It’s where reforms—no matter how difficult to achieve—threaten to become ends in themselves rather than vehicles for mobilizing and positioning and empowering. Meanwhile, many of DSA’s sister parties in the Socialist International scarcely qualify as reform parties.

Jacoby wants to “connect a utopian passion with practical politics,” something he admits is both an art and a necessity. As he writes, “without a utopian impulse, politics turns pallid, mechanical, and often Sisyphean; it plugs leaks one by one, while the bulkheads give way and the ship founders. To be sure, the leaks must be stanchied. Yet, we may need a new vessel, an idea easily forgotten as the waters rise and the crew and passengers panic.”

That’s a good, big thought worth holding.

Michael Hirsch, a labor journalist, is a member of DSA’s National Political Committee and the Editorial Committee of Democratic Left.

Third Camp Art

Art Spiegelman, *In The Shadow of No Towers*. New York: Pantheon, 2004.

by Kent Worcester

Some of the most distinctive voices in American politics belong to cartoonists. In the weeks and months following the attacks of 9/11, editorial and alternative cartoonists such as Ruben Bolling, Jeff Danziger, Tim Kreider, Peter Kuper, Ann Talnaes, and Ward Sutton offered incisive commentary on topics mainstream pundits were loath to touch, from the tangled roots of U.S. foreign policy to the comical excesses of a newly awakened patriotism.

Even deftly expressed cartoon images are rarely taken as seriously as unadorned text. But this can work to the advantage of the image-maker. While cartoonists are sometimes hemmed in by the expectations of syndicates, editors, and even audiences, they generally enjoy a greater degree of cultural freedom than is accorded, say, contributors to the op-ed pages of most daily newspapers.

One of the biggest names in indy comics is Art Spiegelman, who received the Pulitzer for *Maus*, a two-part graphic novel, in 1992. His latest work, *In The Shadow of No Towers*, is another unexpected bestseller that wields the words-and-pictures format for grown-up purposes. The book consists of ten poster-sized cartoon-essays that trace the author’s evolving relationship to the WTC attack, followed by seven equally massive reprints of visually striking but long-forgotten newspaper comic strips.

Along with thousands of others, Spiegelman and his family experienced 9/11 first-hand. He depicts the attack in the second cartoon, where he reports that his “daughter had just started high school at the foot of the towers three days before.” (The first cartoon reveals the history of the phrase “dropping the other shoe,” which Spiegelman calls the “nineteenth century source for the 21st century’s dominant metaphor.”) He opens the second page complaining about the bald eagle he carries around his neck like an albatross: “Everything’s changed! Awk! Go out and shop! Awk!” screeches the bird. Off to one side, Osama bin Laden and George Bush face each other as misshapen cardboard cutouts, one hoisting a flag and a gun, the other a bloody sword.

But the page is dominated by the event itself. In a key panel, he and his wife are walking away from the towers, having dropped their daughter at school. They look like themselves, like New Yorkers, rendered in two-dimensional form. In the following panels, which take place in the moments after the first plane struck, the towers themselves morph into frantic characters from the comic strip classic *The Katzenjammer Kids*. The shift from everyday life to cartoon imagery is of course deliberate. As in *Maus*, the use of familiar

visual icons simultaneously domesticates and amplifies the horror.

Rather than arranging these pages in a standard format, with rows of neat rectangular panels, each cartoon-essay is a complex assemblage of strips, caricatures, visual digressions, and free-floating illustrations. All of them play with the notion that the boundary between nightmares and normalcy is more porous than we imagine. And all of them feature an anguished Art Spiegelman, who says things like “The sky is failing!” and “I can no longer distinguish my own neurotic depression from well-founded despair!”

While Spiegelman’s response to 9/11 is stubbornly autobiographical, it is also explicitly political. He is as afraid of “the gang in power” as he is of “new, improved Jihad.” “Why did those provincial American flags have to sprout out of the embers of Ground Zero?” he asks at one point. “Why not a globe?” Elsewhere he describes himself as “equally terrorized by al-Qaeda and by his own government,” a formulation that is unlikely to win him friends inside the White House or invitations to speak at the DLC.

His broadly third camp perspective lands him in trouble when he is recruited to take part in an NBC broadcast featuring “a collage of interviews with typical New Yorkers.” Rendering himself as Happy Hooligan, a hapless character from the early twentieth century, he answers every question with precisely the wrong answer. When asked where he feels “most American” he exclaims “Paris, France!” When invited to say what the “greatest thing about America is” Spiegelman attests that “as long as you’re not an Arab you’re allowed to think America’s not always so great!” As he’s kicked out of the studio Happy (Art) thinks to himself, “Rats! I shoulda said ‘American tobacco.’”

As the weeks go by Spiegelman finds solace in the whimsy of decades-old comic strips. “The only cultural artifacts that could get past my defenses were old comic strips: vital, unpretentious ephemera from the optimistic dawn of the twentieth century. That they were made with so much skill and verve but never intended to last past the day they appeared in the newspaper gave them poignancy; they were just right for an end-of-the-world moment.”

He shares several examples of these imaginative artifacts with the reader. His selection includes a revealingly jingoistic Yellow Kid, a sweet *Krazy Kat* comic, and a jaw-dropper from Winsor McKay’s *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, where a sleep-walking Nemo climbs Manhattan’s steel and glass canyons. Each of the selections touches in some way on the contemporary urban anxieties that permeate *In The Shadow of No Towers*.

DSAer Kent Worcester is the coeditor (with Jeet Heer) of Arguing Comics: Literary Masters on a Popular Medium (University Press of Mississippi, 2004). He is also an editor of New Politics.

Convention Call continued from page 1

The fight to defend Social Security as a publicly funded, defined-benefit social insurance program is being won. Can we take advantage of the crisis in costs and coverage in health care and growing disenchantment with the Bush domestic agenda to revitalize a mass movement in favor of a truly universal publicly financed health care system in the United States? And can we help develop a robust wing of the Democratic Party on the national, state and local levels that can propose real solutions to growing inequality and economic insecurity and speak to the progressive values of equity, equality of opportunity, and fairness?

We meet at a time when we are heartened by the membership growth (of nearly thirteen percent) that DSA has achieved since the last convention. But we also know that we have to do much more to turn membership growth into increases in organizational activism, strategic interventions and public socialist education.

This 13th convention is mandated to review and begin to update DSA’s general perspective statement, last formulated ten years ago. We also intend to re-draft our immediate mission statement with an eye to examining our relations with progressive electoral movements and the new progressive formations that have emerged since the 2004 election. Finally, we will be examining our efforts to renew our organization and further develop a program and perspective that advances a bold political alternative to right-wing Republican “free market” mantras, to status-quo Democratic centrism, and to the neo-liberal ideology and policies that form the core of mainstream political discourse.

This call is issued in the spirit of optimism and solidarity. The absence of a coherent ideological and political critique of the easy assumption that “there is no alternative” to market mania constrains the constructing of a more just America. Only vibrant progressive social movements and a clear-headed democratic socialist organization can mount such a political critique and help initiate campaigns to defend and expand democratic public programs at home and just trade and diplomatic policies abroad.

Please join us at a working convention where the membership will chart our future. We welcome all DSA members to attend as delegates or observers. We also welcome the attendance of our friends throughout the progressive movement.

See page 2 for more information on DSA’s Convention in Los Angeles November 11-13th, including how to serve as a delegate, or attend as an observer.

A New Generation of Socialists...

by Lucas Shapiro

All of us in the Young Democratic Socialists (the youth section of DSA) work on campuses and in communities across the country to remind young people that there is an alternative to the war, corporate globalization, racism, sexism, ecological ruin and skyrocketing tuition costs that plague our lives and our world. Many of today's youth and students grow up with little to no concept of an alternative to the greed and massive inequality generated by capitalism. Yet when I speak



on campuses across the country it's always heartening to meet a new generation of pragmatic idealists that hasn't given into all the apathy and cynicism. The problem isn't that other young people think that democratic socialism is a bad idea *per se*—it's that they've never been exposed to our ideas.

That's where you come in. The Young Democratic Socialists needs your help in reaching out to both experienced student activists and those that are entering the world of left politics for the first time. Several new chapters are starting up on high school and college campuses around the country, but we can do even better. With the support of campus faculty we can connect with promising young progressives to organize teach-ins, trainings, and best of all, YDS chapters. Having YDS members and chapters on campuses breathes life into the schools' political climate and can help grow a sustained progressive movement. If you work with students or other interested young people, you can help us set up campus visits, put us in touch with key activists, or even mentor a fledgling YDS chapter.

The regeneration of a vibrant left is a task for every radical no matter how old or young, but a new generation of activists can only come from mobilizing students and youth. Your support is critical to making this happen. Check out our website (www.ydsusa.org), email us (yds@dsausa.org) or contact us at the national office (212-727-8610, ext. 24).

Lucas Shapiro, DSA's National Youth Organizer, is leaving staff after two years of hard and productive work building Young Democratic Socialists. DSA's National Political Committee thanks Lucas for an immense contribution to our movement.

A Word from the National Director continued from page 2

-ington who felt she was too poor to join:

I am in 100% agreement with you—the last five years have been Hell. I worked for over forty years and felt I had earned enough to take care of my old age (86). I love this country but that is certainly not the case with our leader. Everything he does hurts us. I find I do not have enough funds and I see no end to it. I hope all goes well for you.

As long as the richest country the world has ever known produces such vast inequality there will be work for the organized socialist movement.

Of course, conventions are social gatherings, too. We have some special events planned. One of them will be a screening of Robert Greenwald's new film on Wal-Mart; we expect that he will speak at the pre-convention conference on Wal-Mart, too. Wade Rathke, the dynamic leader of ACORN, will also be among our guests. DSA will present a special award to DSA Vice-Chair Harold Meyerson for carrying on the tradition of our founding chair Michael Harrington by voicing our values in the mainstream media. There will be other important guests, too—stay tuned for further announcements and start making plans to join us in Los Angeles.

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:
 - \$50 Sustainer \$35 Introductory \$15 Low-Income/Student
 - Yes, I want to renew my membership in DSA.** Enclosed are my renewal dues of:
 - \$60 Sustainer \$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 _____
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Telephone _____ E-Mail _____
Union Affiliation _____ School _____
 Bill my credit card: Circle one: MC Visa No. _____ / _____ / _____ / _____
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My special interests are:

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Return to:

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