



Special Immigration Issue!

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**Socialism—Now More than Ever!
Fighting Neo-Liberalism
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DSA Supports Immigrant Rights

Democratic Socialists of America favors granting immediate permanent resident status to all undocumented workers and establishing an expeditious and non-punitive road to citizenship for these workers and their families. We oppose guest worker programs that would help exploit these workers and undercut all workers' rights to organize and to secure humane wages and working conditions. We applaud the burgeoning immigrant rights movement for its broad-based organizing achievement and for bringing to the forefront of our public debate issues central to a democratic and just society.

Legalizing the status of all immigrant workers and their families, as well as providing for a transparent and expeditious road to citizenship, embody basic democratic socialist principles. First, those who are governed by the laws of a democratic society must have a say in making such laws. Working people – whether immigrant or born in the United States – cannot defend their rights in the workplace absent full political rights.

Second, all those who contribute meaningful labor to a democratic society, who care for our elderly, our children, and our disabled and provide crucial services and labor for the common good deserve full membership in our society.

Third, without full legal status and a road to citizenship, immigrant workers cannot fight for rights on the job and can be ruthlessly exploited by employers. Threats of deportation for undocumented workers, as well as second-class status in guest worker programs, restrict the rights of workers to organize and to become citizens. These policies create a new form of indentured servitude and dependence.

As socialists, we know that “an injury to one is an injury to all.” Thus, the vulnerability of undocumented and guest workers leads not only to the exploitation of their labor but also to the proliferation of low-wage, unsafe, and insecure jobs for all. Employers can more easily discriminate against African-Americans, particularly young men, when there is vulnerable immigrant labor to exploit. Only strong enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, combined with the ability of all workers to unionize and fight for decent wage and working conditions, can yield a full employment economy. The nativist arguments of the Minutemen and others displace anxiety about declining economic opportunities onto the very low-wage workers whose rights in the workplace must be secured if all working people are to improve their livelihoods. Significantly increasing the ridiculously low annual legal immigration quota for less skilled workers would grant these workers full labor rights and enhance the ability of all low-wage workers to organize.

Therefore, Democratic Socialists of America militantly opposes HR 4437, the Sensenbrenner bill already passed in the House of Representatives. The proposed legislation, if adopted by Congress, would criminalize all undocumented workers and all who help them. It would lead to mass repression and a futile effort to deport 12 million undocumented workers and their families. Such an effort would not only be pointless and wasteful; it could only be conducted through massive violations of the civil liberties of citizens and legal residents, as well as the undocumented.

DSA also opposes devoting additional resources to militarizing our border. Since the passage of the restrictive 1994 Immigration Reform Act, the federal government has spent more than \$30 billion on border enforcement. This has not deterred unauthorized border crossings. It has lined the pockets of “coyotes” (who serve the needs of exploitative employers searching for cheap labor) and has led to the cruel, painful deaths of over 4,000 people in the deserts of the Southwest and in the holds of ships.

We also endorse the expansion of opportunities for legal immigration and family unification and the rapid processing of the backlog of pending visa applications.

While some bills before the Senate offer a path to citizenship for considerable numbers of undocumented workers, their provisions for guest worker programs and increased militarization of our borders violate the principles outlined above.

Further, as socialists we recognize that massive migrations of exploited workers, refugees, and asylum-seekers result from an unjust global political and economic system that works for the benefit of transnational corporations and at the expense of the world's peoples. Immigration to the United States does not only result from the “pull” of greater economic opportunity. It is also caused by the “push” of growing economic inequality and exploitation in developing societies. The economic destiny of these countries is severely constrained by the power of transnational corporations and international institutions that regulate the global economy in their own interests and to the benefit of the dominant capitalist nation-states. Much of the mass migration of the past decade from Mexico and Central America is due to NAFTA and other unjust “free trade” agreements. Such agreements have enabled subsidized American agri-business to flood these societies with cheap produce, thus destroying the livelihoods of millions of small farmers. The export-oriented, often capital-intensive form of manufacturing imposed by the IMF, World Bank, and the

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DSAPAC Swings into Action

by Frank Llewellyn

DSAPAC's campaign to support Bernie Sanders' U.S. Senate bid is underway, and response to our efforts is encouraging. House parties were held in Atlanta, Boston and Detroit, and gatherings are already scheduled for Portland, Maine; Boulder, Col.; Indianapolis, Ind.; Columbus, Ohio; and Ithaca, NY. Events are being finalized in Springfield, Mass.; Washington, DC; and New York City. With the California primary over, West Coast groups are organizing Sanders events, too. DSAers wanting to hold Sanders house parties should contact me at fllewellyn@dsausa.org.

Beside supporting Sanders, DSAPAC is backing Jonathan Tasini's primary challenge to Sen. Hillary Clinton and Ned Lamont's effort to deny Joe Lieberman the Democratic renomination. These races epitomize the effort progressives are making nationwide to take the Democratic Party back from the centrist, poll-driven politicians who have left it barely able to utter a dissenting word on Iraq, the power wielded by corporate America and other critical issues. DSA has also endorsed in two House races, supporting Chris Owens' bid to take retiring DSA member Major Owens' Brooklyn seat in Congress. This will be a difficult election, as the presence of several competing minority candidates could split the vote enough to allow an undistinguished white City Council member, David Yassky, to win in this overwhelmingly minority district that is still under Department of Justice voting rights supervision. DSA has also endorsed DSAer and Congressman Danny Davis in his bid for re-election in Chicago.

While there are other races in which DSA could well make an endorsement, we are restricting support this year to those races where members and local groups are directly involved and can make a difference.

Frank Llewellyn is the national director of DSA and treasurer of DSA's PAC. Filings detailing DSAPAC's activity can be reviewed on the FEC's web site. Our next report is due July 15th This report was not approved by any candidate or candidate's committee. The cost of printing any issues of Democratic Left containing this article distributed to non-members of DSA and the cost of placing this issue on DSA's web site has been paid for by Democratic Socialists of America PAC, 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 505, NYC, NY 10038.

DSA Locals Fan the Flames

Atlanta: In just five months, Atlanta DSA grew from an organizing committee into a full-fledged local. Its core group of 15 participated in the April 1 Southeast March Against the War in Iraq and distributed literature at forums featuring Cornel West and Barbara Ehrenreich. The key was one-on-one organizing, they say, plus building an educational component into each meeting. **Boston:** The local Boston DSAers held DSAPAC's first fundraiser for Bernie Sanders and is supporting Mass Alliance-endorsed state rep candidates in the run up to the September Democratic primary. The local also backs the referendum campaign for a state constitutional amendment guaranteeing health care for all, and worked with Wake Up Wal-Mart and Jobs with Justice in organizing anti-Wal-Mart rallies. The group also runs an active Alternatives to Capitalism study group. **Bowdoin College:** The YDS chapter worked with area businesses in

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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 of brutalizing global competition.

Controlling Immigration: US Policy is a Textbook on How *Not* to do It

by Saskia Sassen

The attempt to “control” immigration into the U.S. keeps failing. While immigration is a complex process, much of the failure is not due to this complexity but to faulty policy. At the same time, some of what looks like failure from the perspective of controlling entry is actually delivering those results that particular sectors inside the U.S. want from immigration. If we are to develop a reasonable immigration policy, we need to start by straightening the record on these two issues.

But we know that this is not enough. Beyond controlling immigration, beyond reducing unauthorized entries, is the question of governing immigration. Immigrants will keep coming. And we will keep needing them; indeed under current fertility and legal immigration levels, by the end of the century the U.S. will have almost 35 million fewer people. While this may seem a small loss compared to the estimated 70 million fewer in the EU, it is not insignificant.

Finally, at least for some of us, there is yet another step in the work of shaping an immigration policy that is fair and just to all involved. Beyond immigration policy and its possibilities lie questions of social justice and human rights. We need to forge a substantive conception of political membership for immigrants as well as for our marginalized citizens and our poor.

The Winners: arms dealers, (some) corporate employers, and smugglers

Immigration policy comprises many different, specialized regimes. Many of these regimes are working fine – visas for international business persons being one example. But it is the U.S.-Mexico border that has become the emblematic image for U.S. immigration policy. In the early 1990s, the U.S. government began escalating its effort to control that border. This escalation continues, with much attention going to the astounding array of technologies of control and the vast materiel deployed on that border.

Overlooked by much of the media, by politicians, by “experts,” and even by well-intentioned lefties is the fact that all the build-up of control technologies at the Mexico-U.S. border has failed to raise the number of apprehensions and reduce the number of entries. On the contrary, apprehensions are at an all time low and the total unauthorized population is an all time high.

A critical component in the escalation of border control has been the increase in the annual budget of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), which rose from \$200 million in

1986 to \$1.6 billion in 2005. The number of Border Patrol officers increased from around 2,500 in the early 1980s to around 12,000 today, making it the largest arms-bearing branch of the U.S. government, with the exception of the military itself. The Mexico-U.S. border is one of the most militarized borders in the world.

In what is at this point the most comprehensive and long-term study of border crossings between Mexico and the U.S., *Backfire at the Border*” Douglas S. Massey found the following simple facts:

- First, a sharp increase in the costs per arrest and a sharp decline in the level of apprehensions. Before 1992, the cost of making one arrest along the U.S.-Mexico border stood at \$300; by 2002, that cost had grown by 467% to \$1,700 and the probability of apprehension had fallen to a 40 year low. Whereas in the 1980s, the probability that an undocumented migrant would be apprehended while crossing stood at around 33 percent; by 2000 it was at 10 percent, despite increases in spending on border enforcement. [Escalating border control has redirected crossings away from traditional points to remote zones where risks are high but the likelihood of apprehension very low.]
- Second, the escalation of border control has raised the risks and costs of illegal crossing, which in turn has changed a seasonal circulatory migration – with workers leaving their families behind – into a family migration and long-term stays. The Border study established that in the early 1980s, about half of all undocumented Mexicans returned home within 12 months of entry. By 2000 the rate-of-return migration stood at just 25 percent. Thus, border militarization did not reduce the probability of illegal crossings on the US Mexico border while it reduced the likelihood of return to the home country.

So while billions and billions of tax dollars spent on militarizing the border have delivered fewer apprehensions, they have also deposited a larger and longer-term unauthorized population.

The Peculiar Absences in the Enforcement Effort

Enforcement of entry laws need not be confined to the geographic border. Insofar as employment is critical to potential immigrants, one would think that workplaces would be a priority.

Further, we now know that a good part of undocumented immigrants are actually lawful applicants who have jumped the queue by crossing the border illegally because for various reasons they cannot wait the 10 years it can take the INS to process applications. Thus, speeding up INS processing would be another critical place for the larger enforcement effort. Finally, an estimated 150,000 of the annual growth in the undocumented population over the last decade are visa overstayers: they enter with proper papers (student visas, tourist visas) and then simply stay on.

While one administration after another over the last 15 years has been seemingly happy to triple the budget for buying military equipment to secure the U.S.-Mexico border, such largesse has not been bestowed on workplace inspections, INS applications processing, or tracking visa overstayers. To be fair, some individuals in the government did try. Clinton's labor secretary, Robert Reich, was serious about raising minimum wages and expanding workplace inspections, but he got no serious backing and commitment from the administration.

Only about 2 percent of the INS budget is for employer sanction enforcement. And almost no sanctions have been imposed since the passing of this legislation as part of the 1984 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). What the government has done in responding to this failure of employers sanctions enforcement is to initiate the Basic Pilot Program, part of Homeland Security. It is an electronic search machine that combines Social Security and immigration databases to verify an employee's status. While today's program is small and voluntary, with about 6,000 employers enrolled, it at least allows for the possibility to extend it to each of the country's approximately 8 million employers. Violations of the law would subject employers to stiff fines, with jail sentences for repeat offenders. However, the program is problematic in technical and legal terms. This combination has brought a very mixed group – from civil rights organizations to big business – into a coalition against it. A Government Accountability Office report issued in August 2005 criticized the program for its inability to catch identity fraud, for flaws in the databases, and for the possibility that employers will abuse the system.

What would not be problematic in a technical and legal sense yet feasible and highly effective would be workplace inspections, especially in large corporate workplaces – agribusiness, meat packing houses, poultry farms, and the Wal-Marts of this world. We know that these types of firms employ undocumented workers, and they have enough staff to check on workers' documents. These are ready-made cases for employers' sanctions. As has been remarked many times, all the deployment at the border stops at a certain geographic distance – the large farms close to the border employing all these workers are not inspected. Instead, while we militarize the border to the great

delight of armaments makers who had no war to count on throughout the 1990s, little was or is being done about employers' sanctions.

Nor has much been done about raising the number (and pay) of workers processing visas and green cards. This is remarkable given that understaffing is a critical reason for the huge backlog that now stretches into many many years, thereby feeding some of the unauthorized immigration. How bad is the backlog? According to a report from the National Foundation for American Policy, the wait to receive green cards can stretch to more than five years for qualified skilled workers and professionals. For potential immigrants wanting to join family members in the United States, this wait can last from six to 12 years in India, and up to 14 years in the Philippines. The report blames some of this delay on the processing backlog and says that this could be solved with additional funding and hiring.

Finally, little if anything has been done about visa overstayers. Only one fifth of the work of INS inspectors concerns the annual addition of 150,000 visa overstayers.

All of these flaws go beyond party politics. This is the history of the last 20 years.

Why are these blanks in enforcement allowed, and in such extreme form, given all the strong words about controlling unauthorized immigration and given the annual 1.6 billion dollars spent on weaponizing the border?

At least part of the answer is rather straightforward. There are three critical differences between the investment in border control since the early 1990s and the three options discussed above. They concern buying materiel, lobbies and jobs. While this cannot be the full explanation, it is the case that regardless of political party, our government has repeatedly shown a strong reluctance to create jobs for inspecting workplaces. Over the last 20 years especially, workplace inspections generally have not been allocated the types of resources deployed on the border with Mexico. A second difference is the lobbying efforts in Congress. Armament makers and large corporate employers in agri-business, meat-packing and other sectors known to employ significant numbers of undocumented workers operate powerful lobbies. INS inspectors and green card processors, and large sectors of the workforce, do not. Finally, there is the electoral-and-public opinion machinery: weaponizing a border makes for better footage and a better story than does hiring more INS inspectors and green card processors.

The Reality of the Border

There is a strong contrast, and possibly contradiction, between the project of militarizing border control and the reality of the border zone. The Border Study reports the following figures for 2004: 175,000 legal immigrants entered the U.S. from

Mexico, along with 3.8 million visitors for pleasure, 433,000 visitors for business, 118,000 temporary workers and dependents, 25,000 intra-company transferees and dependents, 21,000 students and dependents, 8,400 exchange visitors and dependents, and 6,200 traders and investors. On the other hand, 1 million Americans live in Mexico, 19 million travel there each year as visitors, and U.S. foreign direct investment in Mexico now totals \$62 billion annually. Trade with Mexico grew by a factor of eight from 1986 to the present.

More difficult to measure but still very real are the multiple crossborder networks connecting people from both sides of the border, which go beyond physical border crossings. Similarly, this social and economic reality underlines the impossibility of rounding up 12 million undocumented workers and deporting them. It may well be that the only way to handle the matter is with a general amnesty.

Furthermore, when it comes to specific immigration channels, the government has had no trouble designing workable policies. The system has worked well for the creation, implementation and governing of specialized visas for international business people, for high level professionals, and so on. NAFTA contains mini-migration policies that cover the cross-border movement and multi-year residencies of foreign professionals. This is not presented as immigration policy but rather submerged into each of the main chapters – on finance, on specialized services, on telecommunications, and so on. It obscures a critical feature of today's global economy: that cross-border trade and investment require mobile workers. By recoding this migration in the language of investment and trade, the built-in necessity for this migration is lost in the debate about immigration.

But the permeability is also there with lower level workers, from cleaners and nannies to gardeners and restaurant workers, many of whom cross every day, or come for the work week. The permeability of the border even with fairly low-wage workers can be illustrated through one particular case, though there are more. Every year the U.S. imports nurses which is a terrible loss for the source countries. The American Hospital Association reports large numbers of vacancies every year – 118,000 in 2006 and growing. Congress has regularly raised the numbers of visas to import nurses, with 50,000 additional annual visas for nurses in 2005.

But there is another side to the story: every year, nursing education institutions in the U.S. have to reject 150,000 students in the U.S. who apply for nursing school. The reason is insufficient nursing teachers, in part due to the low pay of these teachers. The American Nurses Association, a professional trade association that represents 155,000 registered nurses, opposes the import of nurses from developing countries and calls for the expansion of teaching personnel.

The Larger Picture

U.S. immigration policy-makers have chosen to concentrate much of their resources on particular aspects – the border with Mexico – and not on others – workplace violations.

If we take these features of immigration policy, rather than the presence of immigrants in our country, there are some clear winners but overall many losers.

The winners include armament makers, large corporate employers in particular sectors of the economy that tend to employ significant numbers of undocumented, various types of lobbies, employers of undocumented immigrants generally insofar as employers' sanctions are not seriously enforced, and the growing numbers of smugglers whose fees and whose business have increased sharply as our policies have made border crossing more difficult and risky. We might add to the winners the Border Patrol with its increased numbers and weaponry – although many patrol officers don't like what is happening.

The losers include citizens whose taxes are paying for a far larger and costlier border control operation that is not even reducing illegal crossings – the intended policy outcome. The losers also include the migrants themselves whose crossings have become far more difficult, dangerous, sometimes deadly as well as costly given the greater need for using a smuggler. And they include the INS inspectors who have not seen sharp increases in their numbers and resources to enforce employers' sanctions, and the overworked and understaffed processing units at the INS.

If there is a major division in the reality produced by our excessive concentration on militarizing the border and our decision to overlook workplace regulation, it is not so much between citizens and immigrants but rather between those with resources and those without. One simple way of saying it is that the division is between those who have powerful lobbies and those who basically have no lobbies.

Thus the overall tally suggests that this peculiar mix of enforcement and laxity has worked well, and in that sense might be seen as good policy, especially for those who can afford lobbies to fight for their interests and who can profit from control weaponry or armies of low wage workers, including underpaid technical specialists such as imported nurses. Our policy has not worked well for low-wage workers themselves – not only undocumented workers, but also regular low-wage workers whose pay is stagnating, including INS workers. Nor has it worked well for the larger societal project of creating new jobs.

But the problems go deeper. Some of the direct effects of border control policy are unacceptable from normative perspectives – whether these are social justice norms, human rights norms, or religious values, among others. Because of our militarized border we are now witnessing a rising number of deaths among illegal crossers, with almost 500 deaths reported

in 2005 alone. These are people in search of work to support their families. For some among us, these deaths are unacceptable.

Such deaths become even more tragic when we know that there are other, better, simpler ways of governing migration. But these involve creating vast numbers of new jobs for workers to inspect workplaces and to process legal immigration applications. And they involve raising salaries of farm workers, meat packers, the cleaners of hotel chains, and many others. All of this would level the field among workers but also for governing immigration. Instead, the current policy creates monstrous distortions – from using billions and billions of tax dollars to buy materiel from weapons procurers to the growing degradation of large numbers of low-wage workers who are legal immigrants and citizens. Relocating the sites for enforcement away from the border and the immigrant body and on to workplaces and employers would be a good start.

Saskia Sassen is Ralph Lewis Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago and Centennial Visiting Professor at the London School of Economics. She has written extensively on immigration, cities, global capitalism and electronic markets. Her most recent book is Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages (Princeton University Press 2006).



Immigration rights demonstrators, Los Angeles, March 25, 2006.

What's Wrong with the Immigration Bill? Plenty!

by Herb Shore, San Diego DSA

In early June, the United States Senate passed an immigration bill that is not as bad as the draconian, xenophobic House bill HR 4437 (the infamous “Sensenbrenner” bill). Among the provisions of that terrible piece of legislation, undocumented immigrants and those who help them would be declared felons and subject to immediate arrest and prosecution. The proud, hard-working immigrant community responded in mass outrage at this declaration that they are a community of criminals. This outrage engendered a massive immigrants’ rights movement.

The Senate bill contains some of the provisions of the House version, such as the attempt to fence off the U.S. border with Mexico. However, the Senate bill is not as single-mindedly punitive as HR 4437. It contains a complicated (and unworkable) path to citizenship for some undocumented immigrants and “guest worker” provisions, as advocated by the Bush administration. Most Democrats voted for it. It is hard to see how the Senate and House versions can be reconciled; a significant part of the immigrants’ rights movement feels that the preferable outcome is no bill at all.

The House leadership, recognizing that its solely punitive bill cannot pass both chambers, has now announced that it will spend the summer holding hearings on the immigration issue around the country. This undoubtedly will amount to a right-wing nativist attempt to harness popular economic

Acknowledgments

DSA gratefully acknowledges a very generous gift from the estate of Norman Nemor. Norman joined DSA in 1995—like many others, in response to a direct mail letter signed by Ed Asner that he received from us. He told us that domestic social justice, the environment, health care, and racism were issues that he cared the most about. During the ten years he was a part of DSA, Norman was only able to financially support DSA modestly, so his very generous bequest was unexpected, and we are all the more grateful for the trust that it represents. We will do our very best to carry on the struggle for those core values the he and we believe in.

We are also grateful to T.S. Holman for remembering us in his will. A long-time DSA member from New Jersey, he attended many of our events and meetings over the years. It never seemed to matter if it was in Washington, DC, or New York City—he was always there.

Legacy gifts, whether in the form of a bequest in a will or as a beneficiary of an insurance policy, enable DSA members to ensure that our vision and values continue long after we are gone. If you have not made DSA part of your final plans, please consider doing so.

insecurity to the anti-immigrant bandwagon of the fall 2006 Republican Congressional campaigns.

Still, the Senate bill has become the focus of much of the debate around immigration. What follows is a contribution to that debate.

Legalization of undocumented workers currently in the U.S.

There is a strong socialist argument that we are obligated to provide a path to citizenship for undocumented workers from Mexico in particular, the reason being that United States economic policy is primarily responsible for their being here.

According to the Pew Hispanic Center (www.pewhispanic.org), about 2.5 million “unauthorized” migrants resided in the U.S. in 1989. In 2005, the number surpassed eleven million. Massive immigration from Mexico only began after the passing of NAFTA in early 1994. NAFTA was responsible for destroying traditional small-scale Mexican agriculture via the competition of subsidized U.S. agribusiness. This competition from cheap American agricultural products forced people off the land and drove many north as a last resort. Many former peasants came to look for work in the maquiladora industry, and when many of those jobs were exported to China, they were driven further north into the US.

This is a problem we created, and therefore we have a responsibility for fixing it. People cannot be called criminals when they have been forced through no fault of their own to seek honorable work abroad in order to survive.

Physically sealing off the border to unauthorized crossing

Securing the border is impossible. The Pew Hispanic Center uses the term “unauthorized” rather than “undocumented” for an interesting reason: about 40-50 percent of the eleven million people who are not currently authorized to be in the U.S. actually have documents, but those documents are no longer valid. These people came here legally and either overstayed their visa or border-crossing card, or in some other way violated their initially legal terms of admission. Others had the means to plan their crossing at regular entry points with the help of family members already in the U.S. When I enter the U.S. from Tijuana as a pedestrian, I show my California driver’s license to the immigration officer and am waved on in about 5 seconds. Thousands of people who live in Mexico work in the U.S. and cross the border daily. Occasional attempts to make the border crossing “more secure” immediately result in huge lines and multi-hour delays. Since the San Diego-Tijuana region is really an integrated economic unit, the resulting howls of protest from the United States business community and the tourist industry result in things “getting back to normal” in a few days.

Building fences at the open areas of the U.S.-Mexico border will prevent some people from crossing; but such plans are being presented primarily for internal, political advantage rather than as practical steps for reducing unauthorized immigration.

The real problem at the open border areas is that thousands of people have died attempting to cross. We should support those religious and human rights groups that try to rescue and provide support for people attempting the crossing.

Guest worker programs and legal immigration

The proposed guest worker programs are a form of indentured servitude. Most of the labor movement opposes these programs and so should socialists. In the Canadian version of a guest worker program, the employer provides housing, transportation in and out of the country, etc. The guest worker is tied to a particular job and particular employer. This is indentured servitude in every sense of the word.

The real problem is that the U.S. entices or effectively forces low skilled workers to emigrate here to seek work but then uses their undocumented and insecure status to inhibit them from exercising the rights of other workers. The formal immigration system as currently constituted does not correspond at all to the actual pattern of immigration into the country. It is both impossible and immoral to try to eliminate the immigration of low-skilled immigrants into the U.S., as required by current U.S. immigration law. The proper way to deal with the need for low-skilled labor in the U.S. is to create an immigration quota for these categories of immigrants so that people who enter the country in a normal, legal manner can fill these jobs. Only then, when the formal system bears some relation to reality, will it be possible to reasonably regulate this category of immigration. Legal status for all low-wage workers would enable them to organize for better working and living conditions (as well as an increase in the skill level of their work).

Thus, socialists should advocate a robust welcoming immigration system with the development of support mechanisms for education, housing, health, English language instruction, and social services so that new immigrants can become part of the U.S. mainstream as soon as possible. Only if they do will the standard of living and working conditions of all workers in the United States improve.

Visit Our Web Site:
www.dsausa.org

Socialism — Now More than Ever!

by Joseph M. Schwartz

Is the task of building a socialist organization still relevant to the politics of 21st-century America?



The answer remains a resounding yes, if there is to be any hope of reigning in the power of global corporate elites who maintain despotic control over powerful transnational institutions created by the interdependent work of thousands. Corporate leaders understand that anti-socialism, particularly in the United States, remains the most potent ideological weapon against deepening democracy in the political sphere and extending it into the economic arena.

Democratic socialists understand that to fulfill the aims of the democratic revolutions of the late 18th and 19th centuries – and the anti-colonial struggles of the 20th – democracy must be extended into all institutions that have binding power over their members. Corporations are precisely such authoritative structures of power. Corporate decisions are not made by individuals bargaining in a “free market,” but by the command authority of managers and owners. Nor are transnational corporations’ actions the result of “shareholder democracy.” Over the last 50 years, institutional shareholders have emerged as the largest formal owners of corporate capital. These pension, insurance, and mutual funds are the savings of working people, although the rank-and-file fund investors rarely govern these socially created pools of capital. A major part of the democratic socialist project is to achieve the democratic governance of this social wealth.

Arguments against extending democracy into the economic and cultural arena mirror those originally made against political democracy: ordinary people cannot understand complex issues; they are too emotional; they are not rational. Of course there would be a role for experts, scientists, and civil servants in a democratic socialist society. But all small “d” democrats believe in popular control over authority and expertise.

While democratic control of economic and cultural life is the ultimate goal of democratic socialism, the popular mind most identifies our politics with the welfare state. One might question whether an economy ever has been (and can be) governed democratically. And intelligent people can differ as to the proper relationship among markets, democratically governed firms, and democratic planning in a humane system of production. Such a balance will change with time and experience. But ample historical evidence already exists that absent a democratic state providing for basic human needs, capitalism fosters inhumane levels of social inequality.

For all citizens to flourish in democratic societies, they must have equal access to high-quality, equitably financed education, health care, child-care, and housing. Similarly, only through democratic state forms of social insurance can citizens protect themselves against the vicissitudes of the market and of living, such as unemployment, illness, disability, and old age. More robust and extensive forms of public provision (particularly for health care, child care, and guaranteed vacation time) is the major reason why today the levels of inequality are lower in Northern Europe than in the United States, and why the quality of life for the average working family in Northern Europe is superior to that of its United States counterpart.

It is no accident that the two advanced industrial societies with the weakest forms of social insurance are both characterized by a history of legalized racial apartheid and official anti-socialist ideology. Among the most affluent countries in the world, only South Africa and the United States do not have comprehensive national health care systems. A relatively robust welfare state, funded through equitable taxation, remains the major achievement of post-World War II social democracy in Western Europe, New Zealand, Australia, and elsewhere.

The creation of the welfare state owes a great deal to the militancy of late 19th- and 20th-century labor movements and social democratic parties. Strong union power characterized most of the advanced industrial democracies of the 1960s, with union density (the percentage of workers represented by unions) twice as high as today. Only after the 1973 oil crisis did the ensuing stagnation in post-World-War-II economic growth give rise to serious conservative attacks on the welfare state. And the stagflation of the 1970s (simultaneous high unemployment and inflation rates) did result in part from the post-WWII gains in working people’s living standards. But by the 1970s, the United States economy faced increased economic competition, as the West German and Japanese economies recovered fully from the devastation of World War II, and the newly industrializing countries of East Asia began to dominate basic industries such as steel, shipbuilding, and consumer electronics.

As a result, transnational corporations saw their profits squeezed and became reluctant to make new investments. With a strong socialist perspective, the European left responded by demanding social control of investment – either by nationalization or popular control of pension and insurance funds. This new “Eurosocialism” – a program of worker and state control of enterprise – arose as a radical alternative to the moderate program of 1960s welfare-state social democracy. This

vision guided the first two years of the socialist government of Francois Mitterand that came to power in France in May 1981. But after massive French capital flight and parliamentary losses in spring 1983 compelled a shift to centrist policies on the part of the Mitterand regime, the right's neo-liberal alternative came to power in much of the democratic capitalist world – and in a particularly vicious form in Reagan's America and Thatcher's England. The right's alternative program aimed to restore corporate profits by cutting taxes, weakening unions, deregulating the economy, and gutting the welfare state. Labor, environmental, and consumer and occupational health and safety movements also limited corporate profits, so they had to be weakened as well.

In short, during the 1960s, the mainstream liberal-left in the United States assumed, as did European social democrats, that vigorous capitalist growth would continue forever. But unlike the Europeans, when confronted with a crisis, the U.S. left had no alternative conception of productive economic investment to counterpose to the right's plans for restoring the profitability of private capital.

Due to the hegemony of corporate ideology in the United States,

Corporate leaders understand that anti-socialism, particularly in the United States, remains the most potent ideological weapon against deepening democracy in the political sphere and extending it into the economic arena.

mainstream liberal politicians never placed on the political agenda an alternative model of economic growth in the service of human needs – hence the right wing dominance of our politics. (Never mind that the right's nostrums of balance-the-budget fiscal conservatism were repeatedly violated in practice by Reagan's and both Bushes' upwardly-redistributive "military Keynesianism" – massive tax cuts for the rich and huge government deficits driven by military spending.)

In the United States and Britain, the two countries with the greatest faith in "the free market," the neo-liberal politics of "deregulation" and welfare state cuts dominate the programs of both major political parties to this day. Most continental Europeans continued to understand that the market is created and controlled by state regulation. Yet even in Western Europe, social democratic leaders have adopted moderate forms of "third way" politics of deregulation, labor "flexibility," and cuts in government spending. U.S.-dominated global capitalist institutions (the IMF, World Bank, and WTO) imposed this "Washington consensus" upon developing nations in the 1980s and 90s.

Democratic Party leaders never called for steering corporate and public investment into environmentally and economically efficient systems of mass transit, or retrofitting industrial production to make it environmentally benign and energy efficient. (The Katrina disaster reveals the cost of our nation's

long-term failure to replace aging infrastructure and to build affordable housing.) Instead, the national Democratic Party leadership has naturalized the neo-liberal policy consensus.

What mainstream Democratic leader talks of cutting our bloated military budget, even though the United States spends more than the combined military budgets of the next 10 major military powers? We could maintain reasonable defense commitments and curtail terrorism at home and abroad while cutting the defense budget by half. Democratic political leaders also believe they cannot successfully attack the regressive nature of the Reagan and Bush tax cuts. Liberals (how many of them still exist?) can no longer explain the moral and economic logic of the welfare state. When was the last time a Democratic leader explained the roles of progressive taxation and a vigorous, efficient public sector in securing equal social rights for all citizens?

By restoring progressive income and wealth taxes to 1979 levels, we would generate an additional \$700 billion in annual revenue; that, plus \$200 billion from defense cuts, would let us

increase national public expenditure by one-third and devote the funds to obvious social needs in health care, child

care, elder care, housing, basic infrastructure, and education. But we do not hear politicians making these demands, even though the United States is now the most inegalitarian of the 35 members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Absent a vigorous labor and social democratic presence in American politics these realities will continue to be ignored.

The other key element of American politics that contributed to the dominance of the neo-liberal policy is the right's use of racial – and racist – political appeals. The right arose as a majority formation – with backing from a significant portion of the white working class – as a backlash against the Great Society's attempt to treat people of color as equal citizens. Few are taught that the New Deal deliberately excluded African-Americans and Latinos from its core programs. Domestic workers and farm workers (mostly Blacks, Asians, and Latinos) were consciously excluded from the New Deal programs in order to appease powerful southern Democratic congressional leaders.

In addition, the GI Bill and the federal mortgage guarantee programs – the greatest "affirmative action" programs for the white working class – excluded Blacks and Latinos. People of color were simultaneously segregated out of the suburbs and excluded as "too risky" from federal mortgage guarantee programs. And the segregation of universities in southern and border states, where the majority of African Americans still resided after World War II, meant there were insufficient places

in integrated universities and historically Black colleges to absorb all the Black veterans who desired to take advantage of the GI Bill. Thus, the moderate affirmative action programs of the late 1960s onwards resulted, in part, from the earlier exclusion of people of color from the New Deal's social programs and post-World War II veterans' benefits.

Canada has a single-payer national health insurance system in which provincial governments supplant private insurers as the sole, efficient, finance and administrative arm of a health care system whose providers remain in the nonprofit and private sector. Experiments in provinces governed by socialists paved the way for this system; the parliamentary system of Canada enabled the New Democratic Party to participate in national coalition governments and lead provincial governments in the western states. Add the political leaven of a labor movement (whose density – the percentage of workers represented by unions – is twice that of its United States counterpart) and the social democratic New Democratic Party that garners 15-20 percent of the national vote, and one gets a “normal,” more humane democratic capitalist society than that of the United States. That is, Canadian social policy is more similar to that of Northern European welfare states than to the more market-oriented, “neo-liberal” United States. While neo-liberal cuts in provincial funding have led to queuing problems for elective surgeries in some provinces, polls consistently show that over 90 percent of Canadians prefer their national health care system to the private system of the United States. And Canada devotes only 11 percent of its GDP to health care, while the inefficient United States system devotes 16 percent.

The “white backlash” against affirmative action, busing, and (very limited) housing integration of the mid-late 1960s arose in part as a result of these programs being instituted at the very onset of de-industrialization and the stagnation of working class living standards. White working class ethnics, who had achieved the “American dream” only in the 1950s, feared downward mobility in the 1970s. Without a competing explanation of the economic crisis as a product of corporate efforts to squeeze the working class and restore the rate of profit, many working class whites bought into the reactionary narrative that economic stagnation resulted from high taxes and a “bloated” welfare state.

Another component of this narrative blamed affirmative action and “welfare” for the inability of the white working and middle class to reproduce intergenerationally their postwar upward mobility. AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) never cost more than one-half of one percent of the Federal budget, nor more than 3 percent of state and local expenditure. But many swing voters believed that “welfare” constituted a significant part of the Federal budget. And the typical welfare mother came to be viewed as an indolent, inattentive woman of color, addicted to child rearing on an overly generous dole. In reality, the typical mother on welfare was white and the average number of children for welfare mothers was no higher than that for non-welfare mothers. And apart from the 20 percent or so of welfare recipients who had long-term dependency issues, the vast majority of welfare recipients had considerable histories of employment in the formal labor market. Most AFDC recipients used the funds as a temporary form of maternity leave to enable them to parent pre-school children; and they still had to earn money off the books in the informal economy to supplement their meager welfare provisions. Yet the Democratic Party leadership consistently failed to confront openly the right's manipulative use of racial stereotypes.

Is there a political alternative to the idea that “there is no alternative” to the unrestrained “free market” that so dominates our politics today?

We can take hope from the variety of social movements fighting in favor of “democratic globalization.” Around the globe, social movements organize against the “race-to-the-bottom” economic model of global capitalism and creatively try to “raise the floor” under working-class living standards. French students and union militants today resist government efforts to institute a two-tiered American-style labor market in which younger workers can be fired “at will,” while school teachers in Oaxaca, Mexico, strike to maintain their standard of living and adequate school funding.

Across Latin America the energy of such movements (often centered in indigenous communities) has directly contributed to left electoral victories. The election of progressive governments by coalitions of working and middle class voters in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia and Venezuela (and perhaps Mexico in early July) represent a popular backlash against the disastrous policies of the Washington consensus. So do working-class and other social movements calling for international labor and environmental standards and the democratization of global economic regulatory institutions.

Argentina's freeing itself from foreign debt and growing its economy through increased regional trade (along with notable experiments in worker ownership) indicates that democratic regional economic cooperation aimed at leveling up living standards (modeled on the experience of the European Union) could pose a viable alternative to the Washington consensus – although the moderate fiscal and monetary policies of Lula's presidency in Brazil and the African National Congress government in South Africa remind us that the dependence of developing regimes on foreign capital constrains policymakers.

Anti-neo-liberal movements bubble up continuously, even in the belly of the neo-liberal beast, the United States – the fights for immigrant rights, for the right to organize (a democratic right that no longer exists in the United States), and to force Wal-Mart and other low-wage employers to pay living wages and provide decent health insurance. The list goes on.

Some activists believe that we can construct global democratic economic cooperation that levels up living and environmental standards via “movements in civil society” that abjure state power. But given that international economic regulatory institutions are constructed by (dominant) states, the global economic order cannot be restructured absent progressive political parties coming to power in key advanced industrial democracies as well as in the developing world. The United States, Europe, and Japan are likely to have a predominant voice in global economic institutions for some time to come. And democratic movements cannot control the power of global corporations absent the regulatory power of states, which will need to coordinate their policies on a global scale. Therefore, the most profound responsibility facing internationalists in the U.S. is to transform the nature of mainstream American politics.

So why has it been so difficult for grassroots anti-corporate movements to achieve an electoral expression in the U.S.? In large part this is due to our “democratic deficit.” American political discourse is severely curtailed by corporate dominance of campaign finance and corporate control of the mass media. We have a cartel system of two parties that raise money from the same corporate interests. The Democrats raise money from the “liberal” wing of corporate America – Wall Street finance houses, the “infotainment” industry (Hollywood and Silicon Valley), and real estate – and depend upon smaller contributions from upper-middle class and professional people who are liberal on social issues but certainly not “left” on socio-economic policy. The labor movement is the only funding source with a social democratic economic agenda, but absent a revival in union density, labor’s political influence cannot but decline. And until there is genuine public financing of campaigns and democratic political access to the mass media for political parties and social movements, the United States will remain devoid of political parties that reflect the interests of popular social movements.

Given the open nature of American primaries, the absence of proportional representation, and a system of checks and balances that necessitates parties achieving both legislative and executive power if they are to change public policy, most serious electoral insurgency will continue to occur within the two major parties and not from without. The line on the ballot that insurgent political movements choose to use will likely remain a pragmatic tactical question and not one of fundamental principle. Whether supra-majorities could be mobilized to amend state and national constitutions to implement proportional representation is an open

question, but what all progressives can agree upon is the need for public financing of political campaigns and militant efforts to expand, rather than constrict, the suffrage. And as Ned Lamont’s primary challenge to incumbent neo-liberal, pro-war Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman demonstrates, insurgent primary challenges to right-wing Democrats remain possible, even under our relatively undemocratic system of electoral laws.

How does the above analysis argue in favor of continuing the everyday work of building a mainstream socialist organization in the United States? The right will attack the vision of democracy from below as “socialism.” Private health care interests continue to scream, “We don’t want socialized medicine like in Canada!” Until a democratic socialist movement educates enough of our fellow citizens to respond, “So what’s wrong with socialized medicine?!” it will remain impossible to achieve the humane policies of social democracy in the United States.

Our political system can never redress rapidly growing socio-economic and racial inequality without reintroducing progressive taxation; a vibrant, accountable, and expanded public sector; a revitalized commitment to infrastructure investment; and expanded social insurance. (How else to share the vulnerabilities of a baby boom about to hit old age?)

Mainstream politicians all talk about the need for equal opportunity for higher education. Yet they never address the economically and racially stratified nature of our entire educational system, from pre-K to university (nor do they discuss the radical underpayment of teachers and child-care workers). Education, as currently structured and financed in the United States, reproduces class inequality rather than eroding it. Our leading state and private institutions draw about 10 percent of their students from homes in the bottom half of family incomes. Families in the top economic decile make up the vast majority of students not only at the most selective private colleges and universities, but also at top-tier public universities such as the University of Michigan, University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Wisconsin. Until we have equitable democratic financing of public goods – and far greater racial and class residential integration – the American dream of equality of opportunity will remain just that – a dream.

Socialists have a major job to do. Today, transnational corporations dictate the structure of global economics, politics, and culture. Until popular movements democratize these corporate structures, the promise of democracy will remain unfulfilled. And democratizing economic and political power remains the essence of democratic socialism.

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Naming the Beast or Whistling Past the Graveyard

by Michael Hirsch

The democratic left's socialist context went missing. If anyone spots it, please call or instant message. We can even put the appeal on milk cartons.

It was not always thus. Forget about the glory days of pre-war socialism, or the red decade of the thirties or even the sober, literary '50s. In April 1965, Paul Potter, then the president of SDS, said the mission of the new radical movement confronting American power was to "name that system. We must name it," he said, "describe it, analyze it, understand it and change it. For it is only when that system is changed and brought under control that there can be any hope for stopping the forces that create a war in Vietnam today or a murder in the South tomorrow or all the incalculable, innumerable (and) more subtle atrocities that are worked on people all over – all the time."

Forty-one years after Potter made that speech on a perfect spring day in Washington when everything seemed possible, as he addressed 25,000 young antiwar protestors (an unheard of number who effectively launched the antiwar movement nationwide), Potter's mandate is still the goal of democratic socialists: naming, describing, analyzing, understanding, organizing, and changing.

SDS said the enemy was corporate liberalism. Looking back, corporate liberalism in its Great Society garb, in its efforts to ensure social peace and even wage a war on poverty, seems enlightened and even kind, at least compared to the contemporary fang and claw ethos.

Today, the enemy's name is neo-liberalism. That is the political ideology that capitalism dresses in and articulates its policies now. It was in the 1970s that Margaret Thatcher opined that there was no such thing as "society," only grubbing individuals engaged in cementing short-term contracts and where the market, not the family or the community or the class, was the instrument of individual choice.

It's a world, says anthropologist David Harvey, in which "deregulation, privatization and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision is common." And not just in the United States and Britain, but even in France. And Italy. And Germany. And the Scandinavian countries and New Zealand, once the models of welfare-state largesse.

That's the ideology that says: replace defined benefit pensions with defined contributions. It says charter schools and vouchers are preferable to public schools. It says rent regulation stymies housing starts. It says government should not be responsible for health care delivery. It says job security and labor rights constrain competition in a global market, and that labor market "flexibility" is paramount.

It's the logic behind this year's Economic Report of the President, which stupidly brags that the administration will "restrain government spending to reduce the budget deficit," but only for non-military spending. And it will jumpstart an economic boom – at least it will try – by outsourcing jobs, driving wages down, hunting unions to extinction and despoiling the environment.

Neo-liberalism is the rough beast lurking behind every social problem. It's the demon haunting...health care, education and housing. And we could add it's also responsible for U.S. military policy and growing income inequality.

Under neo-liberalism, women are freed to work even as retirement becomes impossible.

Under neo-liberalism, the state no longer manages discontent with ample jobs, placated labor leaders, social welfare provisions, and a guns and butter economy. Now the state exacerbates that discontent. It's all guns, and the butter's gone bad.

Under neo-liberalism it's the capitalists who are the revolutionaries, fulfilling Marx's observation that everything sacred is profaned.

Well, where are the good guys?

In Latin America, global capitalism is taking a beating from insurgent movements and

progressive governments. In Europe, French students and unions beat back an effort to end job security and create a substandard youth wage. French and Danish voters rejected the European Union constitution, and British railroad workers battled their own Labour Party government over pension rights. And yes, the U.S. occupation of Iraq is unraveling.

But here at home, the forces confronting neo-liberalism are fragmented, and mostly defensive. Battles for health care, housing and education, for example, have their own advocates, their own strategies, and make their own trips to the well. Any advocate of education knows children cannot learn without adequate housing and good health care, and each of the issues overlaps the others like circles on a Venn diagram. Yet their armies march alone.

Unionists and environmentalists rarely agree. The trade unions, representing less than 12 percent of the U.S. workforce, still don't support a thoroughly democratic foreign policy, though the vote last July at the AFL-CIO convention calling for rapid withdrawal from Iraq was historic and welcome.

The U.S. peace movement's opposition to the Iraq war condemns its illegality and its immorality, but rarely that the war machine is being the logical outcome of imperial interests.

The point is: of those confronting capital, too few see their particular issues as manifestations of larger, systemic problems.



The social movements resemble competing mendicants. The resistance is Balkanized, and so is its thinking.

That's why it's so great that David Harvey refers in his new book, *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism*, to the free market creed as "the reconstitution of class power." As Harvey says, "If it looks like class struggle and acts like class war, then we have to name it unashamedly for what it is. "We either resign ourselves "to the historical and geographical trajectory defined by overwhelming and ever increasing upper class power, or respond to it in class terms."

Responding in class terms? Our social movements wonder if class is even a viable category for explaining contemporary politics. That's a puzzlement our rulers and our betters do not share.

The Democratic Party, as the opposition party, should be addressing this reality. It isn't. With the exception of a few brave souls like Russ Feingold, its leaders are keeping their heads down, waiting for the Bush regime to implode.

Punchy liberal bloggers obsess over 2008 presidential election prospects as if electoral tactics were the Great Oz; they're not looking behind the curtain. When Hillary Clinton dodges and weaves on life and death questions, too many Bush-hating liberals justify it, saying she's all we've got. Even New York's Working Families Party is poised to endorse her.

Intellectually, resistance is flabby, too. The hot books Bush critics are touting, Francis Fukuyama's retreat from neoconservatism and Kevin Phillips' demolition of the Religious Right – and they are worth reading – don't look at capitalism as a system. Nor should these basically conservative writers be expected to carry our water for us, even if it is thrilling to find conservatives who aren't self-serving or insane.

Another bugbear of mine: the lionizing of the late New Frontier warhorse John Kenneth Galbraith in *The Nation*, in *In These Times* and even in *Counterpunch* and the DSA member listserve. Galbraith was a decent man who titillated Cambridge's sherry-drinking set by calling himself a socialist. But the closest he ever came to working-class self-activity was watching his plumber snake a drain.

Who is coming up with an alternative economic strategy that can roll back the class power David Harvey so brilliantly describes? We need our own thinkers, our own critics, our own activists.

Meanwhile, working people are not standing still, waiting for orders. Work stoppages are up nationwide. The Transport Workers Union fought for respect in New York and a living wage. Northwest Airlines mechanics and cleaners went out, as did Boeing aircraft workers and California hospital workers.

Delphi, the GM parts supplier, wants to declare bankruptcy as a way to escape its union contract; its workers are fighting back. Custodians at the University of Miami forced their employer to accept card check, no thanks to Donna Shalala, the university president and Bill Clinton's HHS secretary.

"Some of the biggest labor success stories of 2005 were made by predominantly immigrant farm workers," writes Chris

Kutalik in *Labor Notes*. "The Coalition of Immokalee Workers' successful Taco Bell boycott and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee's 5,000-worker organizing victory in North Carolina broke new ground for immigrant labor organizing," he reports.

Ditto for the 2 million who marched for immigrant rights last month. And U.S. Labor Against the War shows promise of creating and nurturing a core of unionists who can and do connect shopfloor problems to international issues.

This is all great stuff.

It's not enough.

Because if we socialists don't emphasize class and commonalities, and don't make these run like red threads through all our work, and don't help the movements we support see commonalities and find common work, we run the risk of losing, again. The neo-liberals understand class and power and a unified message. Why not the left? Yes, we have to make the road by walking, but without a class perspective we're just making traffic circles.

Just for an example: Look at the charged debate over Israeli influence on U.S. policy: legitimate disgust with the Iraq adventure is taking the form of blaming Israel for the continued occupation. Now Israel – or more properly its ruling circles – has a lot to answer for, from its tribalism and its colonizing and Bantustaning the West Bank to its austerity assault on its own public sector workers. But the Iraq War isn't Israel's doing. The argument that a shadowy Jewish lobby controls US policy whitewashes the U.S., just as Noam Chomsky says.

Fingering Israel sidesteps taking on the real forces behind the war. Does anyone really believe the U.S. would ever back an ally if it meant going against its basic corporate and strategic interests? Not only is the charge that Israel plays U.S. puppeteer intellectual rubbish, it squanders opportunities to change U.S. and Israeli policies.

In his final book, *Whose Millennium? Theirs or Ours?* the French Marxist and *Nation* contributor Daniel Singer wrote, "We are not here to tinker with the world; we are here to change it."

Even if we only wanted to tinker, and incremental tinkering is all one can do in dark times, the other side won't let us.

Michael Hirsch is a New York City-based labor writer, a member of DSA's National Political Committee, and an editor of Democratic Left. These remarks were first given at New York DSA's annual convention May 13.

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Love Him, He's a Liberal

by Bill Mosley

The Truth (with Jokes). By Al Franken. Dutton, 2005. 307 pp.



Al Franken's left-of-center political musings have always combined the jocular with the serious, the lighthearted with the angry. His latest, *The Truth (with Jokes)*, takes a serious lurch to the heavy side. Perhaps this is his reaction to the way things have been going in American politics, especially the disappointing outcome of the 2004 election. Or it could reflect Franken's evolution from comedian and *Saturday Night Live* writer/cast member to his new role as an advocate of American liberalism, a founder and leading voice on the Air America radio network – and, as he reveals here, a possible candidate for Senate from Minnesota in 2008. Whatever the reason, Franken's new book is full of fighting words.

Like his two previous books – *Rush Limbaugh is a Big Fat Idiot* and *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them – The Truth* has plenty to say about the myth of the “liberal” media, taking on Fox News, Limbaugh and the “mainstream” media as well for being willing enablers of the Bush administration's warmongering, assaults on civil liberties and attacks on what remains of the social safety net. But *The Truth* ventures well beyond media criticism to take on the full range of abuses of the Bush administration and the Right, including invading Iraq without cause and then bungling the occupation, trying to kill Social Security, and running an election smear campaign against John Kerry. Yet despite Bush's ineptitude at governing and his contempt for most Americans, he captured a second term in the

White House for one reason – 9/11/01 – his “little black dress,” as Franken puts it, a rationalization he can slip into for any occasion. According to Franken, Bush is in office today because he played fear as his “ace in the hole,” convincing just enough Americans that only he could protect America from its enemies.

Franken makes no bones about his allegiances: He's a small-“l,” big-“D” liberal Democrat whose goal is to change the party in control of the White House and both houses of Congress (and, in good time, the Supreme Court as well). Kerry, he freely admits, made bulk purchases of this book, and Franken expresses bitter disappointment at his failure to capture the presidency. But Franken also takes the Democrats to task for allowing themselves to be victimized by Karl Rove's smear campaigns. “By slapping Kerry around continuously, the President was sending America the message that ‘Kerry is my bitch,’” a message Kerry only reinforced by failing to fight back, Franken says. Ultimately, however, he expresses faith that if the Democrats return to power, they will reverse eight years of Republican abuses and usher in, if not exactly the good society, at least a much better one than today – notwithstanding their failure to do so during their last window of opportunity in 1993-94. Looking beyond the confines of mainstream politics is not Franken's style.

Missing from *The Truth* are the extended comedic pieces featured in his previous books, notably the “Operation Chickenhawk” cartoons that improbably thrust a cast of warmongering draft dodgers – Bush, Limbaugh, Cheney and others – into “Sergeant Rock”-style combat action. The sole semi-fictional set piece here is a two-page riff on Bush's ride on a fighter jet to the aircraft carrier where he prematurely declared “Mission Accomplished” during the Iraq war. Before Bush strides across the carrier deck in flight suit and codpiece, Franken has

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Locals

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attracting students to those stores and away from Wal-Mart. The group cosponsored a showing of *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*, and had members appearing on college cable talk shows and publishing letters in the school paper blasting Wal-Mart's grotesque employment practices. **Chicago:** Attendees at the local's 48th annual Debs-Thomas-Harrington dinner heard keynote John Nichols predict that “this year is the end of [the Bush] administration. The only thing that stands in the way is the Democratic Party.” The local helped build the May Day Immigrants Rights march, sent a Chicago contingent to New York City's April 29 anti-war demonstration, turned out for the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' kick-off march and rally in Chicago, and supported striking workers at the Congress Hotel. The Greater Oak Park branch is pushing a \$9/hour minimum wage bill for non-tip employees before the Village Board. **Detroit:** Greater Detroit DSA began its seventh living wage campaign, this time in northwest suburban Pontiac. **East Bay:** The local held a well-attended public meeting with Committees

of Correspondence on the improving political scene in Latin America. Ron Dellums, long-time DSAer and former Congressman, is running for mayor of Oakland. **Ithaca:** The local's cable television show, *Ithaca DSA Presents*, promoted single-payer health insurance and car sharing, laid out class and race issues in the school board elections, and reported from the recent New York City anti-war demonstrations and from the local immigrant rights rally. **New York City:** At its May convention, the local endorsed Jonathan Tasini's progressive Senate primary campaign against Hillary Clinton, as well as candidates for state Senate and Congress. **Sacramento:** Working with the Progressive Alliance, the group helped build and participated in Sacramento's largest demonstration ever, as an overflow crowd of some 40,000 mostly Latino immigration-rights supporters extended more than eight blocks down the Capitol mall and into side streets. **San Diego:** DSA worked with the coalition that brought people to Los Angeles for that city's million-strong immigration rights march, literally producing and selling the van tickets. Some 300 San Diegans joined the DSA contingent, all this before the immigrants rights movement broke into the nation's consciousness. (See “Birth of a Movement,” on the DSA website)

Immigration Rights statement

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WTO on these nations also limits the number of good jobs in the urban economy of these developing nations. The same story can be told about African migration to the nations of the European Union.

In their inexorable search for cheap, exploitable wage labor, predominantly United States-owned transnational corporations have eliminated hundreds of thousands of maquiladora jobs in Mexico and moved them to Vietnam and China, where even more repressive states make labor cheaper and more vulnerable still. Thus, the neo-liberal model of corporate globalization, which strives for maximum profitability through ruthless cost cutting, succeeds in impoverishing labor around the world. It is that impoverishment which drives workers in developing nations to reluctantly seek marginally better life opportunities in advanced industrial nations. It is that impoverishment, and not the incoming workers, which is the problem.

The “push” for mass immigration from the developing world can only be stemmed if these economies are allowed to develop in equitable and internally integrated ways. Such development would require democratic national and international regulation of corporate power by free trade unions and democratic governments, as well as the democratization of international economic regulatory institutions. Only if the global economy is democratically controlled and structured in the interests of all the world’s peoples can we achieve full rights for working people in all societies.

The immigrant rights movement is the new civil rights movement of our time. Its demand for labor rights for all points to the reality that social justice for working people around the globe can only be achieved through the extension of democratic and labor rights both at home and abroad. Only by building a truly internationalist labor and democratic political movement can we turn a global capitalist world toward social justice.

Passed by DSA’s National Political Committee, May 2006

Franken

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him driving his pilot crazy by trying to seize the controls and claiming that “I was an ace fighter pilot when you were in diapers.” Franken’s comic riff captures Bush’s toxic combination of arrogance and incompetence better than any straight-faced op-ed ever could.

The contents of *The Truth* contain little that would be news to readers of *Democratic Left* – Bush used “fear, smears and

queers” to win the last election; the Republican Party works overtime to screw most Americans for the benefit of the rich; the neocons in control of the White House had decided to invade Iraq *before* 9/11 – and so on. But as poolside reading, it beats another slog through *The Da Vinci Code*. *The Truth (with Jokes)* packages political outrage with a leavening of humor to keep the pages turning and the left-of-center partisan juices boiling.

Bill Mosley is a Washington, DC activist and writer and a member of the Democratic Left editorial committee.

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