



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



*inside—*

*more on the elections  
special section on the Socialist International  
YDS conferences  
and more*

## Resolution on the 2008 Presidential Election



The November presidential election, now less than three months away, will mark the welcome end of the Bush-Cheney regime – one of the worst administrations in U.S. history.



The corporate-dominated media tainted the primary season by once again treating the campaigns as a series of horse races – where voters are encouraged to vote not for the candidate who best represents their interests and values, but rather for the candidate the media says is most likely to win. For the media to judge a candidate as having a “winning trajectory,” he or she must be among those raising the most contributions from corporate-connected individuals.

We have little hope that over the next three months the media will focus on the policy differences between Senators John McCain and Barack Obama. That is tragic, because there are major differences between the commitments of both candidates and their respective parties that need to be aired and understood, even if these differences are not as great as the democratic Left might like. Obama promises to restore to American workers the right to organize; to renegotiate international trade agreements so they enforce and do not retard labor, environmental, and human rights; to re-regulate the financial sector and end speculative excess; to bring troops home from Iraq and invest the saved funds in domestic needs; and to move toward universal health care. That’s a program worth electing a president on – or fighting for in the event the president and his party renege.

Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) holds a different view of electoral politics than that of the corporate media or even much of the Left. We see electoral politics as one means in a much broader struggle of grassroots democratic social movements to pressure the state to enact policies that address the needs of their constituencies and a wider public. The democratic reforms of both the New Deal (the Wagner Act, Social Security) and the Great Society (the civil rights acts, Medicare) did not derive from the beneficence of moderate presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson. In the case of FDR, his modest programs were substitutes for more radical policies supported by numerous Congress members but deemed not winnable by the president and congressional leaders. The limited reforms of the New Deal and Great Society were enacted because Congress and the president were forced to respond at least minimally to the demands of the mass social movements of the CIO and the civil rights upsurge.

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## Election

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DSA has long recognized that the corporate, neoliberal wing of the Democratic Party is not an ally for radical democratic change. Its support for NAFTA, similar destructive trade legislation, and cuts in government aid to low-income citizens in the face of growing poverty and income inequality; its fronting for corporate power and “free market” ideology; its resistance to allowing the party to make a systemic critique of the war in Iraq, the “war on terror,” or the corporate stranglehold on civil society put it on the other side of a widening political divide. While Obama’s largest funders come from this wing of the party, the social forces fueling his campaign – people of color, union activists, and anti-war Democrats – have long opposed the neoliberal stranglehold on the Democratic Party.

Thus, DSA has no illusion that a Democratic presidential victory, combined with bulked-up Democratic majorities in both houses of the Congress, will in itself bring about significant democratic reform. We do believe that such a political landscape would provide the most favorable terrain upon which mobilized, assertive social movements can pressure the government to appoint decent federal judges and agency administrators and enact desperately needed universal health care legislation, labor law reform, and a federally funded Marshall Plan to develop green technologies and green jobs.

Had the U.S. a genuine multiparty system, neoliberal positions would be held by a centrist party, and DSA would be organizing as part of a left electoral force against it. Given the U.S.’s restrictive election laws, the only electoral fight possible against corporate domination has to happen in and around the Democratic Party, on the federal, state, and (allowing for the rare exception) county and city levels.

An Obama presidency will not on its own force legislation facilitating single-payer health care (at least at the federal level) or truly progressive taxation and major cuts in wasteful and unneeded defense spending. But if DSA and other democratic forces can work in the fall elections to increase the ranks of the Congressional Progressive and Black and Latino caucuses, progressive legislation (backed by strong social movement mobilization) might well pass the next Congress.

Senator Barack Obama has attracted considerable support as a presidential candidate who promises to end “politics as usual.” He has invigorated a significant youthful, multiracial cadre of supporters, as well as gained considerable support from liberal activists. The massive outpouring of small contributions in support of his campaign signals the potential power of his message, and his recent call for a windfall profits tax on the oil companies is encouraging.

Yet his campaign has centered more around gestures and symbols than on concrete policy alternatives; and where he

has been concrete, as in health care, his plan falls short of universal coverage. And he often employs pro-market rhetoric to defend his programs and their failure to cover everyone.

While recognizing the critical limitations of the Obama candidacy and the American political system, DSA believes that the possible election of Senator Obama to the presidency in November represents a potential opening for social and labor movements to generate the critical political momentum necessary to implement a progressive political agenda. We know that a proactive and progressive government can come only on the heels of a broad coalition for social justice united against a reactionary Republicanism as well as a Democratic neoliberalism. Such a movement will also have to fight for a public finance system that can limit the power of corporate fundraising and lobbyists over both major political parties. Thus, DSA offers its Economic Justice Agenda and its “four pillars” as a framework for such a progressive policy agenda. This program calls for:

1. Restoring progressive taxation to the levels before the Reagan administration and enacting massive cuts in wasteful defense spending;
2. Enacting single-payer universal health insurance and expanding public initiatives in child care, elder care and pension security;
3. Passing the Employee Free Choice Act as part of a broader effort to rebuild a powerful labor movement capable of achieving equity in the labor market; and
4. Implementing a U.S. foreign policy that promotes global institutions that advance labor, environmental, and human rights and regulate transnational corporations.

True democracy is not about one woman or man promising change for the American public. That takes consistent pressure from below. Who holds the presidency does matter, if only as a more accessible target for pressure. A Democratic presidency and Congress would also create popular expectations that rising inequality and injustice will be curbed. If the Democrats frustrate those hopes (as they did in the early 1960s), mass mobilization is likely to grow rather than subside.

Nor should the Left be so involved in the national presidential campaign that it ignores the fall primaries and general election races for the U.S. House and Senate. We need more progressives in Congress as well as increased Democratic majorities.

The November election can’t be the end of a fight, but its beginning, and connections made on a local and national level leading up to November can position the Left to play a role in struggles to come.

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## From the National Director:

DSA is engaged in an intensive program of election-year activity. Earlier this year, we began the groundwork to organize a Renegotiate NAFTA campaign, in which we intend to get as many signatories as possible to a petition calling for the next administration to renegotiate NAFTA along principles of fair trade. Our approach is very similar to the trade legislation recently introduced by Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and others.

Members have responded by returning petitions with their signature and others that they have collected. We are making a push to collect signatures at Labor Day events this fall. To facilitate online signatures, we have established a website ([renegotiatenaftha.org](http://renegotiatenaftha.org)), which needs to be tweaked just a *little* bit more before we can begin a major effort online to get people to the site to sign the petition.

And we are not ignoring the election. DSA members around the country are involved in important congressional races as well as state legislative contests. Of course, everyone is focused to one degree or another on the presidential contest (see DSA's electoral statement on the front cover). In addition, the presidential contest provides us with another opportunity to work with Senator Bernie Sanders.

Sanders is organizing a series of events in Vermont and elsewhere that will enable him to speak out on the importance of the election. Four events have already been scheduled in Vermont. Says Bernie, "This November's election may well be the most important in our lifetime. It is imperative that we do everything we can to move this country in a very different direction from where George Bush has taken us." Bernie plans to highlight the importance of the election on the economy, job creation, health care, the environment, and education – and his message is sure to be clearer than the cautious rhetoric of the Obama campaign.

Bernie has asked for DSA's help, and we are responding by organizing a series of house parties that will financially support Progressive Voters of America, the political committee that will organize this campaign. As events are organized around the country, we will work with our members in local communities to ensure their success. So far, metropolitan New York and Chicago are hosting events. DSA members and friends who would like to help this campaign should mail a check payable to Progressive Voters of America to DSAPAC, 75 Maiden Lane #505, New York, NY 10038.

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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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# For Obama and Democratic Congressional Gains – Without Illusions

By Joseph M. Schwartz

For every U.S. radical eschewing electoral politics, there are more who share the dominant ideological view that electoral politics is the sole or highest form of political action. But electoral politics is only one manifestation of political life. Electoral outcomes and subsequent government policy derive from the balance of social forces and ideological trends in society. The Clinton administration, absent pressure from its left, governed from the center or center-right. It accelerated the deregulation of the economy, particularly in the financial sector. It enacted a punitive welfare reform. It did little to move foreign policy away from maintenance of empire. It also operated during a nadir of strength for progressive social forces, typified by de-unionization, loss of hope in the inner cities, a “post-feminist” conceit and the global dominance of free-market ideology.

Yet there are compelling reasons for taking the outcome of elections seriously. For vulnerable constituencies living on the margins, the Clinton administration governed differently from prior and future Republican administrations. It preserved affirmative action, radically increased the earned income tax credit, strengthened occupational health and safety regulations and appointed pro-labor members to the National Labor Relations Board and pro-choice judges to the federal courts. Nor is an Obama administration as likely to ignore the crisis of global warming or flout international law by torturing “terror suspects” and denying them any legal recourse as a McCain administration.

With the near extinction of both conservative Southern Dixiecrats and “liberal” Northeastern Rockefeller Republicans, there is more ideological and policy distance on socio-economic and labor issues between the two major parties today than at any time since the Great Depression. Liberal Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens turns 86 this year and the next administration will likely name his successor. And only a 60-vote, filibuster-proof majority in the Senate will be able to pass the Employee Free Choice Act, granting collective bargaining rights to unions based on card-checks rather than drawn-out NLRB elections. These are sound enough reasons to work for Democratic gains in the House and Senate; and many DSA locals are now campaigning for left Democrats who have a chance of knocking off Republican incumbents or winning open seats.

## The Imperative of Mobilization from Below in Favor of a Productive, rather than Speculative, Economy

As DSA Honorary Chair Frances Fox Piven and others argue, major social reforms such as those of the New Deal and the Great Society did not result from liberal Democratic presidential victories; rather, they derived from moderate elites

making concessions to (and trying to co-opt) militant rebellion by the unemployed and industrial unions in the 1930s and the civil rights, anti-war, women’s and welfare rights movements of the 1960s. The “Progressives for Obama” call initiated by Danny Glover, Bill Fletcher, Tom Hayden, and Barbara Ehrenreich this past March correctly argued that the political mobilization of hundreds of thousands of newly registered African Americans and young voters of all races could mean that an Obama victory would signal a generational shift in American politics. In addition, given that the Republican campaign is likely to appeal to white swing-voters’ “fear of a black planet,” an Obama victory would be a triumph against the right’s racial politics.

But these newly activated constituencies – as well as a union movement that will have to pull out all the stops if Obama is to win the swing states of Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania – are likely to be sorely disillusioned if they do not comprehend in advance that if Obama gains the presidency he will be under immediate pressure from Wall Street to prove that he is “fiscally responsible.” Even Bill Clinton, a founder of the conservative Democratic Leadership Council, had to junk his modest \$40 billion infrastructure program and prioritize balancing the budget in spring 1993 because his Secretary of the Treasury (and current Citibank poobah) Robert Rubin warned him that Wall Street would vote no confidence in his administration by jacking up interest rates if he implemented his stimulus package.

Obama is the darling of the Goldman Sachs wing of finance banking (his major bundlers come disproportionately from that firm); hence his muted call for additional fiscal stimulus programs and anti-foreclosure guarantees. While Obama’s trip to Berlin bolstered his seemingly weak foreign policy credentials, if he does not offer a full-throated economic populism that resonates with the voters of the Berlins of New Hampshire, Iowa and Ohio, he could lose the election.

Obama’s chief economic advisers, University of Chicago economists Jason Furman and Austin Goolsbee, are both proponents of behavioral economics – that is, they believe that market failures can be corrected by improving information and tweaking incentive structures. They favor tax credits to stimulate, for example, pension savings, but they are disinterested in traditional macroeconomic stimulus programs, public investment, or tight government regulation of financial markets. But such “tweaking” will not redress an economy overly reliant on financial speculation while underfunding productive investment. As DSA’s “Economic Justice Agenda” makes clear, only a government-guided structural transformation of the U.S. economy can redress three decades of declining living standards. Only the rejuvenation of the policy tools of

progressive taxation, high-quality public goods, and public investment in infrastructure and research and development (particularly in the areas of green technologies and mass transit) can move us from the neoliberal model of a speculative, anti-union, finance-and-service economy to an economy focused on productive investment, a strong social wage, union rights, and a renovation of high value-added manufacturing.

Acknowledging differences between the two major parties should not blind leftists to the reality that Democratic Party national elites have embraced the global neoliberal consensus of free trade, de-unionization, and “limited government” for more than 30 years now. Jimmy Carter’s deregulation of the telecommunications, trucking and utility industry prefigured the corporate assault on unionized industry, and the Clinton administration’s acceleration of Ronald Reagan’s deregulation of the financial industry helped engender both the internet and housing bubbles. The Federal Reserve’s bail-out of banks and hedge funds that betted incorrectly on the Mexican peso crisis of 1994 and the Asian financial collapse of 1997 merely followed the Reagan administration’s Savings and Loan bail-out, with its policy of privatizing financial gains while socializing financial risk. If the S&L bail-out of the late 1980s and early 1990s cost the federal government more than \$200 billion, the pending bank failures from the sub-prime mortgage crisis (including a threat to the solvency of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which hold or insure over 50 percent of American home mortgages) could cost taxpayers literally trillions in bail-out funds. Kevin Phillips terms this model of economic growth “the bubble and bail” model. As the real income of working families stagnated or declined, and the economy switched from high-productivity manufacturing to services and finance, “indebted” consumption became the engine of growth for American capitalism.

### **Breaking the Neo-Liberal Policy Stranglehold on the Democratic Party**

There can be no solution to the sharp recession induced by the near-meltdown of the global finance sector if the next administration does not commit itself to re-regulating finance capital and investing in both infrastructure and human needs, such as universal health care, publicly financed child care, and an expansion of federal aid to education. But engaging in such productive investments in our nation’s collective resources and in human development will require raising public revenues. And national leaders will also have to tackle the ideological myth that private provision is always superior to public provision. Universal, well-financed public goods such as the post-World War II GI Bill create their own majority base of support. This is why Medicare and Social Security are the untouchable “third rails” of American politics – witness the utter failure of Bush’s “privatization” of Social Security plan to gain political traction. But since the Johnson administration’s implementation of Medicare and Richard Nixon’s doubling of the real value of Social Security (and indexing

it to inflation), no new universal federal public program has captured the nation’s imagination.

The inefficient and inequitable U.S. health care system cries out for replacement by a universal and cost-efficient alternative. If private insurance administrative and advertising costs of 25 percent on the health care dollar could be reduced to Medicaid and Medicare’s three percent administrative overhead, we could achieve both universal and affordable coverage. Only the power of the insurance industry precludes the Democrats from embracing a Canadian or French-style single-payer health care program. While the chances of a national single-payer plan passing the next Congress are slim, progressives should unite behind “opt-out” provisions in any national Obama-style “pay or play” system of private insurance. Such “opt-outs” would allow states to create their own single-payer systems, but progressives will also have to fight hard to ensure that either Medicare or the federal employees’ health plan is presented to employers as a lower-cost alternative to private insurance.

In militating for a much-needed additional fiscal stimulus, progressives should include major increases in government funding of job training (in green technologies, for example) and of opportunities for both GIs and displaced workers to return to universities as full-time students (and for women on TANF to fulfill their “workfare” requirements through secondary and higher education). In addition, affordable after-school, pre-school, and elder care could use stimulating. While affluent suburbs provide superb public education, public parks, and first-rate sanitation, police, and public health services, federal cutbacks in aid to states and municipalities has accentuated the world of private wealth and public squalor. Only federal funding of pre-K education and of after-school programs for vulnerable youth can begin to redress rampant educational inequalities. If we paid (and honored) these public educators and care providers the way Northern Europe does (a French worker at a crèche maternelle has to have more formal education than a public school teacher), we would go a long way to establishing higher pay and career ladders for workers in the care-giving sector (both public and private). And the crisis in private pensions – only one-half of American workers have any pension and only half of those have adequately funded pensions – means that a public supplement to Social Security is an imperative need.

### **Financing Productive Government Investment: Restore Progressive and Corporate Taxation and Cut Wasteful Military Spending**

But how to pay for all this? Major government investment in infrastructure and human needs could readily be financed by reversing not only the Bush tax cuts (which Obama has reserved for his health care initiative), but also the Reagan-era cuts in marginal rates on high-income earners (approximately \$300 billion in revenues, each). In addition, abolishing the 15 percent tax rate on hedge fund and private equity man-

agers' earnings could garner another \$100 billion in annual revenues. John Cavanaugh of the Institute for Policy Studies estimates that an end to the war in Iraq (\$100 billion per year, minimum, plus the long-term consequences of caring for the wounded); a 1/3 cutback in U.S. military bases abroad (most of them in Japan, Korea and Germany) and an end to Cold War-era plans to build a new generation of fighters and an anti-ballistic missile defense could save \$216 billion in federal revenue per year.

The money can be found. U.S. productivity grew more rapidly from 1947 to 1973, a period of relatively high aggregate taxation, than it has in the lower-tax environment since 1980. While the U.S. invested approximately 3 percent of its GDP (both public and private funds) in infrastructure in the 1950s and 1960s, infrastructure investment rates have dropped to less than 1.5 per cent of GDP. It's estimated that we have underinvested in infrastructural renewal by at least \$1.6 trillion. This figure does not take into account what would be required to invest in green energy technologies and retrofitting of our residential and industrial use of energy necessary to combat global warming and end our reliance on fossil fuel.

The military budget is hideously oversized for a nation that claims that armaments are necessary for national defense and not defense of empire. Yet moderate Democrats' obsession with proving they are "tough on defense" has precluded any rational debate as to what constitutes a sane military budget. Even without querying the extent of the "terrorist threat," one fights terrorism by intelligence and espionage cooperation among states and via a multi-lateral diplomatic strategy that provides hope for the billions who still live under authoritarian governments and in extreme poverty. Obama's call to send more U.S. troops to Afghanistan and (perhaps) the northwest territories of Pakistan ignores the lessons of the Soviet-Afghan war. Foreign military presence only transforms the forces of Islamic fundamentalism into national resistance fighters. Better to support internal democratization and anti-corruption efforts and build domestic, multi-ethnic internal security forces than to fuel the flames with an American troop presence. Only if the anti-war movement does not demobilize itself after an Obama victory can progressives prevent the Obama administration from replacing the Iraqi quagmire with an Afghani one.

### **The Structural Crisis of the U.S. Economy: Economic Tinkering Won't Do**

Given the stagnation in real incomes over the past 30 years, economic growth has only been sustained by massive indebtedness – including the holding of several trillion dollars in Treasury bonds by foreign investors. But this willingness to export goods to the U.S. and take payment in paper assets (i.e., dollars) is already at an end. The 40 percent decline of the dollar against the Euro over the past six years and the rise in dollar-denominated oil to over \$140 a barrel are signs that our foreign competitors are tired of subsidizing an unproduc-

tive U.S. economy. The real value of the debt obligations of the U.S. banking sector and private households has risen from \$3 billion in 1984 to \$26 billion in 2006 (while the federal government debt has only gone from \$1.4 billion to \$4.885 billion).

The U.S. government has used the IMF and the WTO to facilitate the export of financial services and "infotainment." But the U.S. has not adopted the view that trade-surplus countries (such as China, which uses state action to artificially devalue its currency) should raise their domestic consumption levels so as to curtail their massive trade surpluses. In short, global-oriented U.S. finance capital has triumphed over the need for productive investment in the U.S. Thus, while in 1970 manufacturing constituted 25 percent of U.S. GDP and the financial sector only 12 percent, today those numbers are reversed. While continental Europe and Japan still have major high-value added manufacturing sectors, the U.S. is now banker to the world, but also the number one importer of manufactured goods and oil, and the world's leading debtor. How long the rest of the world will subsidize American living standards is an open question.

But reconfiguring the U.S. economy so that its financial sector prioritizes investment in the production of real goods rather than speculative financial instruments will take more than micro-economic behavioral incentives. Rather, it will require a re-regulation of the global economy in favor of productive human needs over short-term financial profit. Over the past thirty years the Federal government gradually abolished the Glass-Steagall Act's separation of investment banking from commercial banking and of banking from brokerage firms, with calamitous results: a "turbo capitalism" focused on short-term speculative gain rather than long-term productive investments. When the ponzi scheme of "securitized mortgages" collapsed with the end of the irrational run-up in housing prices, the federal government had to bail out Bear Stearns and then Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Fannie Mae acted much more reasonably as a financier of home mortgages when it was a fully government-owned corporation from the Depression through 1968. The American housing market functioned far better when Fannie Mae was government-owned and run and when government regulation restricted the Savings and Loan industry to local investment in residential home mortgages. In short, only a "globalization" of social regulation of finance capital so as to reign in its speculative excesses and to focus its energies on productive investment in real economic activity can restore sanity and security to the global economy.

Such global regulation would have to renegotiate international economic institutions so that they raise international labor, living, human rights, and environmental standards. But reconstructing the global economy to works on behalf of all the globe's citizens will necessitate a level of solidarity and trans-national cooperation among social movements and progressive political parties (and ultimately governments) heretofore unseen. There are signs of such a politics in the emergent Latin

American Left and in the growing union cooperation across the European Union. Such a politics and program will not be easy to develop. But the growth of a Left both within and without traditional European social democracy is a sign that many are rejecting the center-Left's embrace of neoliberal orthodoxy.

An Obama victory by no means guarantees the imperative, bold policy initiatives outlined above and in DSA's Economic Justice Agenda. His campaign rhetoric does not talk of major defense cuts, progressive tax reform, and significant expansion of public provision. Neither did Franklin Roosevelt campaign on bold solutions in 1932 or initiate any early in his first term. It was pressure from below that forced FDR's

hand. Similarly, an Obama victory might well provide space for those social forces from below who will agitate in favor of a living wage, affordable housing, a democratic foreign policy, and government action to insure that the economy serves the public rather than vice-versa. Rising expectations spur activism; dashed hopes (which a McCain victory would create) retard change.

*Joseph M. Schwartz is Associate Professor of Political Science at Temple University and a Vice Chair of DSA. His most recent book is The Future of Democratic Equality: Reconstructing Social Solidarity in a Fragmented America (Routledge, 2008).*

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## **Solidarity and an Untimely Socialism: Some notes on attending the 2008 Congress of the Socialist International**

By Corey D.B. Walker

*"The West is living through an economic and social crisis so unprecedented in its tempo, so complex in its effects, that there are many who do not even know that it is taking place. They are waiting for an old-fashioned apocalypse, or gleefully proclaiming that there never will be such an apocalypse, even as a gradual revolution mines the ground under their feet."*

— Michael Harrington, *The Next Left* (1987)

*"There is only one sure way of avoiding the risks of democratic socialism, and that is to keep quiet and march ahead under the tutelage and the rod of advanced liberal democracy."*

— Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (1978)

How does one approach the question of socialism in our contemporary conjuncture? What does socialism mean in a world where the rules and logic of capitalism reign supreme? Why pursue a socialist project in light of its deeply compromised past and nominally existing present?

Why socialism, why now?

These were just some of the questions I brought with me to Athens this summer to attend the 23<sup>rd</sup> Socialist International (SI) Congress. I came back with answers.

Over the past three decades there has been a comprehensive and systematic assault on the core principles of democratic socialism. The multipronged attack not only focused on institutionalizing a social and political conservatism commensurate with the aims and objectives of a reorganized neoliberal capitalism, but also on delegitimizing the ideological imperatives of this broad Left tendency.

In the United States, this has had a deep and wide-ranging effect on the democratic socialist project. A fractured and beleaguered democratic Left lost critical ground to a contingent

coalition of conservative forces that not only successfully marched through the institutions, but also gained ideological hegemony and shifted public discourse decidedly to the right.

In all, this history can best be summed up in two words: We lost.

In light of the critical recognition of our recent defeat and the fundamental need to rethink several important questions concerning the socialist project, the recent SI Congress gains in importance for the future of democratic socialism in the United States.

With the theme "Global Solidarity: The Courage to Make a Difference," the Congress represented a crucial opening for reconfiguring the terrain of politics and the very nature of the political along new lines of political solidarity. This solidarity not only challenges the dictates of neoliberal capitalism and low-intensity democracy, but also posits a socialist alternative for human flourishing in a radically transformed world.

The Congress's four interrelated themes – climate change, conflict resolution, global political economy, and migration

– were not just timely. Given the current state of the environment, inter- and intra-state conflict, the latest crisis of global capitalism, and the global movement of peoples within and across national borders, successfully addressing these themes from a committed socialist perspective demonstrates the strength and vitality of a socialist alternative in framing and confronting issues that threaten the future of human civilization.

While the Congress focused its attention on presenting a historically informed analysis of each of these issues, members intensely debated and discussed possible alternatives within a principled commitment to democratic socialism.

The Congress served a crucial purpose in modeling – in however much a partial and flawed manner – a form of global politics animated by a desire to strengthen the bonds of political solidarity in an effort to align a more humane sphere of the political with the worth, value, and significance of an ever-evolving socialist project.

At a time when the eclipse of socialism is too commonly thought to be a given, the Congress instantiated an “untimely” socialism that not only provides the critical political, economic, ecological, and social coordinates for the democratic socialist alternatives in a new century but also reminds us of the signal importance of global solidarity in challenging and overturning the dictates of an already global capitalism.

If, as one speaker at the Congress so eloquently stated, the heart of the socialist project is solidarity, then democratic socialists in the United States must not only strengthen our ties with our traditional allies on the Left, but also join with our comrades globally in advancing a socialist project that meets the economic, political, and social demands of a new century. These new forms of politics and political subjectivities emerging in such formations as the polycentric social forum movement and in the nation-states of the global South remind us that socialism for the 21st century must be both flexible in form and planetary in scope.

For many, this entails fundamentally rethinking and redefining the project of socialism in a rapidly changing global context and in solidarity with an emerging and evolving global socialist bloc. We may, and indeed, probably will, need to jettison much of our old theoretical frameworks and categories – or at least prejudices – as we struggle to

build a new democratic socialist majority. In so doing, we can do no better than be guided by our late comrade Michael Harrington, who wrote that “the next Left cannot assume that there is a spontaneous, homogeneous majority that need only become conscious of itself in order to play a central political role in Western society.”

Thus, our task involves articulating and advancing a distinctive, principled, and globally inspired democratic socialist vision of American public life that addresses the fundamental challenges that inhibit the emergence of a humane society in our contemporary conjuncture.

By necessity, we will have to engage the current configuration of political organization and power in the United States. But in so doing, we will have to critically engage in formal party politics, neither for the acquisition of power nor for a seat at a fundamentally unjust table, but in service to a radical transformation of U.S. economic and political power toward a humane and radically egalitarian end.

These notes could be read as a stale repetition of stock themes littering the history, theory, and politics of democratic socialism over the past half century. And indeed that may be so. However, given the precipitous retreat of democratic socialism in the advanced capitalist countries, the ideological and political success of the capitalist-conservative project in recent years, and the resurgence of a new socialist alternative in the developing countries, it seems quite appropriate, indeed imperative, to engage in a rehearsal of these themes in order to develop the very courage required to make a difference.

No Congress could respond to all the pressing challenges confronting the socialist project, nor did it resolve the ideological and political controversies that are inevitably a part of all such endeavors. Nevertheless, what I saw provided a vital opening to advance an untimely socialism in a world where its time was thought to have passed.

The Congress themes serve as a prescient reminder that despite the hegemony of capitalism, consumerism, and conservatism, the world historical role of international socialism in general and the job of the SI in particular are far from over; indeed, they have only just begun.

*Corey D. B. Walker is a member of the National Political Committee of DSA and an assistant professor in the department of Africana Studies at Brown University.*

## **DSA affiliate the Socialist International meets to tackle climate change, war/peace, global capital and labor migration**

Nearly 700 delegates representing more than 150 political parties and organizations gathered in Athens, Greece, from June 30 to July 2 for the 23rd Congress of the Socialist International. Even with the large turnout, not every affiliate was able to attend.

It is easy – and mistaken – to dismiss the Socialist International. True, it is rarely mentioned in the U.S. press,

even when it meets here. Its pronouncements lack the authority of government or even the standing of the United Nations. It is not as activist-oriented as are the international labor federations or as dynamic as the World Social Forum. However, it represents the political consensus of most of the world’s socialist, social democratic, and labor parties, and, as constrained as those parties are by the requirements of

winning elections and governing capitalist nations, often in coalition with parties that don't share the same values, appreciating that shifting consensus is important.

While the Congress focused on only a few issues, it managed to take significant steps that moved that consensus. The first and featured issue, climate change, consumed more discussion time than any other – exactly the opposite priority from the stereotypical view of socialists. The other featured themes were “Peace and Conflict Resolution,” “Globalization and the World Economy,” and “Migration.” A special session was also devoted to the food crisis.

The Socialist International’s statements, which can be found on its website ([www.socialistinternational.org](http://www.socialistinternational.org)), are consensual and written in the language of diplomacy rather than of activism or social theory. Because of their consensual nature and length of the resolutions, *Democratic Left* doesn’t usually reprint SI resolutions. We are breaking that rule now by reprinting the resolution on the food crisis (see page 10) because it addresses a genuine and pressing calamity while directly criticizing “properly functioning markets” and rejecting the production of ethanol from food sources.

Besides rejecting the major U.S. alternative fuel, corn-based ethanol, SI documents adopted at the Congress opposed U.S. construction of the wall along its Mexican border (comparing it to the Berlin Wall as well as to the wall being constructed that separates Israel from Palestine) and supported generally the importance of achieving a just comprehensive immigration reform policy in the U.S. Of course, the SI has opposed U.S. intervention in Iraq from the beginning.

The debate on the economy produced two notable presentations. The German Social Democratic Party’s Christoph Zopel, who chairs the SI Committee on the Economy, Social Cohesion, and the Environment, called for a global welfare state – a reflection of European concern that globalization continues to undermine the universal social programs they have developed. Michael Higgins, president of the Irish Labour Party, provided a compelling case for a more anti-corporate, democratic, and inclusive politics (see summary on page 11).

The discussion of conflicts and world peace was very important, particularly the discussion on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, in which both sides are members of the SI.

The SI also took up a number of organizational issues. Eleven parties were promoted from consultative-status parties to full-member parties, meaning they now have voting rights

at SI events. Among those elevated was Namibia’s SWAPO. Two parties were admitted directly to full-member status, including Zimbabwe’s Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Six parties were admitted as consultative members (i.e., parties without vote), and five parties, including the Palestine National Initiative and the Polisario Front were granted observer status.

While most of these admissions were noncontroversial, the admission of the Polisario Front, a separatist movement in Morocco’s western Sahara, was made against the recommendation of the Ethics Committee, which supervises the admission process. Following the lead of the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the International Union of Socialist Youth, DSA voted for admission. Additionally, one party, the Fiji Labour Party, was expelled for participating in the government established by a *coup d’etat*.

Consideration of the human rights situation in its country was an important factor in admitting Zimbabwe’s MDC to full membership. Human rights

concerns also motivated the election of Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the nonviolent movement for human rights and democracy in Burma (Myanmar) and Nobel laureate, to the position of Special Honorary President of the Socialist International.

It is not surprising that organizational decisions can be more controversial than decisions on policy statements, such as who is admitted to membership in the Socialist International. That decision is seen as a statement about the brand.

Finally, the Congress delegates were incredibly pro-Obama, a reflection mostly of the tremendous anti-Bush sentiment resulting from the invasion of Iraq and the damage the present administration has done to international diplomacy. At least a dozen speakers wished him well from the podium. We did our best to let our comrades know that while Obama should win, he might not – and that he is not in any sense a social democrat.

**DSA gratefully acknowledges a bequest to support our work from the estate of Stanley Rappeport.**

A final gift to the movement is something that every member should consider when preparing their will. Bequests can take many forms; the national director can provide interested members with information and advice.



*Left to right: DSA members David Duhalde and Corey Walker; SI President George Papandreou and his wife, Ada; and DSA National Director Frank Llewellyn.*

# The Global Food Crisis: A Social Democratic Assessment

*At the Congress, the SI passed the following resolution, which DSA felt was particularly representative of its priorities.*

1. The Socialist International believes that the global food crisis is among the great threats to peace and security in the world, particularly in the most vulnerable of the developing countries, and advocates for a thorough reconsideration of the ways in which the world's agricultural system currently operates.

2. Since the end of last year there have been riots, protests and demonstrations in at least three dozen countries – from Asia to Africa to Latin America and the Caribbean – against fast-spreading food shortages and the worldwide increase in prices that has pushed the costs of food to the highest levels in decades.

For the approximately one billion people living at the edge of survival on less than US\$1 per day, and the 2.6 billion people – forty percent of the world's population – living on less than US\$2 per day, according to the United Nations Development Programme, the steep hike in prices, particularly of staple foods such as rice, corn and wheat, has been calamitous.

The upheaval afflicting the world's food supply not only deepens poverty and undermines stability in countries and regions where economic and social pressures are severe, it also adds to the set of factors that push vast numbers of people to migrate from rural to urban areas and from the South to the North, and this during a time when xenophobia already is on the rise and harsher anti-immigrant laws are being implemented in developed countries.

3. The food crisis stems from rising energy prices, minimally regulated agricultural markets, financial speculation, growing demand in emerging economies, armed conflict in some countries and increasing, often heavily subsidised biofuel production.

The crisis is compounded by extreme weather due to climate change, including drought such as in Australia, one of [the] world's leading agricultural producers where wheat and rice crops have been devastated, and increasingly violent storms such as those that have wreaked havoc in Central America and parts of Asia and other regions in recent years.

According to some scientific studies, climate change – particularly the way it negatively affects water resources necessary for crop cultivation – threatens to reduce food production by up to half in some areas of the world in little more than a decade.

At the same time, the two areas of global enterprise that utilise the greatest amounts of water, energy production from fossil fuels and chemical-intensive industrial agriculture, are among the principal contributors to global warming.

4. The worst effect of current policies has been the neglect and undermining of domestic agriculture in developing countries. The change in emphasis in recent decades from

domestic production to importing basic grains and processed foods heavily subsidised by governments in the developed world has been driving small farmers out of business practically everywhere.

Moreover, cuts in budgets for agricultural research and development by governments and international agencies have left national agricultural systems unable to respond to the growing need today for greater production.

This is most evident with regard to the mounting shortages of basic grains in the developing world, where fewer farmers, lacking in the know-how and technologies to produce higher yields, are simply unable to feed growing populations that can no longer afford increasingly inflated prices for imports.

5. The Socialist International believes that the food crisis could have been avoided and that it can be overcome with a redirection in thinking, approach and policy.

Achieving food security in the developing world first and foremost requires a coordinated, multilateral response at both the global and the regional levels, based on mutual need and long range cooperation rather than short-sighted, debilitating competition between nations.

This effort requires a renewed sense of solidarity – in this case, putting human values before exchange values – and should focus on revitalising domestic production and relying on more traditional foods, supported by substantially higher levels of public investment in agricultural development and technologies.

The International recognizes the important role of women in the domestic production and distribution of food crops in the developing world, particularly in Africa, and underlines the need to enhance their education levels and economic opportunities so that they can fully participate in the development of new agricultural policies.

Biofuel production should be reorganised and regulated so that it does not undermine the production and distribution of basic foodstuffs.

At the international level there should be a reorientation and strengthening of programmes to support agricultural production and food distribution on the part of the OECD nations, international agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as regional institutions including the Inter-American Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Particular emphasis should be placed on increasing the budgets of vital agricultural research centres and earmarking loans and resources to help farmers in developing countries adopt improved methods in their fields.

With regard to the countries most immediately affected by manmade and natural disasters or otherwise threatened by famine, emergency food distribution plans, particularly by the United Nations, should be upgraded and enhanced in terms of both human and financial resources.

6. The food crisis is an example not only of how markets alone cannot provide solutions, but also of how markets, when they are left alone, can add to the problem that needs to be solved.

During the 1960s and 1970s Asia embarked on a Green Revolution which, through a joining of forces between poor countries and wealthier nations and hands-on governmental policy and public investment in the science of feeding, caused

crop yields to increase substantially and significantly reduced the threat of starvation.

The global economy has evolved greatly since then, but with political will and determination agricultural policies can still be reformulated in a coordinated way at the national, regional and global levels to alleviate today's food crisis and to make substantial progress in reducing world hunger overall.

## Irish Delegate Expresses Concerns

By Frank Llewellyn



*Irish Labour Party president  
Michael Higgins*

One of the more direct and powerful presentations came from Irish Labour Party president Michael Higgins, who, on a certain level, asked the movement to stop falling down on the job. Noting that as capital is building in concentration, the socialist project is fragmenting, he asked, rhetorically, "whether the Socialist Internationalist family is ready to leave the paradigm of the Chicago School and neoliberalism, [given] the manner in which SI governments have accommodated themselves within a model that is the very antithesis of what we stand for," and he wondered why the Socialist International had not "demand[ed] the implementation of the Conventions of the International Labour Organisation on a universal basis."

In discussing the creeping consolidation of capitalism, he pointed out that at an international level, we regard its growth in ownership in crucial areas of the public world as inevitable, scarcely worthy of critique or comment. To illustrate, he cited Adam Hanieh's 2006 essay in *The New Imperialists*:

Look at the food sector: five companies control 90% of the world's grain trade, six companies control 80% of the world pesticide market, three companies control 85% of the world's tea market, two companies control 50 % of world trade in bananas, three companies control almost 80% of the confectionary market, four companies control 75% of the retail trade in the UK. In media and entertainment, nine large conglomerates dominate the sector, with five companies around 80% of the music industry worldwide.

Particularly egregious, however, is capital's increased control of the media, because, "as the public world is shrinking through the decline of public service broadcasting and the ending of diversity of ownership in the print media, a powerful tool for the rationalisation of the shrinking world with its single version – the neoliberal one – of the connection between economy and society has become available to the Berlusconis of the world and will be ruthlessly used to suppress critical capacity, not to speak of dissent."

As one strategy in dealing with the growth of global capital's power, Higgins suggested "recovery of the space lost to the transnational corporations by new institutional arrangements such as a body equivalent to the Bretton Woods Institutions that would deal with both sustainability and capital flows: The Council for Sustainable Development and Capital Movements reporting to ECOSOC and the General Secretary of the United Nations."

Most significantly, though, he made some recommendations for "a real alternative to the politics of fear from which no left-wing party anywhere in the world has ever gained," most of which called for greater diversity in outlook. First, he noted that the most potentially sustainable society is global, "more equal, and built on recognition of the integrity and creativity of every living being from a diversity of histories and cultures, respecting both revealed as well as scientifically validated sources of human rights." He urged (a) "a new discourse that would consider governance and transparency drawing on the culture and history of different countries in different circumstances" and (b) acceptance of the idea that there are many models of the connection between economy, society and culture and of the concept of "intergenerational justice, whereby no generation should have the right to take such actions as are irreversible in a future generation."

Finally, he pointed out that while "some of the parties present seemed often to be in hopeless circumstances we should not allow that which was improbable in contemporary conditions to defeat that which was not only possible but necessary; the example of the Chilean people who overthrew a dictator is practical evidence of the indomitable human spirit."

*Frank Llewellyn is National Director of the Democratic Socialists of America.*

# McCain Attacks Teachers' Unions

by Leo Casey

In his speech last week to the national convention of the American Federation of Teachers, Barack Obama was clear and unequivocal in his opposition to using public money for vouchers for private schools. At that time, Obama made it clear that he supported public school choice – the ability of students and their families to choose which public school they would attend. In taking this stance, Obama reiterated what is a longstanding position of his – he had made the same point to the National Education Association convention earlier in July and had explicitly disowned attempts by pro-voucher partisans to spin comments he made in a primary campaign interview into support for private school vouchers. Today, John McCain chose the occasion of a speech to the august civil rights organization, the NAACP, to take on Obama – and teacher unions – on this very point.

McCain said:

In remarks to the American Federation of Teachers last weekend, Senator Obama dismissed public support for private school vouchers for low-income Americans as, “tired rhetoric about vouchers and school choice.” All of that went over well with the teachers union, but where does it leave families and their children who are stuck in failing schools?

Over the years, Americans have heard a lot of “tired rhetoric” about education. We’ve heard it in the endless excuses of people who seem more concerned about their own position than about our children. We’ve heard it from politicians who accept the status quo rather than stand up for real change in our public schools. Parents ask only for schools that are safe, teachers who are competent, and diplomas that open doors of opportunity. When a public system fails, repeatedly, to meet these minimal objectives, parents ask only for a choice in the education of their children. Some parents may choose a better public school. Some may choose a private school. Many will choose a charter school. No entrenched bureaucracy or union should deny parents that choice and children that opportunity.

Let us leave to the side McCain’s intellectually dishonest attempt to wrap the issue of private school vouchers in the mantle of public school choice: there are, of course, very sound policy reasons why Obama, the NAACP and teacher unions all draw a vital distinction between private school vouchers and public school choice, opposing the former and supporting the latter. But the real political import of McCain’s statement lies elsewhere – it is an attempt to force a political wedge between Obama and teacher unions, based on the raw power calculus that an Obama campaign without vigorous teacher and union support would be a far more vulnerable opponent. To accomplish this goal, McCain has returned to

the old Republican Dole and D’Amato playbook of attacking teacher unions. In an American trade union movement that has been decimated in recent decades, teacher unions stand out as a powerful exception, with most of the K-12 educational sector organized in either the NEA or the AFT. It is teacher unions that stand between the Republican right and the privatization of public education and the further dismantling of American public life. Like his predecessors, McCain understands this political reality. Teachers and unionists need to understand it as well, and organize for this election in a way that sends a message every bit as powerful as the crushing defeats of Dole and D’Amato.

*Leo Casey is Vice President, Academic High Schools of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). He blogs on Edwize, on the UFT website, where this article originally appeared.*

## Activism Plan

continued from page 3

We are supporting this campaign because we agree with Bernie about the importance of the election. We also hope that this effort will increase his visibility on the national stage, something that can only benefit the socialist project.

I am sometimes asked if we are not putting all our eggs in one basket by counting on a Democratic victory in the elections. The implicit worry behind the question is that a McCain victory – something that is certainly possible – would leave us stuck supporting legislative solutions with little chance of passage.

No one can deny that a McCain victory would make it much harder to enact progressive legislation and end the U.S. occupation of Iraq. DSA’s strategy does not depend on electing Democrats; we work to strengthen social movements. Regardless of the outcome of this election, politics will go on. And, in fact, largely because the Republicans have so screwed things up, the next administration and the new Congress will be forced to take up issues that Bush has ignored for eight years.

Even the Bush administration has changed course on a number of issues. They are now talking to the regimes that they berated as the “Axis of Evil,” and the recently enacted housing bill is a complete reversal of their free market, anti-regulatory rhetoric. The plain and simple fact is that there are so many crises coming together that there will be no alternative to increased government regulation of finance and banking, major changes in how health care is delivered and paid for, more sensible energy policies, climate change initiatives, and fairer trade policies. In fact, even some conservatives argue for McCain by saying that a larger, activist government is inevitable and that you need a conservative president to temper the changes.

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The work that DSA does now to strengthen social movements and increase the number of progressives in Congress will help ensure that the reforms that are adopted in 2008 and 2009 are significant; a president who will sign rather

than veto legislation will make those reforms even more far reaching.

—Frank Llewellyn

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## YDS Welcomes New Organizer



Young Democratic Socialists have recently hired a new organizer, Erik Rosenberg.

Erik's past political activism has centered on peace. As a high school student at the Walworth Barbour American International School in Israel, he co-organized a conflict resolution committee that brought together Palestinians, Israelis, Israeli-Arabs and Americans to discuss the conflict in the region. After graduating, he returned to the United States to attend Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, where he earned his bachelor's degree in Government in 2008.

Throughout college Erik continued to work as a peace activist. In the spring of 2005, he co-founded Students for Ending

the War in Iraq (SEWI) which he helped develop into one of the most prominent activist organizations on campus. He also connected SEWI with larger networks such as Connecticut Opposes the War (COW) and the Campus Anti-War Network (CAN). Erik has interned with Brooklyn for Peace (formerly Brooklyn Parents For Peace) and United For Peace and Justice (UFPJ), serving on the latter's steering committee (YDS is a member group of UFPJ).

Outside of the political realm Erik enjoys playing the guitar and the piano, gardening, squash and yoga. He looks forward to returning to New York, the city of his birth, to begin his work as Youth Organizer.

Erik looks forward to hearing ideas, comments and concerns from YDS and DSA members, so please do not hesitate to contact him at [erik@dsausa.org](mailto:erik@dsausa.org) or 212-727-8610.

### Join our 36<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

For 36 years, a full decade longer than DSA's existence, *Democratic Left* has covered the work of progressives, including grassroots activism in many movements for social and economic justice. Articles have not been limited to the U.S. but have covered important struggles wherever they have occurred. *Democratic Left* is firmly rooted in both immediate struggles for reform and the principles of democratic socialism.

Beginning as *Michael Harrington's Newsletter of the Democratic Left*, then just the *Newsletter of the Democratic Left*, and finally *Democratic Left*, the magazine has been both an independent voice for the broad Left and the magazine that DSA members get four times a year.

We are asking our friends to join our celebration of half a lifetime's work by making special contributions to support the magazine. For just a dollar or two or five or ten for each year of our publication, or just a hundred bucks, your name can appear in the pages of *Democratic Left*. And to make sure we receive the maximum bang for your buck, this campaign will only be conducted on line and in the pages of this magazine, saving us the cost of printing, postage and phone calls. Every contributor to this campaign will be listed in our fall issue. However, in order to publish your name in the next issue, we need to receive your contribution by this September 30<sup>th</sup>.

To help us out, send a check (payable to DSA) to the national office (75 Maiden Lane, Suite 505, New York, NY 10038); be sure to write "36th anniversary celebration" on the check. Please choose from the following contribution levels:

**DL Supporter**, just \$1 for each of our 36 years: \$36

**DL Sustainer**, just \$2 for each of our 36 years: \$72

**DL Booster**, just one hundred bucks covers 36 years: \$100

**DL Writer**, just \$5 for each of our 36 years: \$180

**DL Editor**, just \$10 for each of our 36 years: \$360

Your special contribution will help us to meet the challenge created by the disproportionate postal increase that Bush and his friends have imposed on small independent publications like *Democratic Left*, *In These Times*, and *The Nation* and help us to improve the publication!

Thank you in advance for your consideration and support.

## **Naomi Klein, The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism.**

**Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2007.**

Reviewed by William K. Tabb

The disaster capitalism complex, with a nod to Eisenhower's military-industrial complex, is a model of for-profit government – think Cheney-Halliburton extended to the day-to-day functioning of the state, in which almost every government function you can think of is contracted out to for-profit profiteers who are typically contributors to the Republican Party but also grease the palms of Democrats. They frequently win no-bid contracts, or subcontracts, from the federal government that are not subject to proper oversight because the government itself is downsized to the point where it both lacks the capacity to do the job or review the performance and compensation of the for-profit companies who act, functionally, in our collective name. We have gone from domestic privatized prisons and charter schools to the “management” of entire nations. In *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein argues that government itself is now a major source of corporate profit. She treats this as a phenomenon of the Bush administration. In examples drawn from many places and events, Klein shows how destabilizing events are necessary to unmoor expectations so that reconstruction can occur in an undemocratic fashion, leading to privatizations which in normal times might be rejected by the public.

For Klein, the two intellectual godfathers of disaster capitalism are monetarist Milton Friedman and the long-deceased psychiatrist Ewen Cameron. Friedman, an influential believer in minimal government who wanted to sell national parks to private vendors and thought public schools represented creeping socialism, has been exceedingly influential, not merely via his ideas but through his direct influence on followers such as Donald Rumsfeld, whom Friedman wanted to be president of the United States. She writes:

Like all fundamental faiths, Chicago School economics is, for its true believers, a closed loop. The starting premise is that the free market is a perfect scientific system, one in which individuals, acting on their own self-interested desires, create maximum benefits for all. It follows ineluctably that if something is wrong within a free-market economy – high inflation or soaring unemployment – it has to be because the market is not truly free. There must be some interference, some distortion in the system. The Chicago solution is always the same: a stricter and more complete application of fundamentals.

For example, trade unions attempt to raise wages above what they would otherwise be in the free market if there were no unions, so companies do away with unions. If you get sick, you can sue the company responsible; it is not for some Food and Drug Administration to interfere. In poor countries, there are no subsidies for food or other necessities. This is the logic of neoliberalism. It is also a

rationale for U.S. intervention to overthrow governments that interfere with “free markets,” although the full logic of the argument is not always spelled out by its advocates.

Ewen Cameron, for his part, developed techniques for breaking people down and shocking them to the point where they could be reconstructed along lines preferred by the torturer. Klein looks at CIA covert experiments in electroshock and other “special interrogation techniques” – some now familiar to us from Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib – pioneered by Cameron. Cameron unmade people to rebuild new personalities. After a disaster, a tsunami, for example, people can be moved away from the waterfront and replaced by luxury hotels. The parallel may seem a stretch to some readers, but Klein’s thought-provoking argument links shock doctrine theory and practice of an Orwellian sort.

Forces of reaction, in Klein’s view, use disasters – man-made or natural – to impose new realities. For example, after Hurricane Katrina, the government immediately imposes a voucher system on New Orleans schools, and contractors hire other contractors to do the rebuilding – if they actually rebuild anything at all. The larger agenda is to emasculate government capacity so that all that its employees can do is write checks to companies to do the work needed – without oversight, competitive bidding, or accountability for the job they do. “Shock and awe” in Iraq has both key elements as well. The civilian population is terrified and terrorized, a form of collective punishment which strikes such fear that Iraqis are unable to prevent the U.S. remaking the country as it wishes – at least, this was the theory. Klein sees the use of missiles and constant bombardment to “spread democracy” producing sensory overload designed to induce disorientation and regression. People want to have their old lives back and to rebuild, but disaster capitalists are given the job of rebuilding to meet the specifications of the invaders. In Chile, University of Chicago economists and their Chilean pupils were able to reverse the priorities of the democratically elected Socialist government overthrown by General Augusto Pinochet. Klein’s description of what happened is exceedingly good, as is her discussion of Russian elites – with U.S. help – choosing the Pinochet option. The detailed cases of Bolivia, Poland, China, South Africa, Israel, and other countries, claims Klein, form a pattern which illuminates much of modern world events. This does make for a long book at 466 pages (588 with references and acknowledgments), but *Shock Doctrine* is a readable account for a non-specialist audience. In each case, extraordinary politics emerge in times of discontinuity, and at these stress points Klein describes the “malleable moment” of unmooring and physical uprooting as a technique of domination and transformation.

But if such psychological techniques and economic

programming succeed so many times in so many places, the question becomes why. What is new or more broadly being experienced which allows these ruptures to succeed? Here Klein is less helpful. Why, for example, did liberalism (in the American usage) and social democracy fail? What has been the role of transnational capital (and not simply greedy contractors with close connections to the Bush Administration)? What are the class dimensions? Is downsizing of government connected to the reality that two out of three corporations paid no U.S. taxes between 1998 and 2005? While these and other large structural political issues have little place in Klein's analysis, surely they have influenced permissible tactics and the rise of the shock doctrine and the doings of disaster capitalists. A larger framing is virtually absent.

Maybe such criticisms essentially ask Klein to write a different book from the one she has chosen to write. But in

terms of what she has discussed, her last chapter, "Shock Wears Off: The Rise of People's Reconstruction," provides a weak finale. We get insufficient detail regarding how resistance is organized, when it succeeds, and why. That said, *The Shock Doctrine* is an outstanding contribution and deserves a wide audience. It is an impressive work, an original thesis, and one well defended and informatively developed.

*William K. Tabb taught economics at Queens College for many years, and economics, political science, and sociology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. His books include Economic Governance in the Age of Globalization (Columbia University Press, 2004), Unequal Partners: A Primer on Globalization (The New Press, 2002), and The Amoral Elephant: Globalization and the Struggle for Social Justice in the Twenty-First Century (Monthly Review Press, 2001).*

## YDS Retreats Bring Activists Closer Politically and Personally

By David Duhalde

The tremendous success of last year's DSA-YDS retreat that summer led to a decision to hold another one this August, at Valley Brook Inn in New York's Catskills (to get away from it all to better focus on our political discussions and social bonding).

Thursday night began with a presentation by NPC member Michele Rossi and a discussion covering our strategy as an American democratic socialist organization, including the importance of DSA and YDS "walking on two legs" – i.e., engaging in both public socialist education and activism with coalitions and partners working for progressive social change. We noted that direct action must play a public but tactical and not all-encompassing role in radical politics.

On Friday, each plenary theme presentation was again followed by a smaller intergenerational group discussion. DSA Vice-Chair Joseph Schwartz presented the first theme, the historical and political roots of democratic socialism in earlier egalitarian and democratic movements. The following

conversation covered what sets us apart from other radicals: our belief in a mass progressive movement where socialists have an integral part in building a post-capitalist world. During the next session on labor and capital, Michael Hirsch reflected on his own political evolution as a student activist, a steelworker, and now as a union writer for the United Federation of Teachers. He reminded us that only when we connect the problems caused by oppressive institutions to the daily lives of people can we justify socialism as the viable and historic alternative.

The DSA-YDS face-to-face concluded with new NPC recruit Barbara Joye reflecting on differing views within the democratic Left on the best ways to tackle imperialism and terrorism. Discussion addressed the idea that the enemy of my enemy does not always a friend make. While we understand that the root of terrorist support is often legitimate anti-imperialist sentiment, socialists must work to defend and promote progressive, secular, and democratic forces – all vital to any healthy internationalist perspective.

### YDS Socialist Summer Retreat

The 2008 Socialist Summer Retreat held between August 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> in Wurtsboro, New York, exemplified the resounding success of the work YDS and its activists have done over the past two years. Participants included forty-five youth and students from places as far away as Colorado, Nevada, and Texas, including delegations of five or more from William Paterson University (NJ), College of Wooster (Ohio), and Brown University (Rhode Island); the higher than usual number of people of color and working-class young people in attendance reflected an increasingly diverse YDS thanks to national chapter growth.

Saturday's political and ideological workshops and



enjoyable interactive plenaries opened with an overview of the tenets of democratic socialism by Joseph Schwartz and Michele Rossi, followed by small group discussions. This is the beginning process of creating a new YDS cadre who can be tribunes of socialism for themselves and the organization. Workshop topics ranged from the environment and the current rise of socialism in Latin America to our Activist Agenda (national priorities) of student and immigrant rights.

The night ended with the plenary “‘YDS and Realities of the Hope’: the Obama v. McCain presidential campaign and building towards and after Election Day.” Sarah Lawrence professor, former NPC member, and veteran activist Komozi Woodard reflected on previous work by radicals in elections. He emphasized how young radicals could use elections as a vehicle for building ties with local communities to create change. Joseph Schwartz touched upon the need to focus on candidates not as individuals but as policy makers. He reminded young students that absent an Obama presidency alongside a near filibuster-proof Democratic-controlled senate, serious labor law reform such as the Employee Free Choice Act, which could bring millions of new union members within years, is doubtful. Both stressed that political change is only as potent as the strength of the movements that hold elected officials accountable.

Sunday mixed workshops and annual voting on documents, positions, and volunteer leadership. Elections to the Coordinating Committee posts, which have been uncontested in the past five years, saw challenges for both the Feminist Issues Coordinator and At-Large seats. Today, the Committee is one spot away from being half people of color and women, a welcome change from previous overwhelmingly male and white leaderships.

A healthy Activist Agenda debate narrowed YDS’s national priorities to only two. It added to our existing National Immigrant Rights Project two proposals: for chapter activism around DSA’s “Renegotiate NAFTA” petition and for amplifying our socialist solidarity with the Florida based Coalition

of Immokalee Workers (representing migrant tomato pickers). We also voted to continue our education and anti-student debt activism and added a new emphasis on K-12 in addition to our existing higher education work.

A new element of the conference was the emphasis on inclusive dialogue about privilege and oppression. No group, no matter how progressive, is free from societal flaws. YDS made space for queer, people of color, women, working-class, and student caucuses. Each caucus addressed how we feel YDS as a collective could address our personal concerns. In addition, artist Javier Cardona led conference participants to address their own privilege and oppression through honest artistic questions and theatrical dialogue. Students enjoyed the safe spaces provided by the caucuses, which allowed them to express their feelings in private, and everyone came away having learned more about themselves and their comrades from Cardona’s theatre.

But it wasn’t all work: throughout the weekend, YDSers watched movies, played sports and music, and sang together. By giving us the chance to be friends as well as comrades, the retreat fostered the deeper connections necessary for our organization to move forward.

YDS members know we have come a great way from when we barely had chapters, much less could put on national coordinated actions. Although YDS still has a good amount of work to do, it’s readier than ever to build with DSA and the student Left. This fall, YDS will hit the ground both with our own Activist Agenda and with a readiness to bring a democratic socialist viewpoint about the election to the campuses. After November 4<sup>th</sup>, we’ll be working with other progressives to challenge any reactionary policies coming from politicians and the right-wing base. Re-elected at-large Coordinating Committee member Andrew Porter said his goal for the year is to see YDS in a major newspaper. Let’s make it happen!

*David Duhalde is the outgoing organizer of Young Democratic Socialists.*

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